

Food Security for Atlanta

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The United States and the South in particular have had long-standing histories of inequality that cover aspects that include but are not limited to race, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, and class. Much of the institutional division between people stems from these inequities. The divisions in society play a huge role when it comes to food insecurity. When considering people's basic needs, food and water should be major priorities. However, the barriers that people face everyday when it comes to getting their hands on nutritious and affordable food, have not created the needed space to make those things a priority when it comes to human rights. It is our goal, as we create a Movement Action Plan, to make food security for all Atlantans a priority, both for the people that need it, and the people that are allies of the movement.

### **STAGES**

Considering the overall goal for our Movement Action Plan, we have come up with both political and community-oriented goals to tackle through each of our stages along the way. Each step of our plan will work in a successive order, yet we expect the goals we have created to be reached at varying times within this 8 stage process. Many of our political goals will take an extended period of time in which community goals will also be met. Our community goals start with building relationships with people and where their food comes from. We plan to do this by an increase in education, community engagement, and political action.

In the Movement Action Plan, we are utilizing the outline of Bill Moyer's Movement Action Plan, which can be found in "Doing Democracy: The MAP Model for Organizing Social Movements" (2007). In this model, 8 steps are outlined for a social movement- ending with a successful movement. However, there are many stages that do not specifically relate to our movement. This does not make the stages irrelevant however, as they allow us to think through the movement and show how all of the pieces- community/local and governmental- fit together and contribute to the movement.

### **Normal Times**

Food deserts are widespread and lack of accessible, reliable transportation makes it difficult for working families to have access to healthy food. In a report on hunger and malnutrition in the United States, it was highlighted that the most food-scarce and poverty-ridden counties are mostly clustered in the South East - Georgia, Florida, the Carolinas, Mississippi, and spreading to Texas and some further as well (Hunger U.S.A., 1968). Though this map was created more than 30 years ago, the data still remains a true representation of food insecurity in Atlanta. This is normal times.

### **Prove Failure of Official Institutions**

In order to begin the movement, we must prove and acknowledge the failure of official institutions. We would achieve this through education and outreach. In part because of the American tendency to focus on individualism, and the tendency for society to shame those who cannot provide for themselves, food insecurity is largely only a problem seen by those who are food insecure. Many tend to hide their struggles from others in fear of being shamed and pushed out of social spheres. Furthermore, governmental programs, such as SNAP and other food aid programs, are not adequately providing for those in Atlanta who are food insecure. In this stage,

we must combine the social aspects of shaming/ignorance and the failure of food and nutrition assistance programs to reach out to people and educate them on the prevalence and seriousness of the food insecurity problem in Atlanta. We would suggest using data from our partner programs, as well as marketing strategies and ad campaigns, to reach the entire Atlanta population through brochures, ads, and schools to target specific populations within Atlanta- especially children.

### **Ripening Conditions**

As we begin to educate the public and attempt to knock down some of the barriers of the social stigma of food insecurity, the conditions will begin to ripen for the movement to take off. Once we educate the public on how widespread the problem is and ways to fix it, our movement will begin gaining ground. By partnering with local organizations such as the Wylde Center, Second Helpings Atlanta, farmers markets, local food banks, schools and churches, we will begin to tackle the social and community goals of the movement. Some of our strategies include educating the public through hands-on experience/learning and community building through cooking classes, gardening, group meals, and supermarket gleaning. Social and digital media marketing through ad campaigns for farmers markets, Fresh MARTA markets, and SNAP benefits, will help engage the community with the resources available. Community and political engagement can be illustrated through community meetings, lobbying and petitions. By partnering with resources such as Wholesome Wave Georgia, elected Georgia officials, local school boards, and the United States Senate Agriculture Committee we will also begin to move the governmental goals of the movement forward.

### **Trigger Event**

For this movement, a trigger event is challenging to envision because food insecurity is such an under-recognized issue by society and because food insecurity is so normalized in the U.S., there are few circumstances that could spark action. One of the worst-case scenarios would be SNAP benefits being taken away. Our farmers and the 42.1 million Americans who rely on SNAP would suddenly be in a financial hunger crisis which could result in direct action such as a protest. A nation-wide recession is another example of an event that could have the potential to motivate people to take action or involve themselves in our movement. Because we are limited in our ability to determine exactly what/if an event would take place, a cultural change may be more plausible in our movement. Raising consciousness around the time-sensitive nature and magnitude of food insecurity could stand as the trigger.

### **Take-Off**

This stage would entail legislation measures at state and federal level. Ensuring the passage of a Farm Bill which fully funds the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for Georgia would be the foundation for our political goals. It would also be necessary to remove any unwarranted work requirements that would coincide with the SNAP benefits. To support this process, it would be necessary to partner with existing pro-food assistance organizations to lobby both the House and the Senate committees every five years. One element of the Farm Bill and SNAP is the Double Up Food Bucks program. The Double Up Food Bucks program (DUFB) serves as an incentive for SNAP recipients to purchase fruits and vegetables. DUFB greatly benefits local communities financially as it helps to strengthen local food systems while supporting farmers, as DUFB offers double the benefits for SNAP recipients when purchasing produce. DUFB has only been adopted by 18 states, excluding Georgia. It would be

essential to ensure that DUFEB is adopted in Georgia. This would be done through passing legislation authored by the Georgia General Assembly and influenced by our social movement and existing partners. The final element of our take-off stage would be the expansion of MARTA buses and trains throughout Atlanta. MARTA expansion would greatly eliminate food deserts and increase access to healthy options which would be available at Fresh MARTA markets.

### **Perception of Failure**

If the legislative process were to take too long and people began getting frustrated, they could easily perceive our social movement as failing. The perception of failure would be caused by the inefficient bureaucratic institutions that are currently in place and have created food insecurity in the first place. Additionally, our movement has to recognize that even if SNAP were to be fully funded and the Double Up Food Bucks program were to be implemented in Georgia, there still would be people who are food insecure. To challenge the perception of failure, our work would need to become more focused on local action. By putting our efforts into connecting communities with local farmers and group meals with churches, our social movement will serve as a reminder that the fight for food security still continues.

### **Majority Public Opinion**

The majority public opinion can be swayed through education and action within communities. If a trigger event were to take place, the public would more likely be empathetic to those suffering due to the failures of official institutions as it will make national media coverage. An issue that often gains media coverage is the stereotype of SNAP (“food stamp”) recipients. There is an unhealthy stigma surrounding the recipients of SNAP benefits and governmental assistance programs as a whole. Ben Heinman, a government official in the late 1960’s describes the attitude of many Americans regarding government assistance programs, stating that “it has

been public policy to have the non-poor decide what the poor need, and...[it] has generally been believed that dependency and poverty spring from faulty values, laziness apathy, and the like” (Kotz, 1969:240-241). Educating the public on who can benefit from SNAP is essential to gaining support and empathy of the public. More than 71% of Georgia’s SNAP recipients are families with children, nearly 33% of recipients are in families with members who are disabled or elderly, and more than 41% of Georgia’s SNAP recipients are working-class families (Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, 2018). Once the public understands those supported by SNAP are essential and hard-working members of our community that deserve food security - support for our movement will greatly increase.

### **Success**

Achieving success in this social movement would mean ensuring food security for all of Atlanta. In doing so, we would reach our political and community goals. Regardless of the outcome of our social movement, success would be working *with* the community, rather than *for* it.

### **Continuing the Struggle**

Keeping the community engaged in the continuing movement is vital in empowering Atlantans to have a voice in their state and food system. We can then expand our social movement to other cities. After we achieve our goals of food security, we could begin focusing on the overarching social and structural aspects of our food system. This could include addressing environmental concerns, agribusiness, the globalization of food systems, and structural inequalities that shape society.

### **APPLICATION OF THEORY**

The theoretical framework that applies most closely to our Movement Action Plan is New Social Movement Theory. This theory puts its own spin on past theories such as Resource Mobilization Theory and Collective Behavior Theory. New Social Movement Theory's main focus is on "an ongoing creation of movement identities and movement cultures that sustain social movements" (Staggenborg, 2016:24-29). Although this focus on shifts and transitions is applicable to our movement, we also need to borrow some ideas from Resource Mobilization and Collective Behavior Theories.

In Collective Behavior Theory, the most important aspect of a social movement is the fact that there was a social disruption, and now cultural and social meaning must be (re)created, thus creating the perfect time for a social movement (Staggenborg, 2016:17-18). However, in our Movement Action Plan, we do not have a specific "social disruption" so we are not reliant on this theory to completely explain our movement. Our movement is attempting to provide ways of understanding food and hunger, and supporting alternate ways of obtaining our social/local goals- through local solutions and community support. However, our movement is also heavily reliant on its constituents and resources, which is why Resource Mobilization Theory also directly applies to our movement. The main premise of this theory is that a movement "requires resources, organization and/or opportunities for collective action" (Staggenborg, 2016:19-20) in order to be effective and become a movement. As a movement, we are heavily relying on partnership with organizations and their established resources. Because the food system has failed, we are not only offering community strategies to work around the system, but also political strategies to work through the system.



## MOVEMENT FRAMING

A movement frame is important in any social movement; it's how the movement can gain constituents, establish a sense of community, and get their message out into the world (Ryan and Gamson, 2014). The overarching frame of our movement is human rights. Human rights is defined by Blau and Moncada as the idea that “all humans everywhere have equal rights to enjoy political and civil freedoms, to have economic and social security, to participate in community and family life, to have an education, and to benefit from scientific research” (2009:1). Blau and Moncada expand on this to add that human rights also encompasses the idea that “all humans have equal rights to dignity and self-determination; to have their own distinctive identity and personality; to participate in culture; and to express themselves through their faith, ideology, and conscience” (2009:1). We believe that this frame fits our movement ideology- to provide access to adequate and nutritious food to all of Atlanta, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, gender, ethnicity, and background.

Although we could have utilized an environmental frame- focusing on local food, sustainability, and environmental stewardship- this type of frame would have put an emphasis on a more privileged aspect of food justice and environmental action. Our main social movement constituents are the people who live in and around Atlanta who are food insecure and who struggle to feed themselves and their families. Because of this, we felt we needed to reach deeper into supporting and bringing to light the health and well-being of our constituents, and frame our movement in this way.

We are attempting to form a “collective identity” which is the “sense of shared experiences and values that connects individuals to movements and gives participants a sense of ‘collective agency’ or feeling that they can effect change through collective action”

(Staggenborg, 2016:25). We aim to do this by encouraging the idea of food as a basic necessity for all.

### **CONCLUSION**

Through our Movement Action Plan, our stages have demonstrated ways of going about fixing the food insecurity problem in Atlanta. We have utilized Resource Mobilization and Collective Action theories to strategically guide our movement forward. We look back on the Black Panther Party efforts in the 1960's and 1970's, in which they utilized a human rights framework, much like ours. The Party's frame centered around food justice, and was focused on overthrowing the system that put all of the food insecure constituents of the movement in this position (Potorti, 2014). By modeling our movement off of past movement strategies such as this one- specifically through pairing the basic human need of food with an overthrow of structural power- strong connections can be created with our movement and others in order to guide future movements and support just and sustainable food systems for all.

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