

# FOOD PEACE

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"What would happen, for example, if we were to start thinking about food as less of a thing and more of a relationship?" ~Michael Pollan

Peace, as defined by the Earth Charter is the wholeness created by right relationships with self, others, and Earth (1). If we think of food as relationship, and relationships are the foundation of peace, therefore food can be the essence of peace. In recent years, the food justice and food sovereignty movements have gained traction as ways to promote equity and autonomy regarding food, respectively. Food peace is a new concept aimed at promoting healthy relationships with food for the individual, community, and Earth. With a shift in our perspective regarding food as "something to eat" to one grounded in relationship, a transformation in how we value food and what we choose to purchase provides a path to promote personal well-being and planetary health. This approach is in stark contrast to our historical understanding of peace and food.

Peace studies largely define peace as the absence of conflict or violence (2). The relationship between food and peace has appeared throughout time, yet it has primarily been assessed through the lens of conflict and food availability. Interestingly, the United States "Food for Peace" program, started in 1954, following decades of global food access shortages and the use of selective food aid as a means to control hungry people whose support was wanted or to prevent opposition.<sup>3</sup> In 1974, Earl Butz, past US Secretary of Agriculture stated, "Food is a weapon. It is one of the principal tools in our negotiating kit" (3). This food conflict narrative maintains our focus on how food can be used to control others in the name of "peace" attenuating progress that is germane to shifting our efforts to *peacebuilding*.

*Peacekeeping*, in the context of food, is the fulfillment of the basic means of physical sustenance to avoid or alleviate hunger (not for the purpose of controlling others), whereas *peacebuilding* describes food as a human right, a means of cultural awareness, and a societal responsibility for the health of people and Earth (4-6). In the realm of *peacekeeping*, we are

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consumers, food is transactional (e.g. energy in, energy out), and we eat to prevent a disease. *Peacebuilding* transforms our involvement with food purchasing to one with broader societal implications that extend beyond the individual. Additionally, the motivation for the food we choose to consume shifts to health promotion and values the welfare of food producers, animals, plants, and Earth (7).

We may be familiar with the many ways that food can “bring” us peace... a favorite recipe, comfort foods, or an early morning cup of coffee or tea. Yet one may wonder what does it mean to “be” in relationship with one’s food? To truly create a relationship with our food will require us to understand *where* our food comes from, *why* the food is important, *who* was involved in the process (e.g. seed to farm to retail to table), *how* it was grown/produced including the consideration of upstream and downstream consequences. The consumer (*peacekeeper*) may purchase food based on taste, convenience, and cost, whereas the inspiration for the food citizen (*peacebuilder*) is to choose foods that promote health not only for their own being but for those in their family, community, and the environment.

Food peace is a call to action, to awaken to the ways in which we can support our selves, families, communities, and the soil, water, and air that provide the building blocks for the food we eat.

To incorporate food peace into your daily life and to become a *peacebuilder*, consider these three principles:

**Contemplate.** How was the food grown/raised? What fertilizers, pesticides, or other chemicals were used to grow the food? Choose foods that were grown with minimal chemical and synthetic inputs to promote soil health and water quality. If you choose to eat animal products, investigate the living conditions for the animals. Does the food require many levels of processing? Is the food traditionally a seasonal food? If so, what resources were needed such as land and water to grow the food out of season?

**Cultivate.** Select whole foods to make simple meals. Carve out the time and space needed to prepare meals at home that nourish and sustain self, others, and Earth. Offer up a note of gratitude at the beginning of a meal to honor the farmer, plants, soil, and others to acknowledge all that transpired to bring this food to your table. Learn skills needed to prepare health-promoting meals. Grow food in raised beds, a community garden, or volunteer at a local farm.

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**Connect.** Purchase foods from a local farmer whether it's sourced from a member-owned cooperative food store, a farmer's market, or directly from the farm, this creates a connection with others in your community. Furthermore, the money spent on food produced in the community or region promotes the local economy. Advocate for policies that make healthy food grown in ways that support Earth's resources in your school districts, towns and cities, and states, to assure these foods are available and affordable.

To "be" in relationship with our food is to select foods that are grown and raised in ways that support the land, sea, and sky, honor those who have come before us with intention to co-create a future for those yet to come. Today, when you sit down to drink a cup of coffee or eat a meal, take a moment to consider where the food came from, who grew the food. Visualize the land where the food was grown or raised, the water that maintained the life of the plant or animal. Where there are unknowns, begin to dig a little deeper to find the answers. This is food peace, a path forward that transforms our relationships in the context of food that allows for the flourishing of human and non-human beings, and the planet.

**Consider reflecting on the following prompts:**

1. How has the concept of "food peace" shifted your perspective about food and/or peace?
2. Create your personal "food peace" action plan with at least one item for self, others, and the Earth.

**Notes:**

1. Earth Charter. Read the earth charter: Democracy, nonviolence, and peace. Accessed June 24, 2024 <https://earthcharter.org/read-the-earth-charter/democracy-nonviolence-and-peace/>
2. Davenport C, Melander E, Regan PM. The Peace Continuum. Oxford University Press; 2018.
3. Science for the People. Accessed June 24, 2024 <https://archive.scienceforthepeople.org/vol-11/v11n3/food-as-a-weapon/>
4. Boyce W, Koros M, Hodgson J. Community based rehabilitation: A strategy for peace-building. *BMC Int Health Hum Rights*. 2002;2:6.
5. Hoover E. "You can't say you're sovereign if you can't feed yourself": Defining and enacting food sovereignty in American Indian community gardening. *AICRJ*. 2017;41(3):31-70.
6. Ingram J. Nutrition security is more than food security. *Nat Food*. 2020;1-2.
7. Hansen RA, Campbell CG. Registered Dietitian Nutritionists' Perceptions of the Relationship between food and peace in the United States Food System: A qualitative study. *J Acad Nutr Diet*. 2023;123(7):997-1010.