

MODULE 5:

Food Justice

WE PLANT SEEDS



*A How-to Guide for Effective Jewish
Service-learning Programs*

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MODULE 5

FOOD JUSTICE

INTRODUCTION

According to Feeding America, a nonprofit organization addressing poverty and food insecurity, approximately 14% of American households experienced food insecurity in 2014. Food insecurity is when an individual or family does not have sufficient access to healthy, nutritious food. This module provides a variety of activities to help volunteers better understand issues of food access, the role of food banks, how the treatment of workers relates to food justice, and the role of urban agriculture. The module includes:

- I. Understanding Food Access
- II. Justice for Workers
- III. Urban Agriculture

I. UNDERSTANDING FOOD ACCESS

The texts and activities in this section are designed to help participants better understand what food insecurity is, how it works and how widespread it is.

A. TEXT STUDY: FOOD ACCESS AND CONTROL

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is to explore what Jewish text has to say about access to food.

Overview:

This activity is facilitated in two parts - first the group reads the text and then discusses it.

Materials Needed:

- copies of “Text Study: Food Access and Control (Appendix A)”

Length of Activity:

15 minutes

Procedure:

1. Text and Discussion (15 minutes)

The texts for this activity are included in Appendix A. Hand out a copy of the texts to each participant. Have participants break into pairs, read the text and discuss the included questions.

B. TEXT STUDY: FOOD ACCESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is to explore what Jewish text has to say about access to food and our individual and communal responsibility for this.

Overview:

This activity is facilitated in two parts - first the group reads the text and then discusses it.

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Materials Needed:

- copies of “Text Study: Food Access and Responsibility (Appendix B)

Length of Activity:

25 minutes

Procedure:**1. Reading Text (5 minutes)**

The text for this activity is included in Appendix B. Hand out a copy of the text to each participant and have them read individually, in pairs or take turns reading it aloud.

2. Discussion (20 minutes)

Once the group has read the text, have them discuss the questions included with the text in pairs or in the larger group.

C. TEXT STUDY: FOOD ACCESS AND SCARCITY

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is to explore what Jewish text has to say about access to food and how feelings of scarcity relate to that.

Overview:

This activity is facilitated in two parts - first the group reads the text and then discusses it.

Materials Needed:

- copies of “Text Study: Food Access and Scarcity (Appendix C)

Length of Activity:

30 minutes

Procedure:**1. Reading Text (10 minutes)**

The text for this activity is included in the appendix. Hand out a copy of the text to each participant and have them read individually, in pairs or take turns reading it aloud.

2. Discussion (20 minutes)

Once the group has read the text, have them discuss the questions included with the text in pairs or in the larger group.

D. MAPPING THE PROBLEM

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is to help clarify the disparities of food access in your city and make it easier to see where basic resources are lacking in your city.

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Overview:

This activity is facilitated in three parts - first the facilitator frames the activity, then participants look at the maps, then the group discusses observations.

Materials:

- Beforehand, go online to the Food Desert Locator map. Print three maps:
- Map of the United States
- Map of your town or city
- Map of the neighborhood where your participants live and/or where your service activity is taking place

For one of the three, you may also want to print out the Supermarket Access Map.

If your group is interested in further data-based learning and discussion, you can also explore different food environment factors and food-related health indicators in your area using the Food Environment Atlas. Use the “Select Map to Display” drop down menu to select different food environment factors and health indicators. You can print maps in advance or use this tool live with a laptop and projector.

Length of Activity:

35-50 minutes

Procedure:

1. Framing (5 minutes)

Share the following quote with the group:

“Maps tell many kinds of stories. They can summarize a situation, trace a route, and show change over time. They can examine causes and effects and reveal interrelationships. They can show patterns of movement and compare and contrast places. They can help people make plans, predict or model the future, and support decisions. They can explain, reveal, and propagandize.”
– *Telling Stories with Maps: A White Paper*

Explain to participants that in this activity, we will look at food desert maps from the USDA to orient ourselves to the food landscape in our neighborhoods, cities, and country. Exploring the food deserts around us will show us the disparities in access in our communities.

Explain that food deserts are defined by the USDA as:

[U]rban neighborhoods and rural towns without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. Instead of supermarkets and grocery stores, these communities may have no food access or are served only by fast food restaurants and convenience stores that offer few healthy, affordable food options. The lack of access contributes to a poor diet and can lead to higher levels of obesity and other diet-related diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease, amongst other far-reaching impacts.

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2. Review Maps (5-10 minutes)

Hand out the neighborhood and city maps to participants and give them some time to look at them individually. You may at this point also choose to hand out the copy of the Supermarket Access Map.

Note: depending on participants' prior experience reading maps and data, you may need to explain the maps and data to the group.

3. Discuss Maps (25-35 minutes)

Once the group seems ready to discuss, ask participants some of the following questions:

- What impressions do they have of the maps?
- Any initial surprises?
- Were there more or fewer food deserts than they had assumed prior to looking at the map? Or about the same?
- What factors do you think contribute to food deserts in this area?
- How does the neighborhood compare to the larger city? To your own neighborhood, if you live outside this one?
- How does the Food Desert Locator Map compare to the Supermarket Access Map? What information can we learn from each?

If there is time, move on to the national map to compare urban and rural food deserts.

To conclude this portion of the discussion, you can discuss these questions:

- How does seeing a physical map change the conversation? Add to it?
- How does a map as a medium help? What does it not get at?

Note to Facilitator: This map only measures geographic access to grocery stores according to pre-set measures of distance, income, and vehicle access. It does not take into account other access issues such as quantity and quality of produce and other fresh foods at a store, high local prices for fresh foods, homebound residents, nor rates of eligibility and enrollment for food assistance programs such as SNAP (food stamps) and WIC (food assistance for low-income women with very young children). For example, it does not reflect a low-income neighborhood in which a grocery store exists within a short distance but (a) the fresh food selection is very limited or of very poor quality or (b) the prices of fresh foods are above average and therefore not affordable for low-income residents. If the group is interested in learning more about these access issues locally, ask local hunger and food security organizations for more information about local food access issues.

E. CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON FOOD ACCESS

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is to explore some contemporary articles that investigate ideas of food access, food deserts and what we can do about this issue.

Overview:

This activity is facilitated in three parts - first participants read and discuss one of the articles, then they present back to the whole group about their article and finally the

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group debriefs through a group discussion.

Materials Needed:

- Copies of “Contemporary Perspectives on Food Access” articles (Appendix E)

Length of Activity:

60 minutes

Procedure:

1. Reviewing and Discussing Articles in Small Groups (20 minutes)

Break the group into pairs or small groups and give each pair/group an article to read. Groups should read their article, then discuss the discussion questions that are included with their text. Finally, they should identify the key ideas from the text and any insights from their discussion to share back with the larger group and decide which group member will report back.

2. Presenting Key Ideas and Insights (20 minutes)

A representative from each group should report back to the larger group on the main ideas of their article and any insights their group has.

3. Debrief (20 minutes)

Once all groups have presented, debrief the activity using some of the following questions:

- Did you notice any themes as you heard about all of the articles?
- What questions do these articles raise for you?
- Was there any information or perspective(s) that surprised you?
- What do these articles teach us about how we engage in service around issues related to food justice?

If you have more time, you can also ask more specific questions:

- Looking together at the examples described in “Why a Philadelphia Grocery Chain is Thriving in Food Deserts” and “What Will Make the Food Desert Bloom?” do you think these are just creative local projects or principles that can be replicated for larger scale systemic change?
- Do you think Jeff Brown’s innovations described in the “Why a Philadelphia Grocery Chain is Thriving in Food Deserts” article respond to the challenges posed by the New York Times piece “Giving the Poor Easy Access to Healthy Food Doesn’t Mean They’ll Buy It” in a compelling way?
- Do you think The Food Trust’s innovations described in “What Will Make the Food Desert Bloom?” respond to the challenges posed by the New York Times piece “Giving the Poor Easy Access to Healthy Food Doesn’t Mean They’ll Buy It” in a compelling way?
- (If your group has already completed the “Mapping the Problem” activity in this module) What information does this report add that you were not able to glean from reading the food desert maps?

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F. THE FIGHT AGAINST HUNGER

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is to explore food insecurity from a variety of angles, including through personal stories and statistics.

Overview:

This activity is facilitated in four parts - first the facilitator frames the exercises, then the group reads and discusses personal narratives of food insecurity, then the group reviews some statistics about hunger and finally the group watches and discusses a video clip about ending hunger.

Materials Needed:

Beforehand, go to Mazon's ["This is Hunger"](#) site and read through the narratives. Print out enough copies of different stories for every participant to have one story. One copy of the ["Quick Facts about Hunger in America"](#)¹ for each participant. Access to an internet capable device to play ["Bucket brigades and the fight against hunger" TEDx talk.](#)²

Length of Activity:

65 minutes

Procedure:**1. Framing (5 minutes)**

When we engage with the many aspects of the movement for food justice, it's important to remember that millions in this country have limited access to food of any kind. In this activity, we will explore the state of food insecurity in America today. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as a lack of access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Although often used interchangeably with "hunger," the metrics of food insecurity provide some useful information about the economic and social contexts that may lead to hunger but do not assess the extent to which hunger, a physiological state, actually ensues. While no one story can encompass all experiences of food insecurity, we will begin by reading several stories collected by [Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger](#) that share first hand accounts of food insecurity, before engaging with statistics. We invite you to treat these stories with kavod, or respect, in the same way you would if the storyteller were in the room with you. These folks have shared their stories bravely and we have a responsibility as listeners to not make assumptions about any additional aspects of the storyteller's life. To conclude we will watch a podcast by Joel Berg, Executive Director of the [New York City Coalition Against Hunger](#) and a leader in the anti-hunger movement in America.

2. Faces of Hunger (15 minutes)

Give each person a "Face of Hunger" story and ask them to read their story silently to themselves - multiple participants will have the same story unless you have a very small group. Once everyone has finished, ask someone to share the name of one of the individuals in one of the stories. Ask anyone with that person to share one way that food insecurity impacts their life. Repeat this process with additional stories as

1 "Quick Facts about Hunger in America." *Mazon*. Mazon, n.d. Web. 05 February 2016.

2 Tedx Talks. "Bucket brigades and the fight against hunger | Joel Berg | TEDxManhattan." Online video clip. *Youtube*. Youtube, 18 March 2015. Web. 05 February 2016.

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time allows. After the go-around, open up the floor for discussion, using some of the following questions:

- What surprised you most about the story you read?
- Did you find yourself holding any assumptions about food insecurity that this story contradicted?
- What were the themes that we heard amongst the stories about the impact of food insecurity?
- What resources did the individuals have available to them? What resources didn't they have?

3. Statistics (15 minutes)

Share with participants that now that they've heard some human stories of food insecurity, you'll be exploring some statistics about food insecurity. Ask the group to read "[Quick Facts About Hunger in America](#)" (from [Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger](#)), rotating among participants for each paragraph. You may want to stop and discuss after a particularly compelling statistic. After the statistics have been read, facilitate a full group discussion using some of the following questions:

- What can statistics tell us about food insecurity that narratives can't? What do narratives tell us that statistics can't?
- How does the breakdown of organizations and services to combat domestic hunger compare to what you knew before?
- If you were to share one of these facts with your representative or legislator, which one would it be and why?

4. Video (30 minutes)

To conclude, watch Joel Berg's "[Bucket brigades and the fight against hunger](#)" TEDx talk.

Once you've watched the video together, either have folks break up into small groups to discuss or stay in one large group. Share the following questions with the group to guide their discussion:

- Berg makes the assertion that to achieve every major national goal - fixing public education in America, cutting obesity, restoring the middle class, cutting crime and incarceration, reducing healthcare spending, protecting the country from our enemies, and slashing poverty - to achieve any of those things we have to end hunger. Based on that assertion, explore how hunger might be a root cause of each of these issues. Does this new framing change your understanding of food insecurity as a social justice issue?
- What other social issues do you know of that have had government services replaced with "bucket brigades?" How are these issues interrelated with food insecurity?
- If food drives are not ending hunger, why do them? (hint: there are many good answers with which Berg would agree.)
- At his climax, Berg says, "Claiming we can end hunger with a bit more charity is like saying we can fill the Grand Canyon with a teaspoon. But the Grand Canyon will always erode faster than we can fill it and hunger will always increase faster than charity. And let's not kid ourselves, we're not going to end hunger either with more seasonal community gardens or farms, more cooking nutrition classes or some sexy new app. Sorry, it's true. Sure, some of those things can help at the margins, but let's be clear that the only thing that can truly end hunger in America

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- is a fundamental paradigm shift that replaces charity with justice.”
- How do you find the balance as a volunteer to help those on the margins and work for the fundamental paradigm shift required for true food justice?
 - » How can we make our service part of a larger movement for change?
 - » Note to Facilitator: It's likely some may feel uncomfortable, or even personally offended by Berg's dismissal of the importance of hands-on service in food pantries and soup kitchens. Encourage folks to lean into that discomfort and discuss the merits of direct service and advocacy to end food insecurity. Both direct service and advocacy are important methods of social change when trying to end food insecurity, and that they are most effective when done together.

Note to Facilitator: It's likely some may feel uncomfortable, or even personally offended by Berg's dismissal of the importance of hands-on service in food pantries and soup kitchens. Encourage folks to lean into that discomfort and discuss the merits of direct service and advocacy to end food insecurity. Both direct service and advocacy are important methods of social change when trying to end food insecurity, and that they are most effective when done together.

II. JUSTICE FOR WORKERS

One important aspect of a just food system is ensuring that the individuals who help to plant, grow, harvest and process our foods are treated justly. The texts and activities in this section explore these ideas from a Jewish perspective.

A. TEXT STUDY: LETTUCE AND GRAPE BOYCOTT

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is to explore what one contemporary rabbi has to say about the intersections of kashrut (Jewish dietary laws) and fair labor practices.

Overview:

This activity is facilitated in two parts - first the group reads the text and then discusses it.

Materials Needed:

- copies of “Text Study: Lettuce and Grape Boycott (Appendix E)

Length of Activity:

15 minutes

Procedure:

1. Text (5 minutes)

The text for this activity is included in Appendix F. Hand out a copy of the text to each participant and have them read individually, in pairs or take turns reading it out loud.

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2. Discussion (10 minutes)

Once the group has read the text, have them discuss the questions included with the text in pairs or in the larger group.

B. JUSTICE ON MY PLATE

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is to explore the intersections of Jewish food ethics/ kashrut with broader issues of social justice and justice for workers.

Overview:

This activity is facilitated in three or four parts - first the facilitator frames the activity, then the group reads and discusses an article, then they reflect on the article and optionally the group can recite a *kavannah* (intention), if eating together.

Materials Needed:

- copies of “Judaism on My Plate” and “Ethical Consumption Kavannah” (Appendix G)

Length of Activity:

35-40 minutes

Procedure:

1. Framing (5 minutes)

Share some or all of the following to frame this activity:

Jewish tradition is filled with sources relating to food justice - there are injunctions to have food pantries in every town, laws requiring farmers to leave the edges of their field unharvested for the poor, obligatory tithing of one’s harvest to charity, and on and on. The project of incorporating the values inherent in these ancient laws is an important and pressing one.

There is also an important spiritual dimension in Judaism of examining our relationship to our food and food system through the practice of reciting brachot, or blessings, before eating. Reciting brachot is a regular mindfulness practice to connect to the many values of ethical consumption. In this activity, we will read an essay by Dasi Fruchter, a rabbinical student and social justice activist, who asserts that “Kosher” should be more than just a label certifying a foods’ compliance with Jewish dietary laws. It should encompass an ethical relationship to the food we eat that is *Yosher* - upright and just.

We will also study a *kavanah*, or intention, to be recited before eating, and explore the ideas this practice can offer in building a sustained commitment to working for food justice.

2. Reading and Discussion (20 minutes)

Have participants read “Judaism on My Plate” in small groups, or all together, and discuss the questions following the text. Please feel free to provide more

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information on the [Tav HaYosher](#) ethical certification.

3. Reflection (10 minutes)

To close, have the group go around and each share one thing they might incorporate into their daily lives to remind them of the importance of food justice.

4. Optional Blessing (5 minutes)

If you'll be eating at some point while the group is together, you can recite the ethical consumption *kavannah* (intention). While eating, you can discuss how reciting the *kavannah* affected your experience of eating.

III. URBAN AGRICULTURE

One current response to the challenges around food access and food insecurity is creating urban gardens and farms. The activity in this section explores this idea in more depth.

A. GUERRILLA GARDENER VIDEO AND DISCUSSION (35 MINUTES)

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is to explore the idea of urban gardens - why they're needed and what benefits they bring.

Overview:

This activity is facilitated in two parts: first the group watches a video together in which Ron Finley talks about his experiences planting urban gardens and building a healthier community in South Central LA. Then the group discusses a series of questions to reflect upon the ideas that Ron presents concerning food justice.

Materials Needed:

- an internet-capable device to play "[Ron Finley: A Guerilla Gardener in South Central LA](#)"³

Procedure:

1. Video (15 minutes)

Watch the video, "[Ron Finley: A Guerilla Gardener in South Central LA](#)".

2. Discussion (20 minutes)

Once you've watched the video together, either have folks break up into small groups to discuss or stay in one large group. Share the following questions with the group to guide their discussion:

- What problems does Ron describe in his community?
- Why does he think gardening is an effective response to these problems? Do you agree?
- What do you think that Ron means when he says, "to change the community, you have to change the composition of the soil?"
- Why is "gardening..the most definant act you can do, especially in the inner city?"

³ "Ron Finley: A Guerilla Gardener in South Central LA." Online video clip. TED. TED, Feb. 2013. Web. 05 February 2016.

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- What does this video have to teach us about how we engage in service around issues related to food justice?

Note: The last minute of the video includes some swear words that might not be appropriate for all audiences.

CLOSING

Food insecurity is one of the most pressing social issues of our day and food justice is one of the most compelling social justice pursuits. The activities in this module provided an opportunity to learn more about these issues and explore them more deeply. In the next module, we'll explore another critical issue - educational equity.

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APPENDIX A TEXT STUDY: FOOD ACCESS AND CONTROL

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Background:

The Talmud is an important collection of Jewish legal discussion, biblical commentary, and stories redacted around 500 CE.

Rashi is a famous French Medieval commentator to the Bible and the Talmud.

Texts and Questions:

Anyone who depends on another's table, the world is dark to him, for it is said, "He wanders about for bread—where is it? He knows that the day of darkness has been readied for him" (Job 15:23). - Babylonian Talmud, Beitzah 32b

According to this text, what does it feel like to depend on others for your food? Do you agree? Why do you think that might be?

"One who has bread in their basket is not comparable to one who does not have bread in their basket" (Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 74b) This refers to one who has food today but worries about food for tomorrow.- Rashi

According to this text, what does it feel like to be unsure where your food will come from? Do you agree? Why do you think that might be?

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APPENDIX B TEXT STUDY: FOOD ACCESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

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Background:

The Talmud is an important collection of Jewish legal discussion, biblical commentary, and stories redacted around 500 CE.

Text:

Our Rabbis taught: One should not clear stones out of one's own property and throw them into the public property. There is a story of a man who was clearing stones out of his own property and throwing them into the public property [a road]. A pious man, seeing him, said to him, "Wretch, why do you remove stones from a property that is not truly yours to a domain that is yours?" The man laughed at him. After a time, the man became poor and needed to sell his field, and, walking on that very same public road, he stumbled over the stones he had thrown. He said, "How well that pious man put it: 'Why do you remove stones from a domain that is not truly yours to a domain that is yours?' - Babylonian Talmud, Bava Kama 50b

Discussion Questions:

- In what ways does this story imply our private property is not really ours? In what ways do we "own" public property?
- How does this story imply we should treat communal resources?
- What can we learn from this text about the importance of food access for all?

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APPENDIX C TEXT STUDY: FOOD ACCESS AND SCARCITY

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Background:

Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) was a French philosopher of Lithuanian Jewish ancestry who is known for his work related to Jewish philosophy, existentialism, and ethics.

Genesis is the first of the 24 books of the Hebrew Bible.

Rabbi Sampson Raphael Hirsh (1808-1888) was a German rabbi best known as the intellectual founder of one branch of contemporary Orthodox Judaism.

Texts:

Emmanuel Levinas, “Nine Talmudic Readings: Saying Grace in the Third World,” p. 132

But how will saying grace create champions of the good cause? It is obvious that what is suggested to us here are peaceful struggles: the problem of a hungry world can be resolved only if the food of the owners and those who are provided for ceases to appear to them as inalienable property, but is recognized as a gift they have received for which thanks must be given and to which others have a right. Scarcity is a social and moral problem and not exclusively an economic one. That is what our text reminds us of, in old wives’ tales.

Genesis 3:19

By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return.

Rabbi Sampson Raphael Hirsh commentary to Genesis 3:19

The whole lamentable condition of gaining a scanty subsistence via sacrifice is expressed in the little word-bread (L-Ch-M). The Hebrew word for sustenance (T-R-F) carries the root meaning of snatched, for it must be ‘snatched’ in the struggle implies that in the same moment of struggle against nature, there is another struggle against one’s fellow, the struggle of all against all. Did we not have to direct our minds so much to obtaining our daily bread, strife between man and man would be not so pre-eminent, and the idea of property would not weigh so heavily in the scales.

Discussion Questions:

- What happens when we shift our thinking to seeing food as a “gift...for which thanks must be given and to which others have a right?”
- How does a feeling of scarcity and limited resources impact our approach to ensuring we have enough to eat? How does it impact our approach to ensuring that everyone has enough to eat?
- What is the implication of the Genesis text when it says “by the sweat of your brow you will eat your food?”
- What impact would it have on you if you no longer had to worry about providing for food for yourself? What impact would it have if no one had to worry about that?

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APPENDIX D USING THE FOOD ACCESS MAPPING TOOL

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Go to <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas.aspx>

Type a zip code, city/town, or county in the search box on the top left-hand side.

Select a layer from the “Low Income (LI) and Low Access (LA) Layers” box in the top righthand side of the screen. Food deserts are displayed by census district.

Note: For each of the first three layers listed, the first distance given (1 mile or ½ mile) is the criteria for distance from a supermarket in urban areas and the second distance (10 miles or 20 miles) is the criteria for distance from a supermarket in rural areas.

You may choose more than one layer to map at a time, which will enable you to view the areas that meet any of the food desert criteria. However, for census districts that meet more than one definition of food desert, only the color from a single layer will be displayed, even when multiple layers are selected. Therefore, you may find it useful to first view the map by selecting only one layer at a time.

To learn more about the data in a particular census tract, click on the tract on the map. A box will open with summary information on the first tab (“Summary”), and more detailed information about geographic access in the second tab (“Tract Information”).

Data indicators ending in the term “share” represents a ratio (multiply by 100 to determine the percentage).

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APPENDIX E TEXT STUDY: CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON FOOD ACCESS

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[WHY A PHILADELPHIA GROCERY CHAIN IS THRIVING IN FOOD DESERTS⁴](#) MAANVI SINGH, MAY 14, 2014, NPR

When Jeff Brown opened his first grocery store in a low-income neighborhood in Philadelphia back in 2004, it seemed like a long shot.

Most people thought he was crazy to even attempt to make money in a food desert like Southwest Philly, he says. Other grocers had tried and quickly gone out of business.

But Brown...tried a different approach: "Before we did anything, we brought together a group of community leaders, and we just asked them to tell us exactly what it is they were looking for in a neighborhood grocery store."

It worked: Brown's company now operates seven profitable supermarkets in low-income neighborhoods in and around Philadelphia. Along the way, he's learned a thing or two about what it takes to change shopping and eating habits in food deserts.

...When it comes to selling fresh produce, Brown says he likes to take cues from higher-end stores like Whole Foods, which put lots of effort into marketing it. He says he has his employees at every store take extra time to hand-stack fruits and veggies "into little pyramids — because it avoids bruising and it's eye-catching."

He also invests in skilled butchers, fishmongers and in-store chefs. And that's how he's managed to tempt customers into choosing healthier food, he says, like "fire-grilled chicken" instead of fried chicken.

"It's grilled right in the store, so people can smell it. And it makes this popping and cracking sound," he says.

Selling groceries also takes lots and lots of market research. "Before we open a store in a neighborhood, we work with community leaders ... learn about their background, religion, where their families came from," Brown says. In areas with larger Muslim populations, his stores have a separate department for Halal meat.

"In some parts of Philly, we also have lots of African American families coming from the South. But Southern food and ingredients aren't so easy to come by in these areas," he says. So the ready-to-eat sections of stores in those areas offer collard greens (cooked with smoked turkey instead of pork, as a healthy touch). "And now we're famous for our Southern sweet potato pie. We bake them in-store, and they're really authentic."

But Brown doesn't just want people to shop at his stores – he wants people to spend time there. After all, foot traffic is key to sales.

So he started by making sure his stores were easy to get to. "We lobbied the transportation authority to put bus stations near our stores," he says.

And then he added other services and perks, like community centers, which locals sign up to use for meetings and events. Some stores also have credit unions, staff nutritionists, social workers and health clinics.

⁴ Singh, Maanvi. "Why a Philadelphia Grocery Chain is Thriving in Food Deserts." *The Salt*. NPR, 14 May 2015. Web. 05 February 2016.

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Almost all of these services are free, and they are often provided in partnership with local non-profits. "It's a win-win – because by stationing in our stores, the non-profits get access to more people in need," he says. "And from our standpoint, each broken social thing hurts business."

In the case of the health clinics, Brown noticed that lots of his customers were going to the emergency room because they didn't have access to primary care practitioners. So he started his own non-profit health service, called QCare. And the organization now serves any supermarket across the country that's interested in providing low-cost health services.

"Different things work for different stores," Lempert says. "In the end, it's really about putting the supermarket at the center of the community."

Discussion Questions:

- Are there conflicts between community health and the profitability of Mr. Brown's business model?
- If you were a community organizer and wanted to replicate this model in a food desert in which you were organizing, what steps would you take? Who would you have to get on your side?

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[WHAT WILL MAKE THE FOOD DESERT BLOOM?](#)⁵ DAN CHARLES, MAY 01, 2012, NPR

...The Food Trust [that originally set up farmers markets in Philadelphia] is shifting gears a bit. Instead of just trying to bring in supermarkets, it's working with the owners of hundreds of little corner stores - the kind that are common throughout low-income areas of the city, but have a reputation for selling mostly junk food.

The Polo Food Market at the corner of 10th and Brown Streets has a new, colorful refrigerator. It's on loan from The Food Trust, and it's stocked with fresh fruit and vegetables.

Store owner Salinette Rodriguez says...dozens of kids come in here every morning and leave with fruit: Apples, oranges, and lots of bananas. "Once they see something, they'll take it. If they don't see it, they won't take it."

We've reported before that simply moving fresh foods up to the front of the corner store or improving grocery store lighting attracts more buyers.

But making this food available is only the start of this new campaign. On several store racks, there are signs that rate products green, yellow, or red, based on how nutritious they are. And there are flashy little cards with recipes for how to use some of the most nutritious ingredients. Each of these meals should feed a family of four and cost about five dollars....

Barry Popkin, from the University of North Carolina, says this is the sort of effort that really can work. But changing food habits won't happen quickly, he says. Powerful economic incentives got us into this situation over the course of the past half-century. "In 1950, low-income Americans ate the most healthy diets in our country," he says. "In 2010, they ate the least healthy diets. And that's because the least healthy foods are the cheapest."

Discussion Questions:

- What are the characteristics of successful initiatives described in these articles combating the health challenges of food deserts?
- How do we reconcile the excitement of local grassroots initiatives with data-driven nation-wide trends?

⁵ Charles, Dan. "What Will Make the Food Desert Bloom?" *The Salt*. NPR, 01 May 2012. Web. 05 February 2016.

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APPENDIX E TEXT STUDY: CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON FOOD ACCESS

FOOD JUSTICE

“UNSHARED BOUNTY: HOW STRUCTURAL RACISM CONTRIBUTES TO THE CREATION AND PERSISTENCE OF FOOD DESERTS” JUNE 2012

A report from the American Civil Liberties Union and the NYU Racial Justice Project

The following text is a series of excerpts from [“Unshared Bounty: How Structural Racism Contributes to the Creation and Persistence of Food Deserts,”](#) a report produced in 2012 by American Civil Liberties Union and the NYU Racial Justice Project. These excerpts do not go into the methodology and data of their findings, but merely summarize the findings. Footnotes have been removed for ease of reading.

Food touches everything and is never just food: “it is also a way of getting at something else: who we are, who we have been, and who we want to be.” Above all, food “marks social differences, boundaries, bonds and contradictions.” In America, these social differences, boundaries and contradictions are starkly reflected in the fact that 23.5 million Americans currently live in food deserts, urban and rural communities with no access or severely limited regular access to healthy and affordable food... located more than 1 mile from a supermarket. African Americans are half as likely to have access to chain supermarkets and Hispanics are a third less likely to have access to chain supermarkets. Area-specific studies have found that minority communities are more likely to have smaller grocery stores carrying higher priced, less varied food products than other neighborhoods

...Detroit, which is 83% African American and 6% Latino, has no major chain supermarkets. In Los Angeles, predominantly white residential areas have 3.2 times as many supermarkets as predominantly African-American areas and 1.7 times as many as predominantly Latino areas. Residents of predominantly African-American neighborhoods in Chicago have to travel the farthest distance to get to a grocery store as compared to white or even racially diverse neighborhoods. In Washington D.C., the District’s two lowest income neighborhoods, which are overwhelmingly African-American, have one supermarket for every 70,000 residents compared to 1 supermarket for approximately every 12,000 residents in two of the District’s highest income and predominantly white neighborhoods.

The lack of supermarkets within low-income inner-city minority communities is not a demographic accident or a consequence of “natural” settlement patterns. Rather, government policies and their resulting incentives have played a significant role in shaping the segregated landscape of American cities... Supermarkets, along with many other types of businesses, followed white middle-class incomes to the suburbs.

...The scarcity of supermarkets within the inner city continues to impact minorities living in low income urban neighborhoods. African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans living in these neighborhoods travel farther, have fewer choices, and pay more for food than their counterparts. When minority families shop locally for groceries they find a grocery store that is “2.5 times smaller than the average grocery store in a higher income neighborhood” with higher priced food, less fresh produce, and more processed food.

6 “Unshared Bounty: How Structural Racism Contributes to the Creation and Persistence of Food Deserts.” ACLU and New York Law School Racial Justice Project. Racial Justice Project, June 2012. Web. 05 February 2016.

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Discussion Questions:

- How do your favorite places to shop for food fit with the picture painted in this report?
- What are the consequences, communal and individual, of only having access to higher priced food, less fresh produce, and more processed food?
- What other inequalities and injustices are at play in food deserts besides access to food? Why are food deserts referred to as a food justice issue?
- Thinking about our role as change makers in ending food deserts, how can direct service help improve food access? What are the limits of direct service in confronting the injustices described in this report?
- What types of policy changes could help eliminate food deserts?
- How do you balance the need for direct service and advocacy when confronting injustice in the world?

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“CAN THE CANS: WHY FOOD DRIVES ARE A TERRIBLE IDEA”⁷ MATTHEW YGLESIAS, DECEMBER 7, 2011.

‘Tis the season for food drives. It’s a holiday tradition as storied as Christmas trees, awkward conversations with the in-laws, and embarrassing drunken moments at the office holiday party. Your employer, your church, and your kids’ school put out the boxes and ask everyone to drop off excess canned goods for the needy. Then the boxes are collected, sorted, and handed out to the poor. Everyone feels better about themselves, the hungry get fed, and you get to free up some much needed shelf space. It’s win-win-win.

The problem is that, economically speaking, it’s totally insane.

...All across America, charitable organizations and the food industry have set up mechanisms through which emergency food providers can get their hands on surplus food for a nominal handling charge. Katherina Rosqueta, executive director of the Center for High Impact Philanthropy at the University of Pennsylvania, explains that food providers can get what they need for “pennies on the dollar.” She estimates that they pay about 10 cents a pound for food that would cost you \$2 per pound retail. You’d be doing dramatically more good, in basic dollars and cents terms, by eating that tuna yourself and forking over a check for half the price of a single can of Chicken of the Sea.

Beyond the economies of scale are the overhead costs. Charities are naturally reluctant to turn down donations for fear of alienating supporters or demoralizing well-wishers, but the reality is that dealing with sporadic surges of cans is a logistical headache. A nationwide network of food banks called Feeding America gingerly notes on its website that “a hastily organized local food drive can actually put more strain on your local food bank than you imagine.” Food dropped off by well-meaning citizens needs to be carefully inspected and sorted. A personal check, by contrast, can be used to order what’s needed without placing extra burdens on the staff.

...“For a long time we just basically kept politely quiet about the fact that food drives weren’t as helpful as people assumed,” explains Greg Bloom, a development assistant at Bread for the City in Washington, D.C., “but that changed when we became more diligent about stocking our pantry with healthy foods.”

Bloom explains that they tried providing a specific list of items for people to donate, but even so “we find that almost half of what comes to us in any given food drive just doesn’t meet our nutritional standards.” Under the circumstances, telling people that money is more helpful started looking like a more appealing option.

... Good intentions are lovely, but particularly in hard times it’s more important to make sure your charitable dollars go as far as possible. Can the cans. Hand over some cash.”

Discussion questions:

- What problem is Yglesias identifying in this article?
- What do you think is the cause of the problem?
- How does this situation parallel challenges with direct service?
- What resonates with you in this article? What feels challenging?

⁷ Yglesias, Matthew. “Can the Cans: Why Food Drives Are a Terrible Idea.” *Moneybox*. Slate, 07 December, 2011. Web. 05 February 2016.

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Matthew Yglesias is Slate Magazine's business and economics correspondent. He is the author of *The Rent Is Too Damn High*. His full article can be found [here](#).

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"SWEET JUSTICE: DOMESTIC HUNGER AND THE LIMITS OF CHARITY"⁸

J. LARRY BROWN

"...But what motivates the volunteers commands little of the author's time, no doubt in recognition of the fact that all of us typically have multiple impulses behind our deeds, and that what matters most is whether they serve a public good. Instead, Poppendieck focuses her analysis on the "Seven Deadly 'Ins'" of the emergency food business—insufficiency, inappropriateness, inadequacy, instability, inaccessibility, inefficiency, and indignity. Her observations, not new by any means, but more cogent and comprehensive than those offered by others, is that hand-outs are no way to feed the citizens of a wealthy, modern-day democracy. Almost by its very nature the supply of food is not enough (insufficient); it is not the way to insure adequate nourishment (inadequacy); and, no matter how many improvements are made in organization and delivery, it is not adequate to meet the need (instability, inaccessibility and inefficiency). Indeed, even were there a miraculous doubling of the current annual supply of food delivered by Second Harvest, the national umbrella for food banks across the country, it still would be many times deficient to equal the \$27 billion cut from the federal Food Stamp Program as part of the welfare "reform" signed by President Clinton in 1996..."

Discussion Questions:

- What information in this text was new to you? What was not?
- Did anything in this text surprise you?
- If emergency food banks are failing in the ways that the author describes, why do food drives and volunteering at food pantries continue to be so popular?
- What do you think the author is suggesting as an alternative to food banks?

⁸ Brown, J. Larry. "Sweet Justice: Domestic Hunger and the Limits of Charity." *Public Health Reports* 114 (1999): 381-383. Web. 05 February 2016.

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[“GIVING THE POOR EASY ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD DOESN’T MEAN THEY’LL BUY IT”⁹](#)

MARGOT SANGER-KATZ

In 2010, the Morrisania section of the Bronx was what is commonly called a food desert: The low-income neighborhood in New York’s least-healthy county had no nearby grocery store, and few places where its residents could easily buy fresh food.

That’s why it was the target of [a city tax incentive program](#) designed to bring healthy food into underserved neighborhoods. In 2011, a 17,000-square-foot supermarket opened, aided by city money that paid some 40 percent of the costs of its construction. The neighborhood welcomed the addition, and perceived access to healthy food improved. But the diets of the neighborhood’s residents did not.

The work adds to a growing body of evidence that merely fixing food deserts will not do nearly as much to improve the health of poor neighborhoods as policy makers had hoped. It seems intuitive that a lack of nearby healthy food can contribute to a poor diet. But merely adding a grocery store to a poor neighborhood, it appears, doesn’t make a very big difference. The cost of food—and people’s habits of shopping and eating—appear to be much more powerful than just convenience.

[Another study](#), published this week as a working paper by the National Bureau of Economic Research, looked across the country and found that no more than a tenth of the variation in the food people bought could be explained by the availability of a nearby grocery store. The education level of the shoppers, for example, was far more predictive. “If you were going to put all Americans in the same retail environment, you’d end up only dealing with 10 percent of this disparity between college-educated and high-school-educated households,” said Jessie Handbury, an assistant professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, and an author of the paper.

Tackling the problem of food deserts has been embraced by the federal government and many local governments. The federal government’s [Healthy Food Financing Initiative](#) has handed out more than \$500 million in recent years to help encourage grocery stores to locate in places they had avoided. Many states and cities—[like New York](#)—have their own programs, aimed at getting more grocery stores and farmer’s markets into poor neighborhoods where the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables is low and [obesity](#) rates tend to be high.

Still, all that investment may not pay off in the form of healthier communities. The recent paper looked at the buying habits of families who agreed to allow all of their bar-coded food purchases to be scanned and measured, along with details about their address and demographic characteristics. That data allowed the researchers to track what people bought according to their incomes and education levels, as well as their neighborhoods.

The research, like the work that initially described the food desert concept, noted that lower-income neighborhoods tended to have less healthy food nearby and that their residents tended to eat less healthy diets. The researchers set out to see whether those disparities could be explained by access issues, or by more entrenched preferences for particular kinds of foods.

⁹ Sanger-Katz, Margot. “Giving the Poor Easy Access to Healthy Food Doesn’t Mean They’ll Buy It.” *New York Times* 08 May 2015. Web.

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It turned out that food preferences dominated. When the researchers looked at shoppers with lower levels of income and education living in richer neighborhoods with more accessible healthy food, their shopping mimicked that of low-income, less educated people in poorer neighborhoods. (And the reverse was true, too: Richer, more educated shoppers in poor neighborhoods looked more like rich shoppers in rich neighborhoods.)

“When we put supermarkets in poor neighborhoods, people are buying the same food,” said Barry Popkin, a professor of Nutrition at the University of North Carolina, who participated in an [Institute of Medicine](#) review of food desert research in 2009. “They just get it cheaper.”

New York isn’t the only market where new stores have been built and studied. [Research in Philadelphia](#) showed similarly middling effects from the introduction of grocery stores into poor neighborhoods—as [have studies](#) of food desert-amelioration policies in England.

It’s possible that poverty itself explains a lot of the shopping variation. In general, fresher, healthier food is more expensive to buy than less healthy processed food. It also takes more time and resources to cook, and keeps for fewer days.

If people can’t afford healthier foods, then it would be reasonable to think that just giving them a better store wouldn’t solve their problems. But Ms. Handbury’s paper found that the education of the shoppers was much more predictive than their incomes. Poorer families bought less healthy food than richer ones. But a bigger gap was found between families with and without a college education. Those results, Ms. Handbury said, suggest that improving people’s diets will require both making food accessible and affordable and also changing people’s perceptions and habits about diet and health.

Mr. Elbel, who studied the grocery store in the Bronx, says the work highlights just how hard it is for public policy to help reduce obesity. The studies aren’t a reason to stop caring about food deserts, he said. But they do tell us that improving access, alone, will not solve the problem. “Nothing is going to show a huge impact for obesity, or almost nothing,” he said. “We can’t always just negate the smaller things.”

Discussion Questions:

- What information in this text was new to you?
- Did anything in this text surprise you?
- What are some of the reasons the text gives that putting grocery stores in food deserts, on its own, does not change what type of food people buy? What other disparities might be causing this?
- What do you think could be done at the same time that grocery stores are opened in food desert neighborhoods in order to increase the amount of healthy food people buy?

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APPENDIX F TEXT STUDY: LETTUCE AND GRAPE BOYCOTT¹⁰

FOOD JUSTICE

“JERUSALEM POST INTERVIEW WITH R. HASKEL LOOKSTEIN AND R. YITZ GREENBERG, MAY 3, 2008”

Original Text:

Q: In 1971, you were the only Orthodox rabbis to declare that non-union lettuce and grapes should be regarded as non-kosher and you urged Jews to boycott them. What is the basis in Judaism for that position?

R. Greenberg: We were both students of the Rav, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik. From him we learned the idea that Halacha is not just a list of ritual dos and don'ts, but a comprehensive worldview that applies to everything that happens around us. The Torah prohibits the exploitation of workers- so why shouldn't that apply to migrant farm workers picking lettuce or grapes? They were being mistreated, so it was natural for us to apply the principle of non-exploitation to their situation, too. It seemed obvious.

Discussion Questions:

- What are some of the challenges of applying Halacha to modern day challenges, or, as R. Greenberg writes, to helping us create a "comprehensive worldview?"
- What do you think about R. Greenberg's logic? How might he convince other rabbis to align with his stance?"
- How can this text inform our current work on food justice issues?

¹⁰ “Jerusalem Post Interview with R. Haskel Lookstein and R. Yitz Greenberg, May 3, 2008.” *On1Foot*. On1Foot, n.d. Web. 05 Feb. 2016.

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APPENDIX G

FOOD JUSTICE

JUSTICE ON MY PLATE¹¹ BY DASI FRUCHTER

Dasi Fruchter is the former director of tav/food justice community engagement at Uri L'Tzedek. She currently resides in Brooklyn, NY, and is working towards her ordination as an Orthodox clergy member. When she's not teaching or learning, Dasi spends much of her time connecting with those trying to help create spiritually strong, vibrant, and world-changing communities, doing Orthodox feminist organizing, and hosting extravagant Shabbat meals.

It left a sour taste in my mouth to know that my food could be technically kosher but have unjust origins. I wanted another dimension for my brachah.

I vividly remember learning the specific brachot (blessings) for food in my Modern Orthodox upbringing: I can still see the flash cards decorated with colorful pictures of all types of food, from shiny hallot to crunchy bowls of cereal. We had to guess which brakha matched which food, and to be the proud winner of the Brakha Bee was the high point of anyone's school year. At home this ritual—a meditation thanking God for our food before eating—was even further emphasized. I always admired my mother as she closed her eyes and with great intention said a blessing over a beautiful, steaming plate of food.

As I grew older and began to learn more about the production of food, I felt conflicted about the nature of some of the brakhot. Yes, I was grateful to God for what I was eating, and I felt undeniably lucky never to have to choose between my food and my health or between physical sustenance and having a roof over my head.

But I also had begun to learn about injustices related to food, especially through my work with [Uri L'Tzedek's Tav HaYosher](#) program. (Tav awards a special "ethical" seal to food establishments that, in addition to meeting the requirements for kashrut certification, also abide by the basic standards of labor law.) I had become aware that many restaurant employees, in non-kosher and kosher restaurants alike, are subject to exploitative conditions. Their employers do not pay minimum wage, compensate for overtime, or even provide a safe and discrimination-free working environment. As a person who is strictly kosher, it left a sour taste in my mouth to know that my food could be technically kosher but still have unjust origins.

And so, in a world where it often seems that profits outweigh human relationships, I wanted to incorporate a *kavannah* that added another dimension to my brachah before eating—a ritual that invoked rich biblical and Rabbinic texts and traditions protecting the rights of workers. I wanted something to meditate on when I chose to eat at a Tav-certified restaurant or get my produce from a farm where I know the workers are treated properly. I found what I was looking for in the ethical consumption blessing (see below

With programs like Tav HaYosher, the landscape is changing. Those who keep kosher are beginning to think about the impact of their food on others. Consumers are uniting to tell restaurant owners it is important to them that food not only be prepared by the standards of kosher, but also by standards of yosher (uprightness). Over 90 restaurant owners so far have partnered with us as ethical trailblazers in the restaurant industry.

¹¹ Fruchter, Dasi. "Justice on My Plate." *Ritualwell*. Ritualwell, n.d. Web. 05 February 2016.

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As for me, I've found that eating ethically has elevated my brakhah to a higher spiritual level. My enhanced brakhah—layered with social awareness, spiritual activism and immense gratitude—feels completely different from the one I recited in elementary school.

Discussion Questions:

- Whether or not you personally have the practice of saying brachot, or blessings, before eating food, what purpose could a ritual that draws attention to the origins of our food serve in your life?
- Do you have any personal rituals or kavanot that have similar intentions as what Fruchter is describing here?
- What other values or ethics in our food system do you think the system of kashrut should account for?
- How do spiritual practices support the work of social justice activists? Has a spiritual practice been an important part of the work you do in the world?

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ETHICAL CONSUMPTION KAVANAH¹²

Using this ritual, we can employ spiritual intention in becoming ethical consumers, both to acknowledge the centrality of justice and ethics in Jewish tradition and law, and to think about those individuals and communities who are deeply involved in ethical production. By ritualizing this, we make the act of ethical consumption a crucial, positive, and holy deed.

Whether “ethical consumption” means buying ethically sourced meat or eating from kosher establishments that have been awarded Tav HaYosher, it can be a powerful communal or personal experience to acknowledge that decision with a ritual *kavannah*, intention, to recite before using or eating something that was produced in an ethical way, and to acknowledge the workers who have helped bring that food from the farm to your table.

English:

God, the One who does justice in the world and promotes a world of justice, may it be known that I am consuming something that was produced through just means, as I strive to obey the Torah law of “do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord” (Deut. 6:18).

In the same way that this food item was prepared according to the upright tenets of Jewish law and tradition and in just and ethical working conditions, may the rest of the world eventually prevail with justice as it is written, “To repair the world under the sovereignty of the Lord”.

I appreciate and acknowledge those workers who have labored to bring this food to my table. May it be known that I commend those who have made conscious efforts to produce or buy this food in an upright way.

May they be blessed with the ability to do many more upright deeds and be partners with the Creator in making the world a more just place, as it is written, “The wicked man earns illusory wages, but he who sows righteousness has a true reward”. (Proverbs 11:18)

Hebrew:

ה', מלך אוהב צדקה ומשפט, המקדם עולם של צדק, שיהיה ידוע שאני אוכל/ת את האוכל הזה ושהוא הגייע אליי באמצעות של בצדק, כפי שאני שואפ/ת לשמור על חוק התורה "ועשית הישר והטוב לפני ה' ". באותה צורה שהאוכל הזה הוכן על פי עקרונות החוק ומסורת יהודית ובתנאי עבודה ישרים, כך שאר העולם בסופו של דבר יצליח להתנהג בצדק, כמו שכתוב, "לתקן עולם במלכות שקי אני מעריכ/ה את העבודה הקשה של בני אדם אשר עמו כדי לייצר את המזון שאני עומד/ת לאכול. יתר על כן, יהיה ידוע שאני מודה לכל מי שהתאמץ בכל כוחו כדי לתת לי את האוכל הזה בצורה ישרה יהי רצון שיהיה לבני אדם האלו את היכולת לעשות הרבה בעתיד בצדק ועם רוח של חסד ורחמים, ולהיות שותפים עם בורא עולם בתיקון העולם למקום של צדק אמיתי, כמו שכתוב: "רשע עשה פעלת שקר ורע צדקה שכר אמת

Discussion Questions:

- How do you think reciting this *kavannah* before eating would affect your relationship to our food system?
- Would you feel comfortable reciting this *kavannah* if you can't know for sure that every part of your meal was produced through just means? Phrased more generally, can a blessing be aspirational?

¹² "Ethical Consumption Kavannah." *Ritualwell*. Ritualwell, n.d. Web. 05 February 2016.