

University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and
Social Sciences

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Fall 2011

Review of *Food Justice*. By Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi.

Toby Ten Eyck

Michigan State University, toby.teneyck@wwu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Health Economics Commons](#), and the [Regional Economics Commons](#)

Ten Eyck, Toby, "Review of *Food Justice*. By Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi." (2011). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 1196.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch/1196>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Food Justice. By Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010. vii + 290 pp. Photographs, notes, index. \$27.95 cloth.

It is a story about food we have heard before—big is bad; small, local, and organic is better; and if you can link small, local, and organic to students, that is best of all. Part of the problem is that the usual suspects—Wal-Mart, McDonalds, PepsiCo, etc.—have so many more resources than the usual cast of small-is-good heroes eking out a living from the earth and hard work: organic

farmers, migrant workers, CSA founders and operators, and similar supporters. Gottlieb and Joshi provide some hope by pointing to a few small victories among the heroes, but it is a fight with ever-moving targets.

There are a number of issues and cases discussed in the pages of *Food Justice* that would interest *Great Plains Research* readers. The authors point to the Dust Bowl as a key event for getting people to start thinking about food justice. The northern Great Plains—the Corn Belt—is likely to see major social changes if the move towards local foods is successful. The 2006 race for Iowa's secretary of agriculture is discussed as a victory for food justice activists. Running on a platform of “health farms,” “healthy families,” and a “healthy Iowa,” Denise O'Brien won the primary election. She lost the general election by two percentage points to Bill Northey, a “conventional farmer.” Her success is stated as an example of how important healthy food is for the voting public.

The book also inadvertently points to the difficulties with the “small-and-local-is-beautiful” approach. Gottlieb smiles at us from the book's dust jacket, strategically positioned in front of a stack of books, some of which are most likely printed on paper produced from pulp with connections to deforestation efforts in the Amazon rainforest and polluted waters, and written by authors not local to Los Angeles. Promoting local efforts must be all-encompassing—local art, local media, local business—or larger concerns with social justice will continue to be undermined. Thomas Jefferson is mentioned as a yeoman farmer. Jefferson was a great wordsmith, and an individual with a lot of property for his time, as well as a slave owner. On page 231, the authors argue that the only thing to lose by seeking change in the food arena is “an unjust food system.” There are, however, much larger stakes at play. If the food justice movement fails because a majority of low-income consumers see the members of the movement as privileged—a problem the authors point to—this could be a major setback for other social justice movements. Failure also opens the door for the Wal-Marts and Tescos of the world to gain even more control over our food. The spirit of the sentiment is much appreciated and understood to mean that success would lead to losing “an unjust food system,” but if food justice groups do become a food justice movement, it must be precise in choosing targets and strategies. **Toby A. Ten Eyck**, *Department of Sociology, Michigan State University*.