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# OPINION

## How I Fell for Farmers' Markets

### The rewards of making friends with a farmer

BY JILL RICHARDSON

I'll never forget the first time I went to a farmers' market. I hated it.

Like many who buy food only from the grocery store, I didn't realize that local farm-

ers can't produce every food all year round. I didn't expect pineapples or anything, but the extremely limited selection in early spring shocked me: spinach, arugula, green onions, radishes, and rhubarb. That was it.

I had just moved to Madison, Wis., home of one of the nation's biggest farmers' markets. The entire town was abuzz with excitement about the Dane County



Farmers' Market starting up again for the year on the Capitol Square.

Seasoned marketgoers all knew that the selection of produce expands and changes throughout the year. For them, the market's

array of offerings was just the first of many.

They saw it as merely an appetizer, a teaser, as they readied themselves for strawberries, asparagus, sugarsnap peas, and the other treats still to come.

But no one gave me that memo. And it never occurred to me that the snow had only just melted and that it takes a few weeks — or months — to grow food.

I went home, disappointed, and didn't return until August.

The August market made me a true believer. Apples, watermelons, and bell peppers in colors I'd never seen before

(purple!), potato varieties with exotic names like Russian Banana Fingerling, vegetables I'd never even heard of (have you discovered kohlrabi?), and more. Every farmer's stand made my mouth water.

I felt like a chump for missing months of this edible spectacle. And I worked hard to make up for lost time. I got to know each individual farmer and learn why his or her offerings were special.

Seeing carrots in red, purple, and yellow as well as orange hues, I stopped to learn more. The farmer was busy selling them to the chef of the fanciest restaurant in town. Well, if they were good enough for him, they were good enough for me. I bought some too.

I asked a farmer with a dizzyingly diverse display of potatoes which variety I should use in a soup. "German butterball,"

he replied. And he was right. They made the creamiest soup I'd ever eaten.

"I don't like turnips," I told another farmer. "Try these," she said, handing me a baby turnip. Sure enough, they were sweet and delicious, without any horseradishy bite.

And when I got the food home, it stayed fresh for weeks. Unlike food from the store, it was just-picked. It did not have to travel across continents or spend time in warehouses.

I'm not alone. Eaters everywhere across America are discovering the joy of buying directly from local farmers. From less than 2,000 farmers' markets in 1994, the number has grown to nearly 8,000.

At the farmers' market, labels don't matter because you can simply ask the farmer how they produce your food. Instead of looking for an organic label, you can

just ask if a farmer uses chemical fertilizers or pesticides.

Another bonus: You can meet your meat. And find out exactly how it was raised, including its breed, diet, and even how it met its end.

The best way to learn about farming is by simply asking farmers how they do it. If you aren't sure whether they're using pesticides, hormones, or other chemicals, just ask. Farmers are passionate about caring for their soil and their animals, and many are eager to share their knowledge to help you make better food choices.

This summer, do yourself a favor. Visit a farmers' market, make friends with a farmer, and you'll be rewarded with delicious, healthy food.

*OtherWords columnist Jill Richardson is the author of Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It; otherwords.org*

## Failing to Respond to a Moral Crisis

### No more lectures from President Obama

BY RON DANIELS

When I was at Lafayette Park (across from the White House) recently checking the logistics for our day of action to pressure President



Obama to end the War on Drugs and invest in inner-city black communities, I confess to having been filled with pride thinking about the reality of a black family occupying the White House! But, I pinched myself to get past the fact that Barack Obama is the first African American President of the USA.

I had to quickly remind myself that electoral politics is about who gets what, how much and when. At least that's what our beloved Dr. Ronald Walters spent much of his life striving to teach us. It doesn't matter the color, race, ethnicity or even political persuasion of the resident in the White House, presidents should respond to the crises of people/groups because they are part of the body politic of this nation.

If a constituency/group is a key part of

the president's political support base, there is an even more compelling reason to attend to their needs. Unfortunately, as it relates to blacks, these basic expectations of electoral politics seem not to apply. For decades presidents have failed to respond to the crises in black America in proportion to our needs or political support — particularly the Democratic Party.

Thus far, this is certainly the case with President Obama. He refuses to directly respond to the urgent needs of blacks who marched on ballot boxes in record numbers to ensure his election and re-election. Instead of policies and programs specifically designed/targeted to ameliorating and ultimately transforming the conditions in distressed urban communities, black America is treated to symbolism, access and lectures about personal responsibility.

Many of us seem to be content with President Obama's approach, choosing to give him a pass because he is a "brother." On the other hand, there are growing numbers from all walks of life who are simply getting tired, frustrated and angry at the President's reluctance to openly address what can only be considered a moral and political crisis in terms of depression levels of joblessness, horrific gun violence, fratricide and mass incarceration in urban inner-city black communities.

For some, Obama is like Nero fiddling while black communities are imploding!

No doubt deep down inside this president may want to identify with our needs, but apparently he is afraid of a "white backlash" if he shows his true colors. So, in lieu of programs and policies directed/targeted to relieve distressed black communities, we get symbolism — the president and first lady delivering commencement addresses at historically black colleges or visiting inner-city schools.

Certainly there is no harm in symbolism except when it's a substitute for the kind of substantive policies which would alleviate the pain and suffering of people who not only need a kind word but jobs, economic development and relief from violence and fratricide. The same applies for "access" to the White House.

Never in my life have I witnessed blacks having so much access to the White House via conference calls, talk radio interviews, briefings and celebratory gatherings/parties (folks brag about jamming at the White House with the first lady and the prez). And, of course, the Congressional Black Caucus, National Urban League, NAACP and National Action Network have been favored with appearances at their conventions by the most powerful leader in the world.

The problem is that the president seldom, if ever, speaks directly to the most urgent concerns of black America at these auspicious gatherings — the State of Emer-

gency in America's dark ghettos. Can you imagine President Obama speaking to a Latino convention and not addressing the issue of immigration policy reform or talking to a lesbian and gay organization without discussing marriage equality and LGBT rights? He wouldn't dare insult these groups by not directly addressing their priority agendas.

Finally, and perhaps the most egregious act of all is President Obama's persistent lecturing to black audiences about personal responsibility. The most recent instance was his pep talk to the highly accomplished graduates of Morehouse College, who hardly needed a lecture on altering their behavior to be more responsible young men. President Obama has also used Father's Day to become "daddy-in-chief," exhorting us to just behave better, and more responsibly.

There is nothing inherently wrong with encouraging people to do better but it would have much more credibility and impact if the lecture was accompanied by a call on the nation and its political and economic institutions to invest in revitalizing communities ravished by disinvestment, deindustrialization, the war on drugs and mass incarceration. Otherwise, these patronizing lectures are an insult!

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