

Cultivating Food, Cultivating Care

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

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FOOD (IN)SECURITY IN NASHVILLE

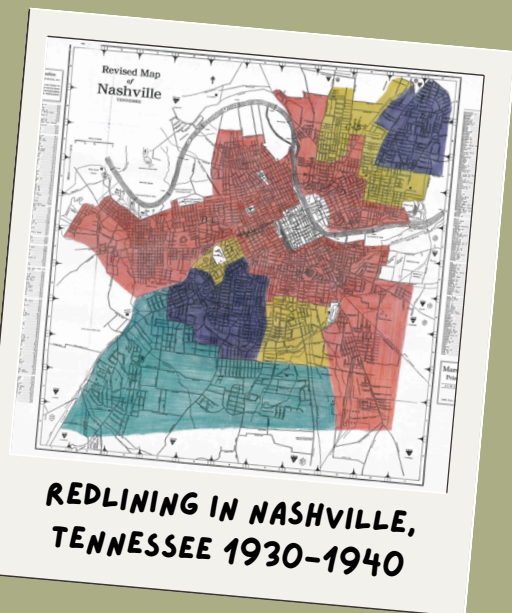
In Tennessee, over 70% of residents report altering their diets because of rising food costs,¹ and more than 14% of households in Davidson County, which encompasses Nashville, are food insecure.² What these food security statistics mask, however, are the sharp racial disparities that drive them. While 12% of White families experience food insecurity in Nashville, the rate climbs to 23% for Latinx families and 27% for Black families.



KOHLRABI FOR SALE, GROWN IN SOUTH NASHVILLE

URBAN FOOD APARTHEID

Urban food apartheid, coined by activist Karen Washington, is an alternative to the USDA's set definition of "food deserts." Food apartheid, recognizing the systemic nature of unequal foodscapes, orients (in)access to culturally-appropriate food back to the PERVERSIVE, historically-situated structural violences that are alive in the landscape. Food deserts are not natural, they are manufactured, and communities cannot feed themselves without adequate access, to food despite the nutritional knowledges they have.



REDLINING IN NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 1930-1940

COMMUNITY GARDENS

Far from barren areas and passive community members, Nashvillians respond to food apartheid by growing some of their own foods. Urban community gardens have sprung up in areas that have the least amount of access to fresh produce. This project, in particular, works with several community organizations that facilitate access to land, tools, and education, in Nashville, Tennessee



AGRICULTURAL DIVERSITY

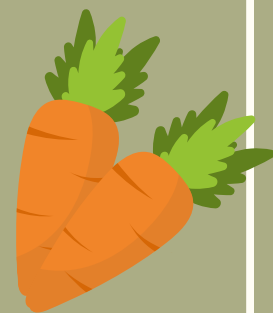
Coming from Latin America, South Asia, and Central Africa (among other places), Nashville's cultivators come from a broad array of growing traditions and bring with them different techniques, tools, and even vegetables. The diversity of agricultural practices gives insights into regenerative strategies, sustainability, and cultural ties for diasporic communities.



SOUTH ASIAN PRODUCE FOR SALE AT A SOUTH NASHVILLE FARMERS' MARKET

ANTHROPOLOGY AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

From an anthropological perspective, my research explores the ways in which community members synthesize traditional, generationally-held ways of knowing and growing across different cultural groups from within conditions of systemic disinvestment. Through sharing these practices, they generate new futurities, spaces in which we can collectively understand and define our shared communities. My collaborators refer to this as food sovereignty.



A FULL CSA (COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE) SHARE GROWN BY REFUGEE FARMERS

FOOD JUSTICE, IMMIGRANT JUSTICE, RACIAL JUSTICE.

Food sovereignty, as most commonly defined by collaborators, refers to the right of people to not only have access to sufficient foods (in respect to both nutritional and cultural needs), but to have a say over the food system itself, from seed to stall. As such, food sovereignty engages directly with how we can envision new food systems that are not structured by racial and socioeconomic segregation. **Other worlds are possible, and new food futures can be collectively envisioned beyond these structures.**



CHALK ART SEEN AT A SOUTH NASHVILLE FARMERS' MARKET

Urban food apartheid and resulting food insecurity disproportionately impacts low-income communities of color; as the framework of urban food apartheid reminds us, these unequal and inequitable systems are not naturally occurring, but are instead tied to histories of racial segregation and the realities of racial capitalism. Food justice must engage deeply with intersectional approaches to truly work towards equitable food futures.

References

- Lowary, Jake. 2024. Over 40% of Tennessee Families With Children Say They Are Food Insecure; 70% Have Changed Spending on Food. Vanderbilt University Medical Center. <https://news.vumc.org/2024/03/19/poll-tennessee-families-with-children-say-they-are-food-insecure/>.
- Feeding America. 2025. Map the Meal Gap 2025: A Report on Local Food Insecurity and Food Costs in the United States in 2023. No. 14. Feeding America.

