

FOOD JUSTICE POLICY AND THE UNESCO CITY OF GASTRONOMY:  
HOW THE DESIGNATION CAN LAY A POSITIVE FOUNDATION FOR THE  
FUTURE OF THE FOOD SYSTEM OF TUCSON, ARIZONA

By

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**Abstract**

This thesis aims to understand the present food situation in Tucson, AZ and the implications for the city's December 2015 UNESCO International City of Gastronomy designation. Through qualitative research and feminist methodologies, this thesis raises the voices of leaders within the Tucson food system to gain deeper insight into how to work towards a more socially just food system, and why this is important. In the hope that this thesis can be used as an advocacy tool for policy-makers and grassroots leadership, the topics addressed cover food justice and security through representation for the underrepresented, culturally significant food access, and long-term solutions. By understanding how the local government has made space for the designation, this thesis provides ideas that the local government should encompass in order to move forward in allowing the designation to positively impact the Tucson food system and the groups it currently inequitably affects.

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This study examines the culmination of desired impacts for the City of Tucson food policy and wellbeing of its food system after being designated as an UNESCO International City of Gastronomy. Tucson, Arizona received this designation in December 2015. One year is not enough time for quantitative or qualitative research on policy change that has already occurred; instead, this study aims to examine the goals of representatives of the present food system and communities that comprise Tucson in order to recognize the need for representation, culturally significant food access, and long-term solutions to inform policy. The subjects for this study were chosen based on the work they do for the City of Tucson. There are two types of research subjects: community organization representative and policy-maker or government employee. The latter's voice often informs the questions posed by the former due to their position in local government, showing the importance of gathering stories from both. These two categories were chosen to ensure varied perspectives on the present food system and the possibilities for policy change. This study serves as a platform to give voice to these subjects and the communities they represent.

All of the community organization representatives work within the food system, on varying but related issues, and this is why they were selected as a subject. The positions they hold, experience they have gained, and expertise they share gives them agency to speak on issues of food justice and insecurity in Tucson. In the Tucson food community, many people wear numerous "hats," as explained by Debbie Weingarten in an interview. "We joke around all the time like, 'okay what meeting are we at?' 'What hat am I wearing right now? [We] gather multiple times a month for [different] organizations, and that's pretty common I think in this community.'" This offers the subjects' ability to represent a lot of perspectives within the community, bring various areas of expertise to the discussion, and speak with real agency on

these issues. The interviewees in this study are listed below, along with their title and/or organizations that they represent that are relevant to this study:

- Mayor Jonathan Rothschild, Mayor for the City of Tucson and first contact for the International City of Gastronomy designation
- Jonathan B. Mabry, Ph.D., Coordinator for Tucson UNESCO Creative City, USA, Planning & Development Services for City of Tucson
- Roxanne Garcia, Co-Director Heirloom Farmers Markets
- Claudio Rodriguez, Farm to Child program at Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona, Tierra y Libertad Organization
- Cie'na Schlaefli, Assistant Farm Manager San Xavier Cooperative Association Farm, member of Leadership Council for Pima County Food Alliance, treasurer of Farm Education Resource Network, member of City of Tucson Commission for Food Security, Heritage, & Economy, previously worked at Community Food Bank
- Debbie Weingarten, Former co-owner of Sleeping Frog Farms, has worked in food system & food production in Tucson for last decade, previously worked at Community Food Bank, current writer for Edible Baja Arizona, member of Leadership Council for Pima County Food Alliance, co-founder and board president of Farm Education Resource Network, member of City of Tucson Commission for Food Security, Heritage, & Economy, writing partner for Female Farmer Project
- Julie Ramon-Pierson, Board President of San Xavier Allottees Association Inc., San Xavier Cooperative Farm Board member

- Robert Ojeda, Chief Program Officer at the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona and Chair of the Mayor's Commission on Food Security, Heritage, and the Economy
- Katrina Martinez, Nutrition and Food Security Coordinator for International Rescue Committee

## **Methodology**

Extensive interviews, literature review, and participation and ethnographic observation were the research methods used for this study between September 2016 and May 2017. The majority of this thesis focuses on analysis of qualitative research conducted for this study, done through in-depth interviews. Because this study focuses on political action that has not been taken yet and is written to give space and voice to the subjects in the realm of food justice, qualitative research was the most effective way to gather relevant information.

The subjects were recruited either in person or via email. The principle investigator (PI) attended various events that centered on food justice issues in the City of Tucson, both for personal desire and ethnographic observation purposes. This allowed the PI to assess relevance of the subjects' expertise before asking them to be a part of the study. Due to the interconnectedness of the Tucson food system and the community built around it, this form of research allowed for snowball sampling, which is defined as "when the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants" (Noy 2008: 330). This event occurred throughout this study and allowed for valid and relevant connections to be made. Snowball sampling is effective because it allows the examination of a topic through "organic social networks," (Noy 2008: 340). The connectedness of the Tucson food system is an

example of an organic social network because of the shared representation in many food organizations by the people who make up the network.

The PI also took part in participant and ethnographic observation through attendance at relevant community events, informal conversations with informed people, and personal study. The PI gained agency to speak about topics in food justice because of her positions in the field – she manages a community garden through the University of Arizona, working closely with a population within a food desert. She also works with Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits at a farmers market that reaches thousands of community members each month. Experience with this governmental program gives the PI increased authority to understand poverty in Tucson because of her consistent interactions with community members utilizing food stamps. These positions along with the PI's personal passion for working within food justice issues in Tucson has led her to be interested in conducting this study, to search for ways to allow the ethnographic research to guide subsequent interviews, and to allow the voices of the interviewees to be heard through the use of excerpts from the interviews using their exact words. Feminist research methodologies, while numerous and varied, generally aim to lessen hierarchies between ethnographer and interviewees and to increase the visibility of their interviewees by highlighting their perceptions in the study write-up (Buechler 2016). Honest ethnography is the basis of feminist research methodology and works to level inequalities. Feminist researchers using feminist research methodologies usually strive in some way to bring about social justice; as feminist geographers Carte and Torres have argued, “feminist research in geography seeks to include voices that are marginalized in society and research, and by doing so, it strives to uncover uneven geographies of power” (2014: 1270).

The background knowledge of and genuine interest in the subject matter of the study also enabled the PI to engage in the interviews with the subjects in the form of a conversation rather than a question-answer period, which lessened any hierarchical tendencies between researcher and research subjects. With familiar context, there was less need to “break the ice” with each interviewee; instead the PI was able to ask questions based on experiential knowledge.

## **Introduction**

In December of 2015, the City of Tucson was designated as an International City of Gastronomy, joining 115 other cities in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN). UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization with the motto of “Building peace in the minds of men and women.” Their mission is to establish connections between countries through collaboration and shared valued of education, science, culture, and communication (“Introducing UNESCO”). These cooperative ideals are shared in the mission of the UCCN, established in 2004, which connects cities by, “placing creativity and cultural industries at the heart of their development plans at the local level and cooperating actively at the international level,” and furthering shared goals for sustainable urban development. The different creative designations that cities worldwide can receive are gastronomy, media arts, craft and folk arts, film, design, literature, and music. Cities can become one of these international cities through an application process that outlines the various features embedded in the city’s culture, history, and present systems that are deserving of an international designation. By applying, each city is showing commitment to working in collaboration with other cities globally to share best practices and promote local growth – think globally, act locally. Implementation of projects in result of a designation is expected to involve partnerships



between the public and private sectors with civil society. Truly the essence of this program is to promote sustainable development through local leadership that focuses on culture and knowledge, working to advance innovation and collaboration at all levels (“What is the Creative Cities Network?”).

Gastronomy is the relationship between food and culture. Before receiving this designation in 2015, the City of Tucson had applied for it once before. Mayor Rothschild describes when Jonathan Mabry came to him and asked if he would be on board to apply for such a designation, and the Mayor gave his consent. In the first application process, Tucson’s case was very impressive, but Tucson was rejected because it did not have a food commission in place in local government. Due to this, the city assembled the Mayor’s Commission on Food Security, Heritage, and the Economy, made up of leaders from the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona, Local First Arizona, San Xavier Cooperative Farm, the University of Arizona, Pima County Health Department, and other food organization leaders, along with owners and representatives from local eateries (Rothschild). This addition allowed the presentation of the designation in December 2015, establishing Tucson, Arizona as the first International City of Gastronomy in the United States of America.

### **Research Site: Tucson**

Tucson is incredibly representative of food culture, exhibiting a diverse mix of cultures and cuisines. Tucson has 4000 years of agricultural history, which is longer than that of any other city in North America. This agriculture is tied to indigenous crops grown by the Hohokam people, then the Tohono O’odham people, and is present throughout the region in native beans, squash, melons, corn, and other heritage foods. Tucson sits in the Sonoran Desert, which is rich in desert harvested fruits and historical cultural traditions to the Sonoran region, incorporating

years of Mexican heritage that shaped not only the food, but the city as well. The region includes the Borderlands, with wildlife that is not found in any other region – this in congruence with the unique flora and fauna found in the Sonoran Desert distinguishes Tucson and Southern Arizona from all other cities in the USA. A city and cuisine shaped by influences from Native American, Northern Mexican, Mission-era Mediterranean, and American Ranch-Style Cowboy culture demands attention – but the cuisine is not the only reason for the designation. UCCN relies on innovation and collaboration – the Tucson food system encompasses a lot of the UNESCO mission in local work. There are numerous organizations in Tucson and in the surrounding region working on issues of food insecurity, food justice, sustainable agriculture and development, nutrition, and economic development. These groups work for equity, education, and empowerment, but more importantly, they work together in an interconnected system to continue to strengthen the food system. But their work is not complete.

Tucson still faces high amounts of poverty and hunger, as well as high rates of diet related health problems, like diabetes. The 2011 census by the US Census Bureau estimated that around 25.3% of the Tucson population is in poverty (*QuickFacts*). The *Map the Meal Gap* program maps food insecurity across the country, and the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona uses this as a trusted source for measurement. They estimate that 15.4% of the population of Pima County are food insecure, meaning they do not know where their next meal is coming from. Often, some of the most food insecure people are children and the elderly (“Map the Meal Gap”). While it is easy to focus on the good, this project urges readers to recognize the issues still being faced by many Tucsonans in the food system in order to work towards reconciliation and innovative strategies for moving forward. By recognizing that there is work still to be done, the gastronomy designation can serve as a tool to better the Tucson community.

The first step in achieving this is hearing the stories of people working in these issues and listening to workable goals to establish real, positive, impactful, and lasting change.

It is important to understand the difference between food security work and food justice work. It is best explained by the Chief Program Officer at the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona, Robert Ojeda, who has worked on both of these issues throughout his career in Tucson. Food justice can look different for each city depending on the problems that are present in the community. For instance, for the city of Parma, Italy, another International City of Gastronomy and one of Tucson's "sister cities" for this designation, food justice takes form in reducing childhood obesity and increasing fitness, while in Tucson it looks different. From the perspective of the Community Food Bank, here is the difference between food security and food justice:

When the food bank addresses food insecurity...this year we're bringing 20 million pounds of produce that is going to be distributed to folks, we're doing food production education in many, many different contexts, all those things allow for families to have more stability when it comes to the food that's coming in...To me food justice is more about what's at the core at the problem of hunger, and what we are doing about that. That's one, so if it is living wages, you know, how are we supporting the finances of the families that we are building relationships with, building opportunities for them. The other is that we have a choice as people that do charity work and as people that do community development work or community organizing work that we either inform what's happening, we inform our clients, our partners...or that we collaborate and partner, or ideally that...the folks make decisions for themselves, they sit at the

table where the decisions are made, that we as partners recognize that there's tremendous opportunity and talent in these communities, that they're capable of coming up with innovative ways of addressing these issues, that we support that. We often have to make those choices as practitioners, how often do we choose to just inform, coming in as experts, and how often do we choose to truly, truly transform (Ojeda).

It is truly the difference between immediate food relief for the people who need it versus uncovering the systems of oppression that make hunger a systematic problem. This definition informs the focus of this project.

With this international designation, the city of Tucson faces a future of challenging but meaningful work to strengthen the food system and carry out the goals that UNESCO has implied through this title. Ultimately, this project serves to give voice to the people with real agency to speak on the issues spanning across food insecurity, food justice, racial injustice in the context of food, local agriculture, and the intersections within the food system; with this combination of vital knowledge, it is the hope that this culmination can be used as an advocacy tool. By giving space for these stories to be told, the PI has identified salient topics within these discussions that must be addressed in order move forward in support of active groundwork around food and in the wake of the gastronomy designation. It is through these stories that the Tucson community members doing this work can hopefully look to find guidance and goals to strive for when approaching the utilization of the designated title "City of Gastronomy" in finding support to strengthen the food system. Through interviews and ethnographic observation, this project seeks answers to address the future of food policy in the City of Tucson after receiving the 2015 designation from UNESCO as an International City of Gastronomy, problems

associated with a designation like this and its process, and how the designation can lay a foundation for positive impacts through community efforts.

“Food is power,” and it is at the very core of every community (Rodriguez). A common diagnosis that Claudio Rodriguez, of the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona and Tierra y Libertad Organization (TYLO), makes is in order to understand a lot of the crime committed by youth in his “hood,” the term Rodriguez uses fondly to describe his neighborhood and community in southern Tucson. The story goes that when a kid is approached that just robbed a convenience store and is asked, “why did you do it?” his story will always return to food, that he did not have anything to eat for the day and he wanted to feed his younger brother, so maybe if he could just steal this box of cereal today his family would eat. Rodriguez speaks as a person of color who outlines the injustice he has been subject to within the context of food and outside of it as well. He speaks about the reasons Tucson faces food insecurity, “food insecurity happens because of the economic stress that we’re in. The world is designed this way because it comes down to money. If they see our community as not valuable, they’re not going to feed us good food – they’re going to fill us up with liquor.” Food deserts, an area of low-income and low-access to food due to large distance from residence to food vendors, cover many areas of Tucson including the University of Arizona campus, several pockets along the I-10, then spanning south into Tohono O’odham Nation Reservation (Tong et al). A common characteristic of food deserts is the increasing amount of liquor stores in neighborhoods that begin with no grocery stores, and therefore have limited food access. This story helps to shape the importance of approaching the food system and its issues with a systematic lens – understanding the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and age with food allows for deeper understanding of the problems that exist in the food system, further outlined in this paper. As the discussion begins, Cie’na Schlaefli, assistant

manager of the San Xavier Co-op Farm, provides insight how to make space for the designation to give support to food justice in Tucson, “keep these conversations at the forefront and maintain the nonprofit perspective of [food] insecurity.”

## **Findings, Analysis, and Discussion:**

### **Representation of the underrepresented**

*“Support the community in what they want to see. Listen to them.” –Claudio Rodriguez*

The leaders of the food community in Tucson agree that one major step in progressive change within the food system is to identify and empower leaders by inviting groups to the table that are not currently represented. These groups are composed of varying race, cultural identity, gender, and age. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 25.3% of Tucsonans are in poverty and that the Hispanic or Latino population of Tucson is over 40% (*QuickFacts*). These are some of the minorities that are most impacted by food insecurity, as described by the subjects of this study. More than that, however, a lot of these minority populations share a culture whose traditions compose much of why the city of Tucson received the gastronomy designation. This is acknowledged in the 2015 application to UNESCO through description of Tucson’s unique cuisine:

These heritage foods are representative of many living traditions that thrive today, and are perceived as a source of identity and vitality for the people who live here.

Tucson cuisine blends the influences of Native American, Northern Mexican or Sonoran, Mission-era Mediterranean, and American Ranch-Style Cowboy food traditions, among others. Key ingredients of this unique blend of cuisines include native desert plants and animals not found in other regional cuisines. Most

importantly, Tucson food traditions retain ancient food preparation practices and cooking techniques unique to the southwestern North America, as part of our intangible heritage (United Nations).

The rich fusion of cultures that not only historically shaped Tucson's present food system, but also the city's culture in general is apparent in festivals like Tucson Meet Yourself, an annual festival put on by the Southwest Folklife Alliance, whose mission is to lift up the arts and traditions of the multi-cultural Arizona-Sonoran Desert region ("Mission and History"). This festival has been given the nickname Tucson "Eat" Yourself due to the extensive representation of these cultures shared through food, allowing Tucson community members to "break bread" with one another and share in these traditions.

However, a prominent concern among leaders of the food community in Tucson is the underrepresentation of these cultures in groups making decisions concerning the gastronomy designation. Rodriguez shared that his community is not properly informed about the designation because they do not even know it exists. "They want to glamourize our food, they want to glamourize our culture, and they are fetishizing our culture. But yet, in downtown you get 50-80 migrant workers getting detained in a process called Streamline, [when] their legacy invented a lot of this food" (Rodriguez). Operation Streamline has been a mandate since 2005 that "streamlines" the prosecution through the federal justice system of all undocumented immigrants that cross the Southern border (Lydgate 2010: 484). Rodriguez has seen this policy affect countless undocumented immigrants in his community and throughout Tucson every year. If the people who hold the food traditions, and in some cases have current or past family members who cultivated and harvested food, are deported from the city that is advertising these traditions internationally, how can they share in the celebration? Neoliberalism falsely honoring

multiculturalism is present in other places as well, and is just as prevalently unjust. Just as Tucson was shaped by the cultural presence of Mexican heritage, the city of Newark in New Jersey was shaped by a Brazilian population. Much like the Tucson local government advertises its multiculturalism and diverse heritages with the gastronomy designation, Newark's local government has tried to advertise an area called the Ironbound, where a majority of the Brazilian community resides, as a space for "exotic, multicultural, and dynamic eating, drinking, and dancing" (Buechler 2014: 601). This kind of advertisement is often the beginning of gentrification-related decisions, made without the communities at the table to discuss these issues that directly affect them:

The use of multiculturalism by cities as a banner has partially come from neoliberal economic patterns of growth that have intensified competition between and within cities, as they vie to create visitor economies by reimagining cities or neighborhoods with place products including ethnic cuisine, stores and street festivals. Sections of the city are made more visually appealing, accessible and safer... Cities that advertise their ethnic communities are, therefore, both trying to draw in that particular ethnic population from the suburbs and nearby cities to come buy food and goods and celebrate their traditions in these inner city neighborhoods, but also trying to attract other groups to come celebrate the goods of 'the other' (Buechler 2014: 602-603).

As these decisions are being made in times of "competition," it is understandable why many of the Tucson cultural community members and food justice advocates, such as the interviewees within this study, express great fear that the designation will only support local food tourism. This is a pattern of neoliberalism across the country – not an isolated instance. Just as Brazilian



culture has been commoditized by the commercialization of a “positive exotic image” that reflects values of Brazilian culture (Buechler 2014: 604), a similar fate may await Native and Mexican communities in Tucson if justice is not addressed immediately.

A classic phrase often presented by Rodriguez is, “If you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu,” meaning, “if there’s people making decisions for your community, and you’re not at that table, people are going to do whatever they want to your community” (Rodriguez). It is salient in the discussions had with the subjects that there are often powerful people making decisions for specific communities without properly considering those underrepresented perspectives. It is easy to make decisions for other people when the people making these choices are not directly affected by the consequences. In the Tucson food system, this underrepresentation can take many forms when considering racial injustice and misrepresentation. For instance, the appropriation of food culture is common – it is done by taking a food tradition out of context, such as mole, and selling for a profit:

I grew up eating Oaxacan food and I know what [real] mole is. When I go to a restaurant and they say that there is authentic mole, I do the Pepsi challenge. And every time I do, I just want to go to the back and slap the chef because it’s so disrespectful...mole to me has been a gift, something real sacred, it wasn’t an all-day kind of thing, when people sell it just as a commodity or plate that you can have...that feels disrespectful because whoever is preparing it doesn’t know how...they can’t even describe it or how it is supposed to taste...no flavor, missing a hell of a lot of ingredients. For us chocolate was a form of currency and it was sacred, and every region had its own style. But when you go to these restaurants and it has no flavor, it’s disrespectful (Rodriguez).

An important lesson in Rodriguez's anecdote is the reminder to have respect in how food is prepared. Appropriation in the food system is the same with all forms of cultural appropriation – in order to remain respectful, it is necessary to share traditions with permission and with regard to the specific practices associated with the tradition. Combating appropriation and remaining “off the menu” begins with creating leaders and taking a genuine interest in the politics that affect cultural communities. Empowering young members of these communities to become leaders that engage in these conversations allows for future security of a safe, sustainable, and healthy space for the community. Rodriguez is passionate about building these kinds of leaders and empowering them to ask questions such as, “our voice may be out there, but are you hearing us?” and then approaching strategies to make these voices truly heard. One step that Tucson leaders can take when facing decisions that impact these cultural communities are to avoid itemization of people of color by providing tokenized space at the table, “Anyone who invites the community out to the table needs to be real and inclusive. Sometimes they’ll listen to your needs but they won’t apply them because it doesn’t benefit them” (Rodriguez).

Cultural underrepresentation at the table within the food system can take form in the development then installation of projects that may not be needed or desired by the community in which they are being instituted. While community empowerment work is important, the first question that needs to be asked when approaching a new neighborhood is, “What do you need?” Avoiding the installation of projects that are not directly beneficial is attainable by conducting needs assessments and placing community leaders in positions that allow their voices to be heard. “Just because you put a farmer’s market on the south side doesn’t mean [the community members] are going to use it because they didn’t ask for it!” (Rodriguez). Rodriguez goes on to explain the importance of creating spaces that not only exist in proximity to underrepresented

populations, but making that space inclusive and accepting. There is no need for a space that does positive work only in proximity to these populations – the projects need to directly impact these people, and that is achieved by listening to their needs and executing projects that reflect them.

Among the traditions that attribute to the gastronomy designation are Tohono O’odham agricultural practices – it is these practices that constitute Tucson’s 4000 years of agricultural history right at the base of Sentinel Peak, or the historic “black hill.” In close proximity to where the Santa Cruz River used to flow year-round, the Tohono O’odham people grew indigenous varieties of beans, squash, corn, and melons. Julie Ramon-Pierson, board president of the San Xavier Allottees Association, would like to see increased profit for the San Xavier Coop Farm come out of this designation. Even with a new focus on traditional knowledge in agriculture through the gastronomy designation, there has been little to no increase in profit for the people who hold this traditional knowledge to grow and sell heritage foods (Ramon-Pierson). This is the kind of disconnect that is continuing to be present for the cultural heritages that represent the Tucson food system and are recognized in the designation. The salient question that is present in almost all of the interviews is, “Who benefits from this?” and the prevalent response to beginning to answer that question is to approach the food system holistically in order to understand the larger picture. If the City of Tucson wants more than local fancy restaurants to benefit from this designation, there needs to be a shift in perspective:

I hope that out of this we can say ‘this is what our food system looks like’ from the perspective of these communities [small vendors, entrepreneurs from cultural communities] so we have these vibrant places, restaurants, small entrepreneurs, we have hunger, need, we have no resources for these things, we have all these

restrictions and limitations, we need to figure out ways that we incentivize our local government, our business owners to create opportunities for communities of color. To me it's just really telling a fuller story around what this all looks like (Ojeda).

This kind of shift calls for more than giving voice – it calls for an importance to be placed on the community's perspective.

Strengthening the Tucson and Southern Arizona food system in the wake of the gastronomy designation also requires a call for farmers and small producers at the table. Local agriculture is the base of the food system that gives way to a strong local economy, increase in attention to nutrition, and connection of people to their food. Local agriculture often focuses on biodiversity and regional growing practices, as opposed to large-scale monoculture. As was studied intensively by essayist and farmer Wendell Berry, small-scale farming reflects best practices for environmental stewardship of the land. He believed that “each farming community must possess its own knowledge, adapted to the specific locality,” and strongly opposed monoculture for its standardization and corporate control over farming techniques (Filipiak 2011: 185). He emphasized that small-scale agriculture demanded regionally honed “holistic philosophy” of cultivation techniques (Jarosz 2011: 309). Agriculture in Tucson has been developed over 4000 years by stewards of the land; this history of adaptation is what gave way to organizations in Tucson like Native Seeds/SEARCH (NSS), whose mission is to combat food insecurity through seed security, and preserving crop diversity and traditional knowledge through seed banking, distribution, and education (“Securing the Future of Food”). The conservation of traditional agricultural knowledge is a prominent piece of the 2015 UNESCO application for gastronomy designation, listed as one of the “main professional and non-governmental civil

society organizations that are active in the city in the creative field [gastronomy] concerned” (United Nations). Growing practices and seeds shared by groups like NSS are often utilized in Southern Arizona by small farmers. NSS provides seed in bulk to local farmers in exchange for seeds saved after harvest; this exchange ensures both commitment to traditional seed saving practices and affordable food production for the small farmer. Services like this include the farmer and are understandably worthy of a designation like UNESCOs – however, even with present commitment to employing sustainable practices and lifting up the small farmer, there is still a disconnect between the policy-makers and advisors of the region and the farmers for whom these legislators are making impactful decisions.

The United Nations has outlined seventeen sustainable development goals (SDG) to combat poverty and ensure wellbeing and prosperity of the planet and its populations – each goal has specific requirements and targets that allow for a more sustainable future. In order to meet these goals, there must be collaboration and grassroots leadership from the local government, the private sector, and the people of civil society. The United Nations calls on cities across the globe to adopt these goals and use them to focus policy and community efforts on tangible objectives. The second SDG is “zero hunger,” which is a focus on food security. The goal emphasizes healthy food systems, biodiversity, and sustainable agriculture to feed the rising global population. This starts at the local level. The focus on agriculture in this goal is prominent; it is impossible to work towards a healthier food system without the empowerment of small farmers that seek to follow this vision. The impact of agriculture on local and global food security is acknowledged, “Agriculture is the single largest employer in the world, providing livelihoods for 40 percent of today’s global population” (“Goal 2”). Giving support to local farmers that utilize agricultural biodiversity techniques ensures more nutrient-rich diets for the surrounding

community, better livelihood for the farmer and their family, and resilience within the food system (“Goal 2”). Applying a Southern Arizona lens to this goal allows the city to recognize specific action that can be taken to support farmers in and around the Tucson area. In order to provide adequate support, the farmers themselves must be present in the conversation and have a permanent seat at the table. A study focusing on community-supported agriculture (CSA) in Washington state notes that “white women predominate in this form of agriculture [CSA], with single women being the most dependent upon their farms as the major source of their income” (Jarosz 2011: 312). For women who are farm-owners or operators, small-scale farming becomes a way of life, often founded in a motivation to nourish the community. It is this motivation and desire to better the community through socially just practices and access to nutritious foods that push these farmers, who are often women, to continue the hard work even through economic instability:

A farm owner who is involved in CSA sells to farmers’ markets and is regionally recognized as a leader in alternative agriculture says, ‘I am often motivated by outrage. It hasn’t been a choice for me since I started worrying about food. ... We keep pushing and I think that people are accepting this three-legged stool of [sustainable agriculture being] economically viable, environmentally sound and socially just. It is not an easy position and there are a number of people [farmers] who are going out of business’ (Jarosz 2011: 317).

Debbie Weingarten is a “farmer-turned-writer” whose vision is to strive for bringing the farmers’ voice to the table. Weingarten is former co-owner and founder of Sleeping Frog Farms, a local farm that participated in a CSA located in Cascabel, Arizona east of Tucson. She shares her

stories of facing food insecurity as a farmer and feeling a lot of anger around being on food stamps while also being a small food producer:

I felt like I was producing all this food for my community. I can remember putting out these CSA newsletters on a weekly basis, including all of these fancy recipes that not only took a lot of ingredients that I might not have (oils, vinegars, spices, etc.), but also took a lot of time... Even though you are surrounded by food there's not enough time to utilize it (Weingarten).

There is a clear level of frustration present for food producers who are unable to afford to eat the food that they themselves cultivated. One of the clear targets for the SDG “zero hunger” demands that by 2030, both the productivity and incomes of small food producers double, with a particular focus on oppressed populations of women and indigenous communities. The suggested steps to ensuring this future are “through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment” (“Goal 2”). While these seem like broad ideas, there is a board of directors under the gastronomy designation that works to implement projects that promote these objectives. The Mayor’s Commission on Food Security, Heritage, and the Economy is a food policy council that oversees a Gastronomy governing board. The commission works to suggest policy and advise the governing council, while the council’s role in the designation is to implement the projects, like focusing on food security for food producers, that will strengthen the Tucson food system. Jonathan Mabry, the liaison between the city of Tucson and the Creative Cities Network under UNESCO, speaks about the role of the council to work on “value-added” pieces within the food system. For example, creating a regional food brand to shed light on the traditional growing practices used in the production of food would increase the amount that the

food product is sold while increasing consumer awareness of food that is representative of Tucson food heritage (Mabry). This example demonstrates the city's commitment to following the objectives that lead to "zero hunger," but it may not be enough in the present food security situation for regional farmers.

The Farm Education Resource Network (FERN) works to bridge the disconnect between farmers, their voices, and the rest of the food system and address problems farmers face, such as food insecurity and lack of support to remain sustainable. Weingarten and Cie'na Schlaefli, assistant manager of San Xavier Coop Farm, both hold leadership in this network. Both Weingarten and Schlaefli have experience as farmers in the Southern Arizona region, giving them agency to understand the real challenges that food producers face. Their work and voices are dedicated to lifting up small-scale farmers and understanding why it is imperative to bring these producers to the table and allow them to make decisions around their livelihood. In a time when the city is discovering next steps in using the gastronomy designation to work towards a wholesome food system, the city must ask, "How can we best be a resource for our farmers in Southern Arizona that struggle?" (Schlaefli). Schlaefli believes that there is clear opportunity for both the city and Pima County to provide these resources. The reception of the designation brought attention to profound work being done within the food system – now it is up to the city to recognize where that work is being done, and provide direct support in order to not only sustain the positive impact on nutrition and access it has, but grow it. Ensuring this includes scrutinizing present policies that seek to support small producers, "There could be more to provide benefits to small producers, specifically small, to enter into this field. It seems like a lot of these policies that are being put in place [are] tax breaks for larger corporations and inviting those sorts of businesses into our community which completely undercuts and undermines



building this system” (Schlaefli). A healthy food system is directly related to a healthy local economy, and putting policies in place that specifically replace local support with corporate has reverberating effects throughout the food system.

A direct barrier in supporting farmers is time constraints. Time is a true barrier for these producers, “Another unmeasured barrier is time, and people are having to work two or three jobs or as a farmer working 80 hour weeks” (Weingarten). However, the reason that financial support for these small-scale farmers is so imperative for bringing their voices to the table is because farmers just do not have the time to participate in these conversations:

Over and over again I think that in a lot of these conversations around food hubs, around all of these kind of sexy, glossy ideas for the community, when you look around the table, it’s the farmers who are missing, and those projects will fail if the farmers don’t have stake or don’t have a voice at the table, if it’s not farmer-centered, or if it’s not financially viable. And farmers can’t come to the table unless it’s financially viable and unless they’re paid for their time (Weingarten).

Farmers as stewards of the land provide invaluable knowledge of agricultural practices, and therefore become some of the most important teachers in the food community. FERN recognizes these skills that are instrumental to sustainable agriculture and pairs these teachers up as mentors to aspiring farmers, then paying them for their work. To overlook such valuable knowledge in the foodscape is to forget the foundation of what makes a food system strong.

Time also constrains farmers and small producers due to restrictive health policies that often discourage from sustainable production. Roxanne Garcia is the market manager and co-founder of Heirloom Farmers Markets. She worked on a farm as a child and has worked in managing farmers markets for over ten years. Due to her unique and lasting position in the food

community, she has watched small producers struggle with these policies, “People with prepared foods have to work with standards of the health department who impose heavy, heavy fines and fees on these people trying to work. There is so much paperwork and bureaucratic health department issues [that] prevent a lot of small businesses from starting, and that is what our biggest problem is, that we have a health department that is very, very strict” (Garcia). This is an evident problem that causes obvious frustration among small farmers. Schlaefli identifies a level of standardization in these policies that limits the success of producers because it is limiting to apply a blanket rule to all. She urges the policy makers to recognize that every state’s food system is different – people need to not only embrace these differences but support them and allow for more room within these policies to produce food with regional practices. “It can’t all fit that mold,” (Schlaefli).

A further barrier to providing support for small producers, however, is lack of funding associated with the designation. Tucson faces extreme poverty and a governmental deficit of \$30 million. Mabry discusses how this budget shortfall limits how much the city can contribute financially to projects under the designation, and encourages the commission and the governing board to think of innovative strategies to provide the necessary support to players in the food community without relying on a budget for success. He identifies some moves the city has already made in order to properly support the Creative Cities mission, such as the “in-kind donation” of his time to the designation efforts. Mabry serves the city as a historic preservation officer, and took on this leadership role with his time being financed as a donation from the city (Mabry).

Grassroots efforts are an impactful first step in strengthening food systems. It is a viable solution for addressing short-term problems faced by the cultural groups of Tucson and the

small, local farmers. However, there needs to be a permanent step taken towards allowing these groups to speak about their challenges. The people who are often underrepresented in these conversations are simultaneously the groups about whom decisions are being made. The purpose of having underrepresented voices at the table for these discussions is to allow these groups to present their specific needs that must be addressed in order for them to move forward – it is not to fulfill a quota or paint decision-making groups as more diverse. If this gastronomy designation is to effect real change, there must be more space given to the voices of cultural groups and farmers that speak from within the food system.

### **Food access: The need for cultural significance & nutrition**

*“La comida es medicina [food is medicine].” – Luz Calvo*

Luz Calvo, Ph.D., Chicana, and current Ethics Studies professor at Cal State East Bay, is a co-author of the cookbook *Decolonize Your Diet*, which focuses on reclaiming culture through food. Their focus is on decolonization, which they define as “the ongoing process to end oppression and servitude and to restore respect for indigenous knowledge and ways of life” (“Decolonize Your Diet”). Calvo joined in on the panels that occurred at the November 2016 conference for the City of Gastronomy, “Food and Water in Arid Lands: Dialogues across Contemporary and Traditional Knowledge” to share their research in why ancestral and traditional knowledge surrounding food is especially important when looking at general health for US-born Latino/Latina and indigenous populations. In current society, the cheapest food can often be the food with the least nutrients, making these food products more readily available for families facing poverty or financial burdens in general. Calvo calls out this type of diet for both the injustice of the system and the need for cultural inheritance. “*La comida es medicina* [food is medicine]” is at the center of Calvo’s work, which draws on the relationship between

Latino/Latina diets that stray from ancestral foods and health problems like diabetes and various cancers. Other studies support this connection as well, identifying the prevalence of insulin resistance in Hispanic youth and therefore more susceptibility to health-related diseases like diabetes. This predisposition is a genetic commonality that is not as prevalent in Caucasian youth, showing the increased need for care when shaping diets for Hispanic populations (Goran et al 2002: 2187-2188). A shift in diet to traditional foods like indigenous beans, squash, and corn is genetically healthier for members of these populations (“Decolonize Your Diet”). Spreading awareness about the necessity of ancestral foods in diets and increasing support for availability of these foods is mandatory in ensuring a healthy community. The gastronomy designation has the full potential to grow this mission if its focus on cultural foods encompasses ancestral diet as a piece of its nutrition vision.

It is this important intersection of social justice and sustainability that is a salient concern among leaders in the field and subjects of this research, and incredibly important in moving forward with the designation. The focus on decolonization naturally extends into diet, as social justice naturally and significantly extends into the food system. Equity and justice is not a piece of a separate system, but rather embedded within and affects the system equally. Working towards culturally significant food guarantees general health for the city population, while socially making the food system healthy.

Perhaps a common misconception is what food insecurity means in Tucson. Rodriguez shares experience from “the hood,” allowing a closer look into what it means to be lacking nutrition. His community has access to food, and this is not the main concern – they instead lack access to nutrition. In a neighborhood that has more liquor stores than grocery stores, finding nutrient-rich goods is challenging, and community members working full-time to support their

families do not generally have the time or financial ability to seek out transportation to vendors of nutritional or fresh food. In Rodriguez's neighborhood, sometimes it's hard to find even the most basic of items:

Where we're sitting right now [the community garden at the Community Food Bank in southern Tucson], there's two liquor stores and one family dollar less than a mile away, but in there you won't find any organic produce, the closest organic produce you'll find is in the garden that we're sitting in...Part of it is that people don't have the economic stability or freedom to eat healthy. The healthy eating pieces were also robbed from us, especially in the industrialization of food...a lot of the food that you can access anywhere is prepackaged, or ready-to-eat food that's not nutritious for us...we suffer from health problems because of what we're eating...You can go to a liquor store, it took me like ten minutes to find the water. I could find every type of liquor that there is, but I couldn't find the water. It was hilarious, you know, once I found the water it was in a little corner...it's the same thing in all liquor stores (Rodriguez).

Time was mentioned earlier as a constraint in getting underrepresented voices at the table – it is also restrictive to accessing culturally significant food. If the system is set up to continuously support economic instability for minority and oppressed communities, fighting through the economic challenge requires time, which is a commodity that is hard to come by when supporting a family. Ramon-Pierson recognizes a similar trend within the San Xavier district of the Tohono O'odham nation. The coop farm grows alfalfa as a cash crop because it is less time-consuming to grow and can be maintained in a field using farm machinery. However, the traditional crops are much more time-consuming because they must be planted, maintained, and

harvested by hand (Ramon-Pierson). The need for a cash crop and variance from the traditional crops is amplified by time constraints, thus limiting the emphasis on heritage growing.

Ramon-Pierson also explains that residents of the Tohono O’odham nation are not necessarily food insecure – it is accessing healthy foods that is the problem, intensifying the need for focus on those culturally significant foods. Ramon-Pierson says that residents are “so close to the city so people don’t have any problems getting to the store. The problem is that they buy unhealthy foods, like sodas...that causes diabetes” (Ramon-Pierson). She talks about plans to increase education around eating healthy through workshops and general awareness. Presently, the food-related diseases and obesity are much more common among the younger generation than the older (Ramon-Pierson). This trend could be due to the shift in diet from heritage foods to the easily accessible junk foods that are cheap in nearby grocery stores – Ramon-Pierson believes that there needs to be an increase in crop production on the coop farm to make more healthy food available. Garcia identifies the health concerns of the Tohono O’odham population as well, suggesting that a viable solution to the health crisis is “going back to your ancestors, asking ‘what were they eating?’” and then ensuring that there is a place for that food to be grown (Garcia). Currently, one of the only large-scale farms producing ancestral varieties of produce with traditional practices is the San Xavier Coop Farm, and their profit is not increasing as much as leaders like Ramon-Pierson would like to see. Perhaps a first step in using the gastronomy designation to incorporate more support for culturally significant food access is by establishing a bridge to remove the disconnect between community members who need these traditional foods and the places to access them. By promoting Calvo’s return to ancestral foods and directing people to the San Xavier Coop Farm for access, the city could simultaneously support Tucson Latino/Latina and indigenous populations’ access to healthy food and the economic stability and

growth of a cultural farm and food producer. This kind of connection directly supports the tenets of the UNESCO program.

The same lack of access to culturally relevant food is prevalent for much of the refugee community in Tucson. Katrina Martinez, the Nutrition and Food Security Coordinator at the Tucson chapter of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has helped hundreds of refugees and their families to learn about healthy eating and food access as a member of the Tucson community. She says that the two biggest food-related health concerns that these refugees face are malnourishment when they arrive in Tucson, and diabetes due to lack of access to their cultural foods. Martinez shares that when refugees arrive in Tucson, they are used to eating these foods, such as halal meat, yogurts, various fermented foods, and yeast. Often, these are difficult to find in normal grocery stores where IRC clients can use their food stamps to buy food. Instead, the foods are more commonly found in expensive and less accessible ethnic food stores, limiting their availability to the people that so deeply connect with the food (Martinez, K). The refugees that join the Tucson community from around the world bring so much knowledge, including agricultural knowledge, and are so excited to contribute to American society, but are not given enough space to do so (Martinez, K). Honoring traditions and culture must extend into all cultures in Tucson – these clients bring such a rich and diverse food culture that contributes to gastronomy. Beginning with respect for ethnic foods and their importance traditionally and nutritionally to respective communities.

Access to healthy, fresh food is beneficial for the entire Tucson community as well, no matter the ancestral background. Garcia has worked with Tucsonans on food stamps for many years now, working to receive grants that would allow electronic balance transfer (EBT) cardholders to not only have SNAP benefits to use at the markets, but also extra money like

grants from the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant Program. This kind of grant deeply strengthens the food system because it allows up to twenty extra dollars to be used on fresh produce only, so the extra money goes straight to the small farmer, while also guaranteeing that the consumer has increased access to fresh, nutrient-rich produce. She has worked with these consumers, getting to know them and understanding their stories. She recognizes that many of the people who come to market often utilize this program and are generally ill in some capacity, “they realize that it’s the food that they’re eating, or the doctor has told them that the food they are eating is what’s driving them [to be ill], so they’re having to make changes, and the first step is always at the farmers market with fresh food – food that has more nutrient value” (Garcia). Access to nutrition is vital to a healthy community, for every race, gender, class, and age. In fact, “good health and well-being” is the third SDG of the United Nations.

Schlaefli shares this same sentiment, recognizing that the food system is set up to make poor quality food the most accessible. Limits on this accessibility are time, financial ability, and geography of where the food is accessed. Due to these constraints, the conversation comes back to the food insecurity of farmers and food workers and the juxtaposed lack of access to food while surrounded by it. Weingarten wrote an article for the March 2017 volume of *Edible Baja Arizona* titled “A Seat at the Table,” which addresses the disparity in access to food from food workers in the US to other workers. According to the Food Chain Workers Alliance (FWCA), food worker wages are lower than that of almost any other worker in most other industries. They also reported that in 2016, 2.8 million food workers were using SNAP benefits in order to supplement their access to nutritional food (“A Seat at the Table”). This is why policies like Proposition 206, Arizona minimum wage increase (which was officially passed in November 2016), are important – they give more room for success and livelihood to people within the food



industry who face low wages, often stressful and unhealthy conditions, and little to no benefits. However, policy like this is not the end. There are still many problems associated with a minimum wage increase, such as the strain it puts on the business owner and the farmer, or the inevitable increase in price of food in order to maintain businesses. The latter, at first glance, may just further the problem of low food access due to financial burden. While currently there is no ideal solution to reconcile these issues, continuing these conversations is one of the most important actions to be taken under the gastronomy designation. With the designation in mind, combating food injustice truly begins with keeping these conversations in the forefront of priorities for the city and organizations, like relevant nonprofits (Schlaefli). Weingarten describes the food system as “sick,” and the limited food access for food workers is one of the symptoms. She addresses the present food situation in Tucson as a member within it who has experienced and witnessed its instability:

If you have an unstable base, then the whole mechanism will fail, everything will topple, and I think that maybe that’s at the root of how I feel about the designation...it’s such an honor...Now, let’s go to the base, let’s look at all of these players and ask how we can make their lives better, how can we keep this system going so that it’s not just the designation; it’s about building community, building an actual food system where all of the pieces are thriving (Weingarten).

This exemplifies the need for looking at the system as a whole. Addressing the “illness” can be temporarily solved by working to cure the symptoms – however, real, impactful change will occur when going to the base of the system and working on making it healthier and more just throughout.

A further example of policy that encourages Tucsonans to think about their access to food and empowers them to grow their own was on the agenda for the Tucson City Council in December of 2015. The Facebook group Tucson Clucks successfully fought to have the city council vote to change city zoning rules regarding urban agriculture. Their argument was to double the amount of chickens that are allowed to live on a 144,000 square-foot lot, from 24 to 48, as long as food and water for the chickens were secure (“Tucson Residents”), along with adjusting the amount of chickens allowed on smaller properties respectively. The zoning adjustment would also allow more flexibility in backyard gardening practices. One of the more memorable comments made during the several-hours-long city council meeting was from a member of the Latina community in Tucson who spoke about how she, her family, and many of her neighbors were already breaking this city ordinance. She explained how it was already customary in her culture to keep more chickens than was allowed by the city, as well as having extensive backyard gardens as a means of feeding her family. Tucson policy must move towards reflecting the cultures that make up the city. The gastronomy designation seeks to bring attention to the diverse cultures in Tucson – Native, Mexican, Chinese, and more. An important step for policy-makers looking to expand the social impact of the designation would be to address these cultural traditions and shape policy that empowers communities to continue their practices, rather than stopping the sharing of knowledge by making these traditions illegal.

Food access is systematically improved through increasing economic stability of citizens, reconciling disparities within the food system and between its workers, and refocusing the food system on decolonization and culturally significant food. All people deserve access to fresh, healthy, and culturally significant food, and they deserve the ability to grow and sustain this food. The City of Tucson has the opportunity to place emphasis on food sovereignty, which

encompasses these ideas, by writing and promoting policy that works to empower all individuals, regardless of race, class, or gender, to contribute to the food system. Whether this contribution takes form in becoming a food worker with sustainable living wages, growing food in backyard gardens, or taking part in the conversation that puts these topics on the table, it is clear that there must be support from within the city government to continue fostering the city of gastronomy by making decisions in favor of these communities.

### **Shifting focus to long-term solutions instead of “Band-Aids”**

*“I want people to take my place, to give me a run for my money...I want to build more community leaders that can engage in these conversations.” – Claudio Rodriguez*

The following is a combination of suggestions, requests, and impactful ideas, from both the subjects and ethnographic research, for moving forward. The necessity for working towards permanent and wholesome solutions to the problems and “symptoms” outlined in the previous topics was salient in all interviews with the subjects. There is constantly a question of how to move forward from issues – they are easy to identify but difficult to reconcile. This section attempts to provide suggestions to all advocates of food justice in the city of Tucson, as well as relevant information from city representatives to bridge the gap in understanding how to properly address the health of the Southern Arizona food system.

In order to address what *can* and *should* be done to increase the attention to food justice in relation to the gastronomy designation, it is important to first look at what has already been done. In November 2016, leaders within the gastronomy designation, including Mabry and Gary Paul Nabhan, Ph.D. and current social scientist at the University of Arizona Southwest Center, organized the previously mentioned Food and Arid Lands conference that collaborated with local food community leaders, the City of Gastronomy designation, and the International Traditional

Knowledge Institute (ITKI). This conference featured panels of community leaders in areas of food justice, social justice, water sustainability, and the City of Tucson, as well as elders from surrounding native populations who shared their work and stories in order to begin an important dialogue that combined traditional knowledge with contemporary knowledge. It was almost a unanimous concern among the subjects of this research to be making conversations on these topics a priority – this conference was a first attempt at establishing that dialogue. The purpose of the conference was to act on the need to set goals and parameters for building partnerships and collaborations between other cities of gastronomy (Mabry). This theme of international collaboration is the current focus for the authors of the application, as UNESCO expects an exchange of knowledge of best practices with other cities in the network. This means that the work carried out under the designation should follow these expectations. In order to achieve this, Mabry in collaboration with other leaders in the gastronomy designation drafted a Memorandum of Agreement to address the priorities of this international collaboration, in an effort of “setting the bar high” for other International Cities of Gastronomy. The priority areas of this collaboration are academics and education for schools and the general public, communications, economic development, food security and food justice, urban policies, sustainability, tourism, and traditional knowledge. While these are worthwhile goals and clear needs for Tucson, drafting a memorandum will not effect change – taking action will. According to Mabry, the memorandum will serve as the guiding document for policy decisions across the globe, and challenge the governing bodies in each of these cities to ensure that proposals underneath their respective gastronomy designations fit within the previously agreed terms. “If it’s formally adopted, then each of the cities, when they turn in their reports every few years, will need to identify what they did that fits within the framework laid out in those different areas” (Mabry).

These reports to UNESCO uphold accountability of each city to be acting on the principles of collaboration and sustainable development for which UNESCO stands. This memorandum can be a source of optimism for moving forward, showing the passion for this work that local leaders have; the document was written by Mabry on Thanksgiving Day. He recalls being home, and his mother kept asking, “Where are you? It’s dinnertime!” and he would repeatedly say, “I just need one more hour!” as he worked on the document from his Airbnb. This is a testament to the initiative of leaders working under this designation.

The memorandum is also important for establishing the clear connection between sustainability and food. In the spring of 2016, leaders from thirteen of the eighteen International Cities of Gastronomy met in Parma, Italy to establish a network and a platform for open dialogue, and Nabhan and Mabry were the leaders present at this meeting representing Tucson. In an article recapping conclusions of the meeting, Nabhan points out how Tucson is already a leader in sustainable growing practices through use of active and passive rainwater harvesting and other forms of sustainable water use. These are incredibly important techniques to share in a time of climate change, which is causing water shortages globally (a fact reported by other UNESCO Cities of Gastronomy). These are practices that Tucson has been utilizing for years – long before the gastronomy designation was on the table for discussion (Nabhan, Gary Paul, and Jonathan Mabry). At the end of 2016, a year after Tucson had received its designation, a report was released highlighting some of the accomplishments in the “first year.” Among these were a study done by the University of Arizona Eller College that looked at Tucson’s farmers markets and concluded that 38.1% of the Tucson population lives within less than a mile of a farmers market, which is an all-time high (Wallendorf, Melanie, and Matthew Godfrey 2016). Other conclusions from the first year of the designation are the announcement of a new Center for Food

Studies at the University of Arizona, Tucson's participation in the September meeting of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, the establishment of Ensenada, Mexico and Parma, Italy as International City of Gastronomy sister cities, institution of the official Tucson City of Gastronomy non-profit, and many more initiatives or major steps within the food system, both directly and indirectly related to the designation (Mabry, et al).

However, with Tucson's progress and focus on international collaboration, serving as an international leader in establishing connections and accountability between other cities of gastronomy, there is still significant need for support of local groundwork. Increased accountability internationally may positively impact the responsibility held by members of the local food system to effect lasting change. Hopefully, local accountability will be realized because the designation comes from the city itself – therein lies the opportunity for impactful policy change. Often, temporary solutions, or “Band-Aids,” will be the focus of energy and resources to make immediate and effective change. An example of this is the food boxes that the Community Food Bank gives out to community members in need – while this is effective in combating food insecurity and providing access for families facing hunger, it does not address the food justice aspect - the root of the problem. The hope, however, is that this designation can support more permanent solutions to hunger, and make programs like food boxes obsolete. Ojeda estimates that 50% of the staff at the Community Food Bank focuses on these short-term solutions and immediate food access, but the other half works solely on long-term solutions. One of the largest priorities in this work is economic development, which is also one of the priority areas in the international agreement for progress. This truly is a way to increase long-term independence because it secures more stability for members of the Tucson community facing this form of injustice. The Community Food Bank approaches long-term solutions through

economic development, food production education, nutrition education, and other forms of programming that focus on ending the problems of hunger, “beyond hunger, it’s really the root causes of poverty as well, so that’s why again the focus on...providing other kinds of skills so that people participate effectively in public life, so they can engage with folks and do some advocacy work, so it’s a very holistic approach to supporting families; we feed the body, the mind, the soul; we feed opportunities” (Ojeda). If there is going to be lasting impact from work done under the title of gastronomy, there must be continued focus on this kind of work. Allowing the Community Food Bank to continue its leadership in these topics will set an important precedent for the city as a whole. However, there are still some constraints to this that need to be remedied before the city can take on these issues.

It is important for farmers as well. Because so many farmers face food insecurity, a city focus on economic development will improve farmers’ stability. Weingarten’s proposed economic development approach is to have the city, county, or state financially support perhaps ten young, new farmers to help with their start-up investment costs. Establishing a system where the local government matches funds saved by these farmers would truly lead to a return on investment because support for local agriculture directly strengthens the local economy. There is evidence that support for the local food system actually improves economic development for local residents, and Weingarten’s suggestion opens the search for similar strategies. Looking at a study on the food system of Iowa, it was found that each dollar spent at the local farmers’ market generated 58 cents in “indirect and induced sales, and that each dollar of personal income earned at farmers’ markets generated an additional 47 cents in indirect and induced income” (Martinez, S 2010: 44). The importance of providing support for farmers is evident in the increased skills and opportunities for rural communities, and the sustainability of new rural businesses (Martinez,

S 2010: 45). Therefore, the opportunity for economic development for small businesses and farmers offers more incentive for the local economy as a whole.

A massive struggle that is salient among the commissioners is the learning curve in understanding how to work within local government:

There is a lot of red tape around communicating with one another, around transparency, which is completely understandable because it is constituent based; many of us [commissioners] have been involved in community organizing efforts together for years and have sat around a kitchen table strategizing, developing the best way to strategize. It's been an adjustment to figure out how we can effect change in a government structure. I have felt frustration around how long it takes for conversations to come up, even to just get a [topic] on the agenda takes a long time... but I also see opportunity to reach the mayor and council, to make recommendations with the weight of this commission behind us (Weingarten).

At one of these commission meetings, some members expressed interest in discussing Monsanto and its plans for Southern Arizona, sharing that a move like this could put the gastronomy designation in danger of being taken away. But even with such a relevant concern, due to open meeting laws, the commission could not legally engage in discussion about the topic. As Weingarten outlined, many of these community leaders are accustomed to being able to speak freely about issues in meetings within the food network, and having the ability to make plans for community organizing to address these issues. This immediate action is not possible in local government structure. The lack of freedom also prevents the discussion on extremely controversial issues involving justice, and calls for a more neutral approach to problem-solving. To further the learning curve, there are also complexities within government work that are not



innately understood by commissioners. For instance, Schlaefli expresses that she does not fully understand the ripple effects of actions taken by the city, such as the way the budget affects decisions and implementation of projects. This lack of deeper understanding is one challenge that the commission faces.

Food justice is a controversial issue – this is why it is a constant fight to make it a top concern for the city. However, focusing on change through commission work is prohibitive due to the controversial nature of the topic and the red tape that exists in public service through local government. Additionally, there seems to be misunderstanding for what purpose the commission was formed. A few of the commissioners expressed excitement about being a part of a network with a wealth of knowledge about issues within the food system and having the opportunity to have concerns heard by the Mayor and his council. However, some expressed that they thought the commission was formed to specifically address food justice in Tucson; the city, however, formed the commission in immediate response to the reception of the designation, and may have brought the network together to work as a force in direct response to it. As discussed earlier, Mayor Rothschild shares that the commission was formed in direct response to the application for the designation, standing as the singular piece missing from a complete and successful application. Members of the commission, however, were under the belief that their role would be to discuss these controversial food justice issues. The commissioners do not want the group to become a “rubber-stamp kind of commission,” (Schlaefli) which leads to some frustration around the restriction to talk about justice issues, and the focus on food insecurity only. While food security is important, initiatives to tackle it are often only Band-Aids to a bigger problem. Real, permanent change lies in addressing food justice. Recognizing this restriction is the first step in allowing this change to take place, “My personal belief is that if you want change to

happen, it's not going to come out of the kindness of local government, it's going to come out of a space where we create an exchange of power, and as commissioners we don't have a whole lot of power" (Ojeda). A solution may be shifting the focus back to grassroots groups and large-scale community organizing – if the commission can never truly embrace food justice, then the conversation must be moved. Generating a space to frequently and fluidly discuss controversial issues that arise allows the discussion of how to combat injustice to take place. If the gastronomy designation will set the tone for these issues to be addressed, the first question must be, “how do we speak about hunger and poverty in the context of the city of gastronomy?”

Creating leaders is also a necessary step in ensuring long-term impacts for the food system. While there are many effective leaders working on relevant food issues currently, such as the subjects of this study, their work must be continued, expanded, and remain innovative. One of Rodriguez's main goals in his work is to be finding and training these leaders – he wants to feel almost threatened by their effectiveness, so that they can give him “a run for [his] money” (Rodriguez). Every generation of leaders should be better than the last, according to Rodriguez, so that progressive change is continually pursued. These leaders must be well-versed in the issues presented in this project; they should understand the importance of having a voice at the table, in being the representative for communities, and knowing how to start effective dialogues across topics. Most importantly, these leaders should come from within the communities that need to be represented – they should be young farmers, producers from the Tohono O'odham nation, and children of the many Mexican and Mexican-American families, immigrants, and refugees residing in Tucson. Building these leaders ensures the continuation of the conversation, “I want to build more community leaders to...engage community, and build a safe, sustainable, healthy space for the community...we need to create leaders to know what to say, what to ask,

and what to do at those tables” (Rodriguez). More than this, the city as a whole must continue to allow space for these types of leaders to emerge, and that the designation “would allow the time and the resources to convene people to have conversations and direct resources to people that need them” (Weingarten). For instance, many of the refugees who resettle in Tucson are so eager to contribute to American society, and have so much to teach. They are stewards of the land as well, and come with a wealth of knowledge in diverse agriculture as well as the various degrees many of them hold. Recognizing that foreign knowledge is just as valuable as local knowledge will contribute to a stronger community – just the Tucson chapter of the IRC alone resettles 455 refugees a year, meaning that refugees make up a relatively large portion of the Tucson population (Martinez, K). Encouraging diverse leadership allows for innovative strategies to change, an increased space of tolerance, and deeper systemic change. Garcia sees the importance of this leadership as well, pointing out that it is these leaders that start the grassroots movements necessary to address food system concerns. Talking about the issues is the first step in solving them, and is a prevalent reason as to why conversation is such a salient request among the subjects of this study. With leaders in place prepared to continue these conversations and suggest positive, impactful solutions, there is a stronger opportunity for long-term change.

Truly encouraging and teaching respect is important for progressive change and a positive foundation for the Tucson food system. Having respect across cultural lines and for each individual as a fellow human being can be incredibly impactful. Respect is the basis for tolerance, a value that must be learned in order to carry out these long-term solutions of clear communication, genuine intention, and compassionate leadership. Sharing respect allows for an appropriate exchange of traditional knowledge and cultural traditions; it would allow for a deeper understanding of the importance of cross-cultural traditions that would encourage

increased access to culturally significant foods and true appreciation for why it is necessary to allow communities to make decisions about themselves for themselves. Institutionalized respect is not a Band-Aid – it is the long-term solution that can generate true systematic change and a socially just food system.

## **Conclusion**

The City of Tucson has already taken important steps towards carrying out the goals of UNESCO in order to stand as an international leader in sustainable development and gastronomy. However, the scope of the Tucson food system must be expanded into a larger vision that encompasses true food justice principles – it is with deeper understanding of justice that a positive foundation can be laid for the Tucson food system. The basis of food justice is making space for food sovereignty and giving real voice, or a seat at the table, to underrepresented communities to make decisions on their role in the food system, their neighborhoods, and their future. If justice were to become a priority for the city under the UNESCO designation, then the next steps for a healthy food system could occur naturally – not only increased food access, but better access to healthier, culturally significant food and education on its importance. Diverse leaders would emerge due to their ability to speak as a representative for their community. Food sovereignty dictates that every person has the absolute right to culturally appropriate food, to produce their own food through sustainable practices, and to define what their food system looks like. This is incredibly important for all people because, as Rodriguez shares, everything comes down to food. It is necessary for the livelihood of Southern Arizona’s cultural communities and farmers that hold multi-faceted types of knowledge that includes traditional knowledge. Both of these groups shape the food culture of Tucson,

through history, production, tradition, and knowledge. The City of Tucson has shed light on the importance of this food culture by working for the gastronomy designation and setting in place the foundation to expand on food system work – now it is necessary to recognize the precedent that the designation sets, listen to the leaders within the food system who understand it and want to improve and strengthen it, and acknowledge the connection between a healthy food system and a socially just Tucson.

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