



Promoting smart, fair food policy for New York

NYC Food Policy Center: Fall Forum on Growing Good Food Jobs

October 17, 2013

Panelist Presentations

Lesley Hirsch, Director of the New York City Labor Market Information Service, CUNY Graduate Center

Ms. Hirsch provided a brief update on and discussion of data used in the NYC Food Policy Center's good food jobs report, "Jobs for a Healthier Diet and a Stronger Economy."

- There are approximately 350,000 unemployed people in New York City and that estimate increased to about half a million when "underemployed" individuals are included.
- The number of restaurants in NYC has grown significantly since 2000
 - Manhattan has experienced the greatest increase in number, but growth is faster in Brooklyn and Queens
 - There has also been huge growth in restaurant employment - almost 250,000 people are employed by this industry.
- Real wages have decreased on average for workers in four food sectors - restaurants, food retail, grocery wholesale and food manufacturing.
 - The sector with the highest wage, currently, is grocery wholesale.
- The overall goal is "up-scaling" existing food jobs.
- The highest employment demand right now is for restaurant food supervisors, a position that is "one step up" from line staff employees
- Employers in the food industry have indicated a demand for their employees to have a myriad of skills and certifications.

Ben Master of Fast Food Forward; **Luis Vasquez**, McDonald's worker representing Fast Food Forward

Mr. Master, Mr. Vasquez and Fast Food Forward work to make fast food jobs good jobs.

Ben Master

- Fast Food Forward (FFF) feels that fast food jobs do not have to be "bad jobs" – they can be good jobs and fast food workers want their jobs to be good.
- Fast food corporations are making such large profits and should start giving their employees benefits and opportunities.

- FFF supports fast workers strikes and works to prevent workers from losing their jobs due to participation in strikes. No workers were fired in the November 2012 strikes, for example. FFF has supported the strikes in April 2013 in NYC and the strikes across the nation in August 2013.
- FFF is fighting for all low-wage sector jobs, not just fast food jobs.
- FFF hopes that its efforts will help to rebuild the middle class in the U.S.

Luis Vasquez

- Mr. Vasquez comes from a Dominican background and lives with his 5 siblings and his single mother.
- His mother currently unemployed and his family relies on public assistance to survive.
- Mr. Vasquez was forced to find any job to bring in some income to support his family.
- He frequently has to choose between food, metro cards (as transportation to or from work), or paying bills.
- He spends his days feeding others but can barely afford to feed himself.
- Bosses only care about customers, not employees
- Mr. Vasquez was scared about losing his job when he recently participated in strikes but had support from his colleagues and FFF.
- He described channeling Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr. and other leaders as inspiration during his participation in strikes and also his work with FFF.
- Mr. Vasquez hopes that his efforts will lead to improvement for others and future generations.

Beatriz Mieses, Training Director at Hot Bread Kitchen

Ms. Mieses describes Hot Bread Kitchen as “the United Nations of bread... the breads are inspired by the nations that these women come from.”

- People come from all over the world with diverse food talents, and Hot Bread Kitchen (HBK) wants to help immigrant women utilize these skills to secure good food jobs.
- The Project Launch program trains women to make artisan bread and compensates these women for their training and time. The program also provides leadership and language training.
- All revenue from the bread sold supports HBK training programs.
- The HBK Incubates kitchen incubator program allows small food producers to grow their enterprise in the kitchen.
 - There are 38 businesses currently participating in the incubator program and 73 have participated over the course of the almost 3 years since HBK’s inception in Harlem.
 - The incubator is not currently at capacity and HBK hopes to increase participation.
- HBK employs largely women from East Harlem.

- There are currently 12 graduates of the HBK Project Launch program.
 - Another benefit of the program is that graduates are then able to support good jobs for other immigrant women.
- HBK uses local ingredients for its products as often as possible, to support local producers.
- To further benefit members of the community, Hot Bread Kitchen has implemented a “pay what you can” policy - after 2:00 pm you can buy two pieces of bread for whatever you can pay.

Diana Robinson, Campaign and Education Coordinator for the Food Chain Workers Alliance
Ms. Robinson and the Food Chain Workers Alliance endeavor to improve conditions for workers all along the food chain.

- Recently, there has been a huge interest in food issues. Missing from the discussion, though were issues faced by food workers, and this is why the Food Chain Workers Alliance (FCWA) was founded.
- The FCWA currently has 21 member organizations that represent approximately 280,000 workers.
- 2012, the FCWA published a report called “The Hands that Feed Us” that described both the challenges and opportunities that face food workers along the food chain.
 - There are about 20 million food workers in U.S. and 86% were low-income workers living in or just above poverty.
- What needs to happen to create good food jobs?
 - Workers must have *actual* paid sick days – currently, “shift-swapping” is considered a paid sick day.
 - The minimum wage must be raised and should include all food workers.
 - Six million workers would be lifted out of poverty if minimum wage was \$10.10, a number proposed by Congress in recent legislation.
 - The Los Angeles Food Policy Council has proposed and is in the process of implementing Good Food Purchasing Guidelines for Food Service Institutions. These guidelines have the potential to be implemented more broadly in other cities and areas.
 - The NYC Food Retail Expansion to Support Health (FRESH) was created to help establish and retain grocery stores in underserved neighborhoods, providing better food options and jobs for these neighborhoods.
 - Focus on the Food Chain is a worker-lead organization launched by Brandworks, with the aim of increasing transparency in which food companies are applying for subsidized loans backed by Goldman Sachs. Some of these food companies practice workplace discrimination, steal worker wages and violate health and safety laws. Increased transparency could help loans up in the hands of companies that provide better food jobs.

Nicholas Freudenberg, Distinguished Professor of Public Health, CUNY School of Public Health and Hunter College; Faculty Director, New York City Food Policy Center at Hunter College

Dr. Freudenberg summarized the recommendations presented in the NYC Food Policy Center's recently released good food jobs report, "Jobs for a Healthier Diet and a Stronger Economy."

- The NYC Food Policy Center recommends that 10,000 good food jobs be added to the NYC economy by 2020.
- The Center has put forth six recommendations that could potentially add approximately 1,000 jobs each and Encourage people to start thinking about strategies for good food jobs:
 - Enroll more children in NYC School Food Programs (breakfast and lunch).
 - Create the NYC Healthy Food Truck and Street Vendors Project to help entrepreneurs prepare and sell healthy, affordable street food.
 - The proposed program is based on the notions and experience of the NYC Green Cart program (Department of Health and Mental Hygiene).
 - Build new food processing plants to process regionally grown food. This is a promising sector because of the higher wages associated with food processing jobs.
 - Create social enterprise organizations to produce and distribute institutional food for NYC – for example a "Fresh Direct"-type enterprise for the low-income and the underserved.
 - Provide additional training and compensation to home health aides so they may become healthy food shoppers and cooks for people with diet-related diseases.
 - Enroll an additional 250,000 NYC residents in the NYC SNAP program.

Questions for Panelists and Discussion

What ideas have you had about how to combine fight for better jobs and fight for better food?

- Beatriz Mieses: Provide food workers with the best possible training and provide them with leadership skills to make them knowledgeable and competitive in the food sector.
- Diana Robinson: Support successful pilots such as "Eat Ups," where people meet up to discuss food justice issues and think together about how to address these issues.
- Lesley Hirsch: Incubate more businesses like Hot Bread Kitchen, or replicate opportunities like Smorgasburg or Red Hook market, where people can start their food businesses in NYC with minimal overhead.
- Lesley Hirsch: Support current and encourage potential High Road Restaurants – establishments with exemplary workplace practices and working conditions. Additionally, working to certify farms as "organic" could help bring about better food and also better business practices.

- Nick Freudenberg: Corporate Accountability International would potentially want to have dialog with Fast Food Forward about what makes a responsible company. A responsible company is one that not only serves healthier food (good food) but also treats their employees justly (good jobs).
- Diana Robinson: Brandworkers continuing to push for transparency in food company financing using public funds.
- Nick Freudenberg: Provide funding for food laboratories, and also use existing university research resources and researchers in NYC, to develop hyper-palatable food that is healthy. This has the potential to create new high-tech, production jobs.
- Janet Poppendieck: Moving toward universal free school meals can not only help remove the stigma associated with free school meals but can help create additional school food jobs.
 - Lunch for Learning campaign just launched and will help NYC reach the goal of free and health meals for all public school students.

What recommendations for working with existing food industry: make capacity and efficiency improvements in existing warehouse and infrastructure.

- Nick Freudenberg: NYC and the surrounding region lacks capacity to make new manufacturing plants in some cases largely because of space issues, but processing for local foods like apples may have best chance of surviving. (To Audience Member) What are the infrastructure “starting points”?
- Audience member response:
 - Food safety during processing is paramount and part of achieving this is integrating better technology into existing food distribution infrastructure.
 - Above changes will require training and therefore better compensation for workers (better jobs).
 - “NYC is a world class food city for consumers but not further down the chain.”

What is has been the response of the business community to the good food jobs report recommendations and other organizations’ recommendations?

- Leslie Hirsch: The High Road program has had success working with restaurant employers to provide better benefits to food workers. The restaurant association has not reacted positively to unionizing and paid sick days, though.
- Nick Freudenberg: A “bridge” between individuals in the health sector, business sector and food sector has yet to be found. One of the NYC Food Policy Center’s goals is convening different constituencies and stakeholders around food jobs issues.

How do the panelists/organizations foresee facilitating access to capital for engaging community residents?

- Nick Freudenberg: Increasing focus on public and public-private partnerships and utilizing the new administration to our advantage will help make the greatest social impact.
- Lesley Hirsch: There needs to be more transparency –for example, a business disclosure act that makes publicly available the number many loan applications from African Americans and Hispanics that are turned down.
- Beatriz Miseses: Provide workshops and other resources to businesses that can help increase financial health – the Hot Bread Kitchen, for example has a financial advisor on staff. Also cultivate financial literacy, like HBK does for women participating in their program.

Audience member comment: There is currently a shift of focus from “foodies” to food justice in food discussions – the panelists and their respective organizations should use this shift in perspective to their advantage. The organizations should build a stronger food justice campaign with even briefer and sharper points to bring to communities in a combination of broad-based and focused grassroots efforts.

Closing Responses to Audience Questions and Remarks from Panelists

- Ben Master, Fast Food Forward: FFF and fast food employees need allies, because the fight for justice is difficult. FFF needs support from community members, especially members willing to come to fast food restaurants and demonstrate their support.
- Beatriz Miseses, Hot Bread Kitchen: There are sometimes criticisms from small businesses about raising employee standards because of costs. Consumers should research which food companies provide fair compensation for their workers and spend their money at these companies, where their dollars will make the most impact. Whole Foods, for example, does not pay any of their employees less than \$10 an hour.
- Diana: If the minimum wage for all food workers was increased to \$10.10, this would only cost each American approximately 10 cents a day.
- Lesley: The data included in the good food jobs report did not necessarily include undocumented residents, as a Social Security Number was required in order to be recorded in the data set, though this population is certainly present in the food jobs sector. It is possible to utilize existing infrastructure to improve jobs – repurposing existing manufacturing buildings as low-cost spaces for manufacturing jobs can help create new jobs in this sector. It should be noted, also, that, in the aggregate, raising the minimum wage and providing employee benefits does not affect the economy in a negative way.
- Nicholas Freudenberg: There is potential in the deployment of healthy food carts throughout the city, especially in tourist destinations that will be lucrative for food vendors. This could be an opportunity to “brand” a healthy food that New York City known for and also create more good food jobs. Additionally, there must be more robust *public* food sectors, like in Brazil, for example – private markets are not going to solve our foods problems.