



**FOOD
FOR ALL**
A FOOD CITY
PODCAST SERIES

A Fight for Fair Food Systems

EPS. 3

WITH NICK SPEED

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 zip code.

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 for millions of its most vulnerable citizens.

The issue 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 left behind 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

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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?

Nearly **400,000** people in the Greater St. Louis region don't have reliable access to affordable, nutritious food.

The region had a **\$298 million** food budget shortfall in 2022.¹

391,900
in the bi-state region
are hungry, including
117,120
children.²

that's
1 in 7
people

and
1 in 6
children

“ The reality is that the 63107 zip code, where our urban farm and community garden are located, is one of the poorest in Missouri.

When you look at all the new development happening in St. Louis, it’s concentrated in certain zip codes and specific areas.

Nick Speed [NS]

St. Louis 63107 Fairground Park 9,238

city **zip** **neighborhood** **pop.**

Report Area	Under \$25k	\$25k - \$49k	\$50k - \$99.9k	\$100k - \$199k	\$200k+
63107	39.99%	30.23%	23.22%	6.04%	0.52%
Missouri	18.75%	22.52%	31.50%	21.20%	6.03%
United States	17.18%	19.60%	29.63%	24.14%	9.46%

Households by Household Income Levels, Percent



Nick Speed

Founder & Executive Director

Ujima & George Washington Carver Farms

Nick Speed is transforming North St. Louis through urban agriculture and community empowerment as the Founder and Executive Director of Ujima and George Washington Carver Farms. On the Food For All podcast, Nick shares his journey from aspiring sports journalist to urban farming leader. His work addresses food insecurity and environmental injustice in neighborhoods long neglected due to divestment and environmental racism.

Nick's commitment is rooted in his experience with nonprofits, where he recognized the urgent need for healthy food access. He purchased land in the Fairground and Hyde Park neighborhoods, historically thriving areas now suffering from neglect. "To farm while Black is an act of defiance against white supremacy and honors our ancestors' agricultural ingenuity," Nick says, drawing inspiration from George Washington Carver's sustainable farming practices.

Through Ujima and George Washington Carver Farms, Nick is growing food and building a movement for social and environmental justice, demonstrating the transformative power of urban agriculture.

George Washington Carver was an African American scientist, botanist, educator, and inventor who made significant contributions to agriculture in the United States, particularly in Missouri.

Born into slavery around 1864 in Diamond, Missouri, Carver became one of the most prominent African Americans of his time, known for his work in promoting alternative crops to cotton, such as peanuts, sweet potatoes, and soybeans, which helped to improve the livelihoods of poor farmers.

Inspired by his legacy, Ujima has been combating food apartheid and environmental racism through urban farming, environmental stewardship, and youth empowerment, restoring land and creating space for healing and justice.

Inside the Episode

The Fight for Fairground

Title

Nick Speed

Sara Bannoura

Featuring

Nick Speed, founder of Ujima and George Washington Carver Farms, shares his journey of transforming urban spaces in North St. Louis into thriving community gardens. “For them to see a Black man

Host

who’s a farmer, a Black man who runs a nonprofit, I think is powerful in itself.” Nick addresses food apartheid, environmental racism, and the importance of community.



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

Talking Points

A. Environmental Justice & Urban Farming

Nick sheds light on how environmental racism disproportionately affects Black and Brown communities, leading to poor living conditions and lack of access to healthy food.

B. Building Community Resilience

Nick emphasizes the interconnectedness of communities and the importance of using privilege to uplift those in need.

C. Challenges in Land Acquisition

Nick discusses the significant challenges in obtaining land for urban agriculture, which is often hindered by bureaucratic and financial obstacles.

D. The Role of Representation

Representation matters. Nick highlights the importance of visible Black leadership in farming and nonprofit sectors as a source of inspiration for the next generation.

E. Collective Impact & Collaboration

Nick underscores the importance of collective effort and collaboration in driving systemic change and ensuring long-term success.

F. Reimagining Food Access in St. Louis

Nick encourages a shift in perspective towards a more sustainable and community-centered approach to food access and environmental stewardship.

The Fight for Youth



One troubling reality we discovered while working with teens is that some of them didn't have consistent access to food. So there were days when their time with us, having a snack—their body armor—was the only meal they had that day.

That's another opportunity to show up, to make sure we have body armor, water, snacks, and provide an actual meal, because we want our teens to not just show up for work, but to show up fully.

We understand that it can be difficult to stay engaged if you're hungry, if you don't have the nutrition you need to function. On top of that, the work we're doing is difficult—we're outside, hands in the dirt, moving. And to do that you need a meal in your stomach. You need the armor, the nutrition to make that work happen.

[NS]

During the 2020 pandemic, Serving Our Communities Foundation connected with Nick Speed through our Sprout Fellowship program, where he shared his vision for George Washington Carver Farms. Seeing the potential, we partnered with Ujima to purchase vacant lots, a house, and contributed \$150,000 to develop the farm. This legacy project brings healthy, nutritious food to the community, empowers youth, and honors Carver's legacy, with the community at the heart of the solution.

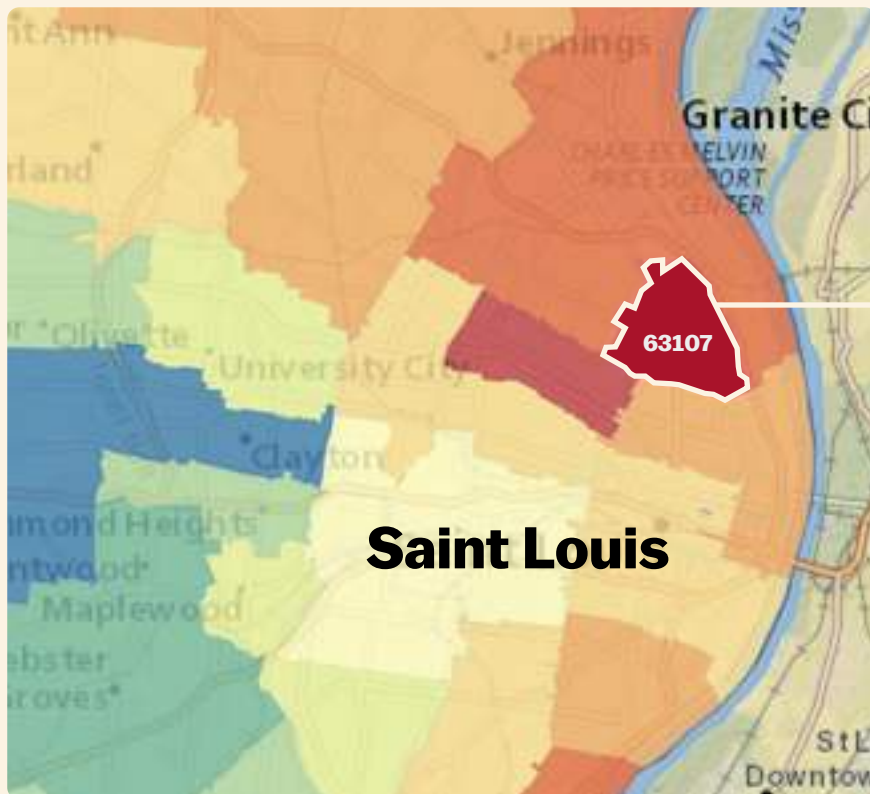
Learn more about Ujima and Nick's work at ujimastl.com.

The Fight for Equity

“ The reality is—St. Louis—while it is an amazing place, it is very segregated.

There is a level of realizing that the folks in these communities are in survival mode 24/7. To expect complete, robust advocacy from the folks who are receiving the brunt end of environmental racism, a full apartheid, is not realistic. It’s a multi-layered issue, one that unfortunately Black and brown folks typically bear the brunt of.

[NS]



63107	67.5
zip	life expectancy

Source:
Exploring the Social Determinants of Health
University of Missouri Center for Applied
Research and Engagement Systems



We have to have that sense of urgency around these communities who are struggling, whether it be through a **food apartheid or environmental racism.**

[NS]

*Defining
Food Apartheid*

The term “food apartheid” was popularized by food justice advocate and urban farmer Karen Washington. She used it to describe the systemic inequalities in the food system that go beyond the term “food desert,” which merely refers to a lack of grocery stores. “Food apartheid” addresses the broader and more profound issues of race, geography, faith, and economics that create and perpetuate these inequities. It highlights how communities of color and low-income neighborhoods are deliberately deprived of access to nutritious food, leading to significant health disparities and social injustices.

Washington argues that “food apartheid” more accurately reflects the oppressive structures that create unequal access to healthy food, implicating not just the physical absence of food but also the socioeconomic and political forces that contribute to this disparity. This term prompts a deeper conversation about the root causes of food insecurity, including historical injustices like redlining and the deliberate siting of harmful industries in marginalized communities, which exacerbate these conditions.

*Defining
Environmental
Racism*

It was African American civil rights leader Benjamin Chavis who coined the term “environmental racism” in 1982, describing it as “racial discrimination in environmental policy-making, the enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in our communities, and the history of excluding people of color from leadership of the ecology movements.”

The Fight for Fairground

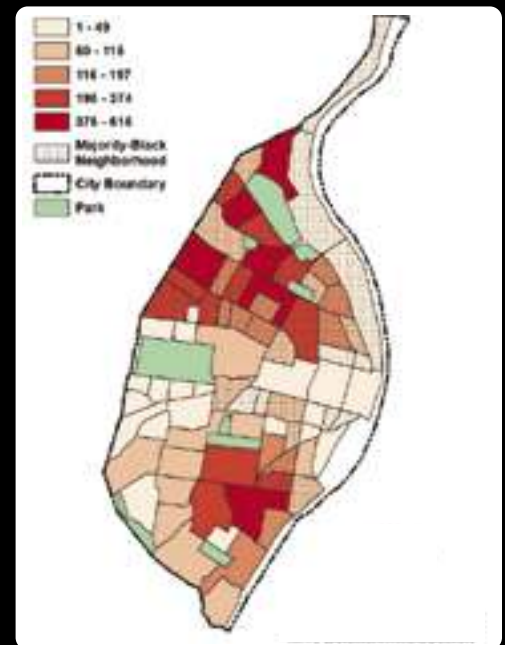
“ It is a real reality that some folks in St. Louis don’t know where their next meal is coming from. They don’t know if they’re going to have housing next month. That is a reality for a lot of families, a lot of individuals.



What does environmental racism look like?

- Littering & Illegal Dumping
- Factories Leaving Behind Pollution
- Hazardous Spaces In The Community
- Vacant Properties, Some Since the 80s
- Lack of Access to Healthy Food
- Compromised Air and Water Quality
- Lack of Trees in Certain Neighborhoods
- Waves of Trash that Come Down the Alley and onto Our Property

Debris & Illegal Dumping Complaints



Source: *Environmental Racism in St. Louis*, Interdisciplinary Environmental Clinic at Washington University School of Law

We pay young people \$20 an hour to do quarterly cleanups in your city and literally divert thousands of pounds of trash and bring it to the landfill to establish a new orchard.

A Journey for Land Acquisition

“ We purchased these three specific lots through the LRA. This body is in charge of holding a massive amount of vacant properties within the city of St. Louis.

It took several months, several conversations, and so I'm grateful for how things turned out because that is not always the case.

Acquiring land specifically for agriculture can be difficult, especially in urban settings.

Oftentimes folks who want to start a community garden or want to start an urban farm, don't have the funding or don't have the resources. To get a water line in the city alone can run you anywhere from 10 to \$15,000.

And so to be able to farm and to grow things is a privilege in itself.

[NS]

Land Reutilization Authority (LRA)

The LRA acquires title to all tax-delinquent properties that remain unsold after the Sheriff's sale. Additionally, the LRA accepts property titles through donations.

The Real Estate Department of the St. Louis Development Corporation (SLDC) is responsible for maintaining, marketing, and selling these properties. The department also facilitates land assemblage to support future development initiatives.



Nearly all 96% of LRA properties are in **North City neighborhoods.**

The LRA owns nearly 10,000 unoccupied parcels, including 8,500 lots and 1,400 buildings. This is as of September 2022 according to the SLDC.

The Power of Representation

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To see the teenagers in the Sunflower Institute, to see them grow, to see their self-esteem and their confidence change, for them to see a different future for themselves.

For them to see a Black man who's a farmer, a Black man who runs a nonprofit I think is powerful in itself.

I'm really intentional about finding Black farmers, Black growers, and Black professionals to engage with our teams so they can see folks who look like them that are really doing amazing things, whether it's filmmakers, whether it's occupational therapists, whether it's farmers, whether it's chefs.

Representation is huge because when we see more people who look like us doing things we didn't think were possible, it opens up a whole new world of possibilities.

It almost doesn't feel real... I know that we've had a profound impact on the young people that we work with and engage with.

[NS]

The Sunflower Institute

A Ujima youth program

Youth Engagement

Since 2021, the Sunflower Institute has worked with 12 local teens, with 11 successfully graduating from the program. In 2023, all graduates reported feeling more optimistic about their future, and over 80% experienced improvements in their mental health and support systems.

Community Support

Over 300 “pay what you can” meals have been provided to the St. Louis community since May 2019, ensuring access to nutritious food for all.

Environmental Stewardship

Since 2020, the Sunflower Institute has removed over 10,000 lbs of trash from North St. Louis City, contributing to a cleaner and healthier environment.

How do we build community resilience?

- one** We need the folks who have privilege, who have the means to care about the folks who are struggling. While we may not be directly impacted by the despair in these communities, we're definitely indirectly impacted by it.
- two** It's going to require us to believe in something bigger than ourselves and want better for the communities that we inhabit, want better for the world we're currently living in.
- three** We have to get uncomfortable. We have to get comfortable being uncomfortable.
- four** The reality is, St. Louis, while it is an amazing place, it is a place that is very segregated.
- five** We have to start showing up for these communities if we want long-term systemic change to happen.
- six** We need the folks with wealth, the folks with resources to then turn and redevelop some of these communities to support because it is a real reality that some folks in St. Louis don't know where their next meal is coming from.

[NS]



Building a Collective for the Communal Good

“

I think change is going to happen because the fight is going to continue. You have people who are in your corner who are invested, who can support you in the difficult times.

We have really kind of built out this amazing ecosystem of folks doing really incredible work. And I'm just really grateful for sure because this is by far me living the dream.

It took for Serving Our Communities. It took for a Franciscan Sisters of Mary to wholeheartedly invest in us and really believe in us and donate an unrestricted grant to us to allow us to spread our wings and really do what we set out to do. By sharing our stories, by uplifting the people doing this important work, that we're going to turn a corner and we're going to do better.

It is really about the collective winning and getting the staff hired that they need and all of the resources that they need to continue to show up for community, for their families, and for everybody.

[NS]

Dinner Table Questions

Help us advocate for a **Food for All St. Louis Region**. Engage with the following reflection and discussion points within your communities and networks. Share your stories and commitments to action with us, and we will amplify them to raise awareness and support!

ONE**Personal and Community-Level Shifts:**

For me, I think that looks like rethinking how we get our food from us as individuals and families. Thinking about what are the things that we really enjoy, what are some things that we can grow right at home?

TWO**Building Collaborative Food Networks:**

How can we build relationships with those individuals, and then thinking about a larger level, how can we as farmers work together and as a cooperative of support so we can scale up our food production if we more people?

THREE**Engaging Leadership and Investment:**

How do we get the leaders, the folks with power, the folks with money, resources, how do we get them to see the importance of investing in these marginalized communities that once had lots of promise and once were thriving communities?

FOUR**Redirecting Financial Resources:**

How do we turn some of those dollars that we invest in the Brentwoods to the reduced Claytons? How do we bring that money to Fairgrounds? How do we bring it to Hyde Park?

FIVE**Fostering Equity and Compassion:**

How do we get the folks that have privilege, that have the means to care about the folks that are struggling?

**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, visit foodcitystl.org.



We're just one piece of the puzzle,
one part of the ecosystem.

But I'm optimistic that we will—by
sharing our stories and uplifting
the people doing this important
work—turn a corner and do better
because my daughters deserve
that. Our kids deserve that. The
next generation deserves that.

[NS]



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