Chicago Food Justice Coalition

First Meeting Minutes

November 13, 2017

The meeting was facilitated by Daniel Edelstein, Legal Fellow, and Miguel Keberlein, Director, of the Immigrant and Workers’ Rights Practice Group of the Legal Assistance Foundation (LAF). 25 people were in attendance, representing 16 agencies.

Organizations in attendance:

* Street Vendors Association of Chicago
* Family Farmed
* Green City Market
* La Casa Norte
* DePaul University
* Illinois Food Scrap Coalition
* Advocates for Urban Agriculture
* Illinois Migrant Council
* Glenwood Sunday Market
* Chicago Food Policy Action Council
* Green City Market
* Illinois Farmers Market Association
* Little Village Environmental Justice Organization
* OSHA-USDOL
* Legal Assistance Foundation (LAF)
* Illinois Legal Aid Online.

**Background, Vision, Goals**

* The Coalition is currently operating through Immigrant and Workers’ Rights Practice Group at LAF, as part of Daniel’s fellowship. The hope is to leverage this funding and resource to explore long-term needs and opportunities.
* Our interest in forming the Coalition was based on a perceived need to:
  + Connect LAF’s legal services, and networks working on food, health, community development, and migrant advocacy to local and regional food justice work.
  + Facilitate dialogue and discussion, to identify needs and opportunities at the local, state and regional levels, and find ways to share resources and collaborate on food justice projects.
  + Provide legal services to support existing work, and incorporate legal services into new projects.
* We hope to gain input, feedback, and buy-in from interested individuals and organizations on where the Coalition can be most effective.

**Discussion**

* Food justice is an active space in Illinois and Chicago with many organizations and communities working on almost all issues impacting the food system. At the same time, concern was expressed that existing work is not inclusive, especially for non-English speakers and communities of color. The Coalition should establish connections and endeavor to support existing work, in order to avoid imposition, overlap, and redundancy.
  + Language access is key. Interpretation and translation should be provided with Coalition meetings and resources. Existing organizations to work with include: DePaul Student Translation and Interpretation Corps and Illinois Legal Aid Online (ILAO).
  + Concern was expressed over racial discrimination in access to business licensing and other food-related economic opportunities.

**Legal advocacy**

* There is a need for guides or toolkits to navigate the law, especially for small businesses.
  + Daniel said that he is developing related legal guides and workshops, including for food cart vendors, and hoped that these could be part of the Coalition’s work.
* Education is needed about existing legal processes to understand how things work and what needs reform, including to show disparities and discrimination.
* There is also a need to map and make available information about lawyers and legal organizations that work in food-related issues.
* It was suggested that if legal services and advocacy will be part of the Coalition’s work, this should somehow be made explicit in the Coalition’s name.

**Coalition structure, logistics**

* There was discussion about whether the Coalition’s intended statewide scope would be hindered by the “Chicago” name and the Chicago flag logo. Many agreed that there is a need for a statewide or regional focus on food justice.
* Since there is already so much local activity and the term “food justice” can be ambiguous, it was recommended that the Coalition clarify and make explicit what food justice means in this context.
* Many agreed that holding meetings during the workday would not be convenient and that many people who wanted to attend this meeting could not because of the timing.
* It was also suggested that meetings be held at the offices or sites of participating organizations and representatives could lead meetings. Efforts should be made to understand the kinds of topics and issues that different communities and organizations would like to discuss.
* Discussed how Coalition information would be disseminated, suggesting a website.

**Other topics discussed included:**

* Connecting food pantries and urban farms. How food pantries can receive food donations, and how to manage and reduce their own wasted food.
* Food prescriptions at farmers markets and expanding double-up buck programs.
* Labor and workers’ rights, including migrant workers on farms and in processing plants. Barriers to SNAP because of state eligibility requirements. Coalition should connect with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and Food Chain Workers Alliance.
* Worker cooperatives as an economic engine, with many businesses operating as cooperatives without formal incorporation. Research and advocacy are needed for worker cooperative legislation.
* Land access and vacant lots for urban farming. The Openlands project was mentioned.
* Creating opportunities for small-scale producers, including through the new Good Food Purchasing Program
* Requirements for working out of a licensed kitchen instead of one’s own home can create obstacles for economic growth. Research and advocacy are needed for “cottage food laws”.
* Open forums and dialogues to discuss needs and opportunities and how different organizations can share resources and collaborate.