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## Beyond the Plate: Leisure Studies as a Recipe for Food Justice

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University of San Francisco

**Beyond the Plate: Leisure Studies as a Recipe for Food Justice**

An honors thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the distinction  
of Honors in the International Studies Department in the College of Arts and Science

**By**

**Julia Montano**

**December 2023**

Approved by:

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## **Abstract**

To address the issues that have been derived from the dominant forces in our food systems, movements such as food justice strive to find solutions through decolonization and addressing barriers to accessing healthy, affordable and culturally representative food. One group of individuals that are heavily involved in, and impacted by, food justice are college students. This study seeks to explore the extent to which college students' involvement in food justice is shaped by their free time. With this research, I strive to bring in the voices of college students, while also bridging a gap in the field by bringing leisure studies, or free time, into the conversation with food justice. I distributed a survey to a group of students majoring in environmental science and studies, in addition to a range of other fields, to gain perspective on their perceptions on the intersection of free time and food justice, as well as meal-based discussion via a focus group. Through this, I found that college students are both in need of the work that food justice does, such as ensuring affordability, but they generally lack the resources or time to participate in the movement. However, it was also discovered that food justice looks different in each context, in terms of who is carrying out the work, as well as in the issues it is trying to solve; thus, there is ultimately not one way to use one's free time to participate in it.

## **Keywords**

Food justice, leisure studies, free time, food-based activism, decolonization, food systems

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## **I. Introduction**

Have you considered the ways in which free time and food justice are intertwined?

Whether that be in the ways that participation in certain activities rework our food systems, or in general, the availability of time to participate in the work, the two are linked. Food justice at its core strives to rework the dominant globalized and capitalistic food systems in place. It calls for localization, food sovereignty, and increasing access to healthy, affordable food. Another area that has been in the sphere of food justice and activism is the idea of free time, derived from the field of leisure studies. In the field of leisure studies, we ought to reflect on how the activities we participate in our free time impact or create the world we would like to see, especially in relation to the food we eat and where we get it from.

One group of voices that have been left out of the conversation surrounding food justice and free time is that of college students. Through my own experience, both as an environmentally focused college student, as well as prior work in a farmers' market, I have been inspired by my peers' efforts in food justice. Through class discussions or projects, and hearing about the different student organizations on campus surrounding food justice, I saw this as a group that has made significant contributions to the realm of food justice that ought to be recognized in academia. Thus, I arrived at the question of, to what extent is college students' involvement in food justice shaped by their free time?

To answer this question, I carried out a mix of both surveys and a leisure-based focus group. The surveys yielded responses from 58 college students, in which about half of whom were environmental majors, whereas the rest consisted of a wide array of fields of study. In the survey, students were asked to reflect on their beliefs on food justice, as well as bring in their perceptions of their free time. The leisure-based discussion group consisted of four individuals



from the university community who are actively involved in different food justice initiatives both on campus and in the city. The discussion consisted of a shared meal, along with a conversation about their work, community building, the problems which they hope to address, as well as a critical reflection on their free time in terms of food justice. Together, both methods yielded two sets of data that were put into conversation with one another. Both sample populations illuminated valuable perspectives on food justice, as they represent a mix of different levels of involvement in food justice.

Food justice encapsulates a vast array of issues, all different in their impacts and the ways they ought to be addressed. Therefore, it is imperative that we add the voices of college students into the conversation surrounding the ways in which leisure and food justice are linked together. While this research may not pinpoint the end-all solution to the problems food justice seeks to address, it seeks to shed light on the systemic barriers to food justice that college students face, as well as highlighting students who are making impacts on their college communities. From this, we can draw lessons that will not only apply to the world of universities, but our general communities and perhaps consequently, the world. The research is valuable due to the imperative need for a localized, decolonized food system to care for our environment and each other.

The research will be divided into three parts. First, there is the literature review which will explore topics of localization, globalization, food justice and leisure studies. The literature review reveals there is a gap in the literature, identified as the lack of the perspectives and voices of college students on food justice, as well as a further elaboration on the connections between leisure time and food justice activism. For this study, the methodology I employed consisted of the distribution of a survey to college students, as well as a discussion group with students who are actively involved in food justice. Lastly, the findings and discussion section discuss the main

themes of the study, as well as putting the findings into conversation with one another. As a conclusion, I revisit the key takeaways from my research, as well as offer suggestions for further areas of exploration in the field of food justice and leisure studies.

## **II. Literature Review**

### **Literature Introduction**

While at the grocery store, have you ever thought about where your food comes from, the hands that sowed the seed and unearthed it from the ground? Or, who delivered this food, who stocked the shelf, who will have the ability to buy it, and where will it be consumed? Perhaps there is a disconnect between the consumer and producer, and as we consume food that comes from miles away, we must not forget that there is a mind and body behind these processes. To get at the bigger picture, the commodification of food is something that impacts not only our health, but our local and global communities. We are able to consume food that comes from around the world; thus, this literature review will explore how globalization impacts food systems. At the same time, it will also examine alternate forces such as localization. It will also draw upon food justice, which has foundations rooted in Indigenous, feminist and postcolonial thinking. This literature review will cover the ways in which food has become a commodity which impacts accessibility and how that can be traced back to the grasp of colonization and capitalism. Lastly, I will introduce the social concept of leisure, or the study of free time. By exploring these three categories (or ingredients), I hope to provide the reader with a picture (or recipe) to see the connections between globalization, food justice and leisure; and consequently, how our connections to food have been impacted by hegemonic systems of domination.

## **Globalization and Localization**

When it comes to food, there are many ways in which we ought to be responsible consumers. Although one may see their weekly grocery run as merely a routine errand, it actually plays a larger role in how an individual acts as a member of the global community. With that being said, it is important to explore concepts of consumerism, the presence of large corporations and globalization in relation to food. The globalization of food has existed for hundreds of years, stemming back to plant and seed exchanges, as well as the circulation of food from population to population (Rapinski et al., 2023). Today, however, these processes have accelerated, and we now have a “global industrial food system,” meaning that food products that are globalized are generally less expensive and more accessible in markets (Rapinski et al., 2023). This phenomenon has implications not only for nutritional health due to globalized food being more processed, but also for the environment. Globally, the heavy industrialization of food production has led to “excessive use of non-renewable energy and the emission of greenhouse gases that contribute to climate and environmental disruptions, which include biodiversity loss as well as the degradation of soil, water and air quality” (Rapinski et al., 2023, p. 2). Keeping the globalization of food in mind, it is important that we narrow in and examine the places where we get our food.

Through an economic perspective, we can see that markets are crucial in the conversation about sustainable agri-food systems. While many scholars have acknowledged that markets increase food accessibility, others would argue that markets themselves are one of the largest drivers of unsustainable practices in agriculture and food systems (El Bilali et al., 2021). In the face of globalization, it is important that we address its opposite in the realm of food systems—a concept called localization. Local foods are classified as those which are grown or produced

within one hundred miles of their consumption point. However, this definition can also be ambiguous, as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) classification entails a total distance of four hundred miles between the farm and the consumer (Farmer, 2012). Local food movements have implications beyond that of just health and nutrition, but rather they pertain to the economy, environment, and in general, the support of farmers and food producers (Farmer, 2012). The push towards local food manifests itself in different ways, both in socioeconomic and sociocultural contexts, showing that food systems are vastly intricate.

In a time of increasing globalization, counter movements such as localization are on the rise. From the years 1991 to 2007, the USDA reported that summer farmers' markets have increased by 349% and wintertime farmers markets have expanded by 38% since 2010 (Farmer, 2012). Efforts to localize food, especially in agricultural settings, can be seen as a counter force to the ways in which globalization has made food an industrial and extensive process of production (Amsden & McEntee, 2011). One scholar even claims that globalization's effect on food and agriculture is the complete opposite than that of localization (Amsden & McEntee, 2011). Thus, adopting more local food is a multidimensional process: it will "change our social fabric by strengthening rural and urban economies, revitalizing downtowns by increased patronage to the area, enhancing community and sense of place, as well as increasing food security and benefiting the environment" (Farmer, 2012, p. 491). This touches on the sociocultural sphere of food and how, to an extent, it can be seen as a way to build community and increase communal gatherings surrounding food, all while supporting local farmers and food producers. The actualization of the process of localizing food systems has the power to revitalize and rework the fabrication of our communities.

When reevaluating the places where we get our food, we find ourselves amid a division. There is a clear dichotomy surrounding markets or places of provisions, stemming from the way that food is framed as something of a “commodity” (El Bilali et al., 2021). One can argue that because of globalization and capitalist expansion, viewing food as that of a “commodity” has been increasingly normalized. This wording can insinuate that food is merely an item that is to be produced and sold, making it into something that can become rather inaccessible in nature to vast populations of people (El Bilali et al., 2021). Although there is the idea of accessibility present in the discourse surrounding globalization, it is important that we acknowledge that food accessibility is certainly not the reality for all people as there are geographical and financial constraints, for example.

To add to this, when talking about markets, it is important to define what is meant because they come in a variety of forms. Some markets come in more “corporate” or commercialized forms, and on the other side of the spectrum, there are types that tend to be more “inclusive” or “democratic,” such as farmers’ or community markets (El Bilali et al., 2021). Farmers’ and community markets create an effect that strengthens social ties between individuals in a community. One can view farmers’ or community markets as key pillars in the localized food movement. Although, one scholar argues that while providing an alternative to heavily commercialized markets, “farmers’ markets create a context for closer social ties between farmers and consumers, but remain fundamentally rooted in commodity relations” (El Bilali et al., 2021, p. 11). While farmers’ markets tend to stray away from the domination of large corporations, it is still important to note that food is still being treated as a commodity, even at a more localized scale. There have been efforts to increase the presence of federal nutrition assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) within

farmers' and community markets, thus trying to address barriers to food (Headrick et al., 2020). While these initiatives seek to help people and aid in the access to food, it still functions within a system of commodification, which raises the question: how can we move away from this dominant framework?

Agroecology has been inspiring many movements over the last decades. Embedded in its principles is the idea to build upon local food systems, which would in turn help to dismantle the “institutional framework” which is widely derived from free market rules and the hegemonic nature of large food and agricultural corporations (González De Molina, 2020). These corporations which have created the commodification of food are rooted in capitalism and the effects of globalization. One scholar suggests a possible solution to deglobalizing food systems is through shifting the focus from merely production-based outputs, to simply put it, just eating (González De Molina, 2020). If we think about the ways in which we ought to—or need to—change our food systems, then why not simplify it to a level that fits and nurtures our basic needs. While it may seem radical in this context, it is important to note its ties to food sovereignty movements. At its core, the nurturing of oneself through eating connects to a complex array of social relations (González De Molina, 2020). Perhaps the act of localizing food is not only associated with becoming an alternative force to globalization, but rather viewing it through a finer looking glass into a level that is more centered towards individual needs. However, it is worth pointing out that these signifiers from the consumption side place an emphasis on the consumer, rather than the larger politicization of food consumption itself. This in turn, makes food consumption into a moral or responsible act—or a political choice—through questioning the larger, structural problems at hand (González De Molina, 2020).

## Food Justice

Now that we have examined some of the foundations of localization, we ought to acknowledge how the pillars of food justice, which have been assembled by Indigenous people and feminist approaches, are extremely pertinent to much of the inspiration behind local food movements. Food sovereignty and agroecology seek to put emphasis on local decision-making and the knowledge of Indigenous and small holder farmers. Upholding food sovereignty is a step in the path to decolonizing food systems. To introduce the topic of decolonization—and to provide more context of localization—let us look at the recent movements of decolonizing aid and development. The process of decolonization is one that critiques systems of domination, like colonialism and white supremacy, while addressing the systemic and structural issues alongside it (Oliver et al., 2022). To bring in localization, it highlights the importance across all of these fields in bringing in local expertise or control in order to move away from external forces who are making decisions (Oliver et al., 2022). While the literature presented here is generally in support of localized food movements, it is important to note that scholars like Holloway and Knfeasey have raised criticism that favoring localism can most often be associated with *parochialism*—only focusing on a small part of an issue rather than the wider scope—of global food issues rather than intentionally focusing on community level care (Ujuaje & Chang, 2020). This raises the question, how can we find a balance between supporting the localization of food, while also being responsible global citizens?

To further elaborate on agroecology, which was noted before, I would now like to explore the connections found with food sovereignty. La Vía Campesina coined the term food sovereignty in 1996 to counteract the impacts of the World Trade Organization (Oliver et al., 2022). Furthermore, food sovereignty consists of these main pillars: “Focuses on food for people,

Builds knowledge and skills, Works with nature, Values food providers, Localizes food systems, and Puts control locally” with the Indigenous addition of “Food is sacred” (Oliver et al., 2022, pp. 6-7). La Vía Campesina describes food insecurity and scarcity as factors that are caused by the “inequitable distribution of food, land, and other productive resources, including water and seed” which urges for an approach that is focused on the rights of people and communities which are entwined with agro-social relations (Sachs, 2020, p. 403). A feminist approach to agroecology calls for self-determination, stemming from the realization of the ways in which food is socially constructed by larger agricultural systems, food choices, sustainable practices of production and consumption, while focusing on the needs of the community (Sachs, 2020). It can be argued that within processes of localization the foundations of agroecology ought to be present.

To further this notion, agroecology serves as an alternative model to counter the global hegemonic food system. In practice, agroecology is “based on and emphasizes the farmer and the farmer’s knowledge according to the diverse characteristics and realities of each context” (Trevilla Espinal et al., 2021, p. 1029). I would also like to bring attention to the fact that women’s roles and contributions to food systems are generally under-recognized. There are countless “epistemological and economic contributions of women in general and women farmers in particular ...[that] remain ignored or in the background. Nevertheless, women generate strategies and lead processes for the adoption of agroecological practices” (Trevilla Espinal et al., 2021, p. 1030). It can be argued that without feminism, agroecology would not be where it is today. When taking a feminist agro-ecological approach to how we perceive food systems, it is centered around the idea of rebuilding the perceived social organizations and how to generate alternative models that are more sustainable (Trevilla Espinal et al., 2021).



To add a perspective of decolonization in regard to food, it is imperative that we acknowledge the work and efforts of Indigenous people. Activist and scholar, Devon Peña, offers a decolonial investigation into food studies that helps to create a picture of how to recover Indigenous knowledge and practices in relation to food, foodways and cuisines (Glowa, 2022). Taking a decolonial standpoint on food helps us to search for hidden or alternative pathways on how we view ourselves in relation to the land, plants, and other beings (Glowa, 2022). This relationship with food, land and other beings has been widely disrupted by colonization and capitalism. Peña also introduces the concept of “decolonial *comida*,” or decolonial food, which illustrates how food and foodways are social relations which are linked to the “normative infrastructure” of the ways which exist in a world that predates white settler societies (Glowa, 2022). By doing this, Peña suggests that through decolonial *comida*, we can find the opportunity for transformation and healing (Glowa, 2022). Other scholars have taken the idea of decolonial *comida* and have applied it to anti-capitalist ideas as well, such as recognizing the potential to resist capitalist and colonial food systems on a micro-level, such as community gardens, in response to international food movements (Glowa, 2022). So how can we tangibly envision what decolonial *comida* or decolonizing food looks like in our communities? For centuries, Indigenous communities have been resisting the global industrialized food system and its roots in capitalism and colonialism (Ulug, 2019). Through Indigenous resilience, it has been possible to preserve “their food and agricultural practices, knowledge, and beliefs” (Ulug, 2019, p. 311).

I would also like to highlight the ways in which the language—that of which is derived from globalization and capitalism—also ought to be decolonized in the dialogue of food systems. We must also critically examine the word ‘consumer’ because in the interaction with food, it helps to solidify the belief that what was produced from the Earth is a commodity; thus, the

language used here takes away from the value and nourishment it has for cultural, local and global horizons (Ujuaje & Chang, 2020). To take this same critical lens, we ought to use it in the same way in which we think about ‘producers.’ This term is also limiting in that it lacks the demonstration that there are many different, unique productive techniques and capacities in the foodscape all over the world (Ujuaje & Chang, 2020). An example of shifting our mindset away from the usual concept of food producers would be to view the school cooks, a mother or grandmother cooking for their family, the driver who delivers the grocery store shipments, or a teenager who works in a fast-food restaurant all as individuals who contribute to our food system (Ujuaje & Chang, 2020). All these individuals are included in the system of food production, and all of these individuals assist in the process of helping others eat (Ujuaje & Chang, 2020). This rigid system of the consumer and producer ideology and commodification structures limits us in seeing what possibilities exist in actualizing a new food system. We ought to seek out non-hegemonic systems of nourishment for the self and all people. Peña explains that decolonizing food is “not just a radical restructuring of our food system, it is the radical restructuring of the meaning of our food” (Ulug, 2019, p. 312). Through an analysis of different definitions of food justice, one author found that there is a “contention that food justice uses agriculture and food as vehicles to address social, cultural, political, economic, and environmental relations between inadequate access to food and larger societal structures of inequality” (Smith, 2019, p. 826). Ultimately, decolonizing food is an act of healing, not only limited to food itself, but for our communities and the planet.

## **Leisure and Free Time**

One field where the concept of leisure has been connected to the study of food is in the context of agritourism, however, the field of leisure studies has wider implications on food beyond that of tourism. It can be defined as such, “The essence of leisure lies less in the specific activity than in the subjective perception of freedom, choice, and intrinsic motivation” (Iso-Ahola & Baumeister, 2023, p. 1). Within the past decade or so, there has been an influx of research connecting the study of leisure and food, due to a clear intersection between the two. To bridge the two together, we ought to focus on them individually at first. Food is more than just a means for fuel, it is “a source of sustenance, a cause for celebration, an inducement to temptation, a vehicle for power, an indicator of well-being, a catalyst for change” (Mair & Sumner, 2013, p. 312). Similarly, the way we perceive food plays a role in how we view leisure and our communities, both local and global. Therefore, we may ask ourselves, “What is food when known through leisure in these ways? Is it a way of knowing the world? Can it be a path for sharing knowledge about the world? What happens when we think of food through leisure by foregrounding its social construction and asking who benefits and who loses?” (Mair & Sumner, 2013, p. 314). By viewing food through the lens of leisure, it is not only a way to reevaluate one’s personal views, but also on a local community or global scale.

Viewing physical spaces associated with food also shifts it towards an idea of community building. In a world marked by industrialization, we see food as something that is expedited, fast and ready-to-go (Rey et al., 2012). Expediency and food may be seen as something that is cost and time effective, easily available and rather simple to prepare (Rey et al., 2012). To further bridge the connection of leisure, it is embedded in food tourism which can be defined as a “cuisine, meal system, or eating style considered to belong to a culinary system not one’s own”

(Rey et al., 2012, p. 397). Highlighting the idea of curiosity is important, because oftentimes, food piques people's interests to explore and learn about other cultures. This curiosity of food and culinary tourism are shaped by a folkloristic approach that brings awareness to the idea that food is tied to memory—perhaps lending itself to the inclination towards new experiences such that individuals are constantly reshaping their perspectives on identity, community and culture (Rey et al., 2012). In a world that is dominated by capitalism and marked by colonialism, perhaps a shift towards a folkloristic view of food could be a radical shift if we apply it to our everyday lives outside the restraints that this can only be the case while traveling. Tourism scholars like Priscilla Boniface have made efforts to familiarize this phenomenon, that perhaps rather than being a new niche in tourism, there can be a blend between vacation and every day, rather than viewing tourism and the quotidian as opposites (Rey et al., 2012).

Drawing upon the idea of Boniface, perhaps there can be a shift of viewing food from the standpoint of leisure in everyday life. Researchers have found that “exploring one's relationship to food through leisure allows time and space for critical reflection, resistance and the articulation of alternative lifestyles and systems” (Warner et al., 2013, p. 338). However, I would also like to address the exclusionary implications that may come with certain privileges associated with leisure. Amsden and McEntee (2011) are striving to frame the concept of ‘agrileisure,’ which ties together food, leisure and social change. They are using this concept also as a tool that examines how we ought to find a balance between “leisure, necessity and subsistence.” (Amsden & McEntee, 2011, p. 43). It is a privilege to have the time, opportunity, or economic capacity to prioritize leisure, where there are factors such as necessity and subsistence that may appear higher up on a hierarchy of needs. Some scholars in the field have noted that “food is knowledge and story – an opportunity for hearing and sharing a multiplicity

of perspectives and for engaging in a critical, reflexive evaluation of the personal experience underlying how we grow and know food” (Mair & Sumner, 2013, p. 315). While this is certainly the case to a certain extent, it is important to realize that there are deeply rooted privileges that are associated with both food and leisure. This is also another area in the literature that has yet to be thoroughly explored.

The realm of leisure studies has been making efforts to create connections within the realm of food, but one area where leisure has been tied to food is through agritourism. Agriculture and food systems are often associated with the discourse of merely being places of work, but now there has been a shift towards that of a social sphere through activities such as agritourism, rural and urban farmers’ markets, and home or community gardens (Amsden & McEntee, 2011). We are also now seeing a resurgence of farms and agricultural space being viewed as places of “recreation, education... and personal growth” (Amsden & McEntee, 2011, p. 37). In the study of leisure, it is often observed as overlapping with social change and movements. To add to this, an area of food that leisure has been applied to are community gardens. Here, food is seen as a “kind of conduit – a mechanism through which relationships are built and shared meanings of place are constructed” (Mair & Sumner, 2013, p. 315). With the idea that leisure can be seen as a mode of social change, there is room for further exploration in bridging the gap between decolonization and leisure surrounding food.

Additionally, there is a clear connection within the existing literature between leisure and the localization of food. People may participate in or seek out local agriculture not only for supporting local food or sustainability movements, but also for the social connection—or leisure—that comes from the enjoyment of visiting farmers’ markets and shared, communal spaces. In the studies of leisure there exists the idea of resistance, which is inextricably linked with social

change, giving way to the idea that we can reimagine systems that are not serving people the way that they should. Some researchers have coined the term, “critically reflexive leisure activities,” which is “politically oriented leisure where the central components of reflection, resistance, and the articulation of an alternative vision inform and are informed by the dimensions of pleasure, activism, and empowerment” (Mair et al., 2008, p. 381). There have been efforts to seek out the ways in which food leisure can be classified in ways such as “pleasure, activism, and empowerment” (Mair et al., 2008, p. 383). Perhaps there can be a connection made between leisure as resistance and food justice as a counter to hegemonic systems like capitalism; however, this is an area in the literature that has yet to be explored.

## **Summary**

While the connections between leisure and food systems have been explored in the literature already, Farmer (2012) suggests that there is space for further research on the benefits of leisure and how it impacts the community and environment. This has left room in the literature for more research to be conducted on leisure and food systems; therefore, with this research, I will take a new perspective on the concept of leisure by exploring it through the participation in food justice initiatives. To further address the gap in the literature, I will bring in the voices of college students who have studied food justice, as well as those who actively participate in it. College campuses and its students are conduits of food justice, however, there is a lack of research that touches on the implications of leisure studies in participation in food justice work. Therefore, with my research, I will bring new voices—those of college students—into the conversation, as well as further the conversation of leisure studies and food justice together. In the case of this paper, I hope to further research the concept of leisure in relation to

food systems through the following question: to what extent is college students' involvement in food justice shaped by their free time? And ultimately, how can the examination of different types of leisure and food activism within college students provide more context to the ways in which we can reimagine our food system?

### **III. Methodology**

To reiterate the findings of leisure scholars, the following methodology will strive “to pull back the curtains on the power relations that underscore food and reveal the extent to which eating can become a pleasurable, activist, empowering practice against mainstream notions of food and food production” (Mair et al., 2008, p. 398). To consider the gap found in the literature surrounding leisure and food studies, I sought out to add the perspectives of college students, those who regularly participate in food leisure activism or who have studied food justice, thus ultimately striving to bridge the gap for its implications in the realm of leisure studies. By doing so, my aim of this research is to further bridge the gap between local food justice movements, and the implications it has in larger contexts. Through a mixed methods approach of both surveys and a focus group discussion, I will examine the question: to what extent is college students' involvement in food justice shaped by their free time?

To better understand the guiding concepts of the research, it is important to acknowledge localization as the movement or decision to consume seasonal food close to its production point. In addition to this, I would like to further define leisure as an activity and its perceived idea of freedom, choice, and personal motivation, alongside with the associated feelings with the experience, or in other words, the availability of free time and how one chooses to spend it. Lastly, I am using food justice and decolonization such that it is based on Indigenous and

feminist ecological principles which move away from heavily commercialized and capitalistic food systems. To address the guiding question, I employed a mixed methods approach, consisting of two methods of analysis, both a survey and a focus group discussion. For the focus group aspect of my study, I replicated a study done by Warner et al. (2013) through a focus group-based discussion on food activism and leisure. To ensure that the research is defensible, I also distributed a survey to a larger population of college students to further add to the conversation surrounding the motivations behind food leisure.

### **Meal-Based Focus Group Discussion**

Drawing inspiration from a prior study, and applying it to a new context, I pulled inspiration from the discussion design approach employed by Warner et al. (2013). In their study, the authors utilized a community-based, participatory learning approach to open up the conversation on food citizenship through an educational leisure experience. The basis of this educational approach consisted of assembling a group of volunteers to host a sustainable-based meal in their homes for a group of friends or community members (Warner et al., 2013). In this focus group, the leisure-based meal consisted of activities, an in-depth reflection of issues surrounding food systems, a discussion of values and considering ways in which they would like to shift their food habits.

By replicating this approach, I wanted to uphold and emulate the values present in leisure studies. Therefore, I created a leisure-based experience for the focus group participants through the act of a shared meal and conversation. However, to fill the gap in the literature, there were crucial adjustments made that added the perspective of food justice to the discussion, as well as addressing the constraints they face with their free time and their work. Ultimately, the aim of



this approach is to open up the dialogue surrounding food and leisure, and the decolonized pathways ahead which are necessary to take. Through facilitating a leisure activity—a shared meal—the objective of my study was to be able to open up the dialogue of food justice within the realm of leisure studies through the voices of college students.

The target population of the focus group were college students in San Francisco who are interested in examining their relationship to their role in the local food system and are currently participating in an area of the city’s food system—whether that be through university organizations, programs, internships or jobs. In this way, the selected participants represent what is called prefigurative politics. This is “where there is an effort to live out the vision of a better world while seeking to change it. Again, by eating, growing, and serving food in ways that counter dominant assumptions about food, these movements are indeed becoming the change they advocate” (Mair et al., 2008, p. 398). Drawing from the Warner et al. (2013) study, I had four participants in the discussion, so it was feasible to organize and observe the conversations and activities. By addressing college students’ perspectives on food justice, I asked them about their current relationships with food, as well as to identify problems they face within their communities. This sample population drew upon the ways in which perhaps a decolonized food system has been prefigured, as well as touching on the work they do within their communities and the overlap between their work and their free time. In the conversation, the participants shared a meal and a discussion, as well as examining food justice pieces of art from various artists. I identified and reached out to the individuals through a network of mutual interests and connections.

## **Student Survey**

To further my research, I distributed a survey that examines college students' behaviors and attitudes on the idea of leisure—or in the context of the survey, I used the word free time interchangeably—as localizing and decolonizing food. I would like to note, like Warner et al. (2013), that the findings of the discussion group do not fully support the assumption that the impacts of this study would generalize to different contexts, like a larger population outside of university students. Therefore, I found it imperative to not only facilitate a focus group discussion, but also to distribute surveys to a larger group of participants to further the defensibility of my research. For the survey, I reached out to professors in departments of specific majors in the University of San Francisco, such as environmental studies and science, to distribute my survey in certain classes. Additionally, I handed out the survey to a wider population of other fields of studies through a personal network to reach other perspectives on free time and food justice outside an environmentally based group of students. It is the hope that the research will illuminate the wider implications, while also providing a perspective of students who study, but not explicitly participate in, areas of the food system.

In the survey, I had the survey respondents answer questions on whether they have learned about decolonization in their courses, whether they view or participate in food as leisure, what they imagine a localized food system to be, perceptions on the food systems, and how they rate the importance of food justice values. Additionally, there were open-ended questions, such as asking the respondents to bring awareness to systematic barriers they face in their communities surrounding participation in food justice or any barriers to decolonization to food they see in their communities. With the surveys, it was the goal to have the students examine their actions and perceptions on leisure or free time, and to see if it is possible to imagine a

localized and decolonized food system. I created the survey with Qualtrics, a survey platform that allowed for easy accessibility for the respondents, and it took approximately no more than ten minutes to complete. The hope was that survey respondents would reflect on these questions, but also acknowledge the fact that there was a time constraint due to the nature of distributing the survey during class time or during their own time.

## **Limitations**

I would now like to illuminate some of the limitations to my study. One limitation regarding the scope of my study was due to time restraints. For the purpose of my study, I had one month to complete my data collection, whereas the Warner et al. (2013) study was developed over the course of two years. Consequently, during the two-year span of their study, the researchers were able to conduct ten discussion-based dinners. However, for the feasibility of my study due to my time constraints, I only was able to conduct one discussion-based dinner. Due to this, my study yielded a less expansive range of participants and data collection. Additionally, I would like to point out that due to the nature of a focus group-based study, it is important to point out that the participants are not representative of the entire population of people who participate in food justice. Moreover, another area to consider is the nature of focus groups themselves. They are controlled environments, therefore, some of the results may not authentically represent the actual participants behaviors. Furthermore, I was both the researcher and facilitator of the study, so I remained in the background of the discussion, and tried to find a balance between facilitating, recording the audio to transcribe, and observing, taking notes, during the dinner. Due to resources, I fulfilled both roles, whereas the model study had trained

volunteers to host the dinner discussion. It is important to bear in mind these limitations as I move forward into the analysis of the study's findings.

In addition to these limitations, I would also like to reflect on my own positionality in relation to the research. This is a topic of interest to me due to the nature of many of the courses I have taken at the University of San Francisco, which have included the study of decolonization and food justice. Additionally, in conjunction with food systems, I have had the opportunity to work in a non-profit organization in a farmers' market educating elementary school students about sustainable and local produce. I also have another personal tie to the food system, as I have worked in a chain grocery store for the past three years. I think these two work backgrounds and lessons from prior classes reflect my beliefs and what drew me to conduct further research on food, localization, leisure and decolonization.

#### **IV. Findings and Discussion**

##### **A. Survey Findings**

For the survey, it yielded responses from 58 college students of various majors. In the group of respondents, roughly half, 27 students, were of an environmental background, with majors or minors in environmental science or studies. The other two highest categories for college majors in the study were politics and international studies. The rest of the respondents come from a diverse background of other majors, such as sociology, psychology, or public health, for example. Because of the field of their studies, I hypothesized that the environmental students would produce responses that would be more inclined to participate in food justice activities. In addition, the other half of respondents did not come from a background of

environmental science or studies. To consider some future implications, a wider and more diverse population could illuminate the realities of the wider university community. I would also like to note that for the case of this study, I did not ask survey respondents about their school year, age, or other personal information on their identity. Despite the division between environmental and other specialties, most of the survey respondents reported that they have learned about food justice in their classes. Additionally, before further delving into the analysis of survey responses, the information listed in Table 1 outlines some of the example questions students were asked to respond to.

**Table 1.** Examples of questions and answer selections in the student survey.

Question	Answer Selections
When studying topics like food justice or local food movements, do you think it is feasible to implement this in your life?	<input type="radio"/> Very feasible <input type="radio"/> Somewhat feasible <input type="radio"/> Neither feasible nor unfeasible <input type="radio"/> Somewhat unfeasible <input type="radio"/> Extremely unfeasible
Does your free time impact your level of involvement with food justice?	<input type="radio"/> Definitely yes <input type="radio"/> Probably yes <input type="radio"/> Might or might not <input type="radio"/> Probably not <input type="radio"/> Definitely not
In your free time, do you participate in any of the following? (Please select all that apply.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Community gardens <input type="checkbox"/> Food waste reduction programs <input type="checkbox"/> Farmers' markets <input type="checkbox"/> Sharing a meal with others <input type="checkbox"/> Local food programs <input type="checkbox"/> Food banks <input type="checkbox"/> Food education programs <input type="checkbox"/> Other

## **Perceptions of Food Justice**

Keeping in mind most respondents stated that they have some educational background of learning about food justice, students were to reflect on and rank pillars of food justice in the level of relevance to them. The six categories consisted of and were ultimately ranked in the following order with the first being the most relevant to the respondents based on the total number of selections for each category: Increasing access to food; Working with nature or sustainable practices; Uplifting Indigenous knowledge; Localizing food; Supporting smallholder farmers; and Valuing food providers. The ranking of relevance of decolonization practices of food for college students suggests that food access is a top priority. This can be reflective of grocery prices or university dining accessibility. Another piece to note from this data is that there are signs that students care for the environment and view it as a top priority, especially in relation to food. Valuing Indigenous knowledge was viewed as equally important in the rankings to students, however, one limitation to point towards the reason why valuing food providers was noted last could be due to unclear wording. Perhaps the localization of food and supporting smallholder farmers rank lower for students due to financial constraints of students, more so than free time factors.

To shift into the adoption of food justice practices into free time, over half of students reported that it is feasible to implement these practices into their lives. Due to the nature of the survey, there is slight ambiguity regarding what this would look like, but there is a general sentiment that food justice practices can be implemented, but there are various barriers that also exist that make it difficult to participate in it. Furthermore, almost all the respondents said that supporting the localization of food is part of being a global citizen. Perhaps this supports the question that asked students to rank food justice principles via relevance, especially regarding

supporting sustainable food practices. Although perhaps there is a disconnect between localizing food, especially for students, when it comes to thinking about larger, global issues.

Keeping this in mind, respondents were also given the opportunity to answer an open-ended question analyzing their relationship with food justice: Are there any personal or systemic barriers that make it difficult for you to engage in food justice efforts that you would like to share or bring awareness to? A main theme that arose out of the responses was regarding large corporations and capitalism, such as the structures that make it easy to rely on the commodification of food, therefore, difficult to move away from. One respondent stated:

“I would say capitalism is a systematic barrier in the way of food justice that places a toll on most individuals (in particular BIPOC and low-income individuals and families). It is hard to buy locally when it costs so much more than just simply buying processed foods from a grocery store.”

Addressing this acknowledges the different ways that individuals are affected by the globalization of food, such that places like corporate grocery stores offer the most cost and time efficient options. Many responses include phrasing such as “living in the dominant system,” “money, corporation greed, and time,” as well as the general sentiment that it is “difficult to avoid supporting large corporations that contribute to unsustainable food practices.” Many of the responses yielded this sentiment, thus, being indicative of the vast scope of these issues. While there are options like farmers’ markets that offer sustainable and local alternatives to the processed, commodified foods in corporate stores, many responses also highlight that a barrier to the localization of food is affordability. Another further area of research could be looking into student access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP, which provides grocery aid and food benefits to qualifying individuals, in addition to also examining the places in which students who receive SNAP get their food.

To add a layer to this in relation to leisure, many respondents note that their status as a student with obligations such as classes, extracurricular activities, and work make it difficult to participate in food justice movements. While there is the urge or necessity to participate in food justice, it was commonly noted that many students lack the opportunity for leisure or free time.

One student explains:

“As a student, it’s hard for participation in food justice efforts to seem feasible. This is because of financial reasons (shopping local/sustainably has the connotation of being more expensive), living on my own (buying things like fresh produce does not make as much sense for me), and the fact that we live in a city and may not have certain resources available. It is something that I would love to implement more into my lifestyle but feel as if I’m unable to participate in larger ways.”

The larger implications of the sentiment of these responses not only apply to college students, but also to the public that may not have the socioeconomic status to participate in or afford local or organic food. In addition, being a student not only impacts free time for food justice practices, but also other factors such as income:

“My financial situation can definitely be a barrier to shopping local and supporting local farmers markets and farms, especially in an economy like San Francisco and as a low-income student. Also, I live in a residence hall where I don’t have a kitchen which also limits the types of foods I can buy and easily prepare.”

Perhaps this adds a layer to the general perception of what food justice is or should look like from the perspective of the survey respondents, as most of the responses to the open-ended questions are correlated to the idea that food justice is connected to purchasing local and organic food. This may be an area that students most likely associated with food justice, but it encapsulates much more within its principles. Another respondent notes, “Living in the dominant system makes this rather difficult. I am a student and do not have the funds to buy local food, as they are often expensive or only at farmer's markets. Even buying organic is so expensive.” From

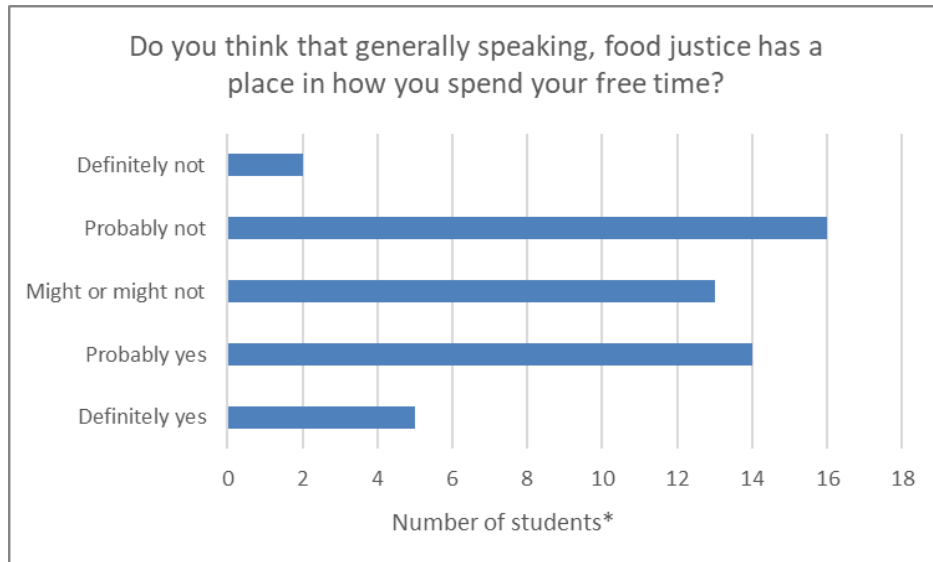


the open responses, a general tone that exists is that students want to participate in food justice, but there are many systemic barriers that stand in the way of their ability to participate.

### **Free Time and Leisure Activities**

The second portion of the survey focuses on free time, or leisure activities, in relation to food justice. The first question asked, do you think that, generally speaking, food justice has a place in how you spend your free time? Figure 1 depicts the answers provided by this question, illustrating a dualism such that food justice either plays a large role, or no role at all in their free time. I would also like to note that many students reported that they were unsure, so perhaps this nod to another area to be addressed: what exactly do students classify as food justice? Although I ultimately decided to provide definitions of my key terms for the overall clarity of my survey, in addition to cohesiveness, an interesting question that could have been posed for the respondents would be to ask them to describe in their own words what food justice means to them. However, it is important to note that not every individual provided a response to the open-ended questions that were included as the survey takers were able to leave questions unanswered if needed. The answers to the first question can perhaps point to the idea that perhaps food justice can be something as ordinary as sharing a meal with others, or it can look more defined, like participating in a food waste reduction program. Even further, the question arises if students' amount of available free time impacts their level of engagement in food justice initiatives.

**Figure 1.** Student reflection on whether food justice impacts the way students spend their free time.

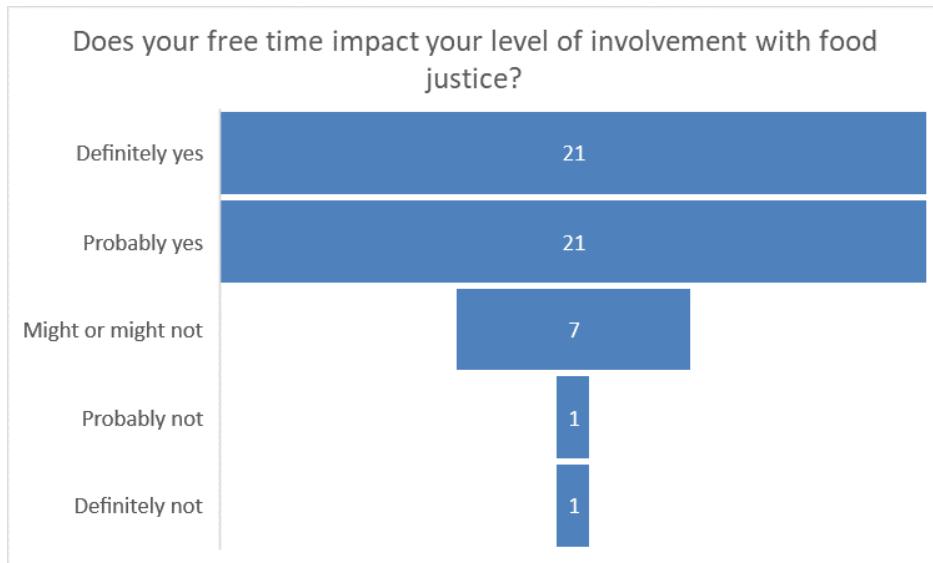


*\*50 students responded to this question*

However, when asked whether free time impacts food choices, such as what students buy or where they choose to support. The majority of respondents described that their free time impacts where they buy their food, or which producer or company they consume from. In the replies to this question, there were not any answers associated with food choices that suggest that free time does not play a role in their decisions. It could be argued that food choices are impacted by free time, and perhaps connected to the qualitative responses above where students note that affordability and being in college are barriers to food justice. However, for further research, one area that should be addressed is where students receive their food from, or what they buy. This could be examined both on and off campus as well to further factor in the realities of university students. Perhaps the relationship between free time and food is indicative of the capitalistic

corporations that make access to food more convenient, but it is important to note the barriers to food that exist even within these commercialized systems.

**Figure 2.** Free time versus level of involvement with food justice.



Next, students were asked whether free time impacted their level of involvement in food justice. As seen in Figure 2, the majority of students stated that their free time does impact their level of involvement in food justice, whereas only two students stated that it does not impact their involvement. While students may learn about or want to participate in food justice, there is a barrier that exists between their ability to allocate their free time to participate in it. Previous research has noted that exploring food through leisure, or free time, can open a pathway for reflection and resistance of other possibilities of food systems (Warner et al., 2013). While this may be the case, the ability, or rather privilege, of having the time to spend is a barrier that can stand in the way of one's ability to be involved in food justice. Adding to the open responses that students added, many also note that being a student not only impacts their financial ability to buy

certain types of food, but being busy with classes and schoolwork are also associated with being barriers to having available leisure or free time. Therefore, participation in food justice as a free time activity might also insinuate that it is already a passion or interest of an individual.

To gain perspective on what students associate food justice with, especially in relation to it being a form of activism or free time, they were asked whether they associate food justice more with obligation or freedom. Few students responded to the options individually, whereas the majority of respondents noted that it is a mix of both freedom and obligation. The connotations behind the reasoning of selecting freedom can point not only towards it being a form of liberation from dominant forces like capitalism and colonialism that have structured our food systems, but also the freedom to participate in food justice, or the freedom it creates through practices of decolonization. Additionally, the connotations of food justice being an obligation can be an act of urgency or necessity. Many of the problems that food justice seeks to address are urgent, but having the ability to have the freedom to work on them is another level of liberation within the idea of having the leisure or free time to do so.

### **Bridging Leisure and Food Justice**

Most of the respondents, 68%, reported that they believe their hobbies and interests have the ability to make social change. The broader implications of this question suggest that students do believe that activities they participate in their leisure time can make social change, whether it is tied to food justice, or another topic. I also asked students to mark which food justice activities they participate in from the list provided: Community gardens; Food waste reduction programs; Farmers' markets; Sharing a meal with others; Local food programs; Food banks; Food education programs. Respondents were able to choose more than one answer or fill in their own response if

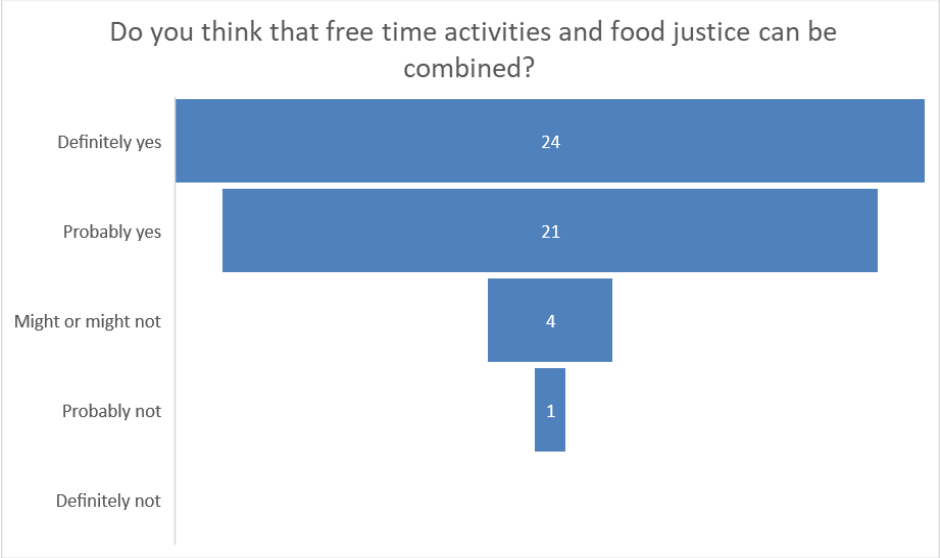
an activity was not listed. The activities that yielded the most responses were sharing a meal with others and farmers' markets. Sharing a meal with others consisted of the highest total of responses, followed by attending a farmers' market. Perhaps participating in these activities may not be widely associated with food justice, especially sharing a meal with others, but as seen in the focus group conversation, it can lead to social change to a certain extent. The majority, 76%, of participants responded yes when asked if food ties them to social change, in addition to around 90% to both forms of affirmation report that they believe that free time activities and food justice can be combined as seen in Figure 3. There is a general sentiment that food and food justice can be linked to social change, but a lack of resources, like free time and financial constraints, make it difficult to be able to do so. At the end of the survey, students had the opportunity to leave additional comments. One student noted:

“I think it would be rather difficult for my free time to be as impactful on food justice as the questions insinuate. The problem is so grand that not even 10 people working towards food justice will ultimately change the food system. I think it is important to build a better world, but localization is imperative.”

It ought to be recognized that, much like the sentiment of the student respondent, that food justice is a complex and large issue, there is not one single solution that may solve all the problems that exist within it. From the distribution of surveys, students expressed a general concern of their lack of resources and availability of free time to participate in food justice. Thus, rather than free time being a means of carrying out food justice, within the population of college students, it generally seems to act as a barrier to participation. The localization of food is extremely important in decolonizing our food system, but there are many barriers that stand in the way. Yet, despite this, the college students surveyed believe that their free time can be paired

with food justice activities, but rather it is a matter of addressing the barriers students—and the wider population—face.

**Figure 3.** Survey population report on combining free time and food justice.



**B. Focus Group Findings**

The discussion group consisted of four individuals, three of which stayed the whole conversation, and in total, the conversation lasted an hour and a half. The individuals who participated all have ties to food justice, but in different spheres of work. For the purpose of this study, the participants will be described under a pseudonym and any other identifying factors, such as organizations, will not be included in the findings. The individuals in the group consisted of three undergraduate students, and one recent graduate student from the University of San Francisco. For the sake of the data, I will only discuss the participant who could not stay the entirety of the conversation, only in the description of the group’s ties to food justice. The evening consisted of a dinner, which was sourced almost entirely locally from the Marin

Farmers’ Market in San Rafael, California, as well as in depth conversation on food justice, activism, and free time surrounding food. As the researcher, I took the role of monitoring the recording software, taking notes, and suggesting questions if the conversation faltered.

For the outline of the evening, the individuals led the conversation and for the most part answered all of the provided questions. Additionally, other areas of conversation came up that were not initially predicted. Table 2 depicts the meal name, characterized by the individuals in the guest column, and then a brief description of which questions were answered and preliminary reactions from the researcher. Although the discussion was recorded with transcribing software to later analyze, I found it imperative to write down my reactions as the evening progressed. To ensure the conversation flowed, I provided an extensive list of questions and possible directions for the focus group individuals. Table 3 provides the outline of the evening, and the same list of questions the participants were given to ask one another to guide the evening’s conversation. I will now go in depth about the main themes that arose from the participants in the discussion dinner.

**Table 2.** Description of discussion dinner activities and questions.

Meal name	Guests	Facilitation of Activities	Reactions
USF students and alumni	Three undergraduate students studying environmental science and studies, one graduate student with a master’s in public health.	Which questions were answered? Not answered? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most questions were answered in all portions of the dinner, aside from the ‘Question Strips’ ones.</li> <li>- Discussed only a few of the art pieces.</li> </ul>	Found many connections and overlap between their work, the concept of ‘slowing down’, food justice and activism look different for each person as well as how they spend their free time.

**Table 3.** Outline of the evening under the ‘Activity Description’ column, and the conversation topics under the ‘Questions’ column.

Activity Description	Questions
Group introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Please share:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Name</li> <li>- Major, minor (or what you studied)</li> <li>- Organization, studies, work, hobbies or ties to food justice</li> <li>- What comes to mind when you think of sharing a meal with others?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Meal time + artwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In these pictures, what values do you see displayed?</li> <li>- What does sharing a meal mean to you?</li> <li>- Can you talk about a time when you shared a meal and felt reciprocity?</li> </ul>
Questions and discussion time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What are your ties to food justice?</li> <li>- What does food justice mean to you?</li> <li>- Or what does food justice look like in your life?</li> <li>- What is the motivation behind your work?</li> <li>- Do you think that your hobbies or free time align with the goals of your work?</li> <li>- Do you consider your participation in your food justice work as free time, activism, or both?</li> <li>- Or in other words, in your life do you feel like free time and your activism are separated?</li> <li>- What are some systematic barriers to food justice that you see in your community?</li> </ul>
Question strips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did any questions arise from the conversation above?</li> <li>- You can use the question strips in the middle as inspiration:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What are some personal values that you think are emulated in your food justice work?</li> <li>- Why did you choose to get involved in food justice activism?</li> <li>- Do you think that your group or organization will factor in decolonization into their food justice practices?</li> <li>- How can we decolonize our free time?</li> <li>- Do you consider yourself a food justice activist?</li> <li>- What values of food justice are most important to you and the context of your activism?</li> <li>- Are there any aspects of your food justice activism that are intimidating to you? What advice would you give to others who are unsure of how to get involved?</li> <li>- In what ways do you see, or not see, decolonization practices in your community?</li> <li>- Are there any personal or systemic issues that influence your relationship with food justice?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you consider food justice and the way you spend your free time to be intertwined? If so, in what ways? If not, where do you think the disconnect is?</li> <li>- Generally speaking, do you think that your hobbies and interests have the ability to make social change?</li> </ul>
Closing conversation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you have anything you would like to close with or share?</li> <li>- What is one thing that you either stood out to you, or you learned from this conversation today?</li> <li>- From talking with the others, did you learn something new from someone else?</li> <li>- Can you bring the messages of this conversation to your groups, connections and organizations?</li> </ul>
Last questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Now that you have had this conversation, what will you take away with you, if anything?</li> <li>- What are some actions you would recommend to other students and individuals, especially regarding balancing their activism and free time?</li> <li>- Do you think that building community within food justice helps with your work and how you spend your free time?</li> <li>- Lastly, can you imagine your hobbies or interests that you participate in your free time as a way to reinvent our food system?</li> </ul>

### **The Different Faces of Food Justice**

Food justice looks different in each context. Perhaps this is one aspect that might be self-explanatory, as food justice encompasses a wide range of issues within the realm of food. Food justice can look like increasing access to food for at-risk populations, reducing food waste, eating locally, educating communities about supporting smallholder farmers, uplifting Indigenous voices, and adopting practices that will tend for our planet. If someone is a food justice advocate or activist, there is not a ‘one size fits all’ position for doing so. Just like the diverse array of issues within the realm of food justice, there is also diversity in the ways people participate in it.

One way that this theme was emulated in the discussion was through the participants themselves. To familiarize ourselves with the individuals within the discussion group, it is important to look at the different areas that they are all involved in, as well as what they study.

Participant A is an undergraduate student, double majoring in both environmental science and studies. Participant B is an undergraduate student studying environmental studies and design. Participant C is a recent graduate student of master's in public health (MPH). Lastly, Participant D is an undergraduate student studying international studies, environmental science and Spanish. Even within the realms of what each individual is currently studying or has studied, we see that there is space in food justice for all kinds of people and interests. An environmental aspect was certainly present in the conversation, as well as the health and social aspects of it as well.

To further this, each individual has different ties to food justice. Participant A is heavily involved on their college campus through holding a leadership position in a student organization that seeks to reduce food waste by redistributing excess food from the university dining hall that would otherwise be wasted. In this organization, Participant A describes that they work with other organizations in San Francisco where they “redistribute it back out into the community with a focus on people dealing with food, insecurity, houselessness, and other issues like that.” In this work, they also collect food from grocery stores in the city to redistribute back to students on campus through a university food pantry. The work of Participant B also resides in the same sphere on campus but is centered around the university’s community garden and creating events surrounding sustainability and the garden. However, they also work at a grocery store chain, which provides an interesting position, especially regarding food justice. In the past, Participant C used to intern for a local Bay Area nonprofit organization that works to educate elementary school students about local food and sustainability through trips to the farmers’ market. Now they are working in a nonprofit operated community center which offers free eight-week culinary programs to low-income families, while providing access to food, and tips on how to “stretch your dollar” for groceries. This participant sees their work as a way to help address food deserts,

or areas that do not have grocery stores or places to buy nutritious food, in a close proximity. Lastly, Participant D, who was not able to stay the whole discussion, interns in a local nonprofit. The work of this organization is to provide, or prescribe, “medically supportive food and nutrition.” The work is bilingual, both in Spanish and English, and the patients receive different food items, but there is also an educational aspect of it as described by the participant. They explain, a “dietitian from the health center comes in and we have a recipe every week that we make, and then discuss... what the health benefits are.” This is another visualization of the ways in which food is multi-dimensional, it impacts our communities, the environment, and our health for example.

From all the participants in this discussion, we see a diverse array of food justice ‘backgrounds.’ Food justice here can serve as an umbrella term—it is all encompassing and perhaps looks different in each context. The representation of the different areas each individual works in is representative of all the aspects that food justice strives to address. While there is the urge to consume local food, there also needs to be work that values the places and limits barriers people face to places like farmers’ markets or community gardens. Our industrialized food system creates a lot of waste, like chain grocery stores, but there is still food insecurity; therefore, it is important to hold spaces, like community cooking classes or the redistribution of otherwise wasted food from a university dining hall. People systemically lack access to healthy, nutritious food, so it is important to view food as medicine. Just like the array of issues to be covered in food justice, each participant's ties to it look different to address these issues. While some may think that food justice is an all-encompassing act, it can be beneficial to break it down to see the different areas individually. To digest these larger issues, we can take these participants' areas of expertise to see that we do not have to bite off a large piece of the issue to

get involved in food justice, but rather take small steps in one area. Perhaps this notion can be a deterrent for people who want to get involved in food justice but feel overwhelmed by the scope of the issue. Another issue of getting involved in food justice can be the fact that it is difficult to know where to start, but the participants' diverse backgrounds show that there are many steps that need to be taken. Food justice looks different in each context, therefore, we ought to recognize that there is no singular way to 'do' food justice. When thinking about free time, this can be seen as a bridge. Just like each person's specific taste in their hobbies and interests, food justice has space for a variety of interests. The participants also highlighted their diverse array of interests when it comes to food justice and the issues they are working to address. Some of the main areas of issues that ought to be addressed that were illuminated from the participants were increasing spaces for urban agriculture, especially in a city such as San Francisco, and addressing the food distribution systems in institutions like universities or corporations. Interestingly, there was a lot of overlap within the aims of their work.

### **Community Care and Work**

A major concept that was emulated in the discussion was the sense of community, as well as a discussion of individualism and collectivism. Throughout the discussion, there was a constant emphasis on the participants' ties to food justice through the organizations they are involved with and the work they hope to do for the community, as well as being able to find community. As seen in Table 2, the discussion started with a 'Group Introduction.' For the most part, all the participants were strangers with one another prior to the discussion. The purpose of the introduction was to have the participants familiarize themselves with one another, as well as their respective ties to food justice. This was the first activity that happened, but it showed that

while food justice is diverse, like the findings above, it also is intertwined. Two of the participants, although they did not know each other personally, both of their organizations work together, so they were familiar with one another's organization and work. Within the first ten minutes of the discussion, there was a tangible image of the connection between food justice work and the sense of community it creates, especially for those involved in the work.

However, another interesting aspect of the aspect of community that ought to be addressed is the idea of community as a group of people to be 'served.' This was also prevalent in the discussion, especially in regard to two specific communities: university students and at-risk individuals in the city. Participant B describes that through their work with the university community garden, they strive to create events and opportunities to bring people together within the garden space. Whether that be events for university or for nearby elementary school students, there is the emphasis that the garden is a gathering place for people in the community. Another community that was mentioned in the discussion was university students, especially when it comes to dining hall prices and the realities that students face when it comes to access to food on and off campus. Students are not only participating in food justice efforts, but they are also impacted by the issues it is trying to solve. Participant A also works in the wider San Francisco community, helping to distribute warm meals from excess dining hall food to community members facing food insecurity or homelessness, for example. In addition, the organization that participant C works in serves low-income families in the area. Like the diversity of the people working toward food justice, the communities that are being served also need to be the center of discussion because there are many factors that contribute to their experiences and realities that shape their relationships to food.

Another aspect of community that was prevalent was through the concept of the evening itself: a place of gathering and sharing a meal. The participants described the power of sharing meals, especially in relation to various pieces of art shown by Oakland based artist and activist Favianna Rodriguez, and activist and pop-artist Corita Kent as seen in Figures 3, 4 and 5. When reflecting on what they saw in these pieces, on a more conceptual level, they touched on themes of reciprocity and that food is a powerful conduit for bridging communities, as well as the connections it creates with culture. In Figure 5, the participants reflected on the ties that food brings us, especially in relation to other people. For example, they reflected on how food has the power to bring people closer to their ancestors, as well as be an act of celebration and care.

A consensus was that food is something that “brings people together.” Whether that be in a cultural way or the act of sharing food with someone else, there is another dimension to food. The inclusion of food justice based artwork also adds to this multidimensional area of food itself, and perhaps shows that another way that food justice work can be conceptualized is through other outlets, such as the creation of art. Just like one of the main themes of the discussion, the presence of food justice based art is another way that people can bring in their personal ties to the work they wish to carry out. Food justice based art is another way that someone can be involved in the movement, furthering the idea that there is not one way to participate in food justice. In relation to the survey responses, most students believe that their interests and hobbies can create social change. Food justice themed art is one way in which we can visualize the different ways in which we can bring our own interests and gifts to a movement. One area of further research along these lines could be an analysis of food justice zines, self-published magazines, in the university community, or places like the seed libraries, an archive and distribution of plant seeds open to students on campus.



**Figure 4.** Corita Kent. (1967). *Fresh Bread*. [screenprint]. Corita Art Center Immaculate Heart Community, Los Angeles, California.

One of the lines of text in the artwork seen in Figure 4 says, “What kind of revolution would it be if all the people in the whole world would sit around in a circle and eat together?” (Kent, 1967). The participants reflected on this quote, and in a way, they were actively participating in the very sentiment of Kent’s piece. The use of a participatory leisure discussion dinner to talk about food, food justice and issues is a way of prefigurative politics, or actively engaging in or embodying their activism. The participants reflected on the communal act of sharing a meal. The general theme that came up when talking about it was that of community. It is an act of reciprocity and bonding with someone else, which was connected to the piece in Figure 5. Participant B explained, “Sharing a meal with others, it’s community.” The act of sharing a meal itself may not be one that comes to mind when thinking about food justice, but the group noted that it allows space to bring people together. Perhaps this can be a nod to the need for decolonizing our relationship with food, but sharing a meal is also connected to leisure and free time, which is a privilege.







**Figure 6.** Favianna Rodriguez. (2015). *Food is Freedom*. [digital print]. Oakland, California.

The art was shown at the beginning of the conversation to begin the reflection on the relationship of food with community, the planet, and social change through activism. At the end of the discussion, one participant explained: “if the food wasn’t here, maybe it wouldn’t have led to the conversation it did.” One aspect of the focus group that was new for all the individuals was having a shared space to have these conversations surrounding food justice and free time. Another suggestion could be having, in a non-academic setting or extracurricular space, conversations like the one the individuals participated in with this study. This notion could help separate the lessons learned in university classes from their actual practice outside the walls of a classroom, or through a more leisure-based approach. At the end of the conversation while reflecting on the nature of the discussion surrounding a meal, Participant A added,

“I think it also made it, or at least made me, feel a lot more comfortable. It definitely felt more communal, you know, like I'm sitting down talking and I feel comfortable, like it doesn't feel like I just met you guys. It felt really close, and I really liked that.”

A main takeaway is that it is important to have these open conversations in spaces where the individuals feel comfortable or through a participatory leisure-based approach. To reiterate the significance of the chosen methodology, it was beneficial to uphold the values of leisure and food justice, especially when it was the focus of the conversation. Perhaps when talking about certain topics, like reciprocity, community or local food, it is important to put them into practice. The nature of the discussion, while it was focused on community, was also an example of the creation of a new network through creating new connections with individuals who share similar interests or passions.

Another sub-theme that appeared out of the conversation was in relation to the motivations behind participating in food justice work. A general sentiment of the conversation was that their participation in food justice is driven by the urge to reimagine the world, or the larger systems that dominate the ways in which our food is produced, distributed, consumed, and even wasted. When asked whether they consider themselves to be food justice activists, perhaps activism was not the best word to describe their work. Participant C explains:

“I don't know if I see myself as a food justice activist. I think I see myself as a food justice resource. I just feel like food justice is so complex. I feel like a lot of the things that are intertwined with food justice, including security, I may have not experienced. And it's not really my place to advocate on behalf of that. But, like, I definitely feel like I'm a resource. I'm here if people need anything... And I'm more than happy to share what I do, or like ways for people to get involved.”

The general sentiment of the participants and their views on the term activism suggests that it is all-encompassing or official, such that people are not able to identify themselves as, or have the motivation to, participate in food justice. The sentiments here also reflect the focus of

the participants on the wider university community, which is the main focus for the current students through the organizations they are involved in. The discussion also served as a space where they were able to reflect on their discontentment with university wide practices, such as the price of food, dining hall meal plans, and food waste. Holding spaces to have these conversations can be beneficial, both in terms of addressing common issues within the different realms of their work, but also to build connections between other individuals who are passionate about food justice. While this may appear to be an answer that lies at the surface, the connections and discussion itself were an act of community engagement.

### **Free Time and Burnout**

While the participants reflected on their interests and goals of their work in food justice, the dimension of engagement through free time was also addressed. One of the main themes that arose from the discussion was that all the three participants are passionate about food, so that their passion transfers over to the ways in which they like to spend their free time. However, having the ability or time to spend in both leisure and food justice is difficult, which resonates with what the survey respondents noted. However, noting that the participants are heavily involved in and passionate about food, their responses on free time generally suggest that they heavily prioritize it in their lives. For example, Participant B explains the dynamic between free time and food activism such that “it's hard to separate the free time, and though maybe quote food activism, because when you care about it and are aware of it,” and because of that, it leads into other aspects of life. In comparison to the responses of the survey respondents, it seems like here food justice work or activism are something that are linked to free time, whereas in the survey, it was a means to be able to participate in it. Although free time is associated with

positive emotions that are tied to that choice, it also should take into consideration the obstacles in having access to view it as such.

However, that does not mean that it is easy to find time, nor does it minimize the struggles that come with the responsibilities of being involved in food justice organizations, for example. Another area which was highlighted was that sometimes, while the work an organization does is beneficial, it is not always carried out such that it strikes a balance between the time commitment and toll it takes on the individual. Participant A explained that their club has a lot of interest from students on campus, but difficulties with the organizational mobilizing. Therefore, it falls mostly on them to drive the food, which is something that they enjoy doing, but if more people were involved, the food distribution would most likely reach more people. Although the conversation focused on a lot of the positive attributions of participation in food justice, the participants also noted that it is not always simple. For example, Participant A explained that their work in their club can get overwhelming, and it is their hope that it does not become stressful or negative to them. Perhaps this nods to the idea of burnout, which can be described as a mental and physical deterioration that comes from work or activism. The concept of burnout is another area that can be further explored through the realm of leisure studies and food justice.

Additionally, they reflected on the fact that the results of their work may not be apparent right away but are more long term in nature. However, there was a certain sentiment that it is important to acknowledge the motivation behind doing the work, and the participants described how the work should be something that they like to do. With this, another key theme that came up was making sure to take care of oneself, especially when it comes to devoting a lot of time to work or activism. This can apply not only to that of food justice, but as well as other types of

activism. To add to the notion of the larger picture, or not seeing the impacts of one's work right away, a main takeaway from the participants and their reflection on their own work is that the mobilization of community participation plays a large role in how they spend their free time and how they perceive the impacts of their work. When discussing suggestions to students who are struggling with managing the relationship between their time and ability to participate in food justice, they note the importance of starting at a smaller level. With environmental issues, while they can feel intimidating and like they are out of our control, the participants noted that it is important to even start at a level such as through a university program or club.

Perhaps this ties back to the central idea of community and creating collective spaces to gather. In its nature, food is an agent of socialization, which is tied to leisure and free time. A main theme to highlight is that even within these spaces, there is room to inspire others to act and spark interest within people who have similar interests and passions. Perhaps a main takeaway from this is that food justice and free time are tied together when there is a sense of passion and interest; however, that is not to say that it must be a large commitment. Through the sentiment of the participants, even starting individually is a place to begin to reimagine our food systems, but more importantly mobilizing as a community, whether it be through clubs or organizations, is a powerful way to create change.

## **Discussion**

To bridge together the perspectives of the survey respondents and the discussion group participants, I would like to underline the connection between the two sets of data. Both parts of the data suggest that increasing access to food to college students is an utmost priority of food justice work. The surveys, as well as the perspectives of the discussion group, also suggest that

there are other groups of individuals that ought to be served, such as low-income individuals and families. The food justice needs of each individual are different, but there are also different ways to get involved. The pricing of food is a main barrier to food justice movements that respondents brought awareness to, however, in the discussion group, the participants noted this, but focused heavily on food waste.

The survey portion suggested that there is a difficulty, especially for students, to have the capacity to participate in food justice initiatives, perhaps commenting on the link that in order to participate in food justice, you need to have the free time to do so. A general barrier for the majority of university students in this study was lacking both the time and financial resources to participate in food justice. Perhaps this also points to the idea that sometimes the people who are interested in, or maybe not able to participate in food justice, are also the ones who need to benefit from the actions and solutions it is trying to achieve. In a way, we can look at the participation in this study as an act of food justice in of itself. The students who participated in the survey and focus group were upholding the principles of food justice by realizing their needs and acting upon them.

With that being said, it is also important to note that the ways in which food justice actualizes itself looks different from each person, organization and approach. Both the surveys and focus group noted that there are many systemic issues and barriers that exist within our food systems; therefore, it is only necessary that we also have a diversity in the approaches we use to respond to them. For many of the open-ended questions in the survey, there was a general sentiment that it is difficult to get involved in food justice, but the discussion group suggests that there are different ways to get involved and apply one's own interests and passions to the movement in a way. Because food justice can look different in each context, like how it did

within the participants of the discussion group, this realization can be a factor to help those who feel like they lack the time or resources. Like the feelings echoed by many of the students, reworking and decolonizing our food system seems like, and ultimately is, a difficult task. Acknowledging the role that leisure or free time plays in reworking our food systems is just one piece of the larger puzzle.

In general, there was a dualism that arose from the two sets of data. In the survey, leisure or free time acts as a type of requirement to do food justice, not as part of the practice. On the other hand, in the discussion group, it is paired with the work as a sort of means to carry out food justice. However, I would like to emphasize that the survey respondents for the most part echoed that they believe that their passions and hobbies can lead to social change. Within the ways we choose to spend our leisure time, there are many possibilities where we can apply ourselves to make change. Although both groups note that we ought to move away from dominant forces that control our food systems, it is difficult to break these ties. However, the focus group did insinuate that even starting small, like through a club or organization, can start the process of creating change. This also emphasizes a key piece of the findings, such that the sense of community, whether it be the creation through the ties of work, sharing food with others, or helping out other individuals, is key to ensuring that the leisure time spent in food justice is transformative.

It is important to note that within food justice, there is room for optimism and progress, but that does not go to say that the struggles and issues are not as important. It is important to create room for both, especially when thinking about the ways in which we may or may not devote our time to a movement. Especially with work like food justice, it is important to also take care of oneself. College students are a group of individuals who are both in need of food

justice, while also being the ones who are driving the work in the movement. Perhaps leisure time is one way of addressing food justice or making room for it, as well as social change. The issues in food justice are complex, and the work is difficult, but it is important to note that there are many ways to apply oneself to address certain pieces of the situation at hand.

Lastly, it is important to reiterate some of the limitations that came out of my study. Again, one of the main limitations of the data was that there was a small sample size of the survey. Additionally, the majority of the respondents came from an environmental background, therefore, it is likely that food justice is something they are conscious of. While the other portion of respondents came from other fields of study, further research could be conducted on a larger population of students from a more diverse array of specialties and the wider university community. Furthermore, due to time constraints, only one discussion group was carried out. For further research, perhaps there could be follow-ups to the focus group, another set of discussion, or perhaps one centered around individuals who are not actively involved in food justice work to illuminate other perspectives.

## **V. Conclusion**

With this research, I investigated the work and perspectives of college students in food justice, while also acknowledging the ways in which leisure and free time intersect. Through the analysis of food justice and free time, I found that the relationship between the two are linked together, but it may look different for each of the sample populations I looked at. From the survey population, which was composed of environmental-based fields, as well as a mix of other majors, it appears that the general sentiment for this sample was that free time is the means for participation in food justice efforts. However, for the group of discussion group participants who



are actively engaged in food justice organizations, their perspective of free time and food justice is perhaps the mode to participate in these efforts. Although, I would like to address that for some, food justice and addressing issues of food insecurity, are of a high priority. That does not go to say that addressing these issues is not important to others who may not be active in the movement, but rather it notes that there are different barriers to having the access to participate in food justice that ought to be addressed.

For the survey respondents, the systemic barriers to participating in food justice were mainly based around financial and time constraints. Although, perhaps nodding to another layer in the issue is that many students were aware of the role that large corporations play in capitalizing on our food systems. When I first embarked on this project, it was my hope to bring in a perspective of decolonization into the realm of leisure studies, as decolonization is a foundational pillar of food justice movements. Perhaps in a way it was still emulated in the responses I heard from the two sample populations, but I suggest that there ought to be further research done in linking these concepts. However, many students were aware of the importance of uplifting Indigenous knowledge when it comes to our food systems, as well as acknowledging that there are dominant systems that control where we get our food from and how it is produced. While the sentiment of decolonization was present, I would suggest that more extensive research should be done to add to this field.

Furthermore, another main theme that was touched upon in the discussion group conversation was that of community. Whether it was in the ways in which a certain community is served, or the ways in which food justice fosters collectivity and brings a community together, the conversation suggested that food justice is inextricably linked with community. On a smaller level, the participants discussed the power of sharing a meal and how in its nature, food leads to

acts of reciprocity. Perhaps in a way, the values of decolonization are embedded in the belief that there ought to be a sense of community and reciprocity surrounding the ones who provide food, as well as to the land. However, in the survey, there seemed to be a general tone leaning towards the individual acts tied to food justice. This could likely be the case because the survey was asking participants to analyze their relationship with free time and food justice, but many of the responses had a general sense of individual acts, not collective ones.

Another main aspect I would like to underline is that food justice looks different in every aspect. While this may be trivial, I think that reaching this realization can be revolutionary, such that it makes the act of approaching food justice work seem more feasible, especially if someone feels as though they lack the time or resources to participate in it. Within the discussion group, each of the participants comes from different backgrounds, such that their work in food justice looks different as each of their ties to it focuses on a different aspect of the movement. However, at the end of the meal and discussion, they were still able to come together and pool together their experiences, knowledge and resources surrounding their ties to food justice. For each of the individuals, their relationship to food justice through their organizations looked different, whether it be through work focusing on food waste reduction, community garden outreach, community cooking classes with healthy, affordable food, or prescribing food as medicine, this small group of individuals is focusing on the different aspects of food justice. Although this may be a limitation of my research, such that the sample size of the discussion was rather small, and the fact that due to time constraints, I was only able to carry out one discussion, this can also serve as a consolation that even on a smaller scale, there is a variety of food justice organizations, activists, advocates and resources that exist. In the survey, the responses generally echoed that the structures that compose food systems that make it colonized, capitalistic, and

commodified, are not easy to move away from. Being aware of this is one step, but perhaps acknowledging that even when issues are so large in scope, like food waste and security, there are multiple ways that these issues can be addressed. For example, even in the variety of ties to food justice, the discussion group encapsulated that there are common ties and missions within their work. Therefore, we ought to realize that even though these issues are large, there are ways in which we can approach them—whether it be at a smaller scale initially—that can make a difference.

While the students in both populations showed that they were both in need of food justice, and also the ones who are actively driving the movement, we can see that college students are both acknowledging their needs and finding solutions in an act of food justice itself. Beyond the context of college students, the idea that having spendable free time to use to be involved in food justice is something that also suggests that perhaps our time is colonized as well, that there is a barrier that exists between our ties to the environment and being able to have the time to care for ourselves and others due to capitalistic structures. Therefore, this is also an area of further research that can be investigated, perhaps moving forward the field of leisure studies can also be tied to decolonization, beyond the context of food justice. Ultimately, the voices and actions of college students are typically tied to being vehicles of social change, and many are using their leisure or free time to make a difference by bringing together and serving communities within and beyond that of their university and making strides within food justice.

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