

Food Is Life

By Craig Hickman

When you read Representative Hickman's story, you will understand why he is so passionate about the issue of food sovereignty as an approach to ending hunger. Mr. Hickman is an organic farmer, operates a fresh food bank and inn, and is an author, artist, chef and a state representative for District 81 in Maine. He has been a relentless advocate for small farmers and farm patrons in the Legislature. In his first term in Maine's House of Representatives, Mr. Hickman submitted LD 475 An Act to Increase Food Sovereignty in Local Communities. LD 475 fell just one vote short of passage in the Senate. He persisted in including the language of food sovereignty, drawn from the LFCSGO (see pages 18-19), in the final version of a bill that merged the Department of Agriculture with Conservation and Forestry.

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A wise man once said, "There's a hunger beyond food that's expressed in food, and that's why feeding is always a kind of miracle."

Back when I was a kid in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, our family struggled to make ends meet. My father worked the first shift at Pabst Blue Ribbon Company in the mail room. A World War II veteran with little education, he was basically the company mailman. My mother held a string of part-time jobs to help put food on the table for their two children. As hard as they both worked, and they worked hard, we needed food stamps in order to survive. Still, my parents made clear in both word and deed that no matter how little we had, someone else had less and we needed to help them however we could.

I will never forget the day a young girl who smelled of dried urine knocked on our door. I was about three or four years old. My father was at work, my sister at school. My mother let the girl in and escorted her to the bathroom where she drew a bath for the girl, who couldn't have been more than 12 years old. After bathing her, my mother gave her a blouse and a pair of pants and sat her down at the kitchen table for a steaming bowl of Cream of



photo: Saad Akhtar

Wheat, bacon and toast. I couldn't believe how fast the girl devoured it all. It was an image that stuck with me, like good preaching. She ate another bowl of cereal and then my mother let her take a nap on the couch. Later, when it was time for her to leave, my mother handed the girl a brown paper bag with a change of clothes and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich inside.

I couldn't count how many girls came knocking on our door over the next months, but they came nonetheless. My mother cared for each of them in almost the exact same way, like ritual. Our home was a stop on an underground railroad for throwaway girls.

It's no surprise, then, that I would turn my current home into a place where anyone, no matter their need, can come at any time, no questions asked, and receive food.

If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes an entire community to feed an entire community.

Craig Hickman's beloved mother, Minnie Juanita Hickman, died as this issue is going to press. He commemorated her passing by saying, "Thank you, Mama, for showing me the miracle of feeding people. I will always love you."

Hunger

"Our real hunger challenge today is to raise incomes and sustain the livelihoods of small-scale food producers, enabling them to feed themselves and local people sustainably. Facing this challenge, the 'food sovereignty' movement has emerged as an incredibly effective alternative to the industrial food system...food sovereignty promotes community-control of resources and access to land for small-scale producers. It prioritizes peoples' ownership of their food policies. Importantly, it demands the right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through agroecology — the application of ecological principles to farming. The solution to global hunger is within our grasp, but it requires a fundamental reform of the global food system: a wholesale shift from industrial farming to agroecology and food sovereignty."

— Kirtana Chandrasekaran and Martin Drago



photo: Emma Altman