

Money, Race, and Class Dialogues

Leading a Decent Life

**A Day-long Collaborative Conversation
On the Culture of Food and the Economy of Need**

December 4, 2008
RSF Social Finance

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Invitation

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“I would like to suggest to you, as an Indian that has a Spanish surname, that this room constitutes a ‘we.’ That for all of your physical differences, for all of your age differences, for all of your cultural and religious differences, you have extraordinary things in common and that you are also responsible in various ways for making each other. That is, your story is part of her story.”

—Remarks by Richard Rodriguez from Convocation on Providing Public Library Service to California’s 21st Century Population, May 23, 1997

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Purpose

To bring people together in conversation, to listen to and speak about our experiences and those of each other through the lenses of the culture of food and the economy of need; to invite understanding of one another’s perspectives; to invite and encourage differing voices on the issues of money messages and the social, race, class and gender realities of our financial system.

Intention

Through conversation, we will gather individual and collaborative wisdom. With participants’ permission, the conversation will be recorded as a valuable resource for the future and from which transcripts and further conversation can develop.

While this is the third small gathering to focus on the broad issues of money, race, and class in our economy, there is no expectation of an ongoing commitment to anything beyond your interest and to the value of the conversation.

Inquiry

This conversation is an inquiry with focus on the issues of culture of food and the economy of need.

Glossary

A Decent Life: *A subjective, qualitative judgment that characterizes a human life lived within recognized standards of propriety, humanity, and compassion towards oneself and other living beings. For instance, you can be of any economic class and lead a decent life.*

Culture of Food: *An expression of values, habits, expectations and needs that surround the individual, the product and the situation in which it is consumed. (i.e., coffee, water)*

***Economy of Need:** Each of us organizes our lives around meeting our and others' needs. This creates priorities in how we allocate time, spend money, care for others or seek solitude. We create a community of awareness around physical and emotional needs that becomes our expanded home and life support.*

We chose these themes because they are so connected to the experience and quality of life for individuals, family, and community. We hope to explore how our perspectives, practices, and biases affect actions and relationships.

We will delve into how each of us views these topics in the conditions of daily life, with a wish for developing perspectives on moving toward a future that is equitable and sustainable. Further, we will look at how do we weigh and decide about these issues, the boundaries, and our needs. Collaboratively, we will reconsider how we meet these issues through the lenses of money, race, and class.

The group can define or change the scope and content of the day's topic. We'll also collect questions throughout the day for more exploration and reflection. However, the following questions are intended as a starting point for the inquiry:

- What is a decent life?
- Who gets to define it and how?
- What human needs do we have that conflict with our living in an equitable and sustainable world?
- How do our economic values and food values influence our community? What are the challenges in talking about these issues?
- What is a culture of food? What messages define this? Can we change the messages? How do we keep the good ones?
- What are our human needs?
- What are the ethical and cultural questions buried in an economy of need?
- Will consumer-driven innovation build an equitable and sustainable new world? Or does marketing?
- Is our financial ability the only factor that gives us access to a decent life?
- How does our knowledge/education contribute to a culture of food and the economy of need?

Outcomes

To document a reflective process as part of the gathering; to harvest insights for ourselves and for the benefit of others; to consider who else may contribute to and benefit from further participation.

We would hope this quality of inquiry brings about insights that will change the conversants, deepen relationships, widen the circle of participants, and inspire other conversations.

A Thread

This exploratory conversation follows *Who, How Much, and Why: a Conversation on Identity, Consumption, and Economic Citizenship* held in September of 2007, and *An Exploratory Conversation*

on Money, Race and Class held in September of 2006. The edited transcripts of the earlier conversations are available online at www.rsfsocialfinance.org/impact/reimagining-money. The text is part of a thread of conversation to which we are inviting your participation. While the topic of this third conversation has a different focus, we welcome the realities of race, class, gender, spirit, or religion (among others) into the conversation as they are a living part of economic life.

RSF Social Finance is committed to transforming the way the world works with money. Our experience has been that financial transactions are one avenue into understanding how people practice their values, make their choices, and engage in the physical world to meet their own and others' needs. Money can hurt or heal, follow a path of greed or compassion. RSF values the healing. By serving as host for these conversations, some of the deeper social and cultural issues, for which money is a bellwether, can be spoken about, brought to the surface and made a more conscious part of decisions both financial and social. Understanding the complexity of our economic life is useless without understanding all the human issues at work in it.

Conversation—Leading a Decent Life

Yolanda: I'd like to start off by acknowledging the planning team, John Bloom, Pilar Gonzales, and Katrina Steffek who worked on today's conversation.

We'll start with our introductions relative to food and how it relates to our personal stories. Then we will go into the first major discussion time on leading a decent life, allocating resources relative to food—our personal resources. Then onto, “Why are people starving? Who is starving, and how do I, how do we live with that?” And, how our economic and food values influence our communities.

Following lunch we'll get into discussion on food access and economy of need. Moving on to this growing picture of the personal to the macro, we'll address ethical and cultural issues that are included in any economy of need and food access.

John: I just want to express deep appreciation for those of you who ventured here for the first time, and also those of you who found it in your heart to come back to engage. Today is part of a thread of conversations inquiring into money and society, our financial systems, and the challenges that we live with day-in and day-out from multiple perspectives—particularly the intersections of money, race, and class. That is the conversation needed to be transformative and healing.

What we can know about the issues of money, race, and class from focusing on food is the vessel and voyage for today.

Pilar: I have a couple of words to add to that. It has been a very organic process to bring us all into a room to discuss different issues through the lenses of race, class, and money. We wanted to create a forum that would be natural for all of us, not necessarily with an action list. We knew that anyone that would come into the room would have a lot to do already in their lives as activists, or as leaders, or CEOs, but that we wanted people to have the chance to just talk to one another.

It was wonderful to join up with the team of Katrina and John, to imagine that there's actually a place that wants to see this kind of conversation happen. I was delighted by that. I came onto the team as a result of a conference where I met RSF Social Finance people. It was a spirituality and philanthropy conference they organized with Fetzer Institute. That's where I really went in deeper and got to know the folks from this organization. I wanted to add not only my deep respect for an organization that sees me and hears me, but also that will hear all of you. So that's the place that I'm coming from.

Katrina: So why the topic of food? Maybe some of you are working day to day in food justice or farming, you think about food all the time. But I feel like just in the past year there's been a movement in the media, lots of books coming out, lots of people talking about it. So, that also informed our thoughts or reason to frame this conversation.

John: Our planning conversations for today were completed before the economic catastrophe that we're in right now. I want to acknowledge this, because it is very real, and there is a lot of pain in the world because of it. We have to be mindful of it, and make a space to address it.

Pilar: There may be pain in the room, and you're not required to reveal or confess anything, but it's amazing how close to home foreclosures, loss of job, loss of business, or family members that may have those losses have come up. So you can share or not share that. I just wanted to say that.

John: I also just wanted to acknowledge that CJ Callen was supposed to be with us today. We will miss her presence and voice, and hope she gets over her flu quickly. She's been at almost every one of the gatherings, as well. It was actually her comment at the last conversation around just the wish to be able to lead a decent life that suggested the title for this one.

I won't spend time defining a “decent life,” because that's one of our questions. But, we will be conversing and hopefully picture-building as an additive rather than argumentative practice. The culture of food is an expression of our values, and our particular practices.

It's a placeholder for the way the rest of the world shows up in front of us on our plate. The “economy of need” has a double meaning. We have real material needs. But we also have emotional needs, psychological needs, a whole other realm of intangible needs that also have a quality of economy—caring, loving, learning—this whole other place that we all live and probably care the most about, more than other things. That is also an economy. How we are awake to that with and for each other, on each other's behalf is a picture of a real but different economy that we live in.

Yolanda: We're each going to share our story. We're asking you to frame your biography by sharing a food experience that you most connect with your identity or that you feel was formative for you. I will start.

My parents were immigrants from Peru. My mom was raised in an agricultural town in the foothills of the Andes, a tiny town called Contumazá. As you can imagine, she was very connected—she is still very connected—to the earth. Her father was a merchant, which meant that he took his oxen and horse team from his town to the nearest big city to trade for manufactured products to bring back. He took agricultural products and brought back city things—dolls for my mom is the one thing I remember.

My dad, by contrast, was a city boy. He was raised in a city that I would think of very much as San Francisco, a cultural artistic hub. And a hub for politics—there was

actually a revolution going on when he was growing up. He was very urban. Both of my parents are quite ambitious.

The particular story I want to talk about happened when I was an adolescent and my one brother —ten years older than me—was stationed in the Philippines during the Vietnam War. So the picture that's in my head happened when it was just the three of us. My parents are Seventh Day Adventists. That meant that my mom, a teacher, would come home after her week's worth of work and need to cook the meals for both Friday night and all day Saturday, because it's a twenty-four-hour religious worship period. She was very energetic about doing that.

She would have to make a very simple meal for Friday night because she was cooking for Saturday as well. She got in the habit of making a soup from her home town, and this soup was—I think of it as peasant food. It's based on potatoes, yes, Peruvian potatoes. Add in some toasted flour, some eggs, some salt, garlic and oregano, and then at the last minute you add cheese. That's the soup. It's very basic. It's very homespun.

My dad would be coming home from work and he'd stop by a baker and buy some fresh-baked bread. It was so fresh that half the loaf would be gone by the time he got home! We'd have bread and butter and soup. And that was our dinner.

What was really special about it I think, besides the history with my mom, is that she'd put down this special tablecloth, and we'd eat in the dining room instead of the kitchen. The lights would be low, because it was the start of our worship period, though we hadn't started all the rigmarole of getting dressed for church and doing all those things. It was our quiet time. It was a time where we actually did breathe and sit down. It had the most elegance, simplicity, and the most sense of belonging to all our family.

This is what I think of when I think about my kids now. Now I'm married and have two kids. I have a five-year-old and a seven-year-old, and a dog and a parrot. I get very up in my head, just like my parents, about their schooling and if they're getting the right kinds of other activities. I get involved in those things, and that's when it's important for me to come back to the soup.

That soup has a name in my mom's home town, which I never remember, because as a wise-cracking adolescent I called it "Friday night soup"—we had it almost every Friday night. And it's still known that way in our family. When I try to remember what's important for me and my family, I try to remember that it's really that. It's the simple, the basic, the peace, and being together.

Richard:

I love to eat. I was raised in a family with five siblings. My father was the one who was the working person in the house, and my mother was a housewife. I was raised eating only the food that my mother would cook for us. We were not allowed to eat outside the home. I didn't have lunches in school. I didn't do the pizzas with my friends. We were allowed to eat only the food that our mother prepared for us. And,

we had a custom of eating together. We had breakfast together. We rarely had lunch together but we always had bagged lunch during school. My mother was an excellent cook. She made her own bread. She made most of her own ingredients to prepare certain foods. This was something on which my father had insisted.

As I grow older, I find some of that difficult to understand, why my mother would put up with some of those things. At the same time, I actually value the fact that we sat down as a family every single night without fail—Saturdays and Sundays included. We had a 6:00 dinner time and we had time to discuss everything that went on in our lives. It actually kept the family stronger and kept us more intact, around the dinner table.

I used to help my mother prepare to bake bread, which was most enjoyable—bread and cakes, pastries—because I always liked to lick the spoon. We had a staple of interesting soup. We couldn't afford a lot of meat, so we didn't have much. Usually on Sundays we would have either lamb or chicken.

What I enjoyed was the fact that I have an appreciation for a good fine meal now. I have an appreciation for family sitting around the table. I'm a little heartbroken today, saddened by the fact that my family is very, very busy in the city, and we do not spend that amount of time around a meal. We seem to be in a hurry, myself included. I eat out more than I've ever eaten out, and my wife—we're always going somewhere and have to be somewhere so we have to eat outside the home, which I think is pretty sad. I would like to return that home tradition.

My parents shaped my way of looking at food. My father was one who always spoke about the negatives of eating an abundance of meat, pork and beef and all this stuff. He would tell us that it was unhealthy. Yet, you couldn't pull a steak away from him! So there was always contradiction like that: "You shouldn't eat meat, son. You know, a vegetarian diet is a healthier way for you to live." That set pretty strong with me. When I went to Cal Poly, Pomona, which is an agriculture school, I actually had an opportunity to work in the cattle industry—cattle section—where I was bringing cattle to the slaughter house, daily. It was decided—I've been a vegetarian since December 1, 1969.

I did discover, in my studies in school, some of the inefficiencies of eating meat, and some of the negative aspects of it. It's become a way of life for me. I'm never on a soap box. I never tell anybody how they should eat, but that is how I choose to live my life—not necessarily as a strict vegetarian, but I know that it's had an effect on me. "We are what we eat," my father used to say.

Esperanza: I'm Esperanza. A formative food experience—probably the most formative was a little over four years ago. I got married and moved into a home with my husband and my father-in-law. They're of Indian heritage. My father-in-law actually grew up in India, and he's turning ninety this year, so he's pretty steeped in his ways. I think initially what happened was that I was seeking to preserve my own identity and create my own space within the house. I love their culture and I love—well, I love

them. They're my family. But it's not my culture! So that took me outside, and I think it just took me outside because I was comfortable spending a little bit less time inside. This was the first year of marriage, and it was kind of—I needed that space.

I was working on creating space, making it more beautiful. We had a peach tree and I had collected the peaches and preserved them the way that my grandmother did. She's still alive, but she doesn't do it anymore. I think that may have sparked something. So I did that, and my father-in-law actually really appreciated it because we realized there was this connection around preserving your own food and growing your own food. I felt inspired to plant a very small garden—and I knew nothing, absolutely nothing. I just casually went to a nursery, and picked out random plants. Now that I've been growing food, I realize it was a bad collection of plants. But I've learned a lot of things.

The pivotal thing that happened was that—I planted broccoli. I had no idea what broccoli was going to look like when it grew, and I had no idea when it was edible. I actually watched it grow and flower from my window. It went to seed, basically. Birds were coming down to eat something on it, so I figured something's edible! I collected what was left and thought, okay, I'm going to make this happen. First I read about it and then I replanted them.

Just that process alone had me relying on archived knowledge from my grandfather. We're Mexican and my grandfather and my grandmother have always—actually grew up growing their own food, preparing their own food. My grandfather worked on a farm. They had a small farm for a while. But this was their life. I had some exposure to it but it wasn't—I guess it's deep within me, but it hasn't been who I am.

Something happened—a need for identity, a need for preserving my sense of self, and creating space launched this project, which has now become an urban farm. My backyard now has livestock. Every step I took, there would be some amazing discovery of my own culture and my family. My grandmother, when she would get really upset about things, her version of swearing, basically, was using farm animals. I always thought it was really funny. The more upset she becomes with somebody, the larger the animal! I always wondered—you know, pigs are easy to use as an insult, but cows? I mean, cows, dogs—just all these metaphors that she would use with animals. And now that I've actually had them, every time I learn something: oh, I realize that's really funny!

Each growing cycle, I learn more and more. It's been a little over four years. I have a chicken coop. I raised turkeys this year. My entire backyard is edible. And it's growing. The whole concept is growing, and my aim is to grow 75% of our food directly out which, in line with the cultural exploration of my own, also requires shifting the culture of my own household to not buy food elsewhere. Some things I just have to accept—we're always going to have Indian imports!

But that has probably been the most formative experience. I mean, it's really unfolded and blossomed since I started. I've since met some amazing people who have really articulated what's been driving me in this process, and I'm just taking it from there.

Pilar:

I'm Pilar Gonzales, I live in the East Bay, and I work out of my home. I identify as Lipan Apache, raised Mexican, and I've been in California now for a good forty years. I've been urban now since 1986 and that marks a year for me. That's important to me because I was raised rural, and am the daughter and granddaughter of migrant farm workers. So, I have a relationship to food through labor. It was my identity as a child and as I became a young woman. When I came out to California, I worked in the fields again. So I hold onto—even though I'm in the city—I still hold onto that identity. I relate that way to the world, although I'm a city girl in a lot of ways.

I was thinking about what experience formed me related to food. There are quite a few, so I picked one that's more recent. My late husband's family is from a small village in Jalisco near the mountains of Talpa de Allende. When I went back to return his body to Mexico, I stayed with the family for a few months. There were all my in-laws, brothers and sisters, and we were in the hacienda. We were working in the cane fields, etc., so it was a very rural life.

When the men came back out of the field back to the house to eat, food had been prepared and there was meat being cooked and such. And I watched, because I wanted to be respectful of their particular culture. I watched that the women stayed in the kitchen, and all the men sat down at the table. They were all talking and taking their napkins and either tucking them in their shirts or laying them on their laps. I was just watching. This was a big family of fourteen siblings, and then there was the father and the mother and a couple of aunts and uncles—but all the men sat down and the women stood in the kitchen, as if there were this imaginary gate that they didn't cross. As the men sat there, the oldest sister started bringing out plates of food with meat on them.

I whispered to my sisters-in-law: "So why aren't we sitting down? I'm sorry—what are we waiting for?" And she said, "Oh, the men eat first." I'm not talking about 1940, 1960—I'm talking 1995. And I said, "What?" They said, "The men eat first. They're the ones that get the meat." And I said, "What?" I just couldn't understand this. Then I noticed that the men, even though they were stuffing their napkins and getting prepared, weren't digging into their plates of food. I said, "Now what is happening—please explain to me." They said, "Well, they're waiting for you to sit down." I said, "I get to sit with the men?" They said, "Well, you're an honored guest because you're a widow."

I went and sat down, and not until I looked at my fork did the men start to eat. Then I got up and they all—the forks went down and they said, "What's happened?" I said, "I won't eat without my sisters at the table." So the father clapped, calls the girls out, they come running out. He says, "Sit down. Sit down so that she can eat." So the girls sit down. Everyone is watching me—every change at the table,

culturally. So they're waiting for me. Then I lift my fork and I say, "Oh," and put it down again. And I wasn't being facetious. Everybody stopped eating. I said, "I want meat for everybody." And the father just looked at me. He said, "Okay."

So the men had to carve some of their meat and share it with their sisters and the other women at the table. It was a very quiet lunch, I can tell you that. We finished eating and such, and one of the brothers said to me, "You're very American. You're very American. You're really challenging my family and my father. It's the first time I've ever sat down at the table with a woman and eaten meat with her." The men get the meat because supposedly they work the hardest—which is not true. The women work very, very hard there because they not only prepare the food but also then go back to the fields with the men. Then they have to leave the fields a little bit early and prepare the food and prepare anything else the men need.

I said, "I'm sorry for bringing this challenge to your home." They didn't think it was funny. They didn't smile. I said, "It'll be like that every day that I'm here. I won't eat without my sisters at the table." And all the men finished. My brothers-in-law finished and my father-in-law, and I just stayed at the table. And he was very much the head of the table and he said to me, "You're a very strong woman." And I said thank you. And then I said, "I hope you'll enjoy my cooking." And he said, "Well, I'm sure that I will." And I said, "Don't be so sure! You don't know yet!"

But, it was such an important meal that I had. That was the first meal with them, and you can well imagine it made me realize that I was most definitely not from Mexico and most definitely not from that village, and I was very, very, much an American woman. But it's caused me to think about my environment and my setting quite a bit.

Willa:

I'm Willa. I was a very picky eater growing up and I didn't like being in the kitchen, so I don't have really great stories to tell like that. But, I'll share a story that my sister shared with me, and also talk about my association with food growing up.

I'm from Alabama originally, and after my father died my sister told me a story about my father. She said that he had come to New York, and they were sitting at the table together. She'd prepared a roasted chicken, and was putting all the pieces together and served everybody, and served my father. And my father said to her, "Why did you serve me the back?" And she said, "Because it's your favorite piece of chicken." He said, "It's not my favorite piece of chicken!" And she said, "Well, that's what you always ate when we were growing up." And he said, "That's because that's all the food we had and I had the back because then I could give you all the better pieces."

My sister is sixteen years older than I am, so I grew up in a time when my family had more means. I recognize, in looking back, how my family's diet changed over the years as our income grew and how my mother's diet has changed as I've become an adult. That's been an interesting experience, just to see the kind of food that we were eating then, and the kind of food we eat now, and what that means about

culture and what it means about means as well. And food is very much a part of my life. I grew up in a family where we did eat dinner together and we did spend time together at the table a lot. As an adult I began to cook a little bit, but it was always a very terrifying experience for me!

And I'm actually a pretty good cook, but if it's beyond breakfast, then it's a source of great anxiety. It's only actually been in the last couple of years that I can prepare a meal, and not be filled with panic about it.

Katrina:

I thought of a formative food experience that is around this very traditional rice pudding that's made in Denmark—maybe in all of Scandinavia. My mom is from Denmark and she grew up on a sugar beet farm. I grew up in Sonoma Valley on a couple of acres of land. At my house growing up, my mom had a fruit tree orchard, while my brother and I, and my mom and my dad each had a farm box to plant. I realized this really links back to her childhood because she said that was really important to her to eventually find a house where she could have a little bit of land to grow things. I remember being amazed that she knew exactly when to prune things, and how to take care of trees and plants. She could just make things grow, and had this connection to weather and just knew what the plants needed.

But linking to the Danish heritage, there's this rice pudding, and the trick to it is that there's one whole almond that's hidden inside. It's peeled and then there are also a bunch of little half-pieces and quarter-pieces and the chef almost always intentionally makes way too much. So everyone scoops some and then if you're the one that finds the whole almond, you're supposed to hide it in your mouth or somehow hide it so no one knows you've got it. The entire bowl has to be finished, and then people guess: "Who do you think has it? Oh, I think John has it." "I think Priscilla has it." Some people will pretend that they have it.

It's something that we did every year. I lived in Denmark for a year after high school so it was wonderful to experience it there and really feel that connection to what I had grown up with. I really appreciated my mom for bringing these little parts of her culture into our lives every day.

But, over the past couple of years I'm becoming more aware of wanting to eat more whole foods and really wanting to learn how to cook, and appreciate why that's such a wonderful thing to be able to do. I'm excited to hear your stories and to keep talking about food!

Nicole:

My name is Nicole Sanchez and I grew up in a very white working-class town in East Bay, not far from Oakland, about two towns over—a little place called Castro Valley, which is much more diverse now than it was when I was growing up.

Probably the most formative thing I can try to summarize is the rejection by each generation of the last generation's way of relating to food in my family. My grandparents are from Mexico. I've never been to Mexico. My Spanish is shaky. I am

very much an American, but I very much identify with being a Mexican American, which is a really important part of who I am.

My grandparents came from Mexico just before 1920, and my father was the youngest of eleven children. Both my parents grew up in East Los Angeles. Part of growing up in East LA at that time was a complete rejection of your immigrant parents and what they did. For my parents, that meant really trying to be American, trying to blend, learning about hamburgers and French fries and milkshakes, and really pushing away what their parents did on farms. My grandparents were farm workers in Mexico and then migrant farm workers when they came here. I saw my parents push away that relationship to the land, that relationship to whole foods, and I grew up as food became more processed.

My father ended up working at a fast-food restaurant and he did that for thirty years. He started working at the window and ended up owning the fast-food restaurant over the course of thirty years. Everything fast and processed—this is how I grew up. In a very white working-class town, basically everything you eat comes out of a box or a can. My mom is an excellent cook, but this is what we knew, and this is what was available and affordable.

Macaroni and cheese to me is orange powder, some butter and milk, boiling water, and you stir it all up. It's great! I still love it! It is so good! And Cheese Whiz—that's cheese. I didn't understand until I then left my home and went to college what was amiss. The one thing I'm supremely grateful for is that we always sat down, as you said, at 6:00 every night. It didn't matter what we were eating, didn't matter how processed it was—at 6:00 we all sat down, my three sisters, my parents, and I. We would sit down and talk about the day. That is the part I realize was way more valuable than the food.

I moved out at age seventeen to go to college and had this revelation that I had always been a vegetarian. It's just that I didn't have control over my food because I wasn't preparing it for myself. At seventeen I said, "I think I'm done eating meat," and then became really sure that I was done eating meat. This was 1990. I went home for my first Thanksgiving and told my mom, "I'm a vegetarian." She just cried. She cried because I was rejecting how I grew up. And, she said, "What are you going to eat at Thanksgiving?" I said, "What is meat on this table?" She said, "Well, the turkey." I said, "What else?" There's nothing else on the table that's meat! She said, "But you can't really have Thanksgiving if you don't have the turkey! It's a fake Thanksgiving!" I just looked at her. Over the years, she's gotten more used to the idea. My father's whole thing was: "Meat isn't good enough for you? It raised you. It paid for you to go to college. Hamburgers paid for you to go to college, basically." So he saw that very much as a rejection as well. But I knew environmentally, health-wise, and my relationship to animals was such that I couldn't eat them anymore in good conscience. I couldn't.

I'm like you—I'm not on the soap box. I don't try to tell people what to eat. I don't like having this discussion while we're eating. That's when people want to hear

you're a vegetarian. "Why are you a vegetarian?" as they're eating chicken. "I'm not going to tell you right now!" You know, they have a drumstick hanging out of their mouth and they're like: "Oh, really?" And I'm thinking: "Don't make me do this to you! We'll talk after." That's become my line: "I prefer to have this conversation not over a meal, okay? I'll tell you all the reasons. You just don't want to hear them now."

I have become, like Esperanza, much more about whole foods and growing our own food. My husband has gotten very hard-core about this. We have a roof garden and we're about to get chickens. It's really wonderful. My two daughters, who are six and nine, are also vegetarians. We all are. At 6:00, we sit down and we eat. Again, it doesn't matter what we eat—just that we sit down together.

But, I'm watching the rejection again. My daughter, who just turned six on Monday, said to me the other day, "I think I want meat!" I said, "You do?" My husband was—you'd think she'd said she was going to run off and join the circus that day. He asked, "What did you say, Grace?" She said, "I'm going to eat meat when I grow up." He responded, "Well, as long as you know it's not going to be in my house." I was thinking, "Why are you going to fight with her about this, right here, right now? She's six!" Then she asked, "How old do I have to be before I can try meat?" I looked at my husband, thinking, "Pick a number, dude, because she's going to have it in her head!" He said, "Sixteen," just like that. She said, "Okay. In ten years I'm going to eat meat." And that was that.

Our relationship to food and migration, and the rejection of the previous generation has been really defining for all of us. That's my story.

James:

My name is James O'Dea and I'm Irish. I was born in Ireland. The Sunday meal was certainly something that was practically a day-long event. This meant you came back from church and the meal preparations began. There were all kinds anticipatory assembling of things you did before the meal, and then you had the meal, and then the meal continued through much politics, much religion, much shouting, much argument, well into the afternoon!

But I actually wanted to go back to my grandmother because in summers I would be sent down to Wexford, where there were two houses—my grandmother's cottage, and then my aunt, uncle and cousins'. I always preferred to stay with my grandmother, who literally had a cottage, cooked over a hearth, got water from a well, chopped her own wood, and grew a lot of her own food. It was just magical. It was just powerful to see that hearth and to have a little window fan that you stoked up the fire with and these big black pots over the hearth, and to see the bread come out of that, as opposed to coming out of an oven up near Dublin, which was more modern.



I actually brought a picture of my grandmother, because it was sent to me recently. It's a really interesting picture. You can see she looks pretty severe, because she was. She was not a sentimental grandmother; she was essential. In fact, you know, we'd come down for a summer and the Catholic family meal would always begin with: "In the name of the Father . . ." And she would say, "Oh, don't waste the Grace, now! I had to use all the Grace for my cooking!"

But you can see in this picture—this is at the house of the uncle and aunt. It's not her cottage. You can see it's not a cottage. You see how thick her arms are from chopping wood and carrying. I think she was conscious of what she held—because she's looking at the camera. She's arranged for this picture. And she's holding the egg as some sort of reminder, like: where does this egg come from? I have some regret that I have lost that simple joy of connection to food. I've become California-neurotic. I have gluten sensitivities! Shouldn't I be drinking more pomegranate?! And then they tell you all these vitamins you're taking, you're washing them out anyway. It's gotten too crazy. It's like: what happened to just cooking the food and eating it? As many of us are saying, the connectivity between people and the food.

Priscilla:

Food was just really, really central in my household. I grew up with my three sisters also, my parents, and my grandparents. And my grandmother cooked all the time. She cooked for everything. We also had a garden that she worked in, and we grew peas and another vegetable, which I still don't know how to say in English. She cooked, and we had kind of a language barrier. My Chinese level was about like a five-year-old's, and she didn't speak any English. So, really, the way that she

communicated with us was through food. She cooked constantly, basically all day, and just stuffed us silly all day. I was not a picky child at all because we always had tons of food. We were always expected to eat everything. Our family parties are like that. It's all basically organized around the food, and they last for hours. It's all just eating.

What really struck me later as I grew older is what I didn't know then—that my dad had an older brother, because he had always been like the only son in the family. When my grandmother was living in China in the early '50s, it was just a really crazy place. The Communists were taking power, and World War II had—the whole place was a mess. So my grandfather had emigrated to the Philippines to work and was sending money back home to my grandmother in China to take care of her two sons, my dad and his older brother. At some point, nothing was coming through. The money he was sending wasn't getting to her, and so she didn't have anything. She lived in a city, so there was no garden for growing their own food.

What I didn't know until after she had passed away (I was already twenty-one at that point), was that her oldest son had starved to death because she couldn't feed him. In my head I just thought, oh, this is kind of like a Chinese thing of being in our family—you feed your kids all the time. But for her, obviously, there was a much more complicated thing going on behind it. She never talked about it, and my dad was too young to really remember his older brother. When I think about how hard it must have been for her to—I'm sure she probably gave the child as much as she could—but, you know, she had to deal with her son starving to death. By the time she made it to the Philippines with my father, he had already passed away. She couldn't help him survive long enough to make it. So when I think about family and food memories, and all of the love behind it, I really think about my grandma and what she must have gone through—and how I'm sure she's trying to make up for it in some way by feeding us all the time.

That's my experience. It's still important to us as a family, even though a lot of them on my mom's side of the family don't know this story about my dad's side of the family. But for me, it's like a defiant thing, a way to honor my grandmother's memory and her struggle is to eat! That's the way I do it—and also feed the people around me. So that's my story.

Rhian:

My name is Rhian Miller. I grew up as a military brat. My dad was in the Air Force and I grew up mostly on air bases, always east of the Mississippi. I consider myself pretty much a Midwesterner because my parents were both from the Midwest. So we also ate out of boxes and cans and, as far as I knew, food came from the commissary. I thought we lived a pretty upper-middle-class life. I think it was actually pretty middle-middle class. When I went off to college, one of the first things that happened in my freshman year was I went to see a film called *Fighting for our Lives* about farm workers. I couldn't believe that there were people that picked food on these huge farms, because I grew up with family farms. That's where I thought food came from. When I saw that, they asked people if they wanted to sign up for the boycott. So, I did. Then, when I went to work on the boycott that

summer, I found out that I was going to be paid five dollars a week with housing. We all lived together in a big house. We got paid five dollars a week, then we went down to apply for food stamps. So that was, for me, a very odd experience.

I felt a little fraudulent about it because I realized I didn't really need the food stamps. But, I also wasn't dependent on my parents anymore. I was on my own, living away from home, and I didn't want to—and in a way I also thought, well, this is kind of cool. The government is paying for me to get rights for farm workers that they should have had already anyway.

It was also a little odd because you think about food stamps and scarcity, but in our situation we had probably ten people in the house and we all had food stamps. We had quite a lot of food in the house. It was opposite to the experience that I'd imagined it would be.

That's the story I thought of yesterday. On my way here, I realized that issues around food are what radicalized me and led me to become the person I am today, for good or for bad. It was two things. It was learning about the issue of how we really get most of our food through the labor of farm workers. Once I got on the boycott, that's what brought me to California after I graduated. I came out here and started working for the UFW.

Just a little story here—being from the Midwest. I'm at the UFW as an ESL teacher in this amazing program that was funded by the Departments of Agriculture and Education. It didn't last that long, but it was great while it did. One day one of my students came up to me with something in his hand and asked me: "How do you say this in English?" I looked down at his hand, and I said, "I have no idea what that is." It was a ripe apricot. I had only known dried apricots, and never seen a ripe one!

Learning about food and how it was actually picked and brought to market was one thing. The other thing was that in one of my classes we were reading Jim Hightower's "Hard Times, Hard Tomatoes." This gave me a whole other part of the story about how agribusiness was determining how and what kind of food we got and were able to choose—again separating us from our determination about food and how to get it. So, I realized food is totally essential to why I've been working in nonprofits all my life!

John:

When you start thinking about food stories, it's like rummaging through memories. One that surfaced for me, particularly through the lens of identity, is when I was growing up. My mother loved to cook. Sometimes, when I was young, I'd go in to help. She was a devotee of Julia Child, so she really took it seriously. She'd get so busy cooking that she would create these dishes with no one there to eat them. So, she'd put them in a freezer. She bought this big freezer for the basement, those ones where you'd lift the top lid up. All this terrific food would go in there. We would really look forward to when my parents went away even for an evening, because we could help ourselves and make a gourmet meal. It would all be labeled, dated and organized.

We didn't eat out a lot because there was no need. I now realize how incredibly privileged that was to go to your freezer and choose this food prepared! I kept thinking: So what does that have to do with my identity? It's a little bit like the way I think about banks. You deposit things, store them, and then you take them out when you need them at another time. It's related to how I think of economics— but, more food economy than a money economy. I wouldn't want my assets frozen! That experience of home economy was a model for me.

My brother and I had some pretty good arguments over which main course we were going to thaw. We recently went back to clean the basement—that freezer is still there, though not running. We actually found a package of brownies that had been baked in 1955!

Fast-forward in time. Twenty-three years ago, I had the joy of meeting some farmers in Covelo, and have had a relationship to that farm ever since. I helped create a CSA [Community Supported Agriculture] group with them. It was maybe the second or third CSA in the US, the first west of the Mississippi.

The farmers invited me to the farm. I had never grown anything. I can't even keep house plants alive, so green thumbs is not what I'm about. But, I do love to eat. I went up to Live Power Community Farm, where they actually plow with horses, so it's the real deal. I spent an afternoon behind a plow, being pulled by those horses. I have never been so exhausted in my life. But I got a direct experience of what the farmer's work is. Not just the fact that they're producing food, but what is the nature of that work? And I really have, in many ways, committed to supporting that vocation, supporting that activity, as a “professional eater.” If you really talk to farmers, they need a community of people to support them and to eat the food, or they don't have a living. There's a conscious recognition of this partnership, in a way that I am only too happy to be part of.

I realize how rare and privileged it is to speak for every molecule in the soil on that farm. Unless you're a farmer yourself and growing your own food, it is amazing to think sitting here in the city that I know the farmers, the food that I'm getting from there, the soil and how it's been treated, and who else is supporting—whose sweat and the animals.

So I have a deep passion not only for the food but also I would say the quality of life that makes food happen, because it's easily forgotten or rendered invisible. You know, you really connect to it growing your own, but to maintain a consciousness of it when you're not growing it—that's another kind of challenge, which I think is a good city challenge. I like to frame that, from an identity standpoint, as, “I'm so happy that you're there because you're actually completing something which I feel is part of my own life path that I can't do.” They're actually farming, in a sense, on behalf of my own inner need to know that that's an important thing that I can't do. So that's what food holds for me. How do we see behind the food into what it actually takes to arrive at my door.

- Yolanda: We're now going to have a quick go-round to add your thoughts. We thought we would give each person the opportunity to say two sentences.
- Richard: Two sentences . . . I am grateful that I have an opportunity to be aware of the needs of many and the needs of my family. That's one. I'm grateful that I have an opportunity to be aware of what is needed for the world. I would like to make a commitment to social services, and make sure that I can do my part to enrich and enhance lives of others through what I do as a musician and as a human being.
- Esperanza: I'm probably going to go over the number of sentences, but I'll speak fast! I'm very drawn in by how food heritages, the stories of food, make such a deep and immediate connection with each other and ourselves. Through my own exploration, I've learned more and deeper meaning of who I am. And just in this brief exercise of sharing a formative story, I got an immediate window into your lives and your heritage. It's so powerful. For me, this was fuel for continuing to seek out a way to capture those stories and to connect communities through the stories.
- Pilar: The tortilla is a currency of my childhood and I continue to promise my grandmother and her memory and keep my word that I will never eat a green or orange tortilla!
- Nicole: That's a wrap! That's how you get around it! That's not a tortilla!
- Pilar: Before my grandmother passed away she saw one, and said: "Are they messing with our food too, now?!"
- Willa: Food is a wonderful way to connect people and to bring people together. It's an important part of my family life and also a way to connect to people that we work with every day. So it's very central for me. And I'm now quite an adventurous eater!
- Katrina: Hearing Nicole speak of the idea of the next generation wanting to do something different than the previous generation, I remember my mom would pick a tomato from the plant and she would just eat it like an apple. I thought that was really gross. I just didn't get it! More and more I'm starting to get it, and she was right after all. But I find that as I become more aware, you know, eating a lot of produce, trying to make sure it's farmed locally and organically if possible, I feel like it's a connection with her and a connection to the memories of when I was a child.
- Nicole: Rhian said something that made me remember a story about how we relate to our food. When I was nineteen I took my first trip on an airplane. I went to Chicago. I must have been looking out the plane and had a really puzzled look on my face, because the guy next to me goes: "What is it? What are you looking at?" I said, "What are those little squares?" And he goes: "Those are farms, honey!" I go: "They're tiny!" And he goes: "You're from California. You've never been out of California." And I go: "What could you possibly grow on that?" He goes: "Everything!" And I was: "Oh, my God!" I just looked out the window—little, tiny boxes! I couldn't believe that that was a farm!

James: A few years back I took my youngest son to Granny's cottage, which is now deserted but still standing. He and I drank from the wellspring where she used to get her water. For months afterwards, he would talk about the sweet water. I'm learning to really honor water as a part of the whole thing. I stopped buying bottled water, and instead, celebrate the good water that comes out of my tap.

Priscilla: One of the assumptions I had coming into this conversation is that I often think of the connection between food and heritage or culture as being—at least, in the United States—as being more of a people-of-color issue. One little story is that my sister's boyfriend is from a city in Iowa. He has a really small family and we have a really huge family, again, like talking and eating all day. She spent Christmas with him one year, and they basically didn't have any food. They had some fruit and nuts. My sister was just starving, because she's used to a big pot of rice, big thing of meat, just tons of food. She was really, really hungry. It was really quiet, and someone said: "Oh, look at your socks! Your socks are so cute!" They talked for ten minutes about the socks and my sister's just dying. That's what I think about the kind of images I carry. I realized that was an assumption: the white folks I know are really kind of disconnected from the food. It's something they eat and they do, but it's not part of their heritage or whatever. So I just wanted to say that, based on these stories, I am leaving that assumption behind—and it's good for me to acknowledge that.

Rhian: Well, I'll say us white folks do really appreciate all the food all the immigrants have brought to this country, for sure! One other thought is that as this economic crisis has gotten worse, people are spontaneously starting to grow food. I think that would be a great, great trend, if it happens.

John: I love to cook so I've taken that on from my heritage—but no freezer. Thinking about what I might make for dinner, has been a great tool for me to figure out the state I'm in on any given day. In other words, you can go from an emotional stress level—because I've got to have protein and probably something's been missing in the day. So it's a wonderful tool to read back from the world outside of me into the inner world about what's really going on.

Secondly, I have heard through this circle a quality of ritual and how central it is. The food is almost secondary to some other ritual that happens. Of course, it wouldn't happen without the food.

Yolanda: Interestingly enough, one of the rituals I share with my mom is baking. My mom worked her way through high school at a school where the students worked to pay their tuition. She was a baker. She didn't like to cook, but she baked. So, when I bake bread or cookies for my kids, it's fun and passing on a tradition.

As facilitator, I would like to introduce a new question. What does it mean to lead a decent life?

Priscilla: I don't have an answer, but I struggled with the question because in my head I thought, "Well, a decent life is, you know, if you can live your life without harming others, or whatever." But, I have so much privilege in my life living here. There's no way that other people aren't sacrificing to be able to make my life happen, no matter how environmentally conscious I'm trying to be. Part of me thinks, "I could have a decent life. I'm committed to it and it's within my ability." But, I don't know how you do that as an American without harming other folks around the world.

Esperanza: This conversation has come up frequently in my own household between my husband and me—looking at the frameworks of meaning, of what it is to live, and what our needs are. I'll just be frank about it. I've been working on him to shift from deriving meaning and need based on money, to time. It's really about the quality of life that happens when you can have time to live it. That's just my framework. Beyond that, the needs that I have in my community derive from the availability of people to be there.

So let's say Oakland and education, the school system. I don't have children now but I would like to. And when I look to the closest elementary school, it's actually surrounded by a freeway entrance and exit. The play yard overlooks rushing cars. There are some trees to maybe block some of the emissions, but environmentally that's probably not my choice. Also, the school is horrible academically. When I think about what's needed, maybe the school doesn't need to be right there. Maybe something else would benefit from being right there. Maybe if we organized, we could move the school's location somewhere friendlier to children, their lungs and their need to play. All of that takes time. What I find lacking in my community is the time to organize, to attend community meetings. When I think of a decent life, I think of having the time to live it, to have time to put into not just my own hobbies but also into my community.

Pilar: As a person who lives by herself, I get away with not leading a decent life, because I'm not accountable to anybody other than my cat or dog in the house. You can cheat and wear your socks or underwear for a second day. You can get up in the morning and not take a shower. You can leave the dishes in the sink more than one day. You can cheat on a diet. There's a whole bunch of things you can fudge on. But when you make your life public, you're then accountable to your community and the public.

Now I know you, so I have a responsibility to you and your family, now that I've heard your story. What helps me lead a decent life is then taking my story outside of my apartment, outside of my little cloistered life. That's where I at least start to lead a decent life. But I think the other area for me is sharing whatever I have—not just money and food but just sharing—giving directions to somebody when they ask me for them, talking to somebody who looks down and out. Those are just the beginnings for me to lead a decent life.

Nicole: I thought a lot about this also, and I don't think I have an answer. But I thought, "Well, if I can't answer what's a decent life, then what's an indecent life?" I came to

the conclusion that when people don't have choices—a variety of good choices—that becomes indecent. That's unconscionable. That's wrong. I especially think about poverty and the kinds of choices that poverty cuts off. Not just obvious ones like, “I can't afford to go to college,” but also abject poverty around the world. “Do I allow my child to be sold into slavery?” “Do I send my 6-year-old to work at a brick-making plant?” Those are indecent choices that people have.

I'd love for the whole world to be vegetarians, for example, but that's not it. I would love for everybody to have the luxury to decide, or the ability to make a conscious choice and look at all the information and say, “I'm choosing this. I'm choosing this school. I'm choosing this neighborhood. I'm choosing this job. I'm choosing to have another child. I'm choosing to not have another child.” Those are the things to me that make life decent. You can make a really bad choice, but at least it was yours. That's about as far as I could go with it.

Rhian: I think it's interesting because already there are two parts to it. I feel very privileged and very lucky that I am able to live a decent life. I still have a lot to do. But our living a decent life—it's so much based on minimizing the impact we have on other people in the world. But that's where we are and that's who we are. If we take that responsibility, there are definitely choices we can make in our privileged life that will minimize the impact on the world. Then there's the question of anyone in this world having a decent life. We are so aware of so many people—the majority of people in the world—who do not. Of course, I can't speak for them.

I mean a lot of people who we think don't have decent lives probably feel like they do. They have their family, they have their hut. It comes down to respect for whatever that life is and making sure people feel that respect. I was just awestruck in all of the organizing campaigns that I've been in, no matter what working class farm worker—even service workers, nurses working at the hospital—it all comes down—no matter what the issue is—wage, working conditions—it all comes down to “I want respect. I just want respect for what I do and that I come here every day.” It's critical to be able to convey that to people— that they get that respect for their life.

Richard: I looked at the question and I struggled a lot trying to find a way to answer it. A lot of things came to my head. I'm not so sure that I still have an answer for that question of decency. I'm a product of the '60s, '70s, and the '80s of course, and currently, but dealing with a country that was so obsessed with race. To me, race has to play a role in what is decent in acceptance for me. I'm always moved by the fact of certain races here in this country have issues with being loved—self love. I'm grappling with the fact of loving myself and letting others do so, but mostly accepting who I am as a human being or accepting myself. That has a connection to being decent.

I may not be articulating it correctly, but to know your self-worth, know your self-value, I think is the direction of having a decent life. What I stated from the beginning, what I'm trying to say, is that there has been a suppression of having

your own value, at least in my community as I grew up as an African-American—that I'm worthless. Trying to fight that battle will create some decency in my life. I struggled with that question and that's kind of where I am right now.

Rhian: What you're saying, I hear this a lot and I read about this self hatred that happens a lot in the African-American community. It's appalling to think about. Not that that's the only place that happens, but I always struggle with what can we do about that? I mean, do you personally feel that way?

Richard: On any given day.

Rhian: That just blows me away, and it just makes me so sad.

Richard: But, I'm not making anyone else responsible. At this point, I have to make choices for myself to learn to accept who I am and learn to accept myself the same way I want to accept others.

John: When I introduced the title, "Leading a Decent Life," I mentioned that it came up during a conversation as an impassioned plea for something. I wanted to know what the barriers to leading a decent life are. A second recognition was that it was not my issue because I have to acknowledge that the world is very organized for me to have a decent life.

I had very small glimpses of the challenges—religious prejudice growing up, being called "Jew." I knew that was a dis-invitation to being present at that moment. But, they were mostly isolated incidents. That moment of dis-invitation—that's the question of the indecent-ness raised earlier. What are the causes of feeling "I have to work to have a decent life" as opposed to, "I experience the world as orchestrated for me to have a decent life."

James: I have first some negative layers that I have to go through with this word because "decent," "indecent"—the norms of decency. Are you outside those norms? Are you inside? And, there's the sense of oppression around decency. When we moved from Ireland to England, I was 11. We moved into one of those London neighborhoods that has just endless rows of houses with little gardens in front of them. I grew up feeling very oppressed by the standards of suburbia. So decency in terms of some common norm I reject. I don't think that's intended in the way the word is being used here, but I have to tell you I have trouble with the word. Encoded in the problem is part of the solution, too, because I think it's about creativity.

A decent life for me is one that is creatively free, where you're really able to live that which is your own destiny to live. That could be very unusual, strange. It could be living in a box. It could be with an amplitude, so that it's got something to do with not regulating what a decent life is, but rather an inner dynamic of trust in relationship to the creative human spirit and giving play to that, so that it doesn't become systematized as well. You've got that, and that's a bit out of the norm,

therefore you're not decent like the rest of us. There's just some element in there that I want to keep pulling creativity and diversity into it.

Nicole:

There's a distinction I made in my mind about dignity and decency, and that I do believe that anybody and everybody can and should live with dignity, regardless of material possessions, social standing, or those kinds of things. Then I had decency much more in relation to accessing resources and opportunities. But when I hear you say, "I just want to lead a decent life," my take is—I'm tired of struggling. I just want to take some of this struggle for survival off my plate. And, that often means materially.

Then there is the way that we categorize challenges of different classes—follow me on this. Let's take alcoholism, okay? We treat and look at alcoholism among poor people very differently than among wealthy people. Wealthy people are still living a decent life. Nobody would say they're not living a decent life. But the alcoholism could be ruining their family. And in a poor family, alcoholism manifests itself totally differently, and the repercussions are huge in terms of where people are going to live or not live. Same thing with mental illness. Same thing with marital strife. It just looks different.

It totally is, and society reacts to it differently like, "Well, Rich Mr. Jones, he likes his wine." That's code for, "Dude's an alcoholic." He's a drunk, just like the guy on the corner. But when someone's leading a decent life—when I hear that, I think that means materially, and that's different than dignity. That's where I'm going with it, even though I know I said it was access to choices and I do want everybody to have that.

Katrina:

To me, it was less about the material basic needs than it was about how we treat each other. So the thought of leading a decent life is where you care for those around you and try to make things a little bit better for them. And then another thing that I thought of was that—it's a very personal thing, so we all need to be careful not to define that for others, but that it changes during your life and what age you're at. We all play different roles at different times in our lives.

Richard:

I think decency is being able to practice love for each other, in my interpretation. I think we need to be able to practice it without any negative effects of that. I think that would be also decency, but I also understand what you were talking about—money or means or material—and eliminating the struggle appears to be the way of having a decent life.

Pilar:

I feel really emotional on this question because I'm thinking about how I lead a decent life, and how my grandparents were judged because they were poor. People somehow think that you're indecent because how dare you take your poverty out in public? I know how humiliating it was for my grandparents to push me, as a little girl to go charge and sign for groceries at the local store, or to go stand in the soup line to get food for them and bring it back to them, because somehow we were judged that we didn't work hard enough in the fields. Oh my God, did they work hard. So

there was a judgment. It wasn't just about me. I had to think of the times when we were judged for being indecent.

The assumption I'm making is that we're all two degrees of separation here in this room. We all basically are liberals, or we have some similar views maybe in a current sense. I don't know from where we all came from, but in current views of what is a good life—what is good and kind—I think that is one of the interpretations of this question for me. But then not going back too many years, I know what the feeling was of being called or being thought of as indecent, because God forbid you come out of drag and show it in public. American frontier-ism, the individualism thing of being a pioneer—you must not have worked hard enough because you wouldn't be in this soup line then, you know? I have that with me really, really strongly.

Esperanza: This is an issue of race and class. The tragedy happens when families or people internalize those very values so that they feel indecent, and then they begin to act in a way that is consistent with harming others, harming themselves, or doing things that take away from themselves—things that they don't have to do. It becomes self destructive, which comes from a lack of love or a denial of who you are. My family grew up in poverty, and I saw a lot of that. My grandparents struggled for this ideal of decency. They knew how to handle growing food that they needed to eat or feed their family.

They had a framework to live with less money. They still had means, and they had their values, and they had everything they needed. And, we always have, culturally speaking. There was something about bringing those values here to a larger city within the United States. These judgments have somehow affected the next generation in a way that they internalized all of that societal judgment. Even though they were, in a lot of ways already very decent, they changed their behavior in a way that became harmful in order to meet societal pressure for material “decency.” In the city, to raise your own chickens and dig your own potatoes out of the ground became an act of desperation, a shame...indecent.

Priscilla: When I think of indecency, I think more about excess because it's the opposite of what it is that you're talking about—the poor choices that people in poverty are presented with. I'm kind of on the other side. My parents live in Orange County, and I was there for Thanksgiving. My mom likes to take walks around the neighborhood. You see these huge houses, with wide driveways with four car garages. My mom sits there and looks longingly at the house, and that just feels so indecent to me that that's okay, and that it is acceptable, and you can shape people's desires to want that also. That's what feels indecent—just that total excess.

Yolanda: How do you allocate your resources relative to food?

Katrina: I have a budget for the amount of money that I take out of the bank every week for eating out and buying lunch. The grocery shopping money doesn't count in that eating out money. So I try to limit the eating out money. But, then if I make food for myself and bring it, there's no limit on that—within reason—that I can spend on

groceries. That's to trick myself into cooking. That's how I trick myself every week to try to bring my lunch.

Pilar: So where does the eating out come from? The entertainment budget?

Rhian: In our family, besides rent, probably food is the biggest amount. We don't eat out anymore because it's too expensive. But I think it's also because food is so related to health. Being able to buy healthy food and buy fresh food—which, thank God, when I moved to California I could start doing. That's just a big expense. I wouldn't spend \$10 on a shirt, but I'll spend a hundred something dollars a week on food. It's just weird how in your mind how you put value on certain things. I do spend a lot on food.

Nicole: Food policy in the U.S. is intended to artificially deflate the amount of resources we spend per household on food, or what we perceive to be the right amount. Truthfully, if our food policy were in line with what we needed to be sustainable as families and as communities, we would spend closer to 13 or 15 percent of our income on food. Right now, because of food subsidies, and because buying stuff in a box is so much more affordable than going to the farmer's market, that number is very suppressed to about six percent. People in the United States feel like they shouldn't be spending—many people feel like they shouldn't be spending a lot on food when in fact we probably should be spending more on food and less on things that we just take for granted as expensive, like electronics.

We just know that's going to be expensive. Instead, in our own households we really need to up the amount of money we're spending on food. That's a very difficult balance for our family of four. After rent, that is definitely what we spend the most money on, and I have to get over it. When I look at the organic tomatoes versus the farm factory tomatoes—and boy those prices don't even compare—and I still have to reach for the organic tomatoes. I don't make any more money than I did yesterday, but I'm trying to retrain myself and know that it's for the good of my kids especially to teach them this part of nourishing themselves.

Priscilla: I live alone and food, including groceries and going out, is almost ten percent of my budget. Unless I'm with other people, I don't go out to eat. I don't buy lunch or anything, I bring everything. And I eat really, really simply, probably because I'm a terrible cook. I'll have a salad or rice and a vegetable or something, but it's very, very simple. My grocery budget is actually really low because of that. Where I'm spending the most money on food is when I'm going out to eat with other people. And for me, the food really is secondary.

You talked about ritual being more important than the food itself. I would never go out to just buy that meal for myself because I wanted to eat that food. It's really only because I'm spending time with people and that's how we spend time together, and so I'm willing to pay to be able to spend time with my friend or my sister. But it's an interesting question to think about. What is the value of the actual food that

I'm buying, and am I paying what it's worth? I hadn't really thought about that before.

Esperanza: I just did a quick breakdown. There are two budgets I go by. There's the one that's in my head, which I just put down here. It's what I call the farm equation. I'm always thinking about the worth and the cost. But, then there's the budget that I have created with my husband that looks a lot more conservative in terms of its line items, because I don't think he's ready for moving the animal feed into our food category. So right now, I just have a blanket category for outdoor and garden stuff.

If I were to really break it down financially, I would have a category for—well, restaurant goes under entertainment. It's secondary, you know, eating with people. Otherwise we cook. But it would be restaurant, groceries that are bought, then it's plants, it's animal feed, and supplies—like canning supplies and the supplies associated with the animals. I'm not quite sure at what point you start separating that out. Time goes towards cooking, growing, and a lot less shopping. One of the benefits of putting in all the hard work and hours and growing food is that I do less shopping.

My husband shops more. But that takes time. And there's the question of space, storing and the actual space to grow—definitely storing supplies, having a place for the animal feed. Add to that, drying goods or preserving roots. Last winter, the experiment was to try to keep us with fresh produce through the winter. I selected foods that could be put in a cold dark place and to keep really well. That would be how our resources are allocated for food right now.

John: I have just the opposite situation. I couldn't answer the question. And if I did want to answer the question, I wouldn't want to know the answer. I don't want to know partly because it's like saying, "Okay, do we have enough hemoglobin in our blood today?" and "What's our red blood cell count?" Some people have to do that because of their medical condition. For me it's so much a part of the life process that such an analysis is a break in the flow. So, I'm sure I don't spend any more than I make. I have a hard and first rule, which I know is something of a privilege, is that I will not buy food if it means I have to use a credit card to do it.

I also have a very deep commitment to never wasting food. I'm known in my family as the master of leftover recipes. It's about paying attention to what you have and to imagining what it could become.

Willa: It's definitely our second largest expense. The home has lots of related expenses, so I'm putting home in another category. It's interesting when you talked about the issue of how you think about allocating resources. If I allocate resources according to priorities—the amount of time I spend shopping for food, and that we spend eating food, it's actually a fair amount of time. I'm not sure that my family spends as much time as we could eating food together. We do eat together, but they're not always leisurely meals as you mentioned, Richard. That's where it may not be as

consistent with my priorities as it could be if we spent more time eating at a leisurely pace together.

Pilar:

My budget for food—though I'm a single person—is actually really big. I include my cat—my cat's food—and, I include food for the day laborers. There're a few of you here who know about that program I do. That's not on grants from the public, that's out of my own pay. Even if I don't get paid that month, whatever money I have, I always partition a chunk to buy sandwiches or coffee, or even give lunch money away to workers. That's in my budget. The other thing is the recreational part. I do go out to eat a lot, and I don't even need an excuse for that. I really enjoy that. I love doing that. I didn't get the experience of eating out until I was a grown woman, and then I went, “Well, this is really amazing. This is a great feeling. People bring you food to the table and they tell you you look great and how are you.”

I love the experience of it. I don't necessarily like the experience of grocery shopping, but I love being in a grocery store and just taking what I want because it rejects the poverty in my childhood where buying a jar of something, we had to decide if we could afford it? There were some difficult choices in childhood. Do we put gas in the car or eat? Does [Pilar] get food for school for a lunch bag? Then my grandparents would go without food for that day. I mean there were some very distinct choices. So, every time I walk up and down the aisles, it has to be a really nice grocery store. I don't just go to Safeway or anything. I want to enjoy this. I get dressed up. My grandparents used to get dressed up to go to a grocery store because it was such a privilege to leave the farm, to leave the fields, to go to a grocery store that they were respecting that person's business.

I get all dolled up and put on some lipstick and nice shoes. When I get to the store, I want it to look nice. I want to say hi to everybody. I talk to the butcher. I talk to the person over at the deli and, you know, it's like I'm there for two and a half hours and all I've done is buy this little bag of food. But I really enjoy that. So the grocery store shopping is recreation for me. It's proving to myself that I'm not poor. And I am like you, John. I will not and never have in my life charged groceries. It's like groceries or gasoline—there's like basic things that if I get to that level, then I feel like I'm just—it feels really frightening for me. But I unapologetically spend a huge portion of my income on the experience of food, not just eating it, but the experience of it.

Nicole:

When I carved out more money for food, my husband—who is from Boston, Irish Catholic, grew up very poor and, as I said, I grew up working class and he grew up really American poor—had a sense of peace because he knew there was a lot of food in the refrigerator. He organizes the refrigerator and he loves it. Our refrigerator looks beautiful. The living room could be a mess, but open the refrigerator, it's like, “Ah!” He loves to see the leaves of the fresh produce coming out of the crisper.

I realized that it brought him so much psychological security, and he knew that we were providing for our kids because this was not his experience growing up. You did not know what was going to be there when you opened the fridge. Mine was that

way sometimes—it ebbed and flowed—but his was always that way. I resisted the healthy eating thing, until he said, “I’m just going to tell you one story, and then I don’t want to talk about this again. When I was in high school, I was a pretty good football player. My junior year I had to quit football.” I asked, “Why?” He said, “Because, I was too tired by the end of the day to go to practice because I didn’t eat all day.”

And I mean I can barely talk about it, right? Think about your spouse as a child just being like, “I don’t know what I’m going to do. I don’t know when I’m going to eat again. And he said, “I couldn’t play football and I quit. I realized it’s not the worst thing in the world. Whatever. It was football. But I was 15.” And I said, “Okay. I’ll figure this out.” He doesn’t do that with anything else. It’s just food. It’s only about food. We probably live outside our means on food. Sometimes we’ve charged food. I hear what you’re saying, but the psychological benefit of knowing there’s enough—I’ll pay the interest. I’ll figure it out.

Priscilla: For us, we could have definitely ragtag clothes, the car’s broken down, but we always have food. My family would never have said that was a lower priority than something else. At some point when we were growing up, there were seven of us living in a one room apartment, and we ate every day no problem. My grandma cooked. We made sure there was food, and I’ve never gone hungry at all. It’s interesting to contrast that with other stories. I don’t like to waste food either, so I time out perfectly how long this head of lettuce will last me; so I never have any food in my fridge because I’m always eating exactly what I buy. But never could I open a fridge and have nothing in it. That’s really kind of crazy for me to think about.

Yolanda: So why are people starving? Who is starving and how do we live with that?

Esperanza: Are there any distinctions being made here between people going hungry and people starving? Because, a lot of people go hungry here in the U.S., but starvation is something I associate with—I mean here in the U.S. you can dumpster dive and get bread for the night. But starvation is much broader and more desperate—maybe more where people are isolated in a rural community. I don’t associate it as much with the U.S. for some reason.

Nicole: There’s undernourished, malnourished and then starvation. I mean this is just in terms of degrees for international development. In the United States, we have a lot of undernourishment—too much. That’s going hungry. That’s the way my husband grew up. He wasn’t at risk of dying. And then starvation is in places where the price of food far exceeds what people actually make, and you’ve got emaciated children. It’s a huge spectrum. So I actually had that question as well trying to figure out what angle we’re coming at it from.

Pilar: So now that it’s defined, want to answer the question? I’d love to hear your thoughts on it.

Esperanza: This is very complicated for me. In my family—the kids in my family, there were four—at the time I was the third—I am three of six—we went hungry. We were hungry, and we were homeless on and off—a very transient family. Not the generations before, just that generation. I still wrack my brain like, “What happened?” I really don't know. It's really complex. I think the reason I made the connection I did around self-love, a place of belonging, and societal issues, when you start to absorb those and start judging your own behavior by it—you lose accountability. You just lose perspective. And I think that happened a lot in my immediate household where there was just a complete loss of perspective, and, because of it, a loss of place, which manifested in real life.

What leads a family to being in that position is complex. In some ways, looking over the list of how people define—I just tried to jot down a few key words here and there with decency, and I feel like those words—or dignity if you want to have decency and dignity—those words, losing these things is what leads to devastating poverty. It's not all about money, but poverty, when it's internalized, is devastating to communities. I see a lot of that. Starvation I don't understand. I have never experienced or witnessed starvation in this country, so I don't know.

Rhian: When I saw that question, I thought, “I don't know but I'm sure Monsanto and the International Monetary Fund [IMF] have something to do with it.” You read things in *Time*, and sometimes they say it's a distribution problem, sometimes they say it's soil depletion. There are so many issues, and it's all about moving from a rural community to an urban community and losing the ability to grow your own food. Those are some reasons that I imagine cause starvation, but obviously I really don't know for sure.

I don't know why, when we were young and we wouldn't eat everything on our plate, we were made to eat it because it could go to a starving child in China—because how was that going to happen, really? I guess we still haven't figured that out. And now China's doing so much better so it would probably go somewhere else. But the idea of starving—just saying it right now, it reminds me that that was always the threat, even in my household where I never felt threatened about not having food. But that was always in our minds. You have to eat that because somebody else is starving so it's your responsibility. Somehow that was going to make it better. I don't know. So it's very confusing.

Pilar: I went to the Web site of the Alameda County Community Food Bank, and there was a definition of hunger, and it made sense. It was very short and sweet. It just said hunger is the physical and mental state of having no access to available food. How do we live with that? I don't know how we live with it. But I know how I live with knowing there are people starving, who are undernourished or malnourished, is I have to deal with a great amount of denial every single day. That's the only way I could cope with it. So I only speak for myself, because each day I get up as an activist and decide what issue I am going to deal with today. Hunger is pretty immediate, so I go to a restaurant and sometimes just buy a meal, bring it out in a

to-go box and give it away to the human being I see that needs it. But that's the person who's on the street who's in an obvious state of hunger.

There are people that I may not know—friends, colleagues, a mother walking down the street with two kids who may be very hungry because she allowed her kids to eat today and she didn't get to. There are people who are hiding their hunger, too. I use a great amount of denial to deal with the issue on a daily basis. Then at the end of the month when I work with the day laborers, I shake their hand, I get to hear when the last time that they ate was. One of them might say two days ago, one might say three days ago, one might say since yesterday. I give them little sandwiches, and they cut it up into four pieces because they're going to stretch it out over four days. Oh my God. A great amount of denial.

Willa: We have environmental and economic issues that affect many people around the world in terms of not being able to have food where they are. In this country, I think it is multi-dimensional, and I think in our area it's multi-dimensional. Obviously, there are people that just can't, physically or mentally, get themselves to food. And, there are people who through pride or dignity—whatever their own perception of dignity is—can't get themselves to food. I think those are huge issues. At Glide we feed a lot of people, and I know on a daily basis we often have food left. So, why is it that more people don't come, and instead, choose not to eat? I think it's for all those awful reasons of pride, dignity, and access due to disability. But, the bottom line is people shouldn't find themselves in that situation. In terms of what's right in our society and in our world, they shouldn't feel that they have to go without food.

Nicole: I took this question very literally in terms of starvations—in terms of people dying around the world because they don't have nourishment. I've been doing a lot of reading and talking to people on this. The United States has to take responsibility for a huge part in why people are literally dying. If we simply use the grain that we feed our livestock in this country, there's enough grain here to feed the whole world, right? This is the livestock that we turn into McDonald's hamburgers. This is very soap-boxy, so I hear myself and it's not a condemnation. We have to take responsibility for it as a country. Our farming subsidies put excess grain on the market that then puts farmers who knew how to feed themselves and their families in the developing world out of business. That knowledge is lost.

Add drought on top of that—which we're experiencing here. Really, do you think we don't have the technology to get water to people who don't have it? Have you ever seen the Bellagio Hotel (Las Vegas)? It's in the desert and there's a fountain that's ten stories high. You think we don't have the technology to get water where we need it? We have really, really screwed up the economy of food in this world. About two years ago, I saw former President Clinton speak at the Global Philanthropy Forum, and somebody asked him what his biggest regret in policy was. It was a great question, right? It was just this random citizen who said, "What's your greatest regret?" And he said, "Obviously Rwanda. That's one that haunts me. However, domestically—corn syrup."

Everyone's asking, "Corn syrup?" He said, "I was talked into signing into legislation the ability to start using corn syrup instead of sugar because we had these huge silos of corn that were subsidized and rotting. I was told by agri-business that if we didn't turn it into corn syrup, and I didn't change legislation to make that legal to put in food, then we would just have rotting corn. And, I was so wrong." He went on to talk another 20 minutes about type-two diabetes, about the food that the United States is putting on the world market, and that India is now facing an obesity problem among their wealthier populations because of corn syrup.

Because our corn got stuffed into their food, their kids are consuming it. Nobody can digest it, and it's making everybody sick, and it's in everything. And I just thought, "What am I going to do about it?" I think this is the next thing I have to work on. I think food policy and where it intersects with healthcare and energy policy—I think that's where I have to go next in my own activism, my own professional life. We've got to fix this and we in this country have the power to really change it. We caused it. We can fix it.

James: When we were talking about the dinner table and about conviviality around food—Ivan Illich wrote about that, *Tools for Conviviality*—he saw that we were losing something in terms of this capacity to be intimate with each other, and that the dream of progress was pulling us away from being convivial as the fundamental ritual of life. So the pulling away of communities from that dream is now at an evolutionary dead end. We're seeing it like a cliff's edge just approaching us. People are using the word "glocal"—that the world needs to go glocal. It needs to go back to the local, instead, and yet have the global infrastructures that are needed.

Recently at a farm in Tennessee, there was a world gathering around how to finance socially integrated permaculture—which is probably a lot of words for local farms, local sustainable farming, and community restoration. There's something great in terms of our evolutionary learning that tells us, "Go back to the hearth. Go back to the community. Rebuild those dimensions of your lives." Whatever the dream was, it was about materialism and accumulation. So, we permitted all the corporations to take it over because we believed that somehow this was going to take us there. But it's a dream that I think we now need to transform at its roots.

Willa: This is a worldwide issue. There are cultural aspects of this in terms of people's desire, either to find work or for whatever reasons, to be in urban environments. This has serious consequences for access to food. It means an extraordinary cultural change also. It's great for people who have the means to sit and talk about going to live on the farm. That's very romantic. But for many people, that may not be what they want to have in life. It may not be what they want to go back to. So it's a very romantic notion, but I'm not sure it's one that's fully embraced or would be welcome.

Pilar: You didn't hear me say I'm dying to get back in the fields to pick all the food.

Nicole: No, but the farmer's market movement—if we can really bring that to scale, and bring food that is from not far away into the cities, and develop CSAs [Community Supported Agriculture]. If we can just get people who are living in really urban areas a decent grocery store, that would be a good start. Then on top of that, farmer's markets twice a week. I live in Berkeley, so I'm going to be the one to say this. We do it really well and I'm proud of it. It's part of why we live in Berkeley. And it is possible. I don't think everybody has to go back. I don't think turning the clock back—it's obviously not feasible. But we can bring good food to people. We can incentivize farmers and communities to engage in this process.

Esperanza: I have a very different perspective on that particular issue because I have an urban farm, and I see how food can come straight out of my backyard. I believe with the space that I have that's part of my property, I can feed my family. Just knowing the reality of that, to me it's a joy that labor. Well, it's a relationship. It's not so much about turning the clock back, as about honoring who we really are. If you look at the time that we've been living in these densely populated urban areas that are separated from key resources such as food, it's just a blip. We're an agricultural society. As a species we're agricultural. We've been agricultural for so long. We have systems and methods that have made sense for a really long time in order to do that.

The way that we have set up a lot of our cities has been separated from that. It's just not a good system. We need appropriate technology in our cities. I truly believe that urban farming is one of them. Not just bringing food from the local farms but even bringing the farms—integrating them into a lifestyle so you don't have to leave the city. I want to be around my community in order to live a decent life. We need to know how to feed ourselves.

John: I wanted to speak to the farmer's market question because there is an economic and money component to this whole access question that we haven't really spoken about regarding the urban-culture-agriculture relationship. It has a lot to do with the true cost of food. The farmer's market model is good from a social relational standpoint, but it is not a sustainable economic model because it's still market driven. When I come to the marketplace, I'm still a consumer and I'm going to compare prices; when you bring your product I'll buy it. But if you're not there, I'm not going to buy it. So for me, the question is how do we get the reality of the farmer's cost of living, the true cost visible?

I mentioned the CSA model. It's one way of making the true cost visible. The CSA group does the farmer's budget with the farmer. We look at what it costs for a year for them to live—health insurance, retirement fund, cost of seeds, capital improvements—and that's their total budget, which we then divide into the share cost. This means that actually we're not buying food. We are actually contributing to the farmers' livelihood twelve months out of the year, and the happy byproduct is that six or seven months out of that, we're getting food back out of it. If it's a disastrous season, the farmer still can live. The CSA approach doesn't make the farmer depend on the marketplace to make that living happen.

Aside from having the true cost visible, the community is also sharing the risk of the farm and farmers. That's the missing piece to me. If each of us were sharing the risk and cost of somebody **not** eating, I think the whole system would look very different. I'm a lover of local farmer's markets and "buy fresh, buy local," so I didn't mean to say that's not the case. But, it would be even better if we question the assumption of the market economy since food is so central to what we do. When you grow your own food, you're not in a market economy at all. It has a different feel to it. The economic part of agriculture should focus on the human beings that are producing the food rather than on the product as a commodity—this represents a fundamental shift that we haven't made yet.

Pilar: I've asked the day laborers what keeps them from access to food. Here's all their reasons. They're afraid of immigration, of ICE. They don't have the two or three or four bucks that it takes to get on the BART train or the bus. They don't know where they are. They only speak their indigenous language. They don't even speak Spanish some of them, so all materials and directions to the food banks or pantries or soup kitchens aren't in their language. It's just fear. One of the other things is pride—is a sense of being seen in a soup line—was horrifying to them, horrifying. They just felt so ashamed. It's real shame based. They didn't wake up and say, "I'm going to go without food today." Instead it's, "What else am I going to do? The best thing I know how to do is work, so I'm going to go stand on that corner and wait for somebody to offer me work so then I can buy food." I guess that's what I have to say.

Katrina: And the people who are growing our food are not even paid living wages to do that.

Yolanda: That's a perfect segue to the question: How do our economic values and food values influence our community?

Nicole: Our devaluing, especially of migrant farm labor is exemplified in our price of food as well. This is our looking at people as subhuman and the whole argument that they do jobs that Americans won't. The fact is we like our lettuce cheap, and our grapes cheap. Our devaluing of those people is evident in our supermarkets everyday.

Rhian: It's also the small family farmers, a lot of times they don't break even without a second income. Yeah, there's been something so skewed about the history of how we pay for food. On the one hand, you have the family farmers who can't make it. On the other hand, you have the big farmers who get these subsidies paid to do nothing. It's all so out of whack.

Pilar: So how does it influence our community? Well, the community that I'm in of fundraising and philanthropy and non-profit organizations—the way it showed up was when I designed a mailer that went out to 200,000 attorneys in the state of California—and that was only a portion of the list, by the way. I was fundraising for migrant farm worker causes and issues for a non-profit law firm, and many responses came back and said, "There are farm workers? What? What are you

talking about? You mean there are people that still pick our food? Hasn't that been automated?" So yes, yes. So people who are educated don't even know.

That's how invisible—we've created an economy of invisible exploited human beings and labor. People say, "I just go to the store, lady. I didn't even know there're kids out there picking strawberries." And I'm thinking, well, you're eating it on your cheesecake. There're human beings picking that food. "Oh, well then here's 20 bucks. Holy crap. I didn't know that." I am absolutely serious folks. I felt my responsibility was just reintroducing the fact that human beings are involved in the food chain—the process of where our food comes from. While we may all know about that, you'd be shocked the amount of people in this country, educated and not, who don't know how the food gets to the supermarket at all. So that's how it influences our country.

Esperanza: I worked with Urban Sprouts for about a year and a half. They work with middle schools and high schools providing garden-based education. They target schools in low income neighborhoods where there's not a lot of access to fresh healthy food. They actually teach the youth how to plant, grow, harvest and cook the food. The kinds of foods that they grow reflect different cultural diets. And that's immensely beneficial. To create the kind of change that I'm hearing here at this table, requires a fundamental cultural shift.

Food is such a personal cultural thing. One of the things I found working with families and volunteers—is that the assumptions I have about food, I can't put them on other people. How people eat with their families, what they do—it cannot be judged. People do what they do for a reason, and all you can do is start creating the opportunity to shift that thinking and support them if they start changing their mind about certain things.

One of the things I have come upon is exactly what we started with here—it's our stories. By sharing who we are through food, it's an immediate connection that is so unique. I don't think that ritual is secondary. It really does have to do with the basic element of food. By fostering that connection through story is something that we do naturally anyway, but doing it with food creates a desire to want to be more engaged. It creates a community around it.

I think there's a need to use our vacant lots, to use whatever space we have available to us to grow our food. That's going to require respecting farming. Growing your own food, touching the soil, getting your hands dirty is dignified.

John: Why aren't there more urban community gardens? It could really help in a city like Detroit. There are vacant lots, and there's a heck of a lot of unemployed people. They could all be fed if you put a garden on every vacant lot as one organization proposed. People would be occupied, they'd be useful and productive and all the rest. Why isn't that happening? What are the barriers to getting that to happen?

Richard: We want an easier life. We don't want to put in the time. We don't want to put in that kind of energy. It's always somebody else's issue. Why should I go over there and start building a garden? I mean I go to the store every day. And then when I don't have enough money, then I start to complain. I mean that's too much energy. That's too much work. I want to sit and watch television. We see all these images, but we aren't able to do anything.

James: In resonance with what you're saying, it goes back to community for me. There's something in community where you can share your need without being shameful of "I have this need." And at the same time, in the sharing of the need there is this conviviality. There's the joy of working together. I live in Larkspur in an apartment complex, and there are no needs that I share with anybody—the 2000 people that live around me. So how do I build community there? We're getting this evolutionary stress at the moment that's pushing us back towards some sort of need to use those vacant lots. And we can. There's some sense that there's a multiple purpose there. It's not just, "Okay, well, now we've got our food." We've actually refound each other.

We're rebuilding community at the roots out of all of this anonymity and alienation. I know it's complex, but when you addressed the question of our community, you went to another dimension of community. And community is complex.

John: It's not only community that is complex—it is the whole field of media messaging and identity.

Nicole: Michael Pollan, who wrote *Omnivore's Dilemma* and *In Defense of Food*, said one of the greatest farces in American history is that General Mills and Kraft have positioned themselves as populist food, while organic, locally grown stuff is elitist food. How did it happen that the processing, the amount of fossil fuels that are put into getting dehydrated macaroni in a box—that becomes the food of regular people, of working folks? And, that the stuff you actually can grow and is better for you, that you can more easily access is for rich and educated people. What the hell is that?

John: That is connected to what I would call the birth of commercial culture post World War II. One of the strategic aims was to capture and control the market for virtually every aspect of our lives. In 1955, we got McDonalds, Disneyland, the Yellow Rose of Texas, Rosa Parks, and the US Congress authorized all currency to say "In God We Trust," and God knows what else at the same time. All those things started with this great promise for the future—we're going to solve all the world's problems. It turns out those were all part of an agenda to make us more efficient workers and take less time to eat. It costs less to eat so we can work more. I mean if you really think through it, there was nothing more to it than a commercial agenda.

The Art Director's Annual for 1955 said, "It's now the business of advertising to manufacture customers in the comfort of their own homes." Just listen to the language—manufacture customers in the comfort of their own homes. It's all part of

a very big created myth and strategy in which packaged products simply make life more efficient so you could work more. I mean it's maybe an oversimplification, but I think it's part of the same agenda because the ground level assumptions behind that are totally illogical but very profitable. Work and shopping, not food, would be the center of family life.

Rhian: The Slow Food movement is a reaction to that. It is where everything comes together because it's about ritual, it's about having connection to the food, it's about good food and the community and bringing all of those issues together. It is the opposite of the packaged food myth, because the Slow Food movement is reminding us that the time that we want and need is the time together around the table. And, it has been criticized as elitist and for the rich.

John: So, do we have secrets around food like we have secrets around money? I ask that partly because I'm imagining what it is that makes people unable to hear and connect with the fact that somebody's telling them how to be healthy, but they're not connecting the food with their health. One of the resistances to making that connection is that I have my food secrets. And, don't mess with my space around my food secrets. I hadn't really ever thought about it quite in that light. It's also deeply connected with identity.

Pilar: And race. There's racism. I hang on to some things that are unhealthy because I'll be damned if I'm going to let White people tell me what to eat. I'll put it right out there. So one or two items that are unhealthy for me, I will hang onto until a grim death because I don't want anyone telling me what to do to that point. I mean do any of you have that? Or anything you're so righteous about because it belonged to your family or your grandparents did it or used it? I'm curious.

James: There used to be a little ditty we sang when we were children that went something like, "Ahem, ahem. My mother has gone to church. She says I cannot play with you because you're in the muck. It's not because you're mucky. It's not because you're clean. It's because you had the whooping cough and you eat margarine." There was a huge stigma around—to death my mother was saying, "And you eat margarine. Don't believe in the margarine."

Nicole: Mine isn't so much about a racial thing. It's about that I don't want to eat what thin people tell me to eat. I mean really, my food secret is, "Yeah, I get it. You're really healthy. I get it. You just ran a marathon." That's what it is for me. And it makes me want to eat like a birthday cake.

Esperanza: My family is that way. They just came over to my house for Thanksgiving. What they'll do is they'll come to my house and they'll have a meal out of respect and all the ritual, and then they'll go and they'll eat food that I would not eat. I mean it's weird to have it within your own family. They just feel I am elitist about food. And, I can't afford really expensive food. I can't shop at Whole Foods all the time. But it's just my values and approach to food that have created this divide.

Richard: I had an interesting experience at lunch. There's something that I do regularly, and the timing is not necessarily perfect for me today. I make a conscious effort once a year to go on a fast, to not eat, to be in solidarity with those who do not have. I'm blessed with abundance of food in my house, but not finances.

I take time once a year to not eat. It's kind of based on the same principle of the Ramadan, where you try to live in people's shoes who are not able to eat, and the victory of overcoming hunger. And, after you survive that day, or you have that victory, you try to find someone and help them out. I usually go somewhere and donate something to someone, or some time, or some energy, some advice, and sometimes money.

I just found it interesting that we're speaking about food and I'm not eating, and that we have a lunch break and I'm not eating. When I said yes to coming to this event, I didn't even schedule the fact that I was going to do my fast at this time. I just wanted to be true to myself, and that's what I'm doing right now. So I'm a little bit hungry—no, not really. I just thought that was interesting, that everything today is related around food, when I'm making the choice not to eat.

John: I'm still—I don't know how else to describe it, except something is still percolating in me around the notion of food secrets. I wasn't thinking of it in the framework of true confessions. I know, because I work a lot in the realm of money, and conversations, that there are lots of money secrets. There are money secrets, and unearthing them is not such an easy process. Sometimes they're powerfully destructive, and sometimes they're best-kept secrets, actually.

I hadn't until our conversation earlier really thought about food secrets in quite the same way of how deeply on a cellular level we're attached to food, not just from a survival standpoint—I would get that—but how we're attached to it because of what it reflects back to us about our whole lives and our being.

Rhian: Well, if I may share, we had a conversation over lunch about food secrets. Priscilla's secret is —Do you want to say it, and then I'll say why I think it's so interesting? It's a whole other issue around food that we haven't really talked about. I mean, it's in the background a lot, about waste, about food being wasted. You tell us.

Priscilla: I was just telling her that my secret wasn't really so much about when it is that I eat. I'm pretty open about that. It was more about being really conscious of food being wasted, and even thinking in the back of my head, “[This] food at breakfast, where's it going to go? Is it going to get eaten, or are they going to throw it away?”

And then, being the kind of person who would take it home, but wouldn't want to tell anyone because it was like I was taking home the food that no one wanted. I would rather do that than have it go in the trash, but I wouldn't tell anyone. It would be like wrapping it in a napkin and putting it in my purse. Not because I necessarily

want to eat it or I think I should eat it, but that it would be better than letting it be thrown away. It's like a constant thing. We could be in a meeting talking about something completely different, and I'll still think, "I wonder what's going to happen to the food?"

Rhian: I think that's a huge issue about food. I think when we have enough, we worry about wasting it because we know there are people who don't, and that whole issue of how to deal with that. But, we're getting to that later.

Esperanza: I have something that I guess by "secret" it's not so much something I hide, but rather it's like an unspoken experience pertaining to food waste. I've had friends—mind you, both individuals are a little eccentric—they have gone into a restaurant and actually taken what is perfectly fine food off of the plate someone has left behind as "done."

They have taken that food off of the plate to eat for themselves, which I don't think I could bring myself to do—not because I think there's anything wrong with the food, but because the degree of shame I feel—my skin would burn off, I'm sure of it, explode in flames right there. I think it has to do with how I grew up. And also being Latina, I would feel stigmatized. But, they're not Latino. They don't have the same social stigmas.

Willa: I was thinking about how I grew up around food. I was in an environment where you had to finish your plate. At some point as I got a little older I realized, "I'm using my body like a trashcan. If I don't want to eat it or if I am full, then I shouldn't finish it."

So what you teach your kids about what is wasteful, and the right amounts to eat, what to eat, all these things, it's very challenging. I have chosen not require that my daughter finish her plate. But, it's also important that we teach the next generation to be grateful for the food that they have, and not to take that for granted.

Pilar: Women are the ones used as the barometers of need, waste, abundance, scarcity. It's not just beauty values that are set to it, but there's actual judgment that's set on it, instead of finding out, "Is it a health reason? Is it because after you've had five children your body does look different?" There doesn't even have to be a point of how much or how little food you take in. But, that actually would be a whole separate day of conversation, because it is so loaded, and it is so real and so different for women of all ages, and women of different cultures.

Then to hear what the men have to say about it, because then how men relate to women who have not the body image that society or magazines says opens up a whole other thing. Then what gets passed onto our children, our daughters, our sons about food and body image is just huge. That's what I thought about.

Yolanda: How do our cultural and food values influence our community?

Willa: These issues are very challenging, because who is our community, anyway? At Glide, we have a lot of discussions around the issue of socio-economic status and how that plays out in our society. I would say that, especially this year, people have all kinds of perspectives on whether they live in wealth or whether they live in deprivation. And it has nothing to do with whether it's true or not in terms of what's reality. It has more to do with your own mental view of what that means.

We've had people who by many standards would be viewed as wealthy who see themselves as not so. And we have people that aren't so, that view themselves as having much in their lives. From our perspective, food is part of it. And, yes, people need to have those basic needs met.

But at the end of the day, all people have to also have meaning in life. That's not a stair-step function. More people are recognizing that as they've lost money or lost opportunity, they could have done with less. They've realized what's important in life. Many of the people that we serve know what's important in life. For some, it might be food. For others, it might be community or something else. They sit with that reality in a way that for others—that have so many things in their lives, so much stuff, activity, money, and everything else—it's very hard to dig underneath and actually get to what life is really about.

Our economic values of what we feel that we need to have to survive, to live well, definitely have a great influence on community and what community is about, and whether there really is community. Our values about foods, in terms of what food means in our lives and whether it's kind of at that base of the pyramid of needs for us, or whether it's something that we take for granted and abuse, I think also has a dramatic influence on our community.

We have people that come through our line multiple times. Some people eat a lot of food. Sometimes it means they're eating once a day rather than throughout the day, and they're bulking up in that way around food. The fried chicken is good. Certainly, fried chicken day is our biggest day. Food really matters to people. The taste really matters to people. Coming in and having food that actually tastes good, it's very meaningful.

We had our senior lunch this week, 200 or 300 seniors were there. We've got this incredible sense of community. Their experience was of community and of communing around food. Food is right up there with what gets people to really engage and to be feeling a kind of warmth in the belly and generosity of spirit, because it's hard to feel that when you're hungry.

John: There's a set of values that Glide stands for. Is there an association between that mission, that set of values, and feeding people?

Willa: Absolutely, it's completely connected. How do we know that we've done it in a way that's consistent with our values? This issue of dignity is something we talk about a lot. It's really what we try to give people when they're coming in, the sense that

they're entitled to what they get; and that we treat them with respect and with dignity. They experience it. They and we feel that there's a human connection that's made. We also have rules that we expect people to follow around how they treat other people.

People feel that they're treated with respect. They're given good quality food. We care about nutrition. We had a discussion about a transgendered person who was in our line where an issue came up. Our security staff have almost all been in jail or prison, at some point. We spend time getting them to begin to see how to respond to that situation and to embrace all people...and, they really work hard to do it. As an organization, we really try hard to practice our values in everything we do. We don't always do it successfully, but we get it right a lot.

We very much don't view ourselves as a charity, because we view what we get from the work is equally as important as what we're giving. We know there's not such a difference between ourselves and our clients and that many of us could easily be there. And many of my staff—they're our clients. So we really work hard not to create those divisions. We very much are sitting along the same continuum.

Yolanda: Is this a good time to move onto our next question? It seems appropriate right after talking about food lines. How do you decide if you're going to leave something on your plate or not?

Priscilla: I'm totally one of those "eat 'til I'm done." Long ago, when I was a child, my parents completely killed any sense of what full means. My body doesn't sense it anymore. It's only when it hurts that I know I'm done. But it's interesting to think about that on a cultural level.

Katrina: I think a lot of what I eat and how and when I eat it just becomes habit. And so it gets back to the idea of trying to find more mindfulness in appreciating where the food came from, of choosing what sort of food to eat, and then when to stop. That's part of it too.

Rhian: I really had to learn how to stop. As I grew up—my parents were Depression-era parents—you felt guilty if you didn't eat. And, actually, they used to charge us for what we didn't finish. I think they were just trying to teach us the value and that you shouldn't take more than you can eat. So they left out a plate: "And, okay, you owe me 15 cents."

I just would eat because it was there. As I became a young adult, I had to teach myself to stop because I didn't need it. That grows into understanding how much you need. So you take less. But the real truth about me is that I'd much rather have what's on *your* plate; I'm much more interested in trying what you've got. I don't really need that much. I just like to taste everything. But, it took me a while to learn that and not to feel guilty about it. Part of that is understanding, don't take more, so you're not wasting.

- John: There are also cultural messages in whether you finish your food or not. My daughter lives in Mexico, and her husband's family is Mexican. We went to dinner at their house and had a very delicious meal. I cleaned the plate. The next thing I knew the plate was full again. Even how you leave your knife and fork on a plate, that's a message. Different cultures read that very differently.
- Willa: In this country you leave it on your plate to show that you weren't eating the food just because you were hungry.
- Priscilla: In my family, if you ate it all, it wasn't that you liked it so much that she gave you more; it was that they didn't make enough food, and you were still hungry.
- Richard: I'm still toying with the idea of insisting that my children eat their food. The way I was brought up, if we had food on the plate, we had to eat it. We didn't have a choice in the matter. We had to finish the food, because we were always told about other people who were starving. So, I have that makeup in my own head. I always eat the food. If I put it on my plate, I'm going to finish it. And, I try to instill this, right or wrong, in my children right now, because I want them to complete the food that is prepared and on their plates. And I want them to have awareness that there are people who are starving and how fortunate they are. That's my relationship to it right now, but these things can change.
- That some children nowadays say they don't want to eat something is quite different from my upbringing. I know that my parents struggled hard to put food on the plate. And I'm also struggling to put food on my children's plate.
- Katrina: John's comment about the signals with your knife and fork, it made me realize that a lot of judgments can be made about a person's class or cultural background based on how they eat. Growing up I was taught to hold my fork in the left hand and knife in the right. There's a certain way that you're supposed to do it. I was proud when I was little that I could do it the right way. But there are judgments. What do you eat with your hands, and what do you not? And when is that appropriate? So how you eat is also a factor that's different between families and cultures.
- Yolanda: That tidbit reminds me—my mother-in-law has a sense of me as an American, and I think elitist, because my husband's family tend to eat their food with either spoons or tortillas. Because I need a fork and a knife, I'm obviously different. And that difference seems to create a very small rift of class or culture—I'm not sure which—between us.
- Esperanza: In my late-teens, early 20s I had a French boyfriend who was of a very different class and culture, obviously, who would make fun of my family and the way that they ate. I felt really embarrassed that we were just of the lower class, and we touched our food because we ate with tortillas; or we mushed our food together, and they had very controlled table manners.

But on my first date with my now-husband—he's Indian—he ordered rotis (it's basically a tortilla!), and he ate with his hands. I know that. I can do that.

James: There is another dimension to the cooking side of the food. When I was married, my wife always made an amount that felt skimpy—we have three sons. But do you know what? It was usually just right there. And if I cooked, there would always be tons of leftovers. If you're having guests, you always overdo it. I wonder whether that comes from expressing something else in the food. Or, is it cultural? In Ireland and probably in other cultures too, you never know who would drop by. So you'd have to be prepared because you know—to be caught without having enough food for them would be embarrassing.

Pilar: One of the last times I was able to visit with my grandmother and our relatives before she died was about seven years ago. She was 91 or 92 years old. It was in Texas in a border town. We went down the road to visit our zillions of extended family members.

She took me aside. She wanted to remind me of what my duties were as a granddaughter. And she said, “You do remember that every home we go into, when they offer you beans and rice and tortillas, you have to eat. I don't want you behaving all white and American,” and she said—seriously, this is what she said to me—“or turning it down or telling them you're on a diet or some crap like that,” she said.

She said, “You will upset them. These are very, very poor people. They may only have a few tortillas stacked up. So if they offer you a tortilla, you take it.” And she said, “I want you to eat it with enthusiasm, not just eat it,”—and she gave me this little talk, which I so appreciated. I remembered from my childhood what that meant.

Down the road we go, hand in hand. She's this big, and she's bossing me around. We go to my first auntie's house, and then my next cousin's house. One had beans to offer; the next one had coffee and tortillas. We visited easily 12 different homes and ate all the way down the road. I also had to do a chore. Whenever I enter into somebody's home, I interrupt the home so I'm to do a chore. But I'm also to eat whatever they have to offer and not to say, “Oh, I'm so full,” or start complaining about the last 10 homes I was at. I don't have to have lots of beans; I can have a little. But I have to have something they offer.

I'm really grateful for that instruction, actually, because she's—the mixed message for me, the food message for me—not a food secret; the food message for me was, “Take and appreciate whatever a human being has to give you at the next place you're at, or the next place in life.” It continues to serve me in my professional life.

Yolanda: So what does your connectedness or disconnectedness to food look like? And how does it play out for you?

Rhian: I think one of the continuing themes is not our disconnectedness to food as much as a disconnectedness to where the food comes from. That is a big issue, and something that I think a lot of people have ideas about, how we can try to change that.

Willa: The whole thing about fast food, and people eating at their desks at work—all these are areas where we are not taking time to really be connected to what we are experiencing in eating food.

Nicole: Other than my mother, my husband is the single-most influential person to me around the way I eat. He's done a brilliant job. I have to credit him for making sure that our girls feel really connected to their food. He feels it. I'm there in my head but not in my heart. My 9-year-old, who I'm convinced is going to be a food critic, gets her plate, and she smells it. You ever see *Ratatouille*? She's like one of those characters. She can actually name what's in the food! I wish I felt it the way that the three of them do. I'm trying. I'm really trying because intellectually I'm there.

Priscilla: The other recurring theme is not just where the food comes from, but the people who are growing the food. The question brought up about what would it mean if we collectively took responsibility for the risk and for the care of the people who are taking care of the food, is still sticking with me from what was mentioned [the CSA model] earlier. What that looks like and how it works is dramatically different from how we do it now.

John: Just imagine if each of us were taking care of a farmer, farmers, or a small farm. The farmer also needs us to be eaters. Instead of working for themselves competing in a market economy, it would be a community supporting their success. That's economic activity, a seedling of a picture, and a radically different future-oriented picture of the whole economy, in a way.

I have four children, so I've had plenty of time to observe them. Based on that longitudinal study (right?), I can predict by watching the children approach eating something of their behavioral economic future. The one who always separates out the food and saves their favorite food for last, he or she will have the biggest savings account. And the one who eats it all simply because they enjoy it all without discrimination, will they have any savings? There's a lot in the character imprint that children bring with them, that is a predictor of their economic selves later on.

If we decide we're going to impose certain things on them, when each child is inwardly working out her or his own relationship to it, it's a picture of what's already theirs in nascent form versus what they need to get from us as adults—and, not that there's a right or a wrong to it. You could take that around food; you could take that around money; you could take that around class self-perception; you could take that many ways.

Richard: Yeah. It's trying to find that balance —

- James: Ah, the nibbler versus the barracuda.
- John: And the poacher.
- Esperanza: The behavior of my being separated out from my family's eating habits has been from an early age. When I was 12 years old, my mother gave me a lecture about having a separate section in the refrigerator—that I needed to stop. But I liked vegetables, and they ate a lot of things out of cans. I would keep my food very separate from theirs.
- Willa: I still think that if you are talking about food, you also have to talk about the issue of obesity in our society, too—the fact that people are basically not responding to how their body is reacting when they are eating, along with the issue of addressing scarcity through overeating and the sense of what you get from overeating. It's a real issue in our culture, and a huge cost for our society.
- Rhian: But this disconnectedness to food...I deal a lot in the issues of tolerance and diversity. Any community that has a unity day, it's always about the food, getting all the different communities to bring their food. It just strikes me that food is a universal connector.
- Yolanda: With your permission, we're going to move towards some thorny ethical and cultural issues here. If we figured out how to solve world hunger, but it required genetically-modified agriculture, would we abide by this?
- Priscilla: This question is a little loaded, because I think a lot about the causes of hunger. It is not about not having enough food in this world. It's really more about the political will and the policies to create ways for people to grow crops in their communities that are not for export to the U.S. Places that have environmental/weather concerns, either food can be brought there or that we can get water to those places that are experiencing drought, for example. So I guess I'm going to say no to the question. People looking for those kinds of scientific solutions to hunger are looking in the wrong place.
- Nicole: I had a similar reaction. I thought the GMO answer is part lack of political will, and a shortsighted answer around “more, faster” is going to solve the problem. That isn't it. We're just trading one problem for another. It might feed people in the short term. But the ramifications are huge for doing something that drastic. I feel like this would just be a market-driven concept so that companies make big profits but can say, “We solved hunger. Nobody is hungry.” That's just not sustainable, and sustainability and food have to go hand in hand.
- Esperanza: Along those lines, when I initially heard this question, I had a visceral reaction to it and a resounding, “No.” But the other thing about GMOs, when you're actually growing food, is that they're not really biologically viable. You can't grow offspring from those plants and have the same original plant, which seems totally pointless in the food world. You want to be able to keep a cycle of food growing. To me this is

the difference between giving a man a fish, or teaching a man to fish. It's just continuing a problem, perpetuating a cycle.

Richard: Along the same lines, I was thinking in terms of people living in different parts of the world who have a certain kind of diet because of climate and their environment. I'm trying to figure out GMO, since it is food that is basically a standard for everyone, how would that affect the region in which they live?

And, actually, it affects their health, their well-being. There's a certain diet up in the North Pole, and a different one in the South Pole. If you're just constructing genetic foods, what would be the outcome of that?

Pilar: The question is being asked in a way that gives me room to make up my own conditions and terms. It doesn't say that it wouldn't include political perspective; it doesn't say that it would exclude all the other things. I am assuming that it would be part of a complete solution, that it's not the only thing that came along to solve world hunger. Science shouldn't be excluded from the solution of solving any kind of world issue. So that's how I view it. That's probably the simplest way I can put it.

Nicole: So if you just give it as a premise, as a hypothetical premise, science itself isn't what worries me about it. And science should advance a lot of things, a lot of agendas.

Pilar: Wouldn't you expect an ethics committee on it? I would expect all those things. I guess I'm saying I just don't want it to be excluded from a possibility of the total response to hunger.

James: I've done a lot of work in the human rights world. There are people who will die, who will sacrifice themselves, rather than live under what they know is the emergence or the completion of an oppressive system, one that is going to destroy their freedom and destiny. And I think GMO is like that. It is a corporate strategy. When we put the terms "corporate ownership" and "patents" in there—I'm sure many of you know the case of the Canadian farmer who took his case all the way to the Supreme Court in Canada because GMO-patented crops blew onto his property. The corporation came along and said, "You now have our patent growing in your field."

He said, "Well, I didn't ask for your patent." And they said, "Well, a patent is a patent. And we own that." And so that's how I see it. I see the phrase "patent ownership control," control of water, and all of these basic visions for humankind that are like the cheap mortgages that end up creating disaster—homelessness as well as ecological ruin and in the end.

Nicole: I just want to make sure that we understand the point is exactly what you say, that people will become reliant on corporate seeds. You cannot harvest again. You cannot take what you grew and put it back in that earth. And that's the kind of modification that we're literally talking about right now. It's just not sustainable.

- Yolanda: I actually felt the argument you were going to make was about timing—that if it took a generation, for example, of these crops with some faze-out period that you would at least be able to save those people who would be fed at that point in time while you moved towards the more sustainable system.
- James: Look at biofuels. What you put in your car is going to affect what somebody else can put on their table. I'm glad that this is a component of this conversation because these ethical interfaces are complex. There are tradeoffs—the environment versus food is a huge one.
- Esperanza: I was just going to say one thing, which is regarding science. Science has definitely advanced our thinking and has a methodology that has led us to finally accept that global warming is happening. Science is a tool. But the difference is when there is a profit to be made. With GMOs, there's a profit to be made. We heard about that much sooner than we did about all this hoopla around global warming, because it wasn't going to look so great for fossil fuel and our current systems to have to start making changes due to the reality of global warming. So, as a tool, science can be applied for good.
- But it's also telling us that there's a greater context that these modified organisms are let loose in, and that's our environment. And it's—the scientific community is recognizing the environmental impact of this invention. And I think that's to be heeded as well.
- Yolanda: There were many additional ethical issues alluded to that are coming up around this issue. So that's what we want to explore next, the ethical and cultural issues included in this topic relative to economy of need and food access.
- John: The thought I was having around the GMO piece is about the unintended consequences. If we really could look at that from the perspective of years hence—what we failed to do with the atomic bomb, for example—perhaps we might see that nature has more wisdom than we do. When we tinker with or violate those processes, our arrogance comes back to haunt us. So what are the unintended consequences? And, secondarily, what are the accepted unintended consequences, the ones that happen for which we cannot see their immediate effect? So for me, all science aside, the frame of reference is core values. And at the end of the day, you have to stand for those.
- Rhian: We were talking earlier about some stories of hate crimes against immigrants. One of these stories starts out—it's in Virginia—where a lot of day laborers are lined up in the community, as they are in a lot of places. The neighbors were all complaining. So a local church said, “Okay, fine. They can be on our property.” They would stand on the church property. The neighbors still didn't like it because they said, “Oh, they're peeing in the grass.” Well, there was nowhere else. Anyway—it's a way to use that as an excuse to target that population that they're not comfortable with for whatever reason. That community had a whole plan for a hiring hall. They had all these people talking about it and then decided not to do it. It's just an ongoing issue.

Richard: I think in its simplest form it's a lack of compassion and empathy. Then they want to find a way to get rid of it: "I don't want to see it."

Rhian: It's an expression of the denial.

Priscilla: There's constant criminalization of hunger and poverty. But it's an interesting question about why they're not looking to solve any of those problems. They just want to hide it, right? It's just creating more instability for the issue, instead of really thinking about what it means that there are actually hundreds of people here in our city that are lined up that need food and are wanting to work.

Rhian: When people are lined up to get those iPhones are the same people complaining?

Richard: Not at all. That's a good point.

Nicole: The same activities by a different class of people are perceived completely differently. I guess I would want to know, who is really driving this. I take the length of the Glide line as an economic indicator in San Francisco. Right? "Oh, damn. That line is long today. Times are hard." And, maybe there is something to be gained by—I'm not going to make assumptions—hiding that growing line.

Richard: Gained by whom?

Nicole: Well, I don't know. I think the folks who want to deny the economic situation that we're in—tourism is our big industry, right? We want to clean up our streets and stop the panhandlers. And, boy, the Glide line could really remind people how hard things are in San Francisco right now. I don't know that that's what it is. Standing in a line, I'm all about safety first. If there really is something going on, then I think that that needs to be addressed. But, it's what the line represents that makes people afraid.

Pilar: When I look at the question, and I focus in on the cultural issues, I've found out in the past year—and I may have said it in the last conversation—that my parents have had to accept meals from a pantry and a soup line where they are; and then they're facing possible foreclosure because they had gotten one of those—refinancing—mortgages, etc., on their tiny house.

I was back there for a family tragedy last year. So the people that came to my brother's funeral were some of the people that feed my parents from a food place and take them meals and such. I said to my mom and dad—it was extremely important to me. I said, "Is it okay that these people are here, Mom and Dad? How do you feel about that?" And my mom says, "Oh, no, honey; it's okay. They're really nice people."

I felt my heart in my throat—it was really hard for me. It was really hard for me to have these people there because they are not part of our family. I could see the

shame on my father's face. It was very, very hard because it's a reminder of the poverty that they're in.

This one guy is really too perky for me at my brother's funeral. He was like, "Hi. We're really sorry. Oh, you know, we really like your mom. We call her grandma there." I just looked at him—he's going on and on. I finally said, "Thank you. Could you please stop talking now?" And he goes, "Oh, okay." He meant well. He really did. I believe that in my heart of hearts. But he's white. And all the other folks there were white and just had a different sense about what happens in a Catholic church at a mass that's being said for my brother, and the casket is there. It's just not how I'm culturally raised. So there was a lot of shame. It was real hard. It was really hard.

He's saying out loud, "We're the people that bring meals to your parents." And I said, "Okay. I got it. I got it. Okay. Could you stop now, please? Stop talking." It's just real hard. So cultural issues are when the people who feed your family might not be the people that—and I know that they're feeding them white bread and stuff that my mom and dad wouldn't eat. It's a cultural issue.

Knowing how to respond to people in line is so culturally important. I have friends who won't go to Glide with me because they don't want to see the people standing in the food line. And, these are friends of mine. I try not to judge in the moment. And I go, "Well, one day you'll go with me. It's okay." And they go, "Oh Pilar, I just can't do that. I just can't see them." I said, "Well, they're there. Sorry. They're there. You can come." But then I said, "There's no difference between them and me." And they're like, "What?" I said, "There is no difference." I said, "You just don't see my family standing in line because they're doing it in Michigan." They don't say a whole lot after that.

Willa: The whole issue of access to food in poor neighborhoods, including overcharging and credit, is just taking advantage of people. There is total inconsistency in how we price our food, what we encourage and what we don't encourage, and what status is associated with it.

With kids, their peers would rather be eating junk food rather than actually eating regular food. They look down on people that bring in vegetables because it's not cool. The issues of what messages we send to people and what incentives we give people in terms of how they eat is a real economic justice issue in our culture.

Yolanda: You remind me of two instances that happened to me recently. At work, somebody was eating something like Fritos. And she said, "Here I am eating petroleum for lunch. Petrochemicals to grow the corn, and the bag is made out of petroleum as well. Even the paint products on the bag are made out of petroleum. So...I am eating petroleum."

Then I go home for dinner. My daughter goes to her father to ask for her favorite food item—fire Cheetos. And I wonder: Where do you draw the line as a parent?

And how do you teach a child these overlapping layers of health and agriculture and environmental issues?

Nicole: My husband works at Chez Panisse Foundation in the Edible Schoolyard at the King Middle School in Berkeley. He says fire Cheetos are his enemy. Fire Cheetos are a sign of class and racial divide.

Katrina: With that age group though, it's all about trends and what's popular and who has what. The peer pressure around food, especially when you're a teenager, is important, it has a powerful effect.

Nicole: Another thing is also about socioeconomic background and the incentives that we don't give people, what we do and do not allow them to buy with food stamps. You can't buy tobacco or alcohol with them, but you can buy fire Cheetos. You can buy all kinds of crap with food stamps or WIC [Women, Infants, and Children] assistance. There are some policies people are playing with, without being too paternalistic about it, such as double value on your food stamps for whole foods, for fruits, for vegetables, for those kinds of things.

Pilar: But not take away people's right to eat junk food!

Nicole: That's right, exactly. You can make a bad choice, but it's still your choice. But then you can also build in incentives. The real problem is that there are no grocery stores that sell these things in the neighborhoods where people are using their food stamps.

Back to the farmer's market! One of the policies recommended is to be able to use the WIC swipe cards at farmer's markets, and to give them double value if you go there, and making sure that part of that is being able to get people the bus fare to get there and back. The challenge is to figure out what systems are going to incentivize people in low socioeconomic backgrounds to be able to access this kind of food. It is very complicated.

[This segment is about artistic work that is a characteristic part of meetings at RSF. Such an approach provides other avenues of engagement and expression of the themes of the conversation. The assignment was to design a recipe for a decent life. Participants had a choice of approach such as collage, drawing, clay, or any combination. They were also invited to collaborate. The following are some example "read outs" from the exercise—JB]

Nicole: It says, "Preheat your sense of justice at 360 degrees. Do no overheat. Mix the following in a 5'-3" bowl—that's me. One cup sleep, two cups truth, three cups partnership, two cups health, power—just a pinch—lots of love, three cups family. Pour contents into a baking dish as big as you can find. Bake. Chill. Remember to always know what you're eating and serve with a smile."

This is so cheery, isn't it? I'm not usually this cheery. I'm really not. Look at all these colors. So the only thing I want to tell you about is this snail. This is the lunch bag

snail. When we were kids, my mom used to pack us a brown bag lunch. She would always draw a snail, and a sun, and a flower and little grass on it—even in high school. And my sister is a television writer. She has her own production company. It's called “Lunch Bag Snail Productions.”

Rhian: The hand is like the community and the general well-being that is the foundation for a decent life. Then my house, everything I need is in there—not everything I want, but everything I need. Then access to a diverse community, diverse cultures, I think is important. Then flowers, since I have to have flowers or nature. Then out here is something that I don't know what it is or contains, but it's the idea that in life there's something you don't know that you're interested in knowing; you're still searching for knowledge or experience, because otherwise you just get bored.

James: This is nonlinear here, but these two are together. One is have a vision, even if it's a single solitary frail little vision, and be aware of others suffering. And serve, serve, serve, serve, serve. There are multiple forms of collaboration and service. Design, you know, just expressing yourself through service—technology and skillful services of different kinds. This kid is having a hearing aid implant. And celebrate. It's really important to celebrate, even if the harvest is small. Celebrate and be in awe, live in awe.

Richard: I think the recipe would be part humility and compassion, and the willingness to take on your brothers' needs. You need abundance, you need money, so I wrote a check. I just think we should have an awareness of the world. I just saw that as—it says “consciousness,” but having an awareness of the world. I think it would bring some joy, some happiness. So there's a little happy face. I don't know about the connection here, except that I think I just saw that we all should be able to eat.

Priscilla: My recipe for a decent life: Servings is one, but multiply many times over. Preparation time is a lifetime. And nutritional information is that you end up with excellent physical, mental, and emotional health. For ingredients I have self-love, one body and mind's worth; respect for Mother Earth, seven generations worth; compassion, one heart's worth; food, enough; and resources, one community's worth. And in terms of preparation, just mix it together, let it marinate a bit, bake it and share.

Esperanza: I created an actual recipe with a little bit of an informational background. I took the words that I pulled out of our conversation around what is “decent,” and used those as the ingredients: time, accountability, choice, respect, self-love, responsibility, place, belonging, creative freedom, and dignity, dignity, dignity.

The directions are: Place ingredients in one bowl. Use your own hand to mix together. When mixture has reached a balanced appearance, add to a larger bowl of similar ingredients that have been mixed by others. Keep adding smaller bowls to larger. No cooking required. Ingredients may be enjoyed separately or together at any point.

- Willa: Mine is blood, breath, and heart; connecting heart to heart. Good food, shelter, water. That's not a great picture of a dove, but it's meant to say meaning and gratitude for life. Also I've got my lifeline, and the lessons and things that you learn from the things that happen in life that aren't so good sometimes.
- Yolanda: Mine is about starting by being grounded in the natural world. For me that includes a dog. This is about learning at all ages and in many different ways. This is for taking care of yourself and enjoying it. Contemplation. I decided contemplation can be outside the box. And then stick together for the ride.
- John: I took a slightly different approach, which was I decided rather than determining what the recipe was, is to put the tools together. So these are all the different tools—herb shaker, salt shaker, a mixing bowl, fork, rolling pin, and a little toaster, in case you need a toaster. A little mixing spoon, a bowl, grill, and this was, of course, for you—there's the red tortilla...I mean wrap.
- Pilar: I did my recipe for a decent life as a pie chart—no pun intended. Twelve percent of your time should go to kindness to animals. Five percent to volunteering; it does for me. Twenty percent is love, being loved, and loving; five percent is listening; twenty-five percent is to fulfilling sex. (You can tell who's in love right now.) Eight percent goes to voting in elections, two percent to retail therapy. Reading good and great books is five percent. Eighteen percent goes to philanthropy, and that's the feeding of others and caring for the sick. Those are my pie chart combinations to make a decent life. I think it turned out to be 100 percent.
- Yolanda: We thought as our reflections in closing, that we would ask you to reflect on the day. We're particularly interested in hearing what changed for you today, and something you appreciated out of the day—just three key reflections on the day. Here's the really challenging part: What you can say in one breath. Take a deep breath, if you like.
- Richard: It's just awakening for me to listen and hear all these different perspectives on this particular topic. I'm hoping that I've contributed enough of value, but I do have to say that I learned a lot, listened a lot, and really appreciate other perspectives.
- Sometimes I'm in this topsy-turvy world of a musician's struggle, and I don't have a lot of time to reflect on these things because I'm more in tune with trying to make a buck. But, I pride myself on being one who wants to serve humanity. I created this lecture series on jazz history, which is somewhat of a pretense for me to have an opportunity to talk about images of African-Americans, images of my community, images of Americans, because I do a lot abroad.
- This kind of opportunity here grounds me and gives me a little bit of hope. I'm just expressing my gratitude for this. It does help me. It does remind me that I'm doing the right thing by serving, trying to serve, doing my best to serve humanity—without a budget, I might add.

I'd like to wish that what we are doing here today will help those folks who need to eat, so that they can feel the same passion that I have for eating. I learned a lot today that I'm not to take things for granted, especially how we get our food. I'm grateful to all of you.

Priscilla: I appreciate what everyone has brought to this space, both the personal stories, some really emotionally deep and others more funny, as well as really smart observations and experience when it comes to food and global policy, as well as ethical issues.

So having a space that encompasses all of those elements I think is really rare, so I appreciate everyone being able to bring their whole selves, because it involves your mind, and your body, and your heart. That can be hard to do, especially if you don't know each other very well. I think what's changed for me is how to be more mindful of that, and how to respect the people who grow the food, and how the food is grown more.

Willa: I was very impressed by the grace of this event, the flow and ease. I've been in facilitated discussions before that for some reason didn't feel this graceful. This had a lot of grace for me. The depth of the ideas shared is something I'm going to be remembering for a while now, which is great. I love that. Also the openness of the group in sharing personal stories and ideas that are so connected to values.

Rhian: When Pilar invited me to come to this, I was very honored and accepted. But I really thought, "I don't know why she's asking me. This isn't really my issue," which is such a silly thing to say now. Because, clearly it's so connected to everything. So I'm just very, very, very glad to have been here, and to have met all of you.

James: I would like to express my appreciation for the attention to the quality of ritual, which I actually feel. My reflection is we just have somehow or other understood the ritual of conversation, in the sense that it can actually happen, and have meaning, and unfold in a large group of people coming together, some of us not for the first time, but others for the first time. And yet, something in the ritual holds us in that. The common topic of food is a great entree.

Katrina: I appreciated all the lovely food and snacks I had available the whole day. I'm going to be more intentional about sitting down and taking the time to not rush through meals. Thank you all for a wonderful day.

Nicole: I'm grateful to have been reminded and reinforced in my belief that one of the reasons I'm a vegetarian is because I couldn't kill animals, which was a lot of our conversation over lunch. I really appreciate, Esperanza, that we can agree on that fact, come to different conclusions, but agree on the same path. I thought it was pretty cool, because I hadn't really met anybody else who thought about it that way before.

I also am glad to be reminded of the intentionality that we need around food, and that I need to slow down. I can't just intellectually know it, but I have to work on feeling my connection to the origin of the food. Third is a reminder of all the work that needs to be done around policy, which I feel re-inspired to try and figure out where I fit in that regard.

I have been looking around for what's the next thing that I'm going to do, the next issue I want to take on. This is definitely a key component to it, because it encompasses so much. So thank you for the opportunity.

Esperanza: In a year in which we've had food riots in various parts of the world, I'm grateful for the opportunity to become more conscious myself of the whole range of issues around it from the personal out to the collective. So I thank you for that. And I thank you for the wholeness of the conversation, itself a kind of whole food. It was bitter; it was sad; it was joyful. It was integrity to this conversation, so I honor and appreciate that.

John: I am profoundly grateful for the wisdom you each brought today—insights into our culture, cultures, and ways of being about food. I never thought the earthly garden could be so complicated, full of pain and joy, and still be delightful. I loved your recipes—it proves that you can never have too many cooks, or too much broth. Thanks for the gift of the day and your time, which is highly valued and likely needed elsewhere. So this is also an appreciation for those that made it possible for you to participate as well.

Pilar: I had a great day, and it's a culmination of months of our work to just be here. I'm very, very grateful to the people on the team who worked to put this together. It means a lot to me. I am profoundly grateful to you, Willa. Thank you for what you gave me, the statement of what keeps people from food. I had just never thought of it that way. And as I told you during our lunchtime break, was that I went on making a list of all things in my family, that have kept them from food—everything from sexism, to pride, to all the things that we were talking about. I'm profoundly grateful for that.

I'm just very, very happy to see, and hear, and be with all of you. I take away also more inspiration and love when I go see the laborers who are standing on the corner, and give them food. And I'm telling you, I just will take all of your love, and your thinking, and your resourcefulness with me when I see them. I just thank you for that.

Yolanda: I've facilitated many meetings in my life, and this is the only place where we have this lovely guideline about holding each other in kindness throughout the day. I have felt that many times over today. One thing that I find different about the conversations here—and it's definitely true for me here today—is that at the end of the day, I feel that my cup has been filled. So thank you. I think we are done.

