



Attendees participated in an activity in which they discussed the resources their organizations possessed and lacked.

Justice league

Rural & Urban Nevada Social Justice Institute

The local and organic food movements are just as much about people as they are about

the environment—especially when they can aid in tackling the food crisis in Nevada’s rural counties.

by
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The food insecurity and nutrition workshop, held at the Joe Crowley Student Union on Sept. 7, was part of the Rural & Urban Nevada Social Justice Institute, and addressed how “food security is related to social justice,” according to speaker Christy McGill, director of the Healthy Communities Coalition. The workshop brought together local food and outreach leaders, including members from Urban Roots Garden Classroom, Washoe County School District, local food banks and area non-profits such as Justice for Immigrants.

McGill and Freida Carbery, volunteer coordinator with Healthy Communities Coalition, spoke of collective impact and individual impact. The Healthy Communities Coalition focuses on the general wellness of Lyon and Storey counties, and has several food initiatives. According to McGill, much of Nevada is a “food desert”—communities in which healthy food is difficult to obtain, largely due to economic status—and many residents of Lyon and Storey counties rely on the food provided by the counties’ food closets. Carbery talked about the importance of empowerment, ensuring that residents know what to do with the foods they are given to make healthy meals for their families.

“We want to empower the people using the services,” she said. “Who knows better how it feels than those who use the service? ... It’s about how a person feels when they walk out of that room [at the food bank]. We need to ask them, ‘Can you confidently cook those green beans?’”

Many of the plans discussed at the workshop included collaboration between food banks, schools and farmers—providing farmers with a larger market by bringing their produce into schools and growing essentials needed by the community. In Silver Springs, children from the local schools collaborated with farmers to host a farmers’ market, where residents were able to use coupons distributed by the Northern Nevada Food Bank. An electronic benefits transfer (EBT) machine was also available, allowing for the use of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to purchase locally grown produce.

McGill talked about the goals for the “Good food for all” plan, which includes “access to quality food for the Western Nevada region; economic vitality for regional producers, manufacturers, distributors and purveyors; natural resources used well; [and] citizens are a part of a healthy food system where eating, growing and cooking healthy, sustainable food becomes more important in daily community life and common knowledge.”

McGill closed the workshop by saying, “A two track food system is not healthy or profitable for Nevada,” she said. A “two track food system” is often used to describe the imbalance between members of the public who can afford to buy healthy and organic foods, and those whose economic status prevents them from doing so.

Ultimately, the message of the day was simple—Nevada needs more farmers and more individuals who can contribute to the state’s demand for healthy food.

“Befriend a farmer,” McGill said. “It’s worth your time.” □

For more information
about Healthy
Communities Coalition’s
efforts, visit
www.healthycomm.org.