Serving Social Justice: The Role of the Commons in Sustainable Food Systems

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ABSTRACT

Food is a source of sustenance, a cause for celebration, an inducement to temptation, a vehicle for power, an indicator of well-being, a catalyst for change and, above all, a life good. Along with other life goods such as potable water, clean air, adequate shelter and protective clothing, food is something we cannot live without. The global corporate food system, however, allows 800 million to go hungry, while an even larger number of people grow obese. Based in money-values, this food system promotes accumulation first and foremost, enriching a few while creating economic, social and environmental externalities that are destroying local economies, devastating individuals, families and communities and degrading the planet.

What would a food system look like that was based in life-values, centred on the commons and anchored by social justice? This paper will focus on the creation of sustainable food systems, beginning with the crises of the global corporate food system and then moving to the heart of sustainable food systems – the civil commons.
our food system, and how communities are creating environmentally sustainable and socially just alternatives. Popularized by such best-selling authors as Michael Pollan, Barbara Kingsolver, and Eric Schlosser, a growing food movement urges us to support sustainable agriculture by eating fresh food produced on local family farms. But many low-income neighborhoods and communities of color have been systematically deprived of access to healthy and sustainable food. A fantastic book that discusses the intersectionalities of the growing food movement and matters of social justice. The popular food movement tends to ignore people of color and those of lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Food scholars and advocates have long asserted that commodification is one of the fundamental injustices of our dominant, industrial food system, as it stands in direct opposition to the notion of food as a human right. The informal social economy, with its concerns for solidarity, participation, service, and community building, offers examples of what de-commodification—that holy grail of food justice—might look like. This article reports on one particular informal social economy manifestation of decommodification, the community orchard. Sustainable food systems initiatives multiply: In recent years there has been a significant growth in the number of initiatives seeking to advance sustainable food both globally, nationally, locally and across sectors, issues and different parts of the food value chain. Clarity required to drive increased impact: As sustainable food system initiatives continue to emerge and develop there are increasingly overlaps in the themes explored, solutions advocated, and membership of initiatives. Overlap in initiatives can dilute the resources available, cause confusion and competition and in doing so