

FOOD JUSTICE GLOSSARY

Language and terms shape the way people understand and address injustice in society. By using terminology preferred or created by communities directly impacted by an issue, we celebrate their dignity and leadership. Language can also illuminate the different factors contributing to a system of inequity or a pathway to change. But language is not static; it constantly evolves as we grow and change. It is the responsibility of people working in solidarity with marginalized communities to keep up with those changes.

Here is a list of terms and definitions that you might find useful as you discuss food justice issues. This glossary is by no means complete or definitive. Rather, it should be used to make sure that everyone is grounded in the same language and can fully participate in the conversation.

FOOD SYSTEM

All processes and labor involved in keeping us fed: growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consuming, and disposing of food and food packages. It also includes the inputs needed and outputs generated at each step.

FOOD JUSTICE

Food Justice is communities exercising their right to grow, sell, and eat healthy food. Healthy food is fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally-appropriate, and grown locally with care for the well-being of the land, workers, and animals.¹ **The Food Justice Movement** is inspired by grassroots and organizing movements before it, including the Civil Rights Movement and Environmental Justice Movement.

FOOD DESERTS

The USDA defines a **Food Desert** as an urban area where much of the population lives at least one mile (10 in rural areas) from the nearest supermarket or large grocery store.² Food Deserts disproportionately affect People of Color. Some prefer to say **Food Swamps**, because food deserts usually have food available, but much of it is unhealthy, and the healthy food is less accessible. Other food and racial justice organizers use **Food Apartheid**, to emphasize that the lack of access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food results from structural inequities and deliberate public and private resource allocation decisions that exclude healthy food from communities of color and poor communities. This term critiques “swamp” and “desert” as inappropriate metaphors because these conditions are a result of systemic racism and classism.³

1 | ["What is Food Justice?" Just Food.](#)

2 | [Food Desert Locator. USDA.](#)

3 | Hank Herrera, a longtime food justice activist and policy advocate, quoted in ["Covering Food Deserts."](#)



FOOD SECURITY

Access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life: the availability of nutritional and safe foods and the ability to acquire the food in socially acceptable ways (without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies).⁴ **Food Insecurity** is any limitation on that access.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The right of peoples – especially farmers – to define their own agricultural and food systems. Food sovereignty demands that the policies and mechanisms involved in production, distribution, and consumption of food focus on creating ecologically sustainable systems and healthy lives for people, rather than profits for corporations.⁵

SNAP

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps, is a federal nutrition assistance program that provides additional income to low-income people to help purchase the food they need.

LIVING WAGE

The minimum income necessary for any worker to meet their basic needs and maintain quality of life. Almost all workers in the food industry earn an unjust wage — migrant workers, food processing plant workers, grocery store clerks, restaurants hosts and servers, etc. In both the restaurant and agriculture industries, minimum wage laws mostly do not apply, or are not enforced. People working for tips received a **tipped wage** (currently \$2.13 per hour plus tips at the Federal level).

MIGRANT FARMWORKERS

About one third of American farm laborers are hired farmworkers, about half of which are undocumented, many of them People of Color. Migrant refers to the long distances from home that migrant farmworkers travel for work. Labor conditions often involve long hours in extreme weather with few breaks, and unsafe exposure to pesticides. Many earn piece-rate wages (paid for each piece they harvest), which often results in payment less than the minimum wage.

FOOD WASTE

Food that is lost, discarded and disposed that is or was at some point fit for human consumption. Food waste can occur at point in the food production process, from farming, processing, retailing, consuming, to the actual disposal of food.



⁴ | Adapted from [Food Security: Measurement](#). USDA.

⁵ | Adapted from the [2007 Nyeleni Declaration of Food Sovereignty](#).