

Food Democracy

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Abstract: *Food democracy has become the rallying cry of an emerging grassroots movement. It demands a transformation of the food industry, so that people can have control over what they produce and eat. It also requires a fair access to land to grow food and fair return for those who produce it. This paper briefly addresses how we can build a more just, equitable, and democratic food system.*

Key Words: food democracy, food justice,

Introduction

Beyond subsistence, food is basically a social and cultural expression of individuals. There is not issue more pressing to a nation than ensuring that its citizens are fed. Calls for food democracy dates back to the sustainable agriculture movement of the 1980s. Proponents of democracy insist that government must be accountable to, and informed by, its most vulnerable citizens. It also requires that people develop the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in society [3]. In food democracy, people are regarded as “food citizens” rather than just consumers or producers. Citizens have a ‘right’ to food that is nutritious and safe. Food security is a fundamental human right. It means that you are not worried about when the next meal is coming, nor do you need to cut back on food in order to pay the bill. When food security is at risk, so is food democracy.

Dave Murphy is the founder and director of Food Democracy Now!, which is a grassroots movement of more than 650,000 American farmers and citizens. They are concerned about achieving school lunch reform through Food Democracy Now

Impacts of Democracy

As a nation, our commitment to democracy is an enduring feature of America. We exercise our democratic rights when we vote in elections and speak our opinions. Democracy offers the potential to turn things around by collectively finding ways for us to solve our problems. If we value democracy as we claim to, then our food system should reflect the same democratic values. Our responsibility in a food democracy depends on how we exercise our political rights as consumers [1].

Most of our struggles over the future of the agricultural and food system seem to be basically about democracy. Activists and food analysts have started to make connections between contemporary agri-food politics and democracy. At the core of food democracy is the idea that all people should participate actively in shaping food systems, rather than being passive spectators [2]. Food democracy means the right of every person to an essential of life: food. It is the pragmatic way of

making choices when values come into conflict. Food democracy requires thinking through aspects of social and economic justice, and democratic governance. It emphasizes fulfillment of the human right to safe, nutritious food.

When food security is at risk, so is food democracy. Food democracy can be regarded as a bridge to food sovereignty, which is based on the idea that the people who produce, distribute, and consume food should control the mechanisms of food production and distribution. Food sovereignty asserts that people must reclaim their power and right in the food system by rebuilding the relationships between people and the land.

The aims of food democracy are many include [4]: (1) Shortening food supply chains, (2) Health food before profit, (3) Protect local lifestyle and livelihood, (4) Reconnect local human, cultural and land ecologies, (5) Tackle structural problems within the food system. Individual and organizations working to change the dominant food system should be engaged in political and social struggles.

Dimensions of Food Democracy

Food democracy revolves around four dimensions: information, collective action, individual participation, sustainability [5]. First, food or any form of democracy thrives on information and our ability to make informed decisions. Information is power and providing consumers with more information is expensive. We strive to inform and motivate people to action on the issues of food insecurity and food safety. Education is an indispensable tool in building and maintaining a strong democracy. Fair access to information and education are critical to the Food Democracy movement.

Second, food democracy necessarily involves collective action by and among organizations. It suggests that food democracy not only depends on collaboration among different groups. Food democracy brings together contributions from leading international scholars and activists.

Third, it requires participation by individuals in governing and shaping their relationships to the food system. Discussion, deliberation, negotiation, and sharing ideas about food issues are necessary for democratic decision-making. Only by engaging people (such as farmers, citizens, people who work in the food industry) for reform by food democracy can lasting food systems reform be achieved. The food system should reflect the democratic values of inclusion, participation, and representation. Many groups such as Food Democracy Now, Big Food, and Healthy Democracy are organizations that work to increase citizen participation food democracy. Organizations often collaborate to affect change they could not achieve on their own. Food activists believe that big corporations have distorted the political process,

allowing them to accumulate treasures at the expense of the citizens.

Fourth, the sustainability of food systems is crucial. Just like other forms of democracy, food democracy is a continued process of developing a democratic, just, and environmentally sustainable food system. Achieving sustainability involves irresolvable conflicts over values.

Conclusion

Food democracy is a pragmatic method for transforming the agro-food system. The Food Democracy movement in America poses several important political, economic, and social questions, which will shape our food future. Although our food future is bright, there is a need to change the dominant food system. The future of food democracy will be written by the social activities of sustainable agriculturalists, local food advocates, environmentalists, farmers, consumers, food marketers, government officials, food security activists, and others who are working to bring about changes [6]. More information about food democracy can be found in books [7-10] and more books available on Amazon.com.

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