

Chapter Five

Food as a Path to Wholeness

Warning for people with an eating disorder: Please do not read or attempt the suggested practices of this chapter.

Note: the use of the word “we” primarily refers to white, educated, above-average income, and privileged people living within the U.S.

People cry for justice, mercy, food, Earth protection, interbeing, freedom, and healing. By transforming our food system, we can build a broad, large form to address all of these calls, one in which people and all beings have a place and the means to meet their needs. The wholeness of a common food system has a form so comprehensive and inclusive that all life belongs within it. Through inclusivity and equality, we will finally know the Wholeness of Earth Interbeing.

On this path we reclaim our responsibility for feeding ourselves in the ways of wholeness. The current means of food production and consumption drive Earth's perils and the dire necessity to transform the food system. Yet we do not achieve wholeness; we become it by yielding to the demands of Earth's limits, reciprocity, and our love for the Earth Interbeing.

Practicing the Path to Food Wholeness

Transforming the injustices of the food system begins with the inner work of persistently choosing to change our relationship with food in the ways of wholeness. This daily work of self-transformation may not seem consequential. Still, if persistently pursued, it will free us from the Western hierarchy, human domination of life and Earth, and the willingness to harm others for self-benefit. Once free from harmful beliefs and values, we can clearly discern creative and equitable ways to transform ever-greater food system complexities. Unless we personally reduce the harm we inflict upon the Earth Interbeing and make the daily effort to become free of harmful Western conditioning, we will remain ignorant and arrogant and not have the clarity or the willingness to transform the food system into one that benefits all life and the Earth.

Just as feet provide a means to move, daily practice allows us to become whole. We discipline ourselves to undo our culturally conditioned behaviors and grow a more just food system by reducing how we harm the Earth Interbeing and increasing our wholeness. Transformation begins with self-discipline.

Until we have an established practice of moving away from omnicide and toward wholeness, we dare not act to impose our will upon others. We cannot keep ourselves busy changing the world while our house lies in ruin. Until we take personal responsibility to change our harmful behaviors and to become whole, we will quickly confront significant obstacles beyond our capacities to manage and fall back into interrelating with others in Western cultural ways: imposing our will on others, exercising our claimed privileges, and acting out our willingness to harm for self-benefit.

Practice of Reducing Consumption of Global Corporate Food

We begin to transform the food system by focusing on what most entangles us with the omniscidal ways of the corporate food system: consumption of industrial beef, out-of-season imported fresh produce, and ultraprocessed foods. When we commit to reducing our consumption of one or all of these three global corporate foods, we start unraveling our complicity with its harms.

Some of us have already taken significant steps to reduce our complicity with the global corporate food system, but we all can take another step. When we commit to goals to change our behavior modestly above our comfort zone but still challenging, we ease ourselves into transforming our foodway. By avoiding self-defeating goals, we learn to live the middle way between doing too little or too much.

For example, Peter has eaten red meat nearly daily for most of his life. Having learned about the destructive consequences of red meat production, he aims to stop eating beef altogether.

We need firmness within the clear, moderate boundaries we set for ourselves. Opportunities to indulge in harmful behaviors will always arise. In situations of mixed feelings, a strong no saves us from losing our resolve and remorse.

However, if we repeatedly find ourselves resisting the goal we set for ourselves, we may want to explore what underlies our difficulties. Self-discipline should not devolve into self-punishment. A successful practice avoids harming our overall well-being. Nobody can endure discipline when it inflicts such severe restrictions that it would cause injury or the despair of giving up. When discipline becomes painful, our attention stays on the pain rather than the pleasure of bringing to life the ways of wholeness.

Peter quickly finds that his beliefs, habits, thoughts, and urges scream and push back hard on not having meat. Instead of giving up, Peter backpedals and resets his goal to become a flexitarian, someone who eats more plant protein and less meat. Research has shown that flexitarianism greatly reduces the omnivorous harms of the global food system. This foodway also opens to gradually taking small steps to reduce meat and dairy consumption. Peter decides to limit eating red meat to twice a week.

We seek a transformation of our foodways that cultivates the well-being of all life, which includes our own wellness of body, mind, and spirit. We live in a culture that has no sense of well-being in any dimension. Yet, if we listen carefully to what foods our body, mind, and spirit need and respond in ways that benefit all, then we will transform our food system. Every being has a different way to express their love and care for themselves, all life, and the Earth.

Choosing how to meet our goal of reducing the consumption of global corporate food products requires careful consideration. For example, if Peter decides to replace eating red meat with ultraprocessed plant-based protein, he will miss the mark. But Peter does his homework and learns how to cook with traditional plant protein sources such as grains, beans, or tofu. He discovers a local flexitarian group which he joins and other supportive online resources.

Individually eating less harmful food may seem inconsequential. Yet, our choice to not harm others and the Earth interacts within a total field in which every part of the field interrelates with all the other parts. We cannot right one thing without righting it all because the consequences of our actions affect all our interconnections and interrelationships. Large transformations begin with the smallest changes. Thus, we take small steps toward becoming whole, increasing our trust in the process with every step.

Whatever your commitment, write it down along with the values that informed your commitment. This written agreement with yourself will remind you of your intentions and help keep you moving toward wholeness.

Eve, who eats organic food for health reasons, commits to not eating out-of-season fresh produce, which the global corporate regime imports into the U.S. for year-round availability. She enjoys fresh food but has learned how global corporations privatize the common land and water of indigenous people of Central and South America to grow these foods for Northern markets. She does not commit to saying no to all out-of-season fresh produce, only to those grown outside the U.S. Eve knows that in the winter, she can buy frozen organic fruit and vegetables from California and Florida. Eve has confidence that she can keep her commitment.

Increase Awareness of Cultural Conditioning

We begin increasing the wholeness of our foodways by increasing our willingness to prioritize the Earth Interbeing over self-centeredness. A food system based on the wholeness of the Earth Interbeing depends upon changing how we eat.

The bedrock belief in human superiority over other life forms gives us the right to ignore the beingness of nonhuman life and to use them for our benefit, a belief that profoundly separates us from Earth Interbeing. Most of us have difficulty accepting our equality with other life forms within Earth Interbeing. Yet the transformation to food wholeness offers us a starting point; we can start empathizing with the food animals whose food products we eat. Ask yourself whether you have the right to benefit from the extreme suffering of animals you eat and why you think this way. How you answer the questions will provide feedback on your readiness for wholeness with Earth Interbeing. Love is not a private matter but rather a way of knowing.

The Western global corporate food system has successfully entangled us in its omnicidal ways by shaping our tastes and expectations. Further, Western culture encourages us to indulge and go along with the crowd. At the beginning of our personal transformation, the dominant cultural foodway challenges us as it deeply influences our choices.

We can strengthen our resolve by learning more about the harmful impacts of beef production, out-of-season imported produce, and ultraprocessed foods. We increase awareness of how the corporate food system manipulates us by recognizing how it conditions us to consume its products through advertising, food engineering, and government support. Next time you enter a big box grocery store, imagine what it would look like without any ultraprocessed foods, imported produce, or industrial meat on its shelves.

The inner turmoil caused by what we have learned strengthens our resolve to live in ways that reduce our entanglement with the omnicidal food system. Yet, while we need to deepen our understanding of what we must overcome, we will continue to act ignorantly unless we put what we have learned into actively moving toward wholeness and solidarity with the Earth, all people, and all beings. Self-discipline requires continuing to do the harder but right thing to do despite difficulties, failures, and opposition. Action nourishes our resolve to persist in becoming whole.

Eve quickly learns that all the fresh out-of-season produce, except citrus and apples, comes from Mexico, Chile, Guatemala, and other Global South nations. How can that be? Only a few short years ago, she remembers buying fresh lettuce grown in California during the winter. Now, all fresh produce

comes from actively colonizing parts of the world. Even her beloved avocado, all grown in Mexico! Eve's resolve to keep her commitment wavers.

The practice of behavior change teaches us to make an effort to insert a pause between a harmful urge and acting upon the urge. In that pause, we can reflect on the situation, consider the source of the urge to act in harmful ways, and remember our values. If we can do that persistently, over time, it becomes easier to say no to what harms. Whatever we yield to dominates us. Yield to wholeness. Resist omnicide.

Eve thinks about what she will do. She has grown used to having fresh produce year-round and eating the eternal fresh salad. But even cabbage and other winter produce that could come from the U.S. now come from the Global South. At least she still has oranges and apples. What has happened to all the domestic production capacity within the U.S.? She decides to buy frozen organic food instead. She heads over to the grocery's frozen foods coolers only to learn, to her dismay, that the frozen vegetables now come from Europe and the frozen fruits from the Global South. No frozen organic produce grown in the U.S. Do we no longer grow fruits and vegetables in the U.S. for the frozen produce market? She feels defeated.

The global food system wants us to feel defeated and despair. They want us to give up and take whatever food they push at us. How can we ever overcome something so big and so beyond our influence?

We can have courage. We can say no to our inner urges to act in ways complicit with the omnicidal system, to not compromise our moral and ethical principles to care for the Earth Interbeing, and to find options. The transformation begins when we start seeing doable options to the existing global food system and bringing them to life.

At home, Eve sat down with her apple and thought about how she could keep her commitment. She chose to do the right but harder thing to do, even when it involved some sacrifice on her part. She disrupted her Saturday routine and got herself to the winter farmers market, where she found all sorts of fresh root crops and fresh greens grown in hoop houses. The food coop had local fresh produce, some domestic frozen fruits and vegetables, but only Mexican avocados. With great disappointment, she said no to avocados. Eve put her principles ahead of her personal likes and dislikes.

Having the willingness to do the harder but right thing allows us to practice what we have learned about the need to transform the global corporate food system and recover the wholeness of the Earth Interbeing, not just for ourselves but for all beings. With such a perspective, we keep to our path even in unfavorable situations. Others may control the corporate food system, but we have the inner freedom to live in ways of wholeness.

Once she overcame the inconvenience of going to the farmers market with its limited hours, Eve began to look forward to it. She moved about in the market's bustle, chatted with the growers, and experimented with strange-looking vegetables. In many ways, she felt at home in her community. Over time, she did most of her grocery shopping at the food coop and became a member.

We affirm at every step, regardless of the opinion of others, our responsibility to adhere to planetary and moral limits and to yield to the majesty of the Wholeness of Earth Interbeing. We need courage to transform ourselves even without the support of family and friends.

As soon as we start changing our behavior, we become aware of the feelings, impulses, and urges that yell at us not to change. Once we can distinguish between what others want us to do and what we need to do for our wholeness and that of Earth and all life, we can say no to our conditioning. We can act upon transforming our foodway in the kind and gentle ways of wholeness.

The transformation of the food system requires us to keep a glad mind to bear the burdens of freeing ourselves from our harmful conditioning. Transforming our food way to benefit all gives rise to joy, which powers us to persist, and we receive more joy from living in ways that care for the Earth Interbeing. Our food journey becomes a work of art in which we give up what harms and gladly live our values and interbe with all.

We will take many steps backwards, but we can always learn from our mistakes, take another step forward, and trust that others do the same. If our practice becomes too easy or too difficult, step back and make a mid-course goal correction to keep on the path to wholeness. Taking the perspective of the Earth Interbeing serves as a solid support for saying no. And once we master one step, we take another.

We start at different places within the Western hierarchy. Eve recognized that her wealth, education, and privileges gave her options that many in her community do not have. She took another small step toward wholeness when she contributed to food justice organizations and explored other ways she could increase food access for all.

The food system transformation begins with changing our personal foodway. Without the willingness to change our own behavior and the experience of actually doing so, we remain bound and limited by Western cultural ways and beliefs: domination, colonialism, anthropocentrism, prejudice, exploitation, and Earth destruction. Through these personal transformation practices, we learn the basic counter-dominant strategies of saying no to what harms and not obeying others who presume authority over us. We also move toward becoming whole with the Earth Interbeing.

When we reduce our consumption of global corporate foods, we stand in solidarity with all the indigenous peoples of Earth who suffer from the dispossession of their land by global corporations, migrant workers, the hungry, those sickened by eating industrial food, other beings, and the Earth. By reducing our harm and increasing our care of the Earth Interbeing, we reciprocate for the food gifts we receive, becoming ever closer to wholeness with the Earth Interbeing.

Everyone encounters food within the context of daily life. Because we all have to eat, transforming our foodways becomes a path to the Wholeness of Earth Interbeing that all can follow. We move on the path toward wholeness with the Earth and all life by shouldering our responsibilities and unfurling our love for all. And we thank the Earth Interbeing for every mouthful of food.

Once we have established our path to freeing ourselves from Western cultural conditioning, we will naturally want to connect with others who have a similar path. Together, we can support each other's liberation and begin to experiment with bringing forth the ways of wholeness into community. We

will recognize each other because of our shared values and our life journey toward wholeness: Me becomes we. And we thank and give back to the Earth Interbeing for our food.

Recommended reading

Fletcher, C., et al. *Earth at risk: an urgent call to end the age of destruction and forge a just and sustainable future*. PNAS Nexus, 2024, 3, 1-20.

Taste the Local Difference - Michigan's local food resource (includes local farm and farmers market directories): <https://www.localdifference.org/>

Study Questions

1. What would you set as a goal to reduce complicity with the global corporate food system?
2. What challenges you most in meeting that goal?
3. Which values, tools, and resources would support you in moving toward your goal?