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Welcome Message - Toronto Food Policy Council

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WELCOME MESSAGE

Wayne Roberts
Toronto Food Policy Council

Food is a great topic for young people to sink their teeth into. Food ranks as one of the most important problem areas in the world. More important, it's one of the most important solution areas in the world. Better yet, working on the solutions is fulfilling, positive, creative, empowering, linked to great friendships, networks and career opportunities.

All those good things apply even to a heart-wrenching issue such as hunger or -- perhaps the better word for countries like Canada, where we don't want to forget that hunger in many countries means close to starvation -- chronic food insecurity and under-nourishment.

The most galling aspect of the hunger issue, the aspect that makes it a shameful tragedy, is that there is no reason for hunger. There is no reason, such as lack of food in the world, or the high cost of feeding the world properly, or the difficulty of getting food to people. There is only the sheer irrationality of neglect. In industrialized countries such as Canada, shoppers throw out over 30 per cent of the food they buy. All-told, about 50 per cent of the food that's produced around the world is wasted. Not wasted as in people not eating everything on their plate, but wasted as in a bag of lettuce that was never opened sent to the trashcan, or an perfectly fine apple tossed into landfill because supermarket managers found it too small, or dead fresh-caught fish thrown back in the ocean because they weren't the species of fish the boat was paid to bring back. We not only waste the food that could restore health for the world's more than 800 million hungry people; we pay more to manage the waste than it would cost to share the bounty given us by Nature and food producers. It costs more money to do the wrong thing than the right thing, yet we persist in doing the wrong thing.

That kind of frustrating "the answer is right in front of your nose" feeling goes for almost all food problems. Take global warming, for example. Yes, food causes about a third of all global warming emissions -- think fertilizers made from natural gas, pesticides from chlorine and petrol, trucks that drive strawberries from California to Ontario, and so on. But yes, food could absorb much of the atmosphere's oversupply of carbon dioxide in soils starved for more composted carbon. Instead of creating global warming with fertilizers, pesticides and long-haul trucking, we could double the reduction of global warming by using less fossil fuels and increasing the carbon stored in the soil. More

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often than not, the answer to food problems can be found by turning two or more problems into one elegant solution.

That's why food is so hopeful, and why careers and volunteerism dedicated to food connect with that part of us that wants to make a positive difference in the world. Odd as it sounds, it took until fairly recently before many people caught onto this power latent in food activism. Food is a latecomer to the world of social movements, long after feminism, unionism and so on. It's the new frontier of social and environmental issues. For the coming generation, that means the gates are opening for positive energy and imagination. Welcome to the challenges and opportunities.