



Diversity Summit Report 2013

This year's APACA Diversity Summit was held on Sunday, October 6, 2013, the first day of the annual planning conference held in Visalia, CA. We had over 125 conference attendees at the event.

Agenda

Food Justice: Issues Impacting Urban & Rural Communities of Color
APA California Chapter Conference
Visalia, California
Sunday, October 6
4:30-6:00 P.M.

ABSTRACT: *How do we ensure that everyone has access to fresh and healthy food options? How do we ensure that those who produce our food face just conditions? These are some of the questions of concern under the larger issue of “food justice”, which seeks to ensure that the benefits and risks of where, what, and how food is grown, produced, transported, distributed, accessed and eaten are shared fairly. It is a challenge that influences both rural and urban communities and disproportionately impacts low-income, minority groups. This panel will address different aspects related to “food justice” including access to fresh food in urban areas and issues faced by food workers. Our speakers’ research backgrounds include urban food deserts and the working conditions faced by farm laborers and restaurant workers. The panel will discuss how planners have addressed these issues and the challenges that they face. Some questions we hope to explore through our discussion include: changes in local level regulations needed to improve working conditions of farm laborers; strategies that have been successful in improving access to healthy food; and difference between a responsible farmer, restaurant or community organization and an irresponsible one.*

Overview – Anna M. Vidal – APA CA Board

Food Justice Discussion:

David Sloane, PhD

Sophia Cheng

Gail Wadsworth

Questions & Answers

Closing – Miroo Desai – APA CA Board

Overview

After a brief welcome, Anna Vidal introduced all the speakers at once before handing it over to Professor David Sloane for his presentation. Professor Sloane presented the alarming increase in the obesity rate from 1997 to 2010 and how diabetes has quickly climbed between 1958 and 2009. His most telling slide was the health inequality in Los Angeles, specifically how much higher the morbidity and mortality rates are in South Los Angeles in comparison with the rest of the City of Los Angeles. He went on to discuss how food insecurity is not only an urban issue, and he displayed a map of the state showing how the entire State is affected. Dr. Sloane presented the disparity between grocery stores in South LA and the rest of the City of Los Angeles. He ended his presentation with this challenge to planners, it is not our job to force people to make healthy choice, but it is our job to give more options for a healthy lifestyle in both how we plan our communities and the options we provide such as supermarkets, farmers markets, community gardens, and allowing gardens in the parkway.

Our second speaker was Sophia Cheng from Restaurant Opportunities Centers (ROC) Los Angeles. We presented a short two and half minute video, Behind the Kitchen Door, which shows the life situations of each restaurant worker as they serve an expensive meal to a couple in a restaurant. She then gave a brief history of ROC, which started in New York City after September 11, 2001. ROC United is an organization that brings attention to and assists restaurant workers by educating them regarding their rights and how to obtain better wages and benefits. Sophia stated that most restaurant workers are immigrants, consider it their career, and many have been working for over 15-20 years in the restaurant industry. With the wages they earn, they are barely able to put food on the table for their families and do not have access or can afford healthcare. ROC Los Angeles have run workplace justice campaigns, do policy research on healthcare access and other benefits, wage theft, and promoting restaurants that provide fair wages and healthcare for their employees. She had a Roc Los Angeles diners guide available for those at the session and there is a National Diners Guide available online. For more information on Restaurant Opportunities Center United see their website: <http://rocunited.org/>

Our final speaker was Gail Wadsworth, the Executive Director of the California Institute for Rural Studies (CIRS). She presented her studies on the farm work in California. Farm workers face a similar fate that urban dwellers of color face; they have limited access to healthy food options, affordable housing and healthcare, and public transit. Gail focused on three issues: 1. where do farm workers live and work? 2. How do we balance farmland preservation with access to affordable housing? 3. How do we create affordable public transit for farm workers? She presented statistics on food insecurity of farm workers. The one statistic that was most telling to me was that an average family spends \$151 a week on food and if a farm worker family were to spend that same amount, it would be 58% of their yearly income. Farm workers annual income is on average \$13,800 a year. Farm workers are traditionally paid low wages and work seasonally. The current law does not require agriculture to pay for overtime, workman compensation, pay for unemployment, follow child labor laws, and only until recently was exempt from paying the minimum wage. She presented her case studies that highlight all the issues farm workers face. Her final thought and takeaway for planners was suggesting the idea of Smart Growth for rural communities. We could begin to incorporate smart growth principles such as affordable housing for farm workers and advocate for public transit that lead from the farm workers housing to local farms.

We opened it for questions to the audience and below are the notes from the questions and answer period. We had a good exchange and everyone left the room pondering food justice and how we can find solutions to these issues in the future.

Question & Answer Notes

Notes taken by Dan Amsden:

For Gail: Do you have information on farm workers and pesticide drift, and the connections between that and cancer in children?

Gail: it is hard data to acquire, but we are trying to gather it – especially for western Coachella Valley. I am hoping to get this data.

David: Who here has a connection to food? We all do!

Riverside planner: mentioned “Rethink Your Drink” campaign. Emphasized the values of drinking water as opposed to sugary drinks. Also mentioned that Riverside County is doing great steps to address all of the issues identified in the presentation. In particular the work related to California Endowment.

David: All planners should stand up for health care and access to food. It’s a planner’s job to change the opportunities for people to make a healthy choice.

Gail: Mentioned that their work is also funded by California Endowment. There have been many successes – most important priority was bus transit. Map was taken to Sunline transit and expanded their route (got funding). Mentioned that environmental justice has become an “access” issue. Drinking water is a challenges when you live in a trailer that does not have potable water

What is the profile for the percentage of the year they are actually working in farming, what about the remainder of the time?

Gail: In California, there are a lot of farm workers that work year round. But, many only work during harvest seasons. In the past there were migrant streams from south of the border. Work in California, then Washington, Idaho, etc. Because it is so hard to move across the border, they are staying and living in California (Coachella Valley, Fresno, Napa Co.). There are more families now than in the past.

David: To Sophia, if I were a restaurant owner and wanted to open a restaurant, how do I do it ethically?

Sophia: look at ROC info

How does being an undocumented farm worker relate to being poor/food poor? Does being undocumented result in worse conditions?

Sophia: we do not track documentation, but have noticed that wage theft occurred across all ethnic realms, but undocumented were probably worse.

Gail: about half of all farm workers are undocumented. Fastest growing group is indigenous Mexican workers (non-Spanish speakers). They have seen that the indigenous group does suffer more than Spanish speakers.

Is there a code of conduct for restaurants?

Sophia: there is an idea that you are going to solicit food from ethical restaurants. Developing full

Have you considered exploring adding your work to broader planning policy work? Can you tie ethical practices to health licenses?

Sophia: other ROC affiliates have tried to link (ADD) People arguing wage issues have not means to argue grievances under existing Federal laws. One option we are looking at is tying the wage issue to health license through legislation.

Can you talk about farm labor housing in terms of quantity and quality?

Gail: It has changed a lot in recent decades. Fewer and fewer workers are “living on the farm.” With increasing regulations, fewer owners were willing to provide housing. Farm workers now need to go to the open market – expensive – few choices. So, you have trailer parks all over Coachella Valley. The law for 12 trailers on one farm has led to the creation of “village” of squalier and unsanitary conditions. There is not enough housing for farm workers.

Are there any sample policy planning documents that have some suggestions, even for affluent communities that have food deserts (gated communities, for example).

David: It’s really the idea of bringing back a community. New development, in particular, continues to separate uses and promote food deserts. Food “swamps”... you are in a swamp of bad food and a desert of good food. Need to have the center of a community (quarter mile radius) both a school and a grocery store.

How do we balance farm land preservation and the development of housing for farm workers?

You can change standards for farm labor housing allowed per acre, and also standards for building code/sanitation?

One of the tools that are emerging for this type of question is Health Impact Assessments. This way, we can see real ratios to inform planning decisions.

Conclusion

We continued with last year’s success by adding Ethics CM credits and had a large attendance. The majority of the seats were filled and people were standing in the back of the room. We will be having a conference call with the Section Membership Inclusion Directors on January 14, 2014, to beginning brainstorming for the 2014 Diversity Summit. We have some ideas and will narrow down the choices for our topic and to begin searching for speakers.

Appendix

A – Welcome & Opening Power Point Presentation

B – David Sloane's Power Point Presentation

C – Sophia Cheng's Prez Presentation

D – Gail Wadsworth PowerPoint Presentation