

An Essay about Food Systems, Sustainability and Briyani

Some of my earliest memories are my mom making biryani at home, the sheer spiciness of it enough to make my eyes water. For me and many people, food is an important part of everyday life. We depend on it to survive. It's a sign of love, it helps people reconnect and heal spiritually. But with the U.S's current food system, it's also a source of fear and insecurity.

C.S Lewis once said, "A sum can be put right: but only by going back till you find the error and working it afresh from that point, never by simply going on." Before I introduce a solution to our food system, the problems with our current food system need to be understood. Our current food system is not sustainable. In the 20th century, food production changed drastically. Instead of growing many diverse crops, farmers today grow monocultures, fields that only grow one crop. This leads to higher uses of pesticides, as monoculture crops are more likely to be affected by pests because of their reduced biodiversity.. Monoculture also decreases the soil's fertility. These problems make food production less stable. This affects richer people as well. If the soil fertility decreases, then farmers will be unable to produce enough food for everyone to eat. According to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, National Institutes of Health, African American children are often disproportionately affected by pesticides, and are 4 to 6 times more likely than white people to die of asthma. Food insecurity is also a problem in the U.S. In 2014, about 48 million Americans lived in households that did not have secure access to food. About 30% of these Americans were children. 2.3 million of these people lived in food deserts. Food deserts are areas where healthy food is not available. Many people in food deserts are usually low income, black or brown people who don't have cars.

Grocery stores are not accessible, so people usually resort to buying fast food. A study done in 2014 found that more fast food restaurants were in areas with low income black and brown people. Over consumption of fast food leads to higher rates of health issues in black and brown people, like obesity and heart disease.

However, there is a solution. Localized food systems could mitigate the effects of our current food system. Localized food systems create jobs, and provide a more stable food source. For example, buying local food reduces the environmental cost of transporting food, and it helps your community's economy. While local farming isn't always organic, you can always ask your local farmers on how they grow their food. Food co-ops help support local farmers, and are an alternative to grocery stores. They are owned by a group of members who either supply the food or work at the organization. Co-ops generate local jobs and help support local farmers by selling their produce. Smaller farms also tend to be more biodiverse, because they cover more diverse landscapes than industrial farms, and don't rely on pesticides as much. According to a study in Canada, farmers markets and community gardens help relieve food desert problems. Another local food system is urban agriculture, which is agriculture adapted to the city, (i.e rooftop gardens, or a small garden in the community). These gardens mitigate the effects of food deserts, as it provides easy access to healthy food.

Our current society has developed a worrying detachment from issues that don't directly affect us. There are countless studies that talk about worrying pesticide use, loss of biodiversity and fertile soil, and how black and brown people are disproportionately affected by it, yet none of them make the news. The flaws in our current food system will affect everyone, sooner or

later. The communities that are hit right now will just take it the hardest. I'd like to end this essay with a quote by Kathryn Kennish. "You need not fear it, but you must always bear in mind that the past is never quite as finished with you as you think you are with it."

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