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# FOOD SUMMIT

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Session title: Everyone Eats: Strategies for mitigating stigma

Note Taker: **Nicole Didero**

*Note: \*Based on the flow of the conversation, I mixed the notes a bit to make better sense to re-read (hopefully). Primary questions from the panel were about who the panelists are and what work they do, followed by discussion about what stigma exists in their communities and how to address it. The conversation ended with what motivates the work the panelists do and what their hopes are.*

### Main points of each panelist:

1. Facilitator: Letisha Steele
  - a. Near and dear to Letisha's heart, this topic is the driver for access issues. Food justice is social justice and we need to do what we can as a community to change systems.
2. Speaker 1: Thai Nguyen
  - a. [About Thai] She/her/ji, line of resilient people from South Vietnam (near border of S.Vietnam) through Thai refugee camp.
  - b. [Kaizen work] Is a grassroots BIPOC food access network of mothers, promotoras, farmers, farm workers, undocumented families, neighbors, working on food scarcity, nutrition, and food insecurity. "Kaizen" is a Japanese word for continuous improvement. They are building the ship and flying it at the same time. Major part of their work is decolonizing the food access model.
  - c. [Kaizen Motivation] Started because she happened to volunteer at her kids' school and found a need for food access. They worked with the Food Bank of the Rockies to get food into the cafeteria through the Fresh Food Center. Starting and running a non-profit was so new to her and she figured it out from passion and seeing the need. She didn't see anyone from underrepresented groups initially, and now she works to help lift folks who are coming from the place she did in her communities. Doing it the *right way* is through totally helping (e.g., access to tech, emotional intelligence (e.g., they created a 6-week workshop addressing things like trauma around food, JEDI work)
  - d. [What is their hope] The people in this room that heard their stories. She challenged the room to put it in their 2023 strategies, and let them (the panelists) be the little light for the bonfire of change.
3. Speaker 2: Brad Reubendale
  - a. [About Brad] First came to this work when he experienced homelessness when he lost his job and was discriminated against because of his sexuality. A place like Same Cafe was a space where he could go get some food at his lowest point without discrimination.
  - b. [Same Cafe work] Parent org of Same Cafe (locations in Denver & Toledo). Goal is to help people who are non-white/male/sys access healthy food and be a part

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of the decolonization process using a mutual aid model where everyone can give back (via time, money, resources). Their mission is to create community through health/food access, mission is for everyone. 80% of guests experience active food insecurity through homelessness etc. Trauma informed care to help accommodate and remove as many trauma based issues as possible. Do all they can to remove hierarchy in community systems. The stigma around going to food pantries is really prohibitive for access. Food is the first thing you stop paying for when you people lose their income. They want everyone to recognize the value they bring into the space.

- c. [Major issue of concern/road blocks] Health impacts of food insecurity was something he personally experienced when he was homeless, plus being a part of the LGBTQ community discrimination, the preventative health aspect through food is so important.
  - d. [What is their hope] The overpacked room for this panel gives a lot of hope and the panelists.
4. Speaker 3: Esperanza Saucedo
- a. [About Esperanza] Came to the US when she was 13 from Zacatecas Mexico, her sister is Andrea Saucedo. Got involved with Pueblo-based Project Protect Network with immigrant workers for access to food. Started as a volunteer for vaccinations, her focus is more translating English-Spanish. They are working with other organizations (like with her sister) to provide resources.
  - b. [Project Protect Network work] Originally created for COVID support, but they realized that there is a need for access to resources even outside of pandemic response, especially for food. Also, so many people in her community cannot access federal programs because they are undocumented. The goal is to provide food through delivery at-home which helps mitigate ingrained fear and stigma about accessing food.
  - c. [Major issue of concern/road blocks] Tech has been a really emphasized method of communication/connection, but “word of mouth” has always been the most meaningful/successful for them. Also, a greater focus on the connections between food and health.
  - d. [What motivates her] This work with this org has given her comfort that she as a woman also in the community with kids, with immigrant access challenges herself can also succeed too. Another motivation is that she could identify with those she was helping.
  - e. [What is their hope] They they will get the funding they need to keep going like they have for the past 2 years. As a person in the community - she'd like to see unite more with the community and form a group of people and make decisions together to express their needs. Those expressing now are only those working, and she wants to be a part of the change for her kids too.

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5. Speaker 4: Andrea Saucedo
  - a. Sister of Esperanza, and her mother raised them on WIC. Lives in Avondale, CO.
  - b. She works with the Center for Health Progress to help those working in the fields who do not speak English.
  - c. [Major issue of concern/road blocks] Transportation, language, racism and being able to feel part of the community. When they speak in Spanish, they are treated like they don't deserve the help because they are Mexican. It is something that they never thought would occur to them. The lack of papers and the fear of asking for help are also road blocks. The same happens in Pueblo. Something worse there, because it is so much smaller.
  - d. [What motivates her] Her community. Her goal is to involve Spanish speakers in finding food.
  - e. [What is their hope] That we hear her voice, that she is seen as equal just as the rest of her community with/without papers. More programs, the senior citizens share with her what there used to be (bakery, store) and she just wonders "what happened?". She wants her community to be heard and to grow.

**Key points of panel discussion:**

1. All of these organizations are operating based out of a need they directly observed and personally experienced and they either started the non-profit or responded to someone's ask for them to help.
2. For many, there is already deeply engrained shame around needing help, and when layers around discrimination, economic inequality, representation, and stigma are present, this creates a seriously access barrier.
3. Every person who wants to access a food pantry or food bank should be treated with dignity and respect which all the panelists are working to create at their work. For this group of panelists, there was a particular focus on changing the "charity-based" model to a "all-in, mutual-aid model".
4. There is still a major gap between the food that is donated/distributed and efforts to ensure the food is nutritionally healthy. This includes providing food that doesn't exacerbate people's existing health conditions (e.g., diabetes, food intolerance/allergies).
5. Some more tangible points about key road blocks for this work:
  - a. Transportation is a major physical barrier for nutrition access.
  - b. Language barriers are still an issue in providing food access (Spanish was prominently mentioned, but Thai also works with 12 languages in her community).
  - c. It is essential that the people who need the help inform what help is provided.
  - d. Finding/providing food that people with dietary issues can eat is a major gap in the system of distribution.

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**Question and Answer Summary:**

- Letisha - What stigma does community face when dealing with hunger and accessing nutrition security services?
  - Summary (with specific notes below)
    - There is stigma around any aspect you can think of: race, language, culture, justification of work, why people need hunger/nutrition access...
    - General points about stigma:
      - Stigma stops people from equitable access as a *whole* person. Calling out, naming stigmas is an essential first step.
      - People who are dealing with hunger and nutrition security needs may experience immense shame, fear, reservation, and pride about seeking help. An extremely painful layer to this, is struggling with the above *and* being discriminate against.
      - Communities need more education about stigma.
      - Providing a platform at the food access points where *all* people involved can be welcome and take ownership/pride in the process is important. This helps mitigate the inherent privilege power dynamic in these spaces.
- 1. Esperanza - The community they work with is really reserved/proud and they don't accept help easily. So, helping connect food access via the home was so helpful and impactful because it was a way to get around the fear of showing up for collecting food publicly/being asked for documentation they didn't have (many of their community members can't technically access Federal food programs). The majority of ag workers in Pueblo are seasonal. During the pandemic people lost houses, cars, and the kids were hungry and there was so much tension from battling pride/ego to racism. Related to ego, it is an additionally hard hit to the ego when they hear terrible racists comments like, "immigrants are only here to have kids". Esperanza emphasized that these comments are so untrue and added that immigrants were the only ones working during the pandemic to grow/provide the food people were castigating them for being there for. She says, the government has put this fear on them and created the stigma about access. To remove stigma she thinks we need education with families and everyone involved about stigma. Another one is transport. Without visas, they also don't have access to a car, one time a week maybe. Many are older and don't know how to drive, language is one of the biggest because in Pueblo the reality is that it is rare that someone speaks Spanish.
- 2. Thai - They are working on their canopy of capitalism/abundance. There is so much food and it's not getting into the hands of the people who need it (and for most of them, English is not their first language). The charity model doesn't give people the dignity of eating fresh, healthy food. No one wants crappy canned food. But, also inviting people to come get involved and take ownership about the work is helpful. During the height of the pandemic, they had 18 locations (food access points) bringing food to the community

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(mostly able to walk), even pop up markets, but at the height, there was physical fighting over food. There are 12 languages in the food access work she does. It is so important to let the people who need the work tell them what they want.

3. Brad - Privilege. Though, everyone gets help at Same Cafe in their non-charity model (an all-in a mutual aid model). There is an inherent, dynamic power differential in this space. Always centered around what it means to be a participating member in the community. What does it look like when someone asks for help, how do we reduce the idea of “need help” because we all need help. There is also this issue of battling the problem of people’s food supply being just unhealthy food for them...while they have comorbidities. The food banks also don’t understand the culture nor the language for underserved communities. Also, finding food that people can eat with dietary issues like diabetes.
4. Andrea - It is a place that is a food desert, there is absolutely nothing. The Loaf and Jug was robbed recently, and they wanted to put in a Dollar General but some people in the community see that as a threat, and to buy a gallon of milk it is expensive (\$8), plus so many people don’t have transportation/can’t move. There is so much sadness in their community, the food banks only visit once/month. Her mom who is a senior in Pueblo visited and the food bank would not let her eat because she wasn’t from there. It is such a shame to not feed someone who is needing food, rather judge them for being from somewhere else like Mexico. The closest place to get cheap food or cheap clothes is far away, they just have canned food as an option. She thinks there is a lack of involvement of the Hispanic community.
5. Letisha - Most charity organizations assume that lower income/food apartheid areas don’t want fresh foods/want junk food/fast food.
  - Letisha - What can the community do to get rid of stigma?
    - Summary (with specific notes below)
      - Educating people through programs and volunteering opportunities
      - Educating policy makers and making them accountable for their work
      - Provide options for all dietary needs
      - Training people about food justice, food sovereignty based on what the community members are saying is what they need.
    - a. (Andrea) We are missing more programs that are volunteering like Pueblo Food Project for learning about healthy food. She thinks the food that is getting put on the table being all local and more healthy would be great to create a Hispanic program about/for. Added that what Thai said is about better informing the policy makers, but though that is an issue for farm workers, why not create policy for all people. Project Protect is going to end, and how can it be that they are going to end this programming that is now ending.

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- b. (Brad) Their place has specific food requirements and so they think that would be important to address (so they have to provide accessible \_\_\_-free options for dietary restrictions).
  - c. (Thai) Change needs to happen at a hire policy level, where gatekeepers are not setting boundaries against people doing the work. Eg., work for State funded recently, but there was fine print that you have to be a citizen. The policy level is where it is all at. At Kaizen they launched a local level policy learning opportunity - so talking to people to ignite the little spark to see change happen. They worked with JeffCO FLTI to teach them about civic engagement (which was so surprising that they were just doing this). There is a major disconnect between the people who make the policies not knowing/understanding those who need them. Training people about food justice, food sovereignty based on what the community members are saying is what they need.
- **Community questions:**
    - What are the biggest barriers for their organizations to continue the work they are doing? Funding (for Andrea this is huge, their program is about run out of existing funding), time (for training etc.)
    - Is there a way for organizations in Denver/metro to partner with organizations in rural parts of the state to build more equity? (Thai) they work with Project Protect promotoras/farm workers, and that helps also create food access. Working with farmers - People kept asking “why Florida?” for the video of Kyler Brown talking about selling his potatoes to Florida.