

Commentary: Back To Our Roots- Strengthening Connections between Sustainability & Equity in Los Angeles

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“Agricultural sustainability doesn’t depend on agritechnology. To believe it does is to put the emphasis on the wrong bit of ‘agriculture.’ What sustainability depends on isn’t agri- so much as culture.” – Raj Patel, academic, journalist, activist and author of *The Value of Nothing: How to Reshape Market Society and Redefine Democracy*



Photo Source: LA + SF Specialty

It may seem counterintuitive to say that Los Angeles needs to focus on improving its local, sustainable food system since the city sits so near California’s many conventional growing areas. After all, in 2015, according to the California Department of Food & Agriculture, more than 400 commodities were grown in California and we provided over a third of the vegetables and two-thirds of the fruits and nuts in the U.S. However, a local, sustainable food system does much more than just provide California grown and produced foods to Angelenos. “A local food system rooted in equity and access”, as stated in LAFPC’s vision provides for a stronger local economy and opportunity for jobs and business ownership, especially for lower-income residents and people of color.

An abundance of healthy and nutritious foods is indeed produced in California, but much of it is grown on contract for large retail and foodservice companies operating nationally, even globally. These foods are not produced for and often don’t reach Los Angeles residents and are, therefore, not considered to be part of our local food system. Also, recognize that “locally grown” is not inherently sustainable, despite shorter transportation routes having a lower environmental impact. A local, sustainable food system is when food is produced within a “regional” geographic area for the residents of that area in a way that is socially and environmentally responsible.

While it is the smaller, local farms that tend to engage in farming practices that don’t harm the environment, it’s important to understand what those farming practices are and to identify whether they are being implemented. As a champion of the Good Food

Purchasing Policy, LAFPC is helping buying entities in Los Angeles include a framework in their Requests for Proposals (RFPs) and purchasing programs for evaluating suppliers on the metrics that would support a strong local, sustainable food system. The metrics ensure that food intended for Los Angeles residents is being produced grown, processed, and distributed locally, in a socially and environmentally responsible manner, and is creating jobs in our community. The metrics also establish that purchasing decisions should support fair treatment and wages for farm workers and respect for farm animals. By promoting this policy, LAFPC is supporting local, sustainable farms and strengthening the Los Angeles Food System.



Photo Source: U.S Department of Agriculture

We cannot continue to simply view food production in terms of maximized productivity, we also have to consider how it affects our health, local economy, social equity in our communities, and the sustainability of our environment. It is imperative that we continue to work toward increased access to healthier foods for LA residents, fair working conditions & wages for food workers, and the ability for farmers to determine what they grow, how to grow it, and to own their seeds. Together, we can establish a platform for diverse stakeholders to affect policy change that will ensure a viable food system reaping long term benefits for Los Angeles.