



On a warm autumn day in sunny Santa Monica, California, sometime near the end of the 20th century, I stood in the middle of a bustling street, my senses alight with the sight and scent of just picked citrus, sun-kissed tomatoes, and all manner of greens and fresh fruits I had never before seen. It was my first farmers market. And it changed my life.

This experience set me down a decades-long path of food as my vocation. What started with exploring farmers markets and discovering local food recipes became a series of food-related jobs: from cooking professionally to nutritional counseling to food system organizing in every city and state I lived. Yet it wasn't until I moved to Milwaukee, and heard my predecessor, Young Kim, talk about the work of Fondy Food Center, that I realized there was a problem with the local food movement.

The problem is that the local food movement isn't serving everybody.

Since then this problem has become a major focus of my work and I am writing you today to ask you to join me, and the Fondy Food Center, carry out this essential mission: to bring healthy food and economic opportunities to all people in our community - not just the few.

Research shows that the typical farmers market shopper is white, middle to upper class, highly educated, and female. Your average market goer is someone like me. You might ask why this is a problem. This is a problem because there are very real benefits associated with shopping at farmers markets, these include: improved health and nutrition through increased consumption of fruits and vegetables, helping build stronger neighborhoods, and more local farmers and food producers on the land and in our communities.

Communities of color deserve more access to the very real benefits associated with farmers markets. Which is why Fondy Food Center works to increase that access.

I am also writing you because this is a critical moment in the development of Fondy Food Center.

From the very beginning our organization was formed with the explicit mandate to ensure the Fondy Farmers Market would keep running. The century old market, located in the primarily African American neighborhood on Milwaukee's Northside, needed an entity to take responsibility for the long-term success of this market. And it's working. The market is a nationally recognized leader in serving low-income families and communities of color, and increasingly we welcome new immigrants and refugees.

But there is so much more work to do. Since taking on the Fondy Farmers Market, our mission has led us to take on a host of new programs. These include:

- The Fondy Farm Project which creates access to land and resources for farmers that need it; primarily our Hmong American farm families that sell at the Fondy Farmers Market.
- The Market Match and Fruit & Veggie Rx produce incentives programs allow vulnerable individuals and families purchase more fresh produce.
- The Milwaukee Winter Farmers Market which helps families eat local longer, and creates economic opportunities for farmers and food producers.
- The Milwaukee Farmers Market Coalition which is a network of partners working to connect more low-income consumers with more Milwaukee area farmers markets.

As you can see, the programs of Fondy Food Center have needed to expand in order to meet our mission. And our partners are asking us to step up and take on an ever larger role in the work of restoring healthy food systems, from farm to market to table - healthy food systems that serve everyone.

This work is critical but to succeed we need an increasing number of friends and supporters like you to stand by us and support us, so that we can advance this critical mission of making healthy food access available to all people in our community.

Recently, on a crisp fall day at the Fondy Farmers Market, I had the opportunity to operate our SNAP/EBT program, which gives low-income families and individuals the ability to use their federal nutrition benefits at the market. Smiling brightly, a man approached our booth with arms loaded with eggplants and greens and chiles. With his lilting accent he told me he needed to utilize our SNAP/EBT program once again that day, because just as he had finished his shopping he *finally* found one of our Hmong American farmers selling sweet potato leaves. As a Liberian refugee, he was excited to share this hard to find flavor of his homeland with his two daughters. And of course, I got the recipe.

This fall I learned recipes for African bitter eggplant stew, Burmese sour okra leaf stir fry, Caribbean taro root soup, Hmong sticky corn, Palestinian tomato pepper salad, and grandma's famous collard greens. And I shared recipes from my Italian American heritage.

The work we do to increase access to food, land, and economic opportunities is important. And so is celebrating and sharing the richness in cultural diversity and culinary traditions in our community. I know you join me in celebrating. **I hope you will join us in moving this work forward by giving to our year-end campaign today.** You can donate online at fondymarket.org or by sending us a check in the mail.

Thank you for being a part of our community! We couldn't do it without you.

With appreciation,



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