



Smithsonian
Anacostia Community Museum



OUTDOOR EXHIBITION SCRIPT

ELEMENT - opening text panel:

What is food justice? We all make decisions about what we eat... but we don't make those decisions by ourselves.

Where our food comes from, who produces, processes, and prepares it, where the waste goes, and what impact it has on our health—our food system is full of inequalities. But when we center equity, fairness, and environmental and public health in our food system, we can arrive at something resembling “food justice.”

ELEMENT – art installations that render statistics in three-dimensional form:

LAND OF ABUNDANCE

We currently cultivate 40 million more acres than would be needed to feed all Americans.

Even with our broken and unjust food system, the United States could produce enough food to feed everyone in the country using less crop and pastureland than it currently does. Yet 11% of U.S. households experience “food insecurity”: limited or uncertain access to affordable, nutritionally adequate food. Why are so many people struggling to eat, and to eat well?

873,012,000 acres:

The amount of crop and pastureland required to feed every American, based on 2008 American consumption patterns

914,425,000 acres:

Current amount of active crop and pastureland in the U.S.

FOOD WASTE

*Up to 40% of the food supply in the United States is **WASTED** each year.*

“This waste occurs throughout our food system’s supply chain. Food is lost on farms; during processing, distribution, and storage; in retail stores and food service operations; and finally in households. Every time a bag of lettuce is tossed aside, much more than spoiled produce goes out the window. It’s also a waste of labor, of vehicle miles, of water, of fertilizer. We’re wasting money, trashing resources, and accelerating the changing of our climate.”

-National Resources Defense Council,

“Wasted: How America Is Losing up to 40 Percent of Its Food from Farm to Fork to Landfill” (2017)

THE GROCERY GAP

DC’s Ward 3: 1 grocery store for every 9,336 residents

DC’s Ward 8: 1 grocery store for every 85,160 residents

Residents of the District’s whitest and wealthiest ward (Ward 3) have nearly 9 times as many grocery stores as residents of the Ward with the most Black residents and the most poverty

(Ward 8). For residents of Ward 8, almost half of whom do not have access to a car, this can mean that shopping for healthy food requires a great deal of time and effort. Many food justice activists refer to this kind of unequal access to grocery stores as “food apartheid,” rather than a “food desert,” in recognition of the history of discriminatory policies that shape the food landscape.

ELEMENT – SCULPTURAL TRIBUTE TO FOOD WORKERS

TEXT:

This is a space to honor our food workers, share stories, and inspire continued efforts to build a food system where workers aren’t just surviving, but are thriving.

The labor of millions of people goes into growing, processing, transporting, preparing, serving, and delivering our nation’s food. Without these food workers, life in the United States would grind to a halt. Yet many of these workers labor in oppressive conditions, earning poverty wages while risking pesticide poisoning, serious injury, sexual harassment, deportation, wage theft, and more. The health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have only worsened the already higher rates of poverty, hunger, and health disparities among food workers.

SHARE A MESSAGE

Grab a tag, a marker, write your message, and attach it to the fencing:

Are you a food worker (now or in the past)?
What do you wish people knew about your work?

Not a food worker?
Share a note of gratitude or a story for the food workers in your life.

ELEMENT – larger-than-life photographs of people working to transform the local DC-area food system

Community = Collective Power

Rebecca Lemos-Otero, Co-founder, City Blossoms

QUOTE: “Every young person should be able to walk within their neighborhood to a safe green space that they feel comfortable in and that can be their own. A space they can take care of, where they can be the leaders.” -Rebecca Lemos-Otero, Co-Founder, City Blossoms
Photo Credit: Photograph by Dominique Hazzard, Anacostia Community Museum Archives,

Smithsonian Institution

QUOTE: “Selling our product felt really empowering. We grew the herbs. We came up with the names. We made the logo labels, and we were in charge of what happened. We put our heart into this.” - Sae Garrett, City Blossoms and Mighty Greens alumna

Photo Credit: Photograph by Samir Meghelli, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution

STORY: DC native Rebecca Lemos-Otero co-founded City Blossoms to help her neighbors in Adams Morgan and Columbia Heights take control of their outdoor community spaces. Today, City Blossoms coordinates youth-run community gardens throughout the District. This includes the Mighty Greens program which supports teenagers who want to grow herbs, develop products, and sell the results at local farmers’ markets.

CONTEXT: In recent years, Washington, DC has been one of the most rapidly gentrifying cities in the nation. The accompanying population growth and real estate development have meant that land and green space are at a premium and will continue to be even more crucial to the health and well-being of the city’s residents in the future.

TAKE ACTION: There are dozens of public and non-profit community gardens throughout the Washington region. These are not only spaces to grow food, but to build positive relationships with neighbors and the land. You can see if a community garden near you has a plot available. Advocate for local policies that support urban agriculture.

Judy Davis, Glut Food Co-op

Photo Credit: Photograph by Samir Meghelli, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution

QUOTE: “Increased choices for shopping, everyone’s time pressures, limited area parking—all these points have made our small business an endangered species.... But we’re doing a community service. And when we fell back last year, people came to our aid and said, ‘Oh no, you can’t close!’ People donated money. It made a big difference... You have to have everybody come together on stuff for it to work.”

STORY: Judy Davis has worked at Glut Food Cooperative for 40 years. Founded in 1969 by conscientious objectors to the Vietnam War who wanted an affordable, ethical, and healthy alternative to the large supermarket chains, Glut today is a not-for-profit charitable trust that is collectively managed by its workers. In 2019, when facing financial troubles and potential closure, the community rallied behind the co-op, pitched in money, and helped it to remain open.

CONTEXT: In the 1970s and early 1980s, when large chain supermarkets were largely abandoning DC, the region was home to more than two dozen food cooperatives. With for-profit natural food grocery chains growing in number and popularity over the past couple decades, food co-ops have often struggled to compete.

TAKE ACTION: Seek out and support local food cooperatives and small local food businesses that nurture an ethical, sustainable food system. Take the time to learn about and support endeavors that operate on a cooperative economic model.

Xavier Brown, Founder, Soilful City

Photo Credit: Photograph by Samir Meghelli, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution

QUOTE: “I make my hot sauce to create an interdependent system of Black growers. So, if something happens to my people in Baltimore and they lose all their peppers, my people all over Northeast DC got peppers, my people in Capitol Heights still got peppers. You know what I'm saying? To show a model where if one falls, the whole thing don't just shut down. And where urban agriculture is more economically viable.”

STORY: In 2016, a “seedkeeper” gifted Xavier Brown with Pippin Pepper seeds, a variety of sweet pepper known to have been passed down from renowned 20th-century African American visual artist Horace Pippin. Xavier used his first crop to develop a sauce recipe, then recruited urban farmers across DC and Baltimore to grow the small plots of peppers. Today, their Pippin Hot Sauce is sold at stores across the city.

CONTEXT: Most urban farms are tiny compared to the huge farms that can operate in rural areas. Because of this, some see urban agriculture as a practice that can bring communities together and beautify spaces—but not create enough food to make a commercial product. The Pippin Pepper growers sought to challenge this conventional wisdom. While none of the urban farmers can grow enough peppers for the sauce by themselves, together the network of small growers gets the job done.

TAKE ACTION: Brainstorm what you and your neighbors could create if you all grew food together. And make use of your local public gardening resources, like DC’s Department of Parks & Recreation gardening classes.

TITLE: Transforming the Local Food System

Chris Newman, Co-Founder, Sylvanaqua Farms

Photo Credit: Photograph by Samir Meghelli, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution

QUOTE: “We want to do sustainable agriculture on as many acres as we can get our hands on. We’re trying to get big. We want to be controlling upwards of 10,000 acres in this area [in Virginia], because when you restore 10,000 acres, it makes a difference. When you can leverage economies of scale and take out some of the unnecessary price increases, you have food that can actually get to people that traditionally can't [afford it]. ”

STORY: Chris Newman seeks to build on the traditions of his African American and Piscataway forebears with his farm. While many sustainable farms in the region are small, Newman believes he can have the most positive impact on the environment—and create the most opportunities for other farmers of color—by farming as much land as possible and in the most sustainable way.

CONTEXT: In the last 80 years, the number of U.S. farms has plummeted—with more than 90% of Black farmers dispossessed of their land—while the average farm size has more than doubled. This means a greater amount of land and control of the food system now lies in fewer hands. Many of the remaining small farmers today struggle to make a living, making it increasingly inaccessible for farmers of color to get into the business.

TAKE ACTION: Support farmers of color by purchasing from them wherever possible. Ask your local grocery stores and farmers' market to source from small farmers and farmers of color.

Beatriz Zuluaga, Former Director of Food & Wellness, CentroNía

Photo Credit: Photograph by Samir Meghelli, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution

QUOTE: “We serve at least one local item every day. Our philosophy here is that we give children access to real food beginning when they are young, like six months old—so that they will develop the palate for it—and educate the adults around them to help them to make good choices in food... We provide access to local food, not just through the programs here [at CentroNía], but to our students' families through partnerships with CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture) and farmers' markets where they can use programs that accept public assistance dollars.”

STORY: Beatriz Zuluaga brought a passion for food from her native Colombia to Washington, DC, where for more than a decade she has been working at the early childhood education center CentroNía. In addition to leading food services and nutrition education for students and families there, she created and manages NiaCentral, an in-house catering business that produces and distributes more than 2,000 USDA-compliant meals a day to 12 early childhood centers across DC.

CONTEXT: In 2010, the DC City Council passed the Healthy Schools Act. This law requires greater access to school meals for students, healthier meal options that include locally-grown and unprocessed foods whenever possible, and the incorporation of weekly nutrition education into the school curriculum. While the Act was ambitious, much of it remains to be fully implemented a decade after its passage.

TAKE ACTION: Read up about the Healthy Schools Act—or any similar local legislation in your community—and advocate for its requirements to be met. And learn about and advocate around the U.S. farm bill, which is the recurring federal legislation that shapes national food policy, including school meal funding.

Lea Howe, Director of School Food Initiatives, DC Greens

QUOTE: “DC Public Schools serves 10 million school meals each year. That means the school system's food purchases can have ripple effects that improve our regional food system. It's a huge opportunity.”

LaTón Dicks, Community Advocate

QUOTE: “I joined the School Food Advisory Board because I had a granddaughter who wasn’t eating lunch because she didn’t like the food. I want her to have school meals that she likes and that support local farmers.”

STORY/CONTEXT: In 2018, the DC City Council committed DC Public Schools to the “Good Food Purchasing Program.” This means that the city’s school system will set and work towards goals for purchasing healthy food that is grown locally, under fair labor conditions, and with environmentally sustainable practices.

TAKE ACTION: Do you or your family members get food from an institution, like a school, workplace, or nursing home? Ask that institution to evaluate its food purchases and commit to sourcing food from providers that meet the “Good Food Purchasing” standards.

TITLE: Food Insecurity

Michael Wilkerson, DC resident

QUOTE: “I want to eat right, but I can’t always get it. In my vision of DC’s future, DC residents should not need to be worrying about where they are getting their next healthy, nutritious meal.”

STORY: In 2012, Michael had to stop working because of a disability. Since then, he’s relied on food banks and government food programs to meet his needs. Still, these sources of help are often not enough. Michael’s experience with hunger led him to become an advocate for food and housing justice. He participates regularly in the DC Food Policy Council, and testifies in support of food programs at city council hearings.

CONTEXT: Washington, DC faces some of the highest food insecurity rates in the country. Nearly 12% of residents and 1 in 5 children are food insecure in DC.

TAKE ACTION: Anyone can participate in shaping food policy. Hundreds of Food Policy Councils now exist in cities and counties across the country. If you live in DC, you can attend DC Food Policy Council meetings and even join one of the working groups.

Dr. James Huang, physician and DC Food Policy Council member

QUOTE: “I have a vision of a healthcare system where we acknowledge that access to fresh fruits and vegetables has a direct impact on your health and we prioritize providing that access.”

STORY: As the son of immigrants from Hong Kong, both of whom are also deaf, Dr. Huang was driven to the field of medicine by a passion for making health equity a possibility for all. Here in DC, he has been deeply involved in issues around food access and nutrition education, joining the DC Food Policy Council in 2019.

CONTEXT: DC has the largest life expectancy gap between Blacks and whites in the country. Black men die 17 years earlier on average than white men, and Black women die 12 years earlier than white women. Heart disease, which is often a diet-related illness, is one of the primary causes of these inequalities.

TAKE ACTION: Since 2012, Washington, DC has had a Produce Prescription Program—known as “Produce Rx”—which allows medical professionals to prescribe fresh fruits and vegetables to

patients experiencing diet-related chronic illnesses who can redeem the prescriptions at a participating grocery store. Look the program up and learn about the program. Advocate for its expansion or the introduction of programs like it in your local community.

Alexander Moore, DC Central Kitchen

QUOTE: “Show me a person who’s food insecure and has enough money. Hunger—‘food insecurity’—is a symptom of poverty and injustice. If we just talk about ameliorating daily hunger, we’re missing the point.”

CONTEXT: In Washington, DC, nearly 1 in 5 residents lives in poverty—one of the highest poverty rates in the country. DC also has a higher level of income inequality than any state in the country, with that inequality largely falling along racial lines.

TAKE ACTION: Support efforts that take a holistic approach to addressing hunger, from directly providing people with food to creating living wage food jobs that offer a pathway out of poverty. Achieving food justice will require a variety of solutions.

Marian Peele, Capital Area Food Bank

QUOTE: “Even though [the pandemic] is unprecedented, our staff is very resilient. We’re committed to providing to the community: the operations staff, the truck drivers, the guys that pull the order, folks that work in the warehouse and operations. We’ve been here. We have to be here because we have seniors who have to eat and food that has to be delivered.”

CONTEXT: Before the pandemic, more than 400,000 individuals in the Washington, DC region were already experiencing food insecurity. The Capital Area Food Bank’s “Hunger Report 2020” predicted a 48 to 60 percent increase in the number of local people struggling to eat.

TAKE ACTION: There are many food justice organizations and mutual aid groups working to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Washington, DC region. Look them up, get involved, and support their work.

TITLE: The Grocery Gap

Beverly Wheeler, Director, D.C. Hunger Solutions

QUOTE: “Grocery store access is a racial equity issue that must be dealt with, and it’s a health issue. We can no longer pretend we don’t see what we see. Can you imagine if you have to take two or three buses and take your kids with you? You can’t carry all that back with you.”

CONTEXT: The DC wards with the fewest supermarkets per resident—Wards 5, 7, and 8—are also the area with the most reliance on public transportation. And because of federal regulations, the corner groceries in these neighborhoods are too small to accept WIC vouchers (a critical resource for pregnant women, new mothers, and young children). This can mean that families have to travel long distances—often by bus—to buy fresh food.

TAKE ACTION: Support organizations that are working to address the grocery gap. Champion legislation that can help bring more full-service and small grocery stores to neighborhoods

where they're lacking, as well as expand access to WIC at already existing corner stores.

Ricky Tang and Chunni Fang, DC Chinatown residents

QUOTE: "Cantonese cooking is marvelous. Many of us are Chinese residents and we prefer Chinese vegetables. Since there are no Chinese grocery stores in Chinatown, we have no choice but to go to the Chinese supermarket in Falls Church or Rockville."

STORY: Chunni Fang learned how to cook Cantonese dishes as a young girl in Hong Kong. When she moved to DC in 2009, she was surprised to learn that although Chinatown once was home to several Chinese grocery stores, large-scale developments projects over the years had displaced many residents and small businesses from the neighborhood.

CONTEXT: Today, there are only around 300 remaining Chinese American residents in DC's Chinatown, most of whom are low-income elders who must travel significant distances to find grocery stores that carry Chinese ingredients. Ensuring that immigrant communities are able to access traditional foods is part of food justice.

TAKE ACTION: Support small, local food businesses—especially longstanding ones—that serve neighborhoods with a distinct history and culture. Get informed about and advocate for local legislation that can help such businesses survive and thrive, especially in moments of rapid gentrification or economic crisis.

Mary Blackford, Founder, Market Seven

QUOTE: "It's hard to eat healthy when you live in a food desert or when the quality of the grocery stores you have is not that great. In Ward 7, there's not much fresh anything. They may have a couple bananas at the 7-Eleven. Eventually I said, 'We just need our own market here. That's the real solution.' And we did it."

STORY: Mary Blackford grew up in Ward 7 where she experienced food apartheid firsthand. So when she left for business school, she says, "The dream was always to come back and build my community." Inspired by the cooperative economics of markets she explored while living in Ghana, Mary decided to build something similar at home. The result is Market 7, a community food hall set to open in the Benning neighborhood.

CONTEXT: All grocery stores are not created equal. In addition to organizing for more grocery stores, many residents have mobilized to address the quality of the stores that exist in their neighborhoods. Some have pressed supermarkets to improve food quality, long lines, and cleanliness, while others have turned to entrepreneurship to create new food options themselves.

TAKE ACTION: Support community-minded businesses and local entrepreneurs that are working to bring new fresh food options to DC's underserved wards.