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Eco-Chef Terry Says Everyone Deserves A Fair Share of Grub

KANSAS CITY, MO. – When eco-chef Bryant Terry talks about food, he likes to call it grub. Grub, he says, is “food in sustainable proportions,” but not everybody’s getting a fair share of grub.

“I’ve seen an exponential rise in local healthy food systems, but a lot of communities that need it don’t get it,” said Terry, speaking to more than 800 attendees at SARE’s 20th anniversary New American Farm Conference in Kansas City.



Bryant Terry

Take two adjacent California cities: Oakland and West Oakland.

Oakland, said Terry, has great sources of grub. But 10 miles away, in West Oakland, the 30,000 residents have 53 liquor stores and not one grocery store. To add insult to injury, he said, the liquor stores charge 30-100% more for many of the same items found in Oakland supermarkets.

“They’re forced to pay for high-calorie, low-nutrient junk food, and there’s a West Oakland in cities across America, in New Jersey, in New York, in Louisiana, in Tennessee,” said Terry. “There is de facto, class-based apartheid in the food system. Low income people have little access to healthy food.”

Terry doesn’t just talk about food injustice. The award-winning chef, author and food activist founded “b-healthy” in 2001 to raise awareness and encourage better nutrition among low-income youth. He wrote the critically acclaimed book, *Grub: Ideas for an Urban Organic Kitchen*. And he has a new book due out in 2009, *Organic Soul*.

Terry grew up in rural Mississippi where the base of his grub influence was his grandparents’ beautiful orchards, chickens and vegetables. A graduate of the Natural Gourmet Institute for Health and Gourmet Arts who holds an M.A. in history from New

York University, Terry said he had his fast-food period, so he knows it's alluring. That, coupled with his work in New York City doing outreach for youth showed him the barren nutritional landscapes in the city.

"I realized that food access was a key piece missing from the social justice movement," he said. "If young people are not fed, how can they learn?" He observed that a lack of nutritional food contributes not only to high rates of illiteracy, but to poverty and failing infrastructures as well.

His discoveries have led Terry to focus on community-based ways of creating food access to local, sustainably produced food and building relations between farmers and people in the urban center.

An example is The People's Grocery of West Oakland, for which Terry has served as ambassador at large since 2003. The People's Grocery develops creative solutions to health problems in the community stemming from a lack of access to and knowledge about healthy fresh food. It does this by developing food enterprises that increase access to fresh, local and healthy foods in West Oakland, increasing residents' abilities to grow fresh food through urban agriculture and teaching residents about nutrition, healthy eating and food justice.

"When we look at addressing food injustice, we need look no further than the cutting-edge work being done in urban centers," said Terry. "This is a great model of what we can look for in creating urban food systems."

By the way, West Oakland will be getting a real grocery store in 2009, and Terry said people are excited about it and the jobs and healthy food it will bring.