Challenging Power, Fighting for Food: A Gastronomica Call for Submissions on Food and Activism

Many of us got into food scholarship because we love food, but we also worry about food—the quality of food, the quantity of food, and the lives and struggles of people who bring food to the table. Put simply, food writers and food scholars are often food worriers. Certainly, there is no shortage of issues to be worried about: hunger and malnutrition, climate change, worker exploitation, an obesophilic culture and diet industry, massive animal suffering, and a shocking concentration of power, money, and resources in food chains that transcend national borders. When we attend food conferences and read food-related journals, we witness deep convictions about the need for more justice and sustainability in the food system. Indeed, some of the seminal texts in food scholarship, like Sidney Mintz’s classic work, *Sweetness and Power*, are focused on the ways that food is implicated in capitalist (neo)colonial systems that exploit workers and prop up racist systems of oppression while working their way into everyday food habits and cravings.

While much food scholarship is interlarded with concerns for food justice and sustainability, it would be inaccurate to equate food academics with food activism. Writing about food justice or sustainability is not the same as being involved in struggles on the ground. As anyone who has studied social movements and activism knows, food activist struggles are often so time-intensive, laborious, and exhausting that they leave little time for food scholarship. The reverse scenario also bears truth. For food scholars struggling to finish their dissertations, teach classes, meet publication deadlines, secure funding, and manage institutional demands, there can be little time and energy left to become involved in food activism.

The “Food and Activism” section of *Gastronomica* strives to support an epistemic shift in what is deemed valuable within academic publishing. By encouraging more active engagement in food activism by food scholars and recognizing the immense amount of intellectual work food activists do, this section aims to be a prominent space where knowledge based in, and designed for, activism is celebrated and respected.

The structural tensions between food scholarship and food activism are persistent, but not insurmountable. Indeed, we believe such tensions present a challenge best met with a spirit of openness, creativity, and dialogue. From the perspective of food scholarship, we have much to learn from food activism. Food activists remind food scholars, who can become seduced by specialization and trapped within arcane and esoteric debates, of the many pressing problems facing eaters, nonhuman animals, and food environments. From the climate crisis to demands for racial justice, food activism pushes us to think about how much better our food system could be, and more importantly, needs to be. These demands are especially prominent in the wake of a global pandemic and the ongoing and syndemic crises of livelihood and food security. Many groups and individuals are initiating new projects to feed people, build community through food, provide decent jobs, reduce our carbon footprint, and support food workers. Other groups have adapted to new challenges but have been working tirelessly over years (and decades) to improve and fundamentally change our food system and challenge myriad food injustices.

In solidarity, *Gastronomica* would like to play a part in recognizing and supporting the dissemination of food activism at various scales—from locally rooted community kitchens, to municipal food policy activists and school lunch programs, to international organizations fighting hunger and...
addressing global sustainability crises involving air, water, soil, biodiversity, and the atmosphere.

We invite contributions to the Food and Activism section of *Gastronomica*. In this section, food activists, scholars, and writers can work together to showcase some of the awe-inspiring individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions working for more just, sustainable, and equitable food systems.

We have three goals in our Food and Activism section. A first, primary goal is to bring awareness to and celebrate some of the inspirational organizing and outreach work occurring on the ground. Learning about these efforts to feed people, protect food, and create change can provide valuable nourishment in a time when many feel hungry for change.

Second, we hope to energize the activist-scholar dialogue and reaffirm food studies’ commitment to transformative social change in the food system. As we collectively worry about how we will feed a growing planet that is experiencing record levels of social inequality and rising temperatures, we will need to work together to understand our successes, critique our assumptions, and share moments of solidarity. In this dialogue, we also hope that these pieces will inspire more scholarly research that moves synergistically with the work of activists and creates knowledge that dialectically helps us reimagine new ways forward.

Our third goal is to encourage and support innovative and creative approaches to the activist-academic dialogue. Here, we want to foster contributions that go beyond the confines of a traditional academic article. Given that activist individuals and organizations often lead busy and stressful lives fighting on pressing issues, often in conditions of deprivation, hunger, and crisis, we realize that there is not often time or energy to write traditional academic prose. We hope to encourage creative approaches to address these challenges. Possible contribution formats include, but are not limited to, the following: interviews with activists, roundtable interviews, photo essays, personal profiles of activists or activist organizations, visual art, and poetry. We also encourage coauthorship and collaborative writing.

Thinking and writing creatively opens up the opportunity to find underrecognized, thought- and action-provoking connections between food and people. The recognition of how food intertwines us all with systems, injustices, and successes we hope can encourage actions that more empathetically, humbly, and collectively work toward equitable food futures. Creativity is essential in realizing how connection can illuminate better ways to nourish ourselves, our future generations, and our environments through reciprocity. We eagerly anticipate submissions that lean into creativity and push toward innovation within the realm of academic publishing.

The idea for this call came early last year amidst the senses of frustration, fear, and hopelessness that particularly marked the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic and have only dynamically fluctuated since. As we continue to live in the context of enduring multiple crises, we believe it is crucial that food scholars and food activists creatively work together both to find dynamic solutions and to critically reimagine new food futures. Drawing on wisdom from her father, a prominent Chinese restaurateur on the east coast of the United States, community activist and philosopher Grace Lee Boggs reminded us that every crisis brings both danger and opportunity; it is in the opportunity that we find some of the most important human revolutions toward justice and freedom. Food activism participates in this tradition, pushing us to recognize how crises are not times to despair but opportunities to mobilize and organize toward reimagined futures where all generations of beings will be well fed and well nourished. Complementarily, food scholarship and philosophy can help us find the resources to think radically and expansively in figuring out how to dismantle, restructure, and revitalize food systems. It is in this collaborative spirit that we hope to get more food scholars actively involved and facilitate dialogue that will help us all reimagine ourselves and our food systems, and realize regenerative and just food futures together.

What follows is a call for papers for the new Food and Activism section of *Gastronomica*. We hope you will join us.

**Challenging Power, Fighting for Food: A Call for Submissions Centered on the Theme of Food and Activism**

The Food and Activism section of *Gastronomica* is where food activists, scholars, and writers can work together to showcase some of the groups and individuals working for more just, sustainable, and equitable food systems. With this section our goal is to provide a space to recognize and think through different projects within food activism and also to reaffirm food studies’ commitment to transformative social change. Submissions to the Food and Activism section may take many forms, from an interview to an opinion piece to a visual essay, poem, or profile. Essays can be written by activists themselves, but authors need not necessarily have direct ties with a featured individual
or organization. Pieces may be coauthored. We will consider pieces that

- are prepared and submitted with the expressed consent of a featured individual or organization;
- describe why the work of this individual or organization is important;
- highlight problems the featured activism is addressing and the solutions it offers;
- articulate moral and ethical issues with which the individual or organization is engaging;

- discuss how the featured activism fits within the broader food system, or could guide and shape future food studies research;
- offer the activist individual or organization the opportunity to provide links to their work and contact or donation information, if relevant; and
- are written clearly and accessibly, avoiding unnecessary jargon.

Please see the Gastronomica website (https://gastronomica.org/submit) for style guidelines and submission procedures. We look forward to reviewing your work.