

Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice

The UUA Congregational Study/Action Issue (CSAI) for 2008-2012

Issue: Religious organizations throughout the world have discussed the production, distribution, and use of food. Some people enjoy many food choices while others remain hungry. The food industry produces wealth, but small farmers and farm workers are often poor. Food production and transportation contribute to many environmental problems.

Background and Reasons for Study: This Congregational Study Action Issue is inspired by the work of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee with Equal Exchange and the involvement of our congregations with both human rights and environmental protection issues.

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and Equal Exchange work together so that small farmers can receive a fair price for coffee, tea, and cocoa. The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee supports economic justice and safe and sustainable agriculture.

Hunger is both a community problem and an international problem that can be approached in a variety of ways. There is a need for political advocacy in support of government programs that try to feed the hungry. There is a need also for involvement with service programs that deliver food to individuals and families—for example, Meals on Wheels programs.

Significance to Unitarian Universalism: Unitarian Universalists have a vision of environmental justice. One of our principles acknowledges "the interdependent web." Others affirm the importance of human rights. Together our principles form one holistic statement that helps to define liberal religion.

Possible Study Topics

- There are different religious teachings concerning the production, distribution, and use of food. Why is food so important in religion?
- There are environmental concerns and concerns about animal rights and human rights. What moral guidelines, if any, should govern food production?
- Some people have too much food and some have too little. How should congregations address issues like poverty and hunger, nutrition education, and health promotion?
- What guidelines, if any, govern the purchase and use of food and beverages in your congregation? Do you pause for a blessing when you serve food?

Possible Actions

- Support sustainable agriculture and farmers' markets. Encourage organic community gardening.
- Volunteer in support of community food pantries, Meals on Wheels programs, and similar projects that address the problem of hunger.
- Become an advocate for social and economic justice. Support labor unions, farmers' cooperatives, "fair trade" associations, and other organizations that help the farmers and other workers who produce and distribute food in the global market.

Related Prior Social Witness Statements

- [Ending Hunger](#) (1987 General Resolution)
- [Environmental Justice](#) (1994 General Resolution)
- [Nutrition for a Healthy Start in Life](#) (1994 General Resolution)
- [Support of United Farm Workers](#) (2005 Action of Immediate Witness)

Key Dates in the *Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice* Congregational Study/Action Issue (CSAI) Process

For a complete explanation of the CSAI process, see www.uua.org/socialjustice.
The process is managed by the Commission on Social Witness (CSW).

- June 25-29, 2008* **General Assembly 2008 in Ft. Lauderdale, FL.** *Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice* selected as the Congregational Study/Action Issue (CSAI) for 2008-2012. Congregations and districts are encouraged to begin programs of education and reflection, service, community organizing, advocacy, and public witness.
- November 1, 2008* **Deadline** for UUA Advocacy and Witness staff to post the initial Resource Guide. Congregations will be notified of its availability.
- March 1, 2009* **Deadline** for congregations and districts to submit comments on the *Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice* CSAI and Resource Guide. Feedback forms are available at www.uua.org/socialjustice. These comments will help the CSW prepare for the workshop at General Assembly.
- June 24-28, 2009* **General Assembly 2009 in Salt Lake City, UT.** The CSW conducts workshops on *Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice*. Study and action continues.
- March 1, 2010* **Deadline** for congregations and districts to submit comments regarding the *Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice* CSAI and the Resource Guide. Feedback forms are available at www.uua.org/socialjustice. These comments will help the CSW prepare for the workshop at General Assembly.
- June 23-27, 2010* **General Assembly 2010 in Minneapolis, MN.** The CSW conducts workshops on *Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice*. Study and action continues.
- November 15, 2010* **Deadline** for the CSW to prepare a draft Statement of Conscience (SOC) on *Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice*. The draft statement, a comment form, and a ballot to place the draft Statement of Conscience on the Final Agenda of GA 2011 will be included in the Congregational Poll. Congregations will be notified of its availability.
- February 1, 2011* **Deadline** for Congregational Poll ballots and Comment Forms. In order to be placed on the Final Agenda for General Assembly, twenty-five percent (25%) of all certified congregations must participate in the ballot vote on the Statement of Conscience, with a majority voting affirmatively. The CSW shall then prepare and place on the Final Agenda a revised draft Statement of Conscience, taking into consideration comments received by the member congregations and districts.
- June 22-26, 2011* **General Assembly 2011 in Charlotte, NC.** General Assembly delegates consider the Statement of Conscience. It can be amended; overall approval requires a two-thirds vote. The Assembly may also, by a two-thirds vote, refer the Statement for an additional year of study. If adopted, congregations, districts, and UUA staff carry out a year of implementation.
- June 20-24, 2012* **General Assembly 2012 in Phoenix, AZ.** If a Statement of Conscience was adopted in the previous year, workshops are held on it. This concludes the Study/Action cycle for *Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice*.