

Review Article

FOOD DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT: A PRIMER

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Abstract: Food democracy suggests that all people should have access to an adequate, safe, nutritious, sustainable food supply. It emphasizes justice in the food system and the human right of citizens to safe and nutritious food. Several food movements have been formed worldwide by food activists to resist and curb corporate control over the global food and farming systems. These movements were created in the belief that active citizens could improve the world at the local level. This paper provides a brief introduction to food democracy movement.

Keywords: Food democracy, food democracy movement, food citizenship, food system.

INTRODUCTION

Apart from subsistence, food is a social and cultural expression of individuals. Food is always there as an integral part of our lives. It influences how we live and helps determine our health and our fates. Consequently, food is too important to leave to market forces. Just as our political system is controlled by the few, power in food systems is concentrated and controlled by a few. For example, just ten companies account for 55% of the global seed market. The current global food regime is inherently undemocratic. The intervention of democratic food publics is necessary to transform a broken system, which is unsustainable, unjust, and providing inadequate nutrition to the world. Change is not optional.

It is well known that America is a democracy, the world's leader in promoting democratic values in our institutions and activities. We should let our food system reflect the same democratic values. Since democracy involves citizen participation, a food democracy will include the interests of all segments: consumers, food processors, farmers, marketers, workers and regulators [1]. Food democracy is essential because achieving sustainability involves conflicts over values. Democratic publics create forum for democratic debate on environmental sustainability, social justice, and economic viability.

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CONCEPT OF FOOD DEMOCRACY

Food democracy (FD) is basically a social movement which offers the public opportunities to actively participate in the food systems, participating in how food should be produced and consumed. It is an emerging concept that community members should be actively involved and not passive spectators in shaping their food system. It refers to a fair and transparent food system in which people have informed choices in determining what and how they eat. It involves people of various backgrounds at national and international levels who are interested in an alternative to the dominant food practices. It is by the people, for the people, and toward a stronger nation. Within a food democracy, people are regarded as “food citizens” instead of consumers.

Food democracy operates in practice through alliances, movements, and advocacy structures to foster social change. It is about local food enthusiasts reclaiming democratic control over our food and farming systems from corporate agribusiness. It has pursued hundreds of community food projects. Food democracy seeks to achieve the following [2]:

- (1) Collective action/collaboration toward food system sustainability
- (2) Becoming knowledgeable about food and the food system
- (3) Sharing ideas about the food system with others
- (4) Developing efficacy to achieve specific outcomes with respect to food and the food system
- (5) Provide information and education
- (6) Promote not just a proliferation of foods, but of markets, farms, and food processors, as well as opportunities for consumer satisfaction
- (7) Shorten food supply chains.
- (8) Provide room for local farms, support markets that feature a wide range of foods
- (9) Encourage citizens to want more information about their food and more food choices

As indicated above, education is a key tool in building and maintaining a strong food democracy. The corporate food economy has led to the increased separation of people from the sources of their food. Most North Americans know very little on where their food comes from or how it reaches their plates. Individual learning can happen in many ways, ranging from skill development to participating in activities.

FOOD DEMOCRACY MOVEMENTS

Several food movements have been formed worldwide by food activists to resist and curb corporate control over the global food and farming systems. We will consider some of them here.

- *Food Democracy Now!* (FDN): This a grassroots movement (www.fooddemocracynow.org/) based in Iowa, US. The movement was founded in 2007 by the natural food advocate Dave Murphy. It consists of over 650,000 farmers and food enthusiasts who are committed to building a sustainable food system. It is committed to building a sustainable food system that sustains farmers, nourishes families, and protects the natural environment. FDN focuses on lobbying, litigation, organizing events, curbing food monopolies, and campaigning against corporate control of the food and farming systems. The movement has experienced considerable resistance.

- *La Via Campesina*: La Via Campesina is the transnational peoples' movement. It comprises of family farmers, farm workers, fishing folks, hunters, and indigenous people around the globe, working to defend small-scale, sustainable agriculture. It is an international advocacy network of small-producer organizations, representing over 150 million farmers and agricultural workers on five continents. The decision-making process of the movement is officially done by consultation and consensus. The movement is widely credited with introducing the concept of food sovereignty in 1996. Food sovereignty is a movement growing from the farmers, agricultural workers, people, and landless workers. It is an ongoing global struggle over control of food, land, water, and livelihoods. The concept has become a central issue in the discourse of food activists around the world [3]. La Vía Campesina is illustrated in Figure 1 [4].

- *Kitchen Gardeners International* (KGI). This is an online global community of some 30,000 people in 100 countries that are growing some of their own food. It was founded by Roger Doiron, who had his own garden in Scarborough, Maine.

Other movements include the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) in North America, the Korean Women's Peasant Association (KWPA) based in South Korea, the Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) and Healthy Democracy in Oregon.

DEEP DEMOCRACY

Deep democracy is a technology that can be accessed by all. It is a participatory approach that values diversity of viewpoints, equality among participants, elevating the minority voice, and involvement of all those in the food system. This is especially for those who are

oppressed by our current corporate, globalized food system such as immigrant farm workers, food industry employees, low-income food consumers, women, and minorities [4].

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

Food democracy represents part of collective efforts opposing the excesses of industrialization, economic concentration, and globalization of the food systems. It gives their members, especially who have real or potential grievances with the agro-food system, an opportunity to participate in different ways. FD helps support greater equality while generating better and fairer solutions. It is a useful theoretical framing for both understanding of and designing with local food networks. The interest of young people, especially college graduates, in food and agriculture has grown drastically. Their interest cuts across economic, geographic, racial, ethnic, and educational lines [5].

There is a tension regarding the potential of the food movements to create meaningful necessary changes in the food system. The promises of food democracy have been criticized. It is almost impossible for Americans to think rationally about their food choices. We treat food as a weapon and turned it on ourselves, the small farms, the rural workers, and the consumers. We use this rationale to continue the destruction of farming culture [6].

CONCLUSION

Food democracy is a framework for decentralizing food control. It is a practical idea that is gaining momentum in communities across the world. It is an increasing global movement focusing on the people, the land, and environmental protection. Food democracy has enabled consumer–producer cooperation in food networks in which consumers play an active role. Scholars and food activists are increasingly making connections between contemporary agri-food politics and democracy. As food democracy movements continue to make impart, one is optimistic about the future. For more information about food democracy, one should consult the books in [7-9].

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Figure 1: La Vía Campesina [4].