



EXPLORING FOOD JUSTICE THROUGH QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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In the wake of COVID-19, interest in growing and securing local food is on the rise as the fragility of global supply chains and the injustices of corporatized food production are exposed. While this moment is unique and challenging, it offers an opportunity for communities to forge innovative and resilient local food systems. People from different backgrounds are coming together during these difficult times. Examples include online farmers markets established by farmers and food artisans who are saving, collecting, and sharing seeds to help facilitate future food system resilience, the University of Utah Campus Gardens' decision to donate all of the season's produce to the campus pantry, and local nonprofits ensuring that they have culturally appropriate food items for their clients.

The objective of this research is to understand how the University can best partner with community farmers, organizations, agencies, and eaters to build a just and resilient local food system. This project will consist of analyzing interview data initially collected by a graduate student team members who interviewed farmers and local food access advocates in SLC this past year. This project will culminate in a professional report that we will share with the Utah State Local Food Advisory Council, Salt Lake City Food Policy Council, and other local community organizations.

Together food inequality and COVID-19, in the United States pose a significant threat to public health. During the early days of the pandemic, many people rushed to stock their pantries with food supplies and other food staples, leaving people who live paycheck to paycheck or rely on food stamps to face bare shelves in many grocery stores (Raghavendran & McCarthy, 2020). While, demand for local food has skyrocketed and CSA shares have sold at record rates. Low-income communities and communities of color have been denied access to land or other means to produce fresh foods, and the pandemic has only exacerbated this inequality (Westervelt, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has helped reveal the inequalities that currently exist in the food system, and the relationships between food inequity, environmental injustice, and public health.

This is particularly evident in Salt Lake City's Westside, home to the majority of the city's immigrant and refugee communities, including 75% of SLC's Latinx population (University Neighborhood Partners, 2019). The USDA designation of so-called food deserts in the area also indicates the prevalence of food injustice which can be linked to the same racially driven determinants of health that exacerbate comorbidities associated with COVID-19 (Nittle, 2020). In the Westside, Latinx and Pacific Islander community members are being hospitalized for COVID-19 at much higher rates than White residents in SLC (Tanner, 2020). To disrupt food insecurity related to COVID-19 in SLC, we must first understand the intersections of environmental racism, urban agriculture, food access initiatives, especially in SLC's Westside. Analyzing these data will allow us to better understand these intersections and both city and state-level food policy advisors have expressed interest in these results.