

*'We are Made  
of Our Food':  
Latino/a  
Immigration  
and the  
Practices and  
Politics of  
Eating*

# Community Report

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Please share!

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# Introduction

This community report is written as a companion for my dissertation with the same name. Realizing that many people who are active in food systems and immigrant advocacy work are pressed for time and other resources, I wanted to create something that would be more useful, accessible, and quick to read than a 200+ page dissertation. The research that I summarize here took place between the summer of 2005 and the late fall of 2009 in Seattle, Washington and was part of the requirements for completing the Ph.D. program in Sociocultural Anthropology at the University of Washington.

My dissertation examines the points of articulation between Latino/a immigrants and Seattle's food system. More specifically, it explores the experiences of 46 individuals who have immigrated to Seattle from many regions of Latin America, many of whom come from farming backgrounds and bring with them a wealth of knowledge about growing, sharing, and preparing food. I examine the ways that their relationships with food and the land from which it comes have changed through the process of migration and the consequences of having limited access to culturally meaningful food on social relationships, family traditions, and physical and mental wellbeing.

At the same time, I explore how organizations active in the local food system understand and respond to the food needs of Latinos/as living in the city. Surrounded by some of the richest farmland in the nation and characterized by exceptionally favorable and moderate climatic conditions, Seattle has become a hotbed for food systems work and sustainable food movements. There is tremendous potential for building more just, inclusive, and resilient food systems through respecting and understanding the unique needs and contributions of Latino/a immigrants. With this potential in mind, this is my attempt to share the stories I heard and the knowledge I gained through my field research.

This report is just one step in making my findings useful to people fighting for food justice and immigrant rights. I welcome comments, questions, suggestions, and criticisms from all readers who see the potential of this kind of applied research. Also, I hope to soon translate this report into Spanish and would welcome any support in this effort!

\*The names of all Latino/a participants in this report are pseudonyms, as are the names of organizational staff members.

# Latinos/as in Seattle and Washington State

|   | <b>Seattle</b>   | <b>King County</b> | <b>WA State</b>   |
|---|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Pop. of Hispanic/<br>Latino ethnicity<br>(any race) | 33,707<br>(6.3%) | 118,558<br>(6.8%)  | 541,722<br>(8.8%) |
| <b>Total Pop.</b>                                   | 536,946          | 1,755,818          | 6,146,338         |

**Hispanic/Latino Population of Seattle, King County, and Washington State** (Source: City of Seattle 2010, based on 2000 U.S. Census)

|   | <b>Seattle</b> | <b>WA State</b> |
|---|----------------|-----------------|
| Hispanic Per Capita Income                    | \$14,788       | \$11,293        |
| Total Population: Per Capita Income           | \$26,653       | \$22,973        |
| Difference between<br>Hispanic and Total Pop. | -\$11,865      | -\$11,680       |

**Income of Hispanics and Total Population in Washington State** (Source: 2000 US Census)

- King County has recently experienced a substantial increase in its "Hispanic" population – up 81% between 2000 and 2010. WA state saw a 71% increase during this same period (2010 US Census).
- Of the 94,952 foreign-born people living in the city as of 2000, 7902 were from Mexico, the largest concentration of any nationality from Latin America, and the 4<sup>th</sup> largest community of foreign-born individuals in general (City of Seattle 2003).

# National and Local Food Disparities for Latinos/as

|                     | <b>Food insecurity</b> | <b>Very Low Food Security</b> |
|---------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Non-Hispanic Whites | 6.2%                   | 4.5%                          |
| Hispanics           | 18.1%                  | 8.8%                          |
| Total Households    | 12.2%                  | 4.6%                          |

**Percentage of White and Hispanic U.S. households experiencing food insecurity and very low food security, 2006-2008** (Source: Nord et. al. 2009)

The USDA defines food security as “access by all people at all times to enough nutritious food for an active, healthy life.” Food *insecurity* is not having this access. “Very low food security” means that there are “multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake,” or that people are experiencing *hunger*.

In the United States, more than 12% of households experience food insecurity at some point each year. For “Hispanic” households in the U.S, the prevalence of food insecurity is nearly triple that of non-Hispanic whites (Nord et. al. 2009).

According to a 2010 report conducted for Feeding America, 22.9% of the 617,200 clients that are served by Washington state food banks on an annual basis indicate that they are of “Spanish, Latino, or of Hispanic descent or origin,” compared to 57.7% for non-Hispanic whites (Mabli et. al 2010). However, as of 2010, Hispanics only accounted for 11% of the state’s population (2010 U.S. Census)

A report released by Washington State University Extension notes that roughly a quarter of Hispanics living in the state in 2000 were living below the federal poverty line, compared to 10% of the general population (Kirschner and Irion 2006).

# Diet-Related Health Disparities for Latinos/as

- Among those twenty years and older, Mexican Americans are **almost twice as** likely to be diagnosed with diabetes compared to their white counterparts  
(Centers for Disease Control 2010)
- In 2009, Hispanic Americans were **20% more likely** likely to be obese than Non-Hispanic Whites  
(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2010)
- In 2006, the death rate from diabetes for Hispanics was **50% higher** than the death rate of non-Hispanic whites  
(Dept. of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health 2011)
- Hispanics have the highest uninsured rates of any racial or ethnic group within the US, roughly **32%**  
(Dept. of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health 2011)

# Snapshot: Seattle's Food System

## ○ Strong Institutional Support for Sustainable Food Systems

- 85 community gardens coordinated by City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods P-Patch Program
- 14 farmers markets
- Regional Food Policy Council active since 2010 \*after several years of organizing work by Acting Food Policy Council
- Local Food Action Initiative (31019) passed by City Council in 2008

## ○ Strong Emergency Food System

- 30 food banks and pantries in the City of Seattle
- 25 food banks in King County outside of Seattle city limits
- Emergency Feeding Program providing emergency food bags in 50 sites around King County.
- 36 registered hot meal and sack lunch providers across King County.





# Research Methods

- In-depth ethnographic research conducted from June 2005 through November 2009
- Methods included:
  - Archival Research
    - Local Sources
      - Newspaper articles from the Seattle Times and the Seattle Post-Intelligencer
      - Meeting minutes from the King County Acting Food Policy Council
      - Newsletters from El Centro de La Raza
    - Regional Sources
      - Washington State Healthy Youth Survey
      - Annual assessments prepared by the Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs
    - National Sources
      - The Community Food Security Coalition
      - Pew Hispanic Center
      - The Food Research and Action Center
      - America's Second Harvest
  - Participant-Observation
    - Marra Farm, 4 ½ acre farm in South Park neighborhood
    - 5 Spanish-language gardening classes in 2007 and 2008
    - Seed and food distribution at food bank with 70% Latino/clientele
    - Hot Meal program primarily serving Latino day laborers

Cont'd



# Research Methods (cont'd)

## • Methods (cont'd)

### • Two Sets of Semi-Structured Interviews

#### • Set One: Organizational Interviews

- 13 participants
- Staff members working with urban agriculture programs, food banks, hot meal providers, emergency food providers, and within political organizing or food policy
- Interviews conducted in English, digitally recorded, and transcribed verbatim
- **Objective:** Gain an understanding of **1)** The mission and goals of the organization, **2)** What was understood about the food needs of the Latino/a immigrant community in Seattle, and **3)** If and how the organization sought to address these needs.

#### • Set Two: Individual Interviews

- 46 participants
- First-generation Latino/a immigrants, all over age 18
- Equal number of men and women
- 35 from Mexico, 3 from Peru, 2 from Honduras, 2 from El Salvador, and 1 participant each came from Guatemala, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Ecuador.
- Interviews conducted in Spanish, digitally recorded, and transcribed verbatim
- **Objective:** Gain an understanding of **1)** Food preferences and the perceived availability of ingredients in Seattle to prepare preferred dishes, **2)** How diets changed as a result of migration, **3)** Opinions of what constituted “healthy” or “good” foods vs. “unhealthy” or “bad foods,” **4)** Thoughts on the cost and availability of healthy food in Seattle, **5)** Experiences growing food for personal consumption in both their home countries and in the U.S., and **6)** Knowledge of and experiences with community programs and services in the local food system.

# Outline of Findings

- **Finding #1:** Poverty, underemployment, and unemployment are factors that impelled Latino/a participants to migrate and continue to shape their experiences in the United States
- **Finding #2:** Participants longed for familiar foods and experienced profound dietary changes
- **Finding #3:** For participants, migration was both an interruption to healthy habits related to diet and exercise and a cause of unhealthy habits
- **Finding #4:** Participants expressed concern over a decline in their personal health and the health of their children due to cultural pressures of adapting to the U.S. diet
- **Finding #5:** Participants grew increasingly distant from food production and agriculturally-based livelihoods
- **Finding #6:** For participants, utilizing farmers markets and other local food outlets remained largely inaccessible
- **Finding #7:** Participants' perspectives on health and diet mirror concerns in U.S. sustainable food movements despite being underrepresented in these movements
- **Finding #8:** Participants grew increasingly reliant upon emergency food providers
- **Finding #9:** There is a strong desire on the part of institutions to work for and with Latino/a community, and provide culturally appropriate services, but also an uncertainty how to do so
- **Finding #10:** Innovative programs are connecting urban agriculture and the emergency food system for the benefit of the Latino/a immigrant community

**Finding #1:** Poverty, underemployment, and unemployment are factors that impelled Latino/a participants to migrate and continue to shape their experiences in the United States

**Participants discussed the factors that influenced their decision to move to the U.S., most notably their desire to find work or secure better economic conditions. However, as Juana discusses here, these expectations did not necessarily match up with the realities of living in the U.S.**

*"This question is very hard to answer, because here, here people have for example, medical from the government, stamps, food banks, there are a lot of economic things, and work, and well, a lot of people from there come here supposedly to make money here. All of the people that come over the border, they come here because supposedly there is wealth. But also, there people also don't die from hunger, there, like I said, there we have everything. And it's good to have your own animals and your own land to grow, there people are not dying from hunger."*

**-Juana, age 41, Mexico,**

(in response to being asked if poverty is a more serious issue in Mexico or the U.S.)



**Interviews also revealed that men and women had very different experiences with poverty and finding work. Additionally, as Valentina discusses here, participants also experienced the connection between poverty, citizenship status, and unpredictable access to food:**

*"When my husband was picked up by immigration two years ago, I was alone for five months, and in this time, I quickly got help from the emergency stamps, maybe for three months. I don't know how long, but they gave me the stamps because the food bank wasn't sufficient, because I don't work. My husband is the only one that works and so we didn't have food, and I usually had rice, and things like that, but when he wasn't there, we were left without milk, my children always asked me for milk, and I felt so bad but then the stamps helped me a lot."*

**-Valentina, age 35, Mexico**

## **Finding #2:** Participants longed for familiar foods and experienced profound dietary changes

*"It's very important, because when one comes here it's difficult to adapt to the food here, it's all very different. And it's incredible, because Mexico is not very far from the United States! But it's incredible, the taste. It's very sad, but it's the truth, and when people come here, they get sick, because the food is so different."*

**—Francisca, age 36, Mexico**

**As Francisca discusses here, these dietary changes were difficult and sometimes caused people to become ill.**

**When participants were able to find familiar ingredients, it allowed them to sustain culturally-meaningful food practices and share them with their families. In Marisol's case, these ingredients were grown by a Mexican farmer who participated in a farmers market in the South Park neighborhood.**

*"I bought squash flowers and huauzontles [goosefoot]. It was so many years since I've had those, here I don't eat them because I can't find them. This year I made huauzontles for my whole family, and there's twenty of us! And they were all fascinated with them, they were like, how do you eat these? And yes, I prepared them, all day I was cooking and then we ate them."*

**—Marisol, age 62, Mexico**

*"In my country, you went to the market daily, you bought things fresh and you cook it fresh. And here, since I can't go daily, I only go about every 8 days, by the time I cook it, it's not fresh. And so, I find everything, but sometimes, no, like nopal, the cactus, it's almost never here. Or chayote, also there isn't a lot of chayote, or it's very expensive. Tomatillo, you can find it at special stores, and sometimes in other places, but it's also very expensive."*

**—Graciela, age 41, Mexico**

**Another factor in these dietary changes, as Graciela mentioned, was the high cost of familiar foods and the need to adopt different shopping patterns than those they practiced at home.**

### **Finding #3:** For participants, migration was both an interruption to healthy habits related to diet and exercise and a cause of unhealthy habits

*"For me, I feel healthier, better than before when I ate... when I arrived I weighed 230 pounds! It was very frustrating for me, you understand? I was drinking a liter of soda, like a typical Mexican, and a kilo of tortillas with a plate of food, a kilo of tortillas! This wasn't good. Now I think that food is more... like salads, for example, I eat Italian pasta with my salad and all of this. Bread with a little bit of butter, sometimes my wife makes Italian soups, with vegetables and all of this, and with bread, but just a little bit of bread. Just a little piece. Not a kilo of tortillas!*

*One time I invited a friend to my house and we were eating soup, it was Italian food, and you don't eat this with tortillas and he wanted tortillas! "Where's the tortillas?" he said. And I said, "Tortillas with this?" And he said, "You aren't Mexican! And I said, "Yes I am! You don't eat this with tortillas, but if you want tortillas, here are some, and some Tapatio (a brand of hot sauce)." This is bad!"* **—José, age 36, Mexico**

*"So when I came here, well, my husband likes to eat poorly, so he began to cook a lot of the food, and we ate a lot of pasta, many things that are not very nutritious. So I began to gain weight and then I was almost two hundred pounds. This is what happened, but in Mexico, I ate pretty well, I was like this (motioning to her now-slender body), but after two years, I had gained a lot of weight... I think it's because in Mexico, I ate a lot of vegetables, fruit, and I also did a lot of exercise, three times a week, I did aerobics, or I ran at the university, I ran with a friend, we ran and ran and ran, and I had a regimen of eating fish, chicken, vegetables, fruits. I felt good, I had a lot of energy because of the exercise.*

*Then I came here and no exercise, the food changed completely, and I gained a lot of weight. And I felt tired, fatigued, I didn't want to walk and this happened in two years here! This was a big change, I feel bad. I need to drop some weight, because I want to weigh what I did when I was 18, I wasn't fat. But, two years here, and my doctor told me that I have to stop gaining weight, because I would get diabetes."* **—Irene, age 45, Mexico**

**Through these narratives from José and Irene, we learn more about both the positive and negative consequences of migration on diet and exercise.**

**What is interesting to note is that José was previously married to a U.S.-born dietician, a relationship that had a clear impact on his views on diet and health.**

**In Irene's case, the need to work more hours outside of the home (in a sedentary job) had a dramatic influence on her weight and overall wellbeing.**



**Finding #4:** Participants expressed concern over a decline in their personal health and the health of their children due to cultural pressures of adapting to the U.S. diet

*"My children's school serves chicken nuggets, pizzas, corndogs, I don't think it's good. I always tell them, don't eat this, but I don't see what they are doing, I bet they are eating it."*

**–Veronica, age 30, Mexico**

**With the growing concern about the connections between diet and the health of children living and learning in the United States, it shouldn't be a surprise that Latina immigrant mothers are also concerned about what their children are eating. As Veronica and Cristina explained to me, their control over what their children are eating is limited by the foods provided in schools and the influence and appeal of fast food.**

**As their children develop preferences for processed foods with questionable nutritional benefits like corndogs and flour tortillas, is it very possible that they will struggle with chronic illnesses like diabetes, heart disease, and obesity that disparately impact Latinos/as and other people of color.**

*"We eat corn tortillas, but my two children like flour ones better. But flour makes you fatter. So, I don't serve them anymore. One time a month we eat bacon, no more than that. Because my children like it, and I love it, but it has a lot of grease. And I eat everything, I am not very fat, because I try to eat everything at home, fresh, but I am not used to buying soft drinks, or sweets, we never have these at home. Except for during Halloween, or something, that's when we have sweets. We hardly have them. And when the child turns one, they can have a little bit of candy and soda. My child, the 4 year old, really likes hamburgers and food from McDonalds."*

**–Cristina, age 39, Mexico**

**Finding #5:** Participants grew increasingly distant from food production and agriculturally-based livelihoods

*Of the **46** participants, **37** had grown food before migrating to the U.S. Only **4** were currently growing food in Seattle, with an additional **3** growing herbs.*

Most commonly grown foods prior to migration included corn, onions, chilies, avocados, and squash. In the United States, most commonly grown items included yerba buena, tomatoes, onions, chilies, and tomatillos.

**Both Arturo and Valentina had experimented with growing their own food in Seattle to a small degree, but it didn't compare to the amount of food they had grown at home. Unlike the vast majority of participants, these two were fortunate to have a small yard attached to their apartment or house. While several participants mentioned seeing community gardens in the neighborhoods where they lived, they were not aware of how to get involved. However, each of the participants who had mentioned seeing the community gardens were eager to receive more information, which I shared following our interviews.**

"I live in a building of apartments, and there is a little square, where I can plant just a bit of mint, and yerba Buena [variety of mint], in the garden, I planted it because it's very expensive! When I buy it, when I need it for meatballs or whatever dish, just a little bit costs \$5 or more! And so, I planted it and I just cut off a few fresh leaves and I add them to my food. But I would love to have a bigger space to plant, this is my dream, when I think of the future, my dream is to eat fresh food, make a chicken broth and use my own green beans, my own tomatoes, I would love this. My mother had a big patio, and she had corn and yerba buena, she had chiles, she had a few things, they were very good. And my dream is, that if I return to Mexico, when I am a little old lady, to have some space and have my piece of land so that I can grow my own things."

**–Valentina, age 35, Mexico**

"What happens, for example, in Mexico, in the fields, for example, vegetables are in the fields, or lettuces, tomatoes, all of that. Limes, you cut them from the trees at your house. But here, you have to buy everything. In the city you have to buy everything. It could be cheap, but it's not cheap, because you have to buy everything!"

**–Arturo, age 50, Mexico**



**Finding #6:** For participants, utilizing farmers markets and other local food outlets remained largely inaccessible

**Of the 46 interview participants, only 8 mentioned shopping at the farmers markets, even while many shared memories of doing their daily shopping at open-air markets in their home countries. None of the participants mentioned using Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs.**

**Several of the participants who had utilized farmers markets were mothers who had been given vouchers by a staff member at a not-for-profit family center. Overall, participants had a very positive view of the quality of foods that were available at farmers markets, but the higher cost (perceived or actual) prevented most from doing a significant amount of their shopping there.**

*"There are many stands that accepts stamps. And they have so many fruits and they taste sooo good! All of this is natural...Here there is a farmers market, also, and I went, and I got a lot of vegetables and fruits, cheap, and it tasted very good, and I think that they people are the ones that grow it. And yes, it has a very good taste. An onion, oh! I just suck it down!"*

**-Hilda, age 32, Mexico**

*"I have gone (to the farmer's market) but it's very expensive! It's so expensive, but I went because she gave us coupons to buy things there, but you can only buy a very little, because it's so expensive. More than the supermarkets. But I think it's more organic, and healthier... but for example, right now, I am not working because I have to take care of my children and there are many legal issues that we have to resolve, and also with doctors."*

**-Cristina, age 39, Mexico**

*"When my children were little, they had given me these little coupons to go [to the farmers market]. But now, I don't go as often because even though it's good, my husband isn't working and it's very expensive."*

**-Graciela, age 41, Mexico**

*"Well, I think that in Mexico, if you don't have money, you go and harvest your food, here you don't do that, there aren't fields close to here. And in Mexico, I would go to the markets, where the people harvest the vegetables and the fruit, and there were lots of good vegetables. There, there aren't food banks, just the big markets."*

**-Isabel, age 45, Mexico**

**Finding #7:** Participants' perspectives on health and diet mirror concerns in U.S. sustainable food movements despite being underrepresented in these movements

*"It seems healthier in Peru, because everything is fresher, and the markets are different, because it comes directly from the fields, they come to the markets directly, or the biggest markets distribute to the smaller markets that are closer to your house. And for this, it's a little more direct. It hasn't been picked a long time ago, so it's healthier."*

**–Fernando, age not given, Peru**

*"Well, in particular, I think that healthy foods, or good foods are vegetables, for example fruit juices, for example. I think that beef, even though a lot of people don't like it and critique it because of it's harm that it causes, I think that eating it, more than other animals that are raised in the country, without pastures, and with growth hormones, without all of this, the hormones that they give it to the animals so that they get fatter, it's not good."*

**–Pedro, age 26, Mexico**

**Participants experiences reveal deep connections with and knowledge of growing food and participating in place-based food systems with an emphasis on local, fresh, and seasonal foods, reflecting many of the same values and priorities of U.S. sustainable food movements.**

**At the same time, the majority of participants were not actively participating in Seattle-area sustainable food movements through their practices of food production and/or consumption.**

*"I think that in Mexico, it's [food] better...Because they're fresher, the foods are. We don't eat as many things in cans, or fast foods like here. The culture is more about cooking...You cook, you don't go to X Restaurant, and eat fast food. There, the culture is to cook at home."*

**–Ernesto, age 56, Mexico**

*"I think that, look, with all respect, I think that food in the US is very healthy, but I think that food in Mexico is fresher and more natural, and so it could be a little healthier in Mexico because of this. Because you can get things more in season, and you can eat more of them. For example, with oranges, here oranges are small and very hard, and in Mexico, the oranges are more natural. Meat here is always refrigerated and very processed and it has chemicals, and in Mexico chicken and meat is fresher."*

**–Julio, age 49, Mexico**

## **Finding #8:** Participants grew increasingly reliant upon emergency food providers

**Of the 46 Latino/a participants , 41 had used emergency food programs, including 19 of the 23 women and 22 of the 23 men. Both men and women responded that they utilized food banks more than any other resource, but men mentioned using various meal programs nearly seven times more frequently than women. 4 women who were raising children born in the U.S. mentioned using “estampillas” (food stamps) and WIC.**

**As seen in the quotes below, emergency food has become central to the everyday survival strategies of many Latino/a immigrants, even though it was initially an unfamiliar concept. For participants like Francisco and Juana who came from agricultural backgrounds, the need to depend upon emergency food has radically transformed their relationships with food and the land from which it comes.**

*“I don’t go shopping. I go, look, for example, I wake up at five in the morning, and I come here [Day labor center], and then I go across the bridge and I eat at the mission, or at the Millionaire’s Club. From there, I wait... it’s like a schedule. I go, early I go and eat a sandwich, then I go the Millionaire’s Club. Then I wait a little bit and go over the bridge at one in the afternoon, and then I wait until four in the afternoon. I don’t suffer from hunger in this state, it’s a very beautiful state.”*

**-Francisco, age 27, Mexico**

*“Before I knew about the food banks, there were times that I didn’t know how to feed my children and then I started to ask people, and they told me, oh there are food banks here, all of this. And I said, ok! But when someone comes from another country, we don’t know what a food bank is, and it’s very strange here!”*

**-Hilda, age 32, Mexico**

*“It’s very useful for the community, it serves the community. And it’s good, hopefully all of those without work get help because it’s very necessary because without work, you cannot buy food, and it’s so good that people sponsor this help, hopefully there will always be donors because it helps people that are without work, that have few resources, so, yes, it’s very necessary and very important that they don’t abandon this.”*

**-Juana, age 41, Mexico**

*“I think in Mexico, there are a lot of people that don’t have the necessary resources to buy food, here it’s easier to find food. There are more resources if you are poor. There was a time that I was going to the food banks here all the time, because I was in a bad situation and I had to go there.”*

**-Teresa, age 41, Mexico**

**Finding #9:** There is a strong desire on the part of institutions to work for and with Latino/a community, and provide culturally appropriate services, but also an uncertainty how to do so

**Across the board, staff working for organizations devoted to urban agriculture, food policy, and building more just food systems recognized that addressing the needs of the Latino immigrant community in Seattle is central to fulfilling their missions and goals. At the same time, institutional histories, lack of information about these needs, and inadequate resources (including time and funding) prevented these individuals from carrying out these commitments to their own satisfaction. Connecting these commitments with resources and an anti-oppression framework is essential in building programs and services that are more inclusive, useful, and culturally appropriate.**

*"I mean, I guess you could say, it seems kind of obvious, and I don't want to jinx us, but there is the challenge of being a historically white organization. I think that's our challenge in general. It's a historically white organization. But our world is changing at a very rapid pace, and a lot of things that are historically white are changing... Well, like, any white, historically white place, it's a monoculture! And we teach about that, but we're not even following our own curriculum to diversity! Because that's what we teach, that any biological system is a stronger one if it's more diverse, so honestly, I think the organization will fail if it's not able to diversify! ... [B]ecause, in practical terms what it might mean is a lot of new growing techniques, new crops, new solutions to problems, new approaches to food production in an increasingly urbanized area. I mean, we are all kind of inventing a whole new thing together, really."*

**-Ruth**

*"For example, people will say, 'well, low-income people don't have time to garden' and we'll come back and say, 'well, what we are hearing from the Somali community, for example, or from the southeast Asian refugee community, for example' we haven't heard as much from the Hispanic community, or Latino communities, that in fact, this is really what they want."*

**-Leslie**

*"It basically comes down to our outreach, our outreach ability. I think that at the base level, probably once we were able to get more people in the gardens there might be other things that would need to change to meet people's needs better.*

*But, right now, just even getting people to participate in the program is about outreach, I don't think the outreach itself would be that difficult. I mean, based on other times when we had people that were able to do that."*

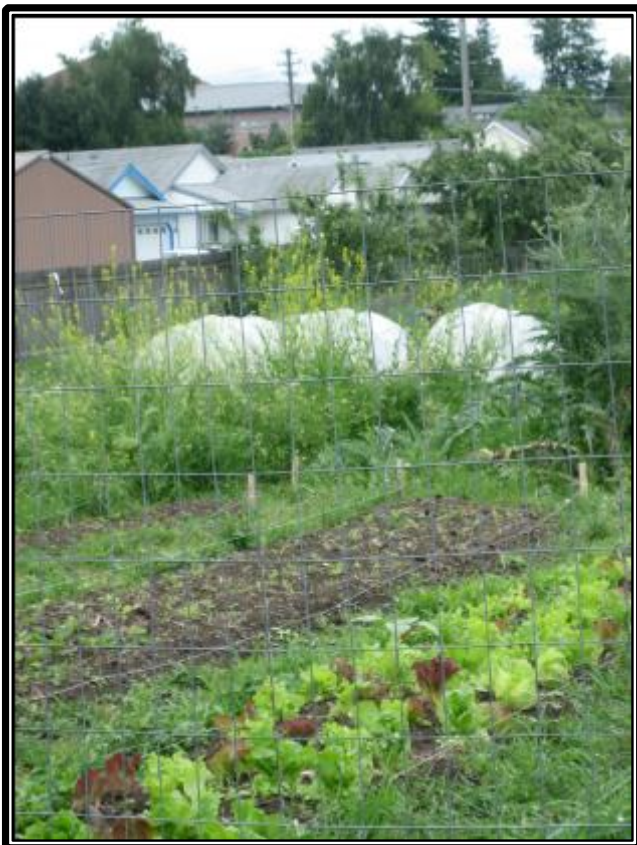
**-Paula**



**Finding #10:** Innovative programs are connecting urban agriculture and the emergency food system for the benefit of the Latino/a immigrant community

**While the first nine findings have shown that there are several areas of improvement needed to build local food systems that are just and equitable, there are already great models in Seattle for building innovative partnerships and programs that benefit diverse communities.**

**For example, the work of Solid Ground's Lettuce Link program at Marra Farm brings more than 22,000 pounds of fresh produce to organizations working to address food insecurity like the Providence Regina Food Bank, which serves an estimated 70% Latino/a clientele. This model is already being replicated at the Seattle Community Farm in Seattle's Rainier Valley.**



# Conclusions :

There is tremendous potential in the Seattle area for building upon the excitement for sustainable food to transform the local food system into one that is more just, inclusive, and resilient. As “Ruth” mentioned (see finding 9), involving diverse communities and respecting their agri-food knowledge would mean an infusion of new solutions, techniques, and approaches to food production and consumption that stands to benefit the broader community. At the same time, understanding the needs of diverse communities and designing effective outreach models that build community-based food systems from the bottom-up are both essential steps.

Over the five years that I was involved in food-related work in Seattle I witnessed the movements around food shifting and changing in response to both on-the-ground mobilization and changes at the regional and national level. When I first started this project in 2005, food justice was a concept that my colleagues and I rarely used to describe what was happening at places like Marra Farm, although local food and community food security were both familiar ideas. However, these conversations have recently started to change and food justice is now a term that community members are using with great regularity. It seems that the time is, quite literally, ripe for substantive efforts to engage all Seattle residents in building a food system that is truly just and sustainable for everyone. However, given the structural inequalities connected to race, class and gender that undergird all food systems merely addressing the symptoms of deeper and broader social inequalities is clearly not sufficient. As Patricia Allen argues, “(t)here will always be people who need food assistance as long as there is underemployment, unemployment, poverty-level wages, and inadequate pensions and access to food is based on ability to pay” (1999:126).

What then, might adopting a framework of food sovereignty bring to this burgeoning food justice movement in Seattle? First, food sovereignty goes beyond the boundaries of the local to demand consideration of the impacts of industrialization and centralization on local food economies everywhere, forging an interdependent connection between local food systems in Seattle to local food systems around the world. It draws attention to the political and economic forces that displace small farmers in Latin America and other regions of the “Global South,” many of whom have no other choice than to migrate to cities like Seattle in search of work. By integrating a food sovereignty framework into the growing food justice movement in Seattle, the struggles of displaced Latino/a farmers like those I interviewed could potentially be better understood and their food and farming experiences better acknowledged. This would not only apply to Latino/a immigrants living in Seattle, but also to the many other groups of immigrant farmers that currently make their home in the city. For more information on food sovereignty, see [www.viacampesina.org](http://www.viacampesina.org).

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