



Where's the justice?

To really deliver sustainable policies, we need to go a bit deeper and address issues of social justice, says **John Turenne FCSI**

Studies have shown that three out of four consumers consider sustainability when making purchases, (The Hartman Group). That begs to ask the question: does anyone reading this have any customers?

If sustainable food is all about the stories behind the food, we should not ignore how food production and politics can affect the disadvantaged as well as the treatment of human and animal quality of life. Socially just food is about food with a story that honors and respects life.

Here are a few of the Social justice issues and some ways to address them:

Food waste

The concern: The world is throwing away 40% of the food it produces yet there are many who live with hunger or are food insecure (the uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods).

A remedy: Learn about the hierarchy of managing food waste by familiarizing yourself with the EPA Food Recovery Hierarchy (epa.gov/sustainable-food/food-recovery-hierarchy). Implement better forecasting so as to limit over production. When over production does occur, donate to feed hungry people before any other use or disposal.

Treatment of workers in the food chain

The concern: In some places, food chain and farm workers are denied basic rights such as fair pay, ethical work hours and conditions.

A remedy: Knowing your source and the practices they employ should be first and foremost. When that is unattainable, look to companies that have a proven record for social concern. This can be identified through valid certification processes such as Fair Trade, Certified Humane, Real Food Challenge standards.

Treatment of animals

The concern: Most animals raised for food in the US are raised in conditions that can cause extreme suffering.

A remedy: Focus on advocacy to reduce meat consumption by consumers. As with the ethical treatment of workers (above), purchase from sources that ensure improved animal welfare conditions.

Give back. Go the extra mile

The opportunity: Many businesses want to make their own commitments to social welfare. Whether it's the way your own employees are treated, or encouraging and supporting their involvement in food related causes such as volunteering at a local food bank, on-the-farm gleaning for those in need, or other food-related fundraisers, there are untold ways your team can give back for the food insecure.

Beware of that label

The concern: Because the demand for sustainably grown and produced food has increased, there has been significant growth in businesses and organizations looking to leverage the good food

movement for their own profits. Beyond the USDA organic label, the terms found on food product packaging have no legal definition or regulation, especially when it comes to the word 'natural'.

Anyone can stick it on a product. Beyond 'natural', phrases like 'free-range', and 'environmentally friendly' can mean whatever producers want them to mean.

A remedy: Know the labeling exceptions to the above-mentioned concerns of improper labeling. Animal Welfare Approved, Certified Humane, Fair Trade are legit. Check the Consumer Reports Eco-label Guide at greenerchoices.org. Read the whole label. If you can't identify or justify what's in it, pass on it.

Each of us must accept our ethical and moral responsibility. We can support food producers committed to protecting the natural environment – helping to make ecologically sound food systems. We can build food systems that are socially just. Social justice includes employment equity for farmers, farm workers and others. But social justice also demands that all people have adequate food. Sustainability is a question of environmental integrity, economic viability and human health.

When the next generation gets involved, these issues are top of their list of priorities for society's improvement. ■

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