



How America Created Its Failing Food Ecosystem

EPS. 1

WITH DR. ROBERT HARVEY

Working for a Future of Food for All.

Food For All is a movement advocating for equitable access to real, nutritious food for all people regardless of race, income bracket, or zipcode.

Despite being one of the wealthiest nations in the world, the United States remains well behind comparable countries in its ability to provide reliable, affordable, and consistent access to nutritious food to millions of its most vulnerable citizens.

The question of hunger isn't a new one. Political indifference, systemic racism, socioeconomic segregation, and policies rooted in profit instead of people, have driven areas like the St. Louis region into an undeniable state of crisis.

Our region has long been celebrated as an agricultural hub in the Midwest, yet tens of thousands of local residents remain food and nutrition insecure.

Grocery stores are too often replaced with gas stations and convenience stores, severely limiting access to healthy food. Additionally, those abandoned by the food ecosystem face overwhelming barriers to growing and distributing their own produce.

Food For All aims to end the generational cycle of inadequate access to nutritious food and the preventable diet-related diseases that come with decades of poor nutrition.

Through education, advocacy and action, we will build a world where there is Food For All.

Jan, Darren, & Sara

Jan Marson
Co-Founder

Darren Jackson
Co-Founder

Sara Bannoura
Lead Researcher, Storyteller

Table of Contents

Welcome	↩
<i>From the Producers</i>	
Why Food For All?	01
<i>A Data-Backed Vision</i>	
Dr. Harvey & FoodCorps	02
<i>Connecting FoodCorps and Food For All</i>	
Inside the Episode	06
<i>Talking Points and Overview</i>	
Defining Food For All	07
<i>Humanity's Right to Food Access</i>	
How Did We Get Here?	08
<i>America's Broken Food Ecosystem</i>	
Food as a Political Tool	09
<i>Who Wins and Who Loses?</i>	
Moving Forward	11
<i>Themes and Proposed Solutions</i>	
Taking Action	14
<i>What You Can Do Now</i>	

Using This Toolkit

Throughout this toolkit you will find key information about the state of our regional and national food ecosystem as well as historical and recent data highlighting political, economic, and health trends that created our current crisis. Additionally, we have provided informational links to help you continue your exploration and have included ways you can help fight food insecurity.

Why Food For All?

Close to 1 million Missourians don't have reliable access to affordable, nutritious food.

The number of children with low access nearly equals the population of St. Louis City.

924,180
Missourians
are hungry, including
254,720
children.¹

that's
1 in 7
people

and
1 in 5
children

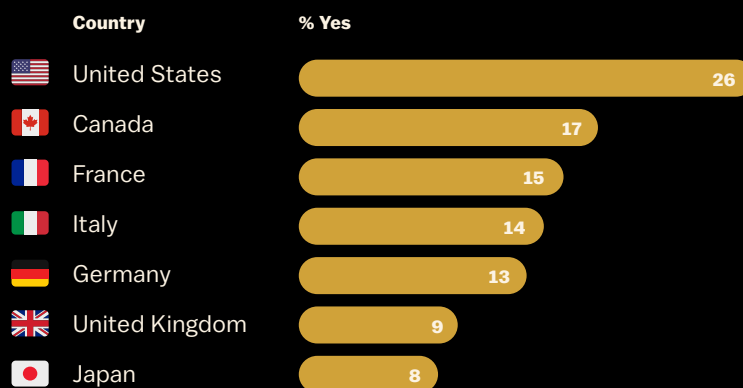
“ Food for all is a complicated phrase, but a powerful one...”

It’s complicated because it’s a phrase that assumes and presumes that there is not already a world with the conditions where there is food for all...

Dr. Robert Harvey [DRH]

One in Four Americans Struggled to Afford Food in 2023²

Have there been times in the past 12 months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed?



In 2023, the United States had the highest rate of people struggling to afford enough food to feed themselves and their families of all G7 countries.



Dr. Robert Harvey

President & Co-CEO

FoodCorps

To learn more about how Dr. Robert Harvey and FoodCorps are working to achieve the vision of a world where all kids know the joy and power of food, visit foodcorps.org.

Dr. Harvey is a visionary leader at the forefront of food justice and education reform. Dr. Harvey is the president of FoodCorps.

In our first episode of the Food For All podcast, Dr. Harvey shares his remarkable journey from the inheritance of ancestral land in Mississippi to leading the charge for universal nourishment in schools across the nation. From his upbringing rooted in black indigeneity to his academic pursuits in sociology and theology, Dr. Harvey illuminates the intersection of public health, food justice, and education equity.

In his own words, at FoodCorps, “we are unapologetically in and on a movement to create a world where every single child in this country in a public school has a locally-sourced, scratched-cooked, culturally-affirming meal twice a day in the school building.”

FoodCorps aims to make this vision a reality by 2030.

No More Hunger Games:

FoodCorps' Fight for a Food For All System that Works for Every Child in America

Imagine a model of Food Reparations where providing free, nutritious, and culturally affirming food to Black, Brown, and Indigenous children serves as a way to invest back into the communities that have been deprived of their rights for generations.

What if this initiative, alongside supporting BIPOC farmers and leaders and promoting land ownership, could create a sustainable framework for a form of reparations?

In almost every American school district, cafeterias lose money daily, disadvantaging children and local farmers while benefiting big food corporations. Dr. Harvey, President of FoodCorps, says, "In a net even pursuit, the loser is the child. The farmer is going to lose. The only person that wins is big food."

FoodCorps is establishing a framework through their Nourishing Futures™ plan, aiming to provide all 50 million students with free, nutritious meals and comprehensive food education by 2030, driving a movement for food justice through partnerships, developing BIPOC leaders, and rallying a community of over 1 million advocates to push for policy changes that ensure free meals for all students, support food education, and strengthen local food systems. In a world shaped by "militarism, capitalism, and racism," as Dr. Harvey notes, food insecurity is a deliberate result. "From the founding of this country, we thought about food as a political tool that could be weaponized," he says. FoodCorps is fighting to ensure we have a Food For All system that enables every school to deliver free, healthy meals and food education for all students.



In the 2022-2023 school year, they served 237 schools, reaching 353,177 students, many from underserved communities. Their service members taught 28,266 lessons and conducted 2,629 food tastings, encouraging healthy eating. Students in their programs ate up to three times more fruits and vegetables than their peers.

We see the FoodCorps model not just a redistribution of resources, but a rebuilding of community resilience, health, wellbeing, and self-sufficiency. By ensuring that our children receive the nourishment they need, while empowering local farmers and leaders of color, we see the foundation for a future where food justice is intertwined with social justice, and potentially a sustainable model for reparations.

FoodCorps' approach, as described by Dr. Harvey, identifies the potential for systemic change when we prioritize community well-being over corporate profit. FoodCorps efforts demonstrate that true food security can only be achieved through policies and practices that support equity and sustainability at every level. This vision calls on us to reimagine our food systems as tools for healing and empowerment, rather than instruments of control and exploitation. However, there's so

much work to be done. Our broken food system left nearly every child behind. In his interview on our Food For All Podcast, Dr. Harvey reminds our listeners how America created its failing food system: “We arrived here because the country wanted us to be here in the name of power and individualism.” FoodCorps challenges this by fostering community and education, promoting equity, and fueling a movement for justice. We include FoodCorps in our movement because they are a leader in this fight to create Food For All communities.

“And the only way that we can pull that off is a systems-level change. And so I don’t hold food service providers to the fire as being the enemy of this work at all. In many ways, they are heroic and what they have to try to pull off with the dollar at their disposal. Who I hold to the fire are the elected

officials who, in moments of crisis, often war and now global pandemic, have demonstrated that if we want to, we can feed every child”. - Dr. Harvey, Food For All Podcast

FoodCorps’ work with schools, support for BIPOC leaders, and advocacy for policy change, provide a valuable model for transforming St. Louis into a Food For All region. By advocating for FoodCorps, we aim to ensure that our community leaders prioritize the health and well-being of our children. We encourage our STL community to advocate for #FoodForAll systemic changes that will reduce uncertainty and food insecurity for millions of families in our city, state, and across the nation. We believe that together we can push for a future where every child has access to nutritious, culturally affirming food and comprehensive food education.

Join FoodCorps

[Contact your senators to extend school meals for all.](#)

Join the Food For All Movement

[Sign the petition to support a Food For all St. Louis region.](#)

Inside the Episode

How America Created Its Failing Food Ecosystem

Title

Dr. Robert Harvey

Sara Bannoura

Featuring

Host

Dr. Harvey examines the myth of American individualism and how it shapes perceptions of those struggling to secure reliable food and nutrition sources, as well as how the country's food ecosystem

became politically weaponized, leading to hundreds of thousands of starving citizens. We examine how to fix what's broken, and change the course of the country for future generations.



Scan this code with your smartphone camera to listen to this episode.

Talking Points

A. Race & History

Recognize and honor the contributions of Black and Indigenous communities in shaping our food systems, advocating for food justice and sovereignty to centralize their voices and practices

B. Public Health & Social Justice

Reliance on corporate food providers means low-income families are left with processed, mass-produced and high-caloric meals with little nutritional value... leading to adverse health disparities

C. Reimagining Food Systems

School food programs should provide local, nutritious and culturally-affirming meals with participation from the public to ensure every child receives the nourishment needed to succeed

D. Empowering Black & Brown Women

Black and Brown women are key to creating transformative change in the food system, as they are the closest to the challenge of caring for and feeding children every day

E. Collective Work for People, not Profit

People with resources need to transcend self-interest for a just and sustainable food system for all people. Food impacts health and life quality. Keep food for people, not for profit

F. Advocacy, Storytelling & Action in Policy

The importance of humanizing the data in order to galvanize policymakers and the public into action



“

When I think about food for all, I have to orient to how I think about all of my life, which is through the lens of children, and I think about the 11.8 million children who on a nightly basis have to ask a question around whether or not they'll eat...

*The 11.8 million total is based on 2019 data. The most recent USDA data analysis shows **13.4 million children**³ are with little to low access to affordable, nutritious food.*

It's not like there isn't enough food around. The U.S. wastes 30 to 40 percent of its food supply every year according to the USDA⁴.

That's 133 billion pounds of wasted food... while 44.2 million Americans live without sufficient access to food.

Food For All is a sunseting of a conversation that we should not have to have. It's also the casting of a vision of what we can achieve... if we take seriously that **people deserve the right to eat.**

[DRH]

“ **We got to this point in the same way that we’ve arrived at almost every injustice in this country: **political will.****

The American narrative is one that has been deeply grounded in individualism.

Our entire country is based on a premise of individuals caring for themselves in order to be able to amass as much of their own needs being met.

You take individualism and you multiply it by what MLK called militarism, capitalism and racism and you arrive at a world where there is not food for all, where there is not clean water, where there is a lack of housing.

[DRH]



“ From the founding of this country, we thought about food as a political tool that could be weaponized over bodies to yield a thing or to not yield a thing.

We arrived here because the country wanted us to be here in the name of power and individualism.

What does a politicized meal look like?

- a breakfast in a plastic bag that needs to be broken apart, thrown in a microwave and then put on the line.
- a lunch that has to be made for anywhere from a \$1.60 to \$3 for each child.
- in order for frontline workers to be able to have a decent wage, but highly likely not a livable wage.
- and for the big food corporations that provide that lunch to be able to make a profit in the spirit of American capitalism.
- It looks like that lunch having to meet so many regulations at some intersection between nutrition, lobbying and the **Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act** that ultimately the lunch or the breakfast doesn't look like anything the child would have in a culturally-affirming household meal.
- It looks like the folks who are legislating on that food at a congressional level are folks who have access, on average, to private chefs, Michelin star restaurants, James Beard winners... and are being able to craft a food journey that affirms them as much as it fulfills them.
- Legislating for bodies in a way that we've not seen since the start of World War I, where our lunch program comes from.

[DRH]



Lunch becomes a box to check so students can go right back to class

A politicized meal is high in caloric intake and low in nutritional value.

The National School Lunch Program began as a way to feed the nation's schoolchildren after a third of men couldn't enlist for service during World War I and World War II due to malnutrition and disease.

Congress passed the act in 1946, *“as a measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the nation's children and to encourage the domestic consumption of nutritious agricultural commodities ...”*

Who wins? And who loses?



Food is a sacred right ... and that right has to transcend our commitment to profit...

In almost every school district in America, every cafeteria loses money. Every day. It's a losing money business. But if we don't come to terms with it being a losing money business, then we're going to always make decisions that privilege.

In a net even pursuit, the loser is the child. In a net even pursuit, the farmer is going to lose.

In a net even pursuit, the only person that wins is big food because big food has scale, big food has infrastructure, and big food has enough corporate contracts.



Reimbursement Rate

"FoodCorps recently led legislation in Connecticut where we were able to double and in some districts triple the reimbursement rate for what showed up on that school plate... Imagine being a food service director and you go from having \$4 a day to having close to \$12 a day to be able to provide for one child."

That model is happening all across the country. There are models in Detroit and in Springfield where the ecosystem is being reimagined mostly by Black and Brown women.



If you told me I have to put a lunch together for 218, done... but you tell your local farmer you got to put a lunch together for 218 and it has to be everything that contributes to all of the regulations and the Child Nutrition Act? **Almost impossible.**

[DRH]

How do we move toward the communal good?



- one** I think we do the communal better by sacrificing the need to be the expert in all things. When I show up in a room, I know the boundless numbers of things I do not know, and I try to remind myself to take the perpetual posture of a student and to learn and to listen.
- two** For folks who have access to resources, there must be a willingness to transcend the self to do something with that resource.
- three** We pull this off always by trusting people most proximate to oppression. The seat holders of power, so many of them at some interval in their elected journey, are no longer proximate to oppression and therefore they turn as if they had never had access to oppression.
- four** I think we undervalue the role of narrative in storytelling and that storytelling is in fact probably a greater lever of changing the hearts and minds of people than the ballot itself.

[DRH]

Listen to Black and Brown Women



Black and Brown women who have experienced and seen the worst and have made a conscious decision that we can disrupt this and we will disrupt this in order to demonstrate the possibilities that are in front of us....

I'm constantly running into Black women in particular who are running school food ecosystems that are spending their lives saying we can cast a new vision for children...

I want to name that we are not putting the onus of solving this problem, this injustice, on Black women and indigenous women and Latina women in an extractive way give, us your knowledge and we'll go figure it out. No. **You are the knowledge bearer. You are also the power holder. You are also the voter.**

[DRH]

Proposed Solutions

Divest From Major Ag and Big Food

The traditional approach to solving low access to food has left people with an abundance of all that's bad, and little of what's good and essential.

Shift investments away from large agricultural corporations and food conglomerates to reduce reliance on industrialized food systems and promote more equitable and sustainable local food systems.

Invest in Black and Brown Women

Allocate financial resources to Black and Brown women who have deep understanding and lived experiences of food injustice, enabling them to lead transformative changes in our local and national food systems.

Empower Children to Grow Food

Involving students in growing and preparing food can create a deeper connection to what they eat and promote healthier eating habits.

Integrate gardening and food-growing activities into school curriculum to foster a deeper connection to food, encourage nutritious eating habits, and teach valuable agricultural skills.

Increase School Meal Reimbursement Rates

Advocate for higher reimbursement rates for school meal programs to ensure that schools can provide nutritious, locally-sourced, and culturally-affirming meals to all students.

Support Local Farmers

Develop policies and initiatives that support local farmers, ensuring they have the resources and infrastructure needed to supply schools and communities with fresh, nutritious produce.

Address Food Waste

Create and implement strategies to reduce food waste at all levels of the food system, from production to consumption, to ensure more food reaches those in need.

Community-Based Solutions

Encourage community-driven approaches to solving food insecurity by supporting local initiatives, cooperatives, and organizations that understand and address the unique needs of their communities.

Take Action

The fight to provide equitable, sustainable access to healthy food for those in our region is critical to our survival. Whether it's advocating for policy changes, pushing for divestment in major agriculture corporations in favor of investing in local growers

(particularly black and brown farmers), increasing childhood education and participation, volunteering, or donations, we can change our future together. It's not just a fight we can win, it's a fight we must win.

Join the Food For All Movement

Join our Food For All Movement and sign the petition urging local leaders to make St. Louis a Food For All region. [For more opportunities to get involved, go to our website at foodcitystl.org](https://www.foodcitystl.org)

Join FoodCorps

From FoodCorps: [we] envision a world where all kids know the joy and power of food. We're building a movement that's one million strong for nourishing futures—will you join us? [Learn more and get involved at foodcorps.org](https://www.foodcorps.org)

Missouri Coalition for the Environment

Join the Missouri Coalition for the Environment (MCE) to support and advocate for clean water, air, energy, and a healthy environment with equitable access to food in Missouri. Track relevant legislative bills, report pollution, volunteer and engage in advocacy efforts. Get involved and take action at moenvironment.org/get-involved/take-action

They're Trying to Kill Us Documentary

From the producer, Hungry for Justice: *They're Trying to Kill Us* explores the connections between diet, poverty and systemic racism. As well as looking at veganism, we discuss Big Pharma and the link between mind and body. [Learn more about the documentary on Youtube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

Tools to Reduce Food Waste

From the EPA: Preventing food from going to waste is one of the easiest and most powerful actions you can take to save money and lower your climate change footprint by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and conserving natural resources. Discover the benefits and tools at [epa.gov/recycle/preventing-wasted-food-home](https://www.epa.gov/recycle/preventing-wasted-food-home)



FOOD
FÖR ALL

A FOOD CITY
PODCAST SERIES



©2024 Serving Our Communities Foundation