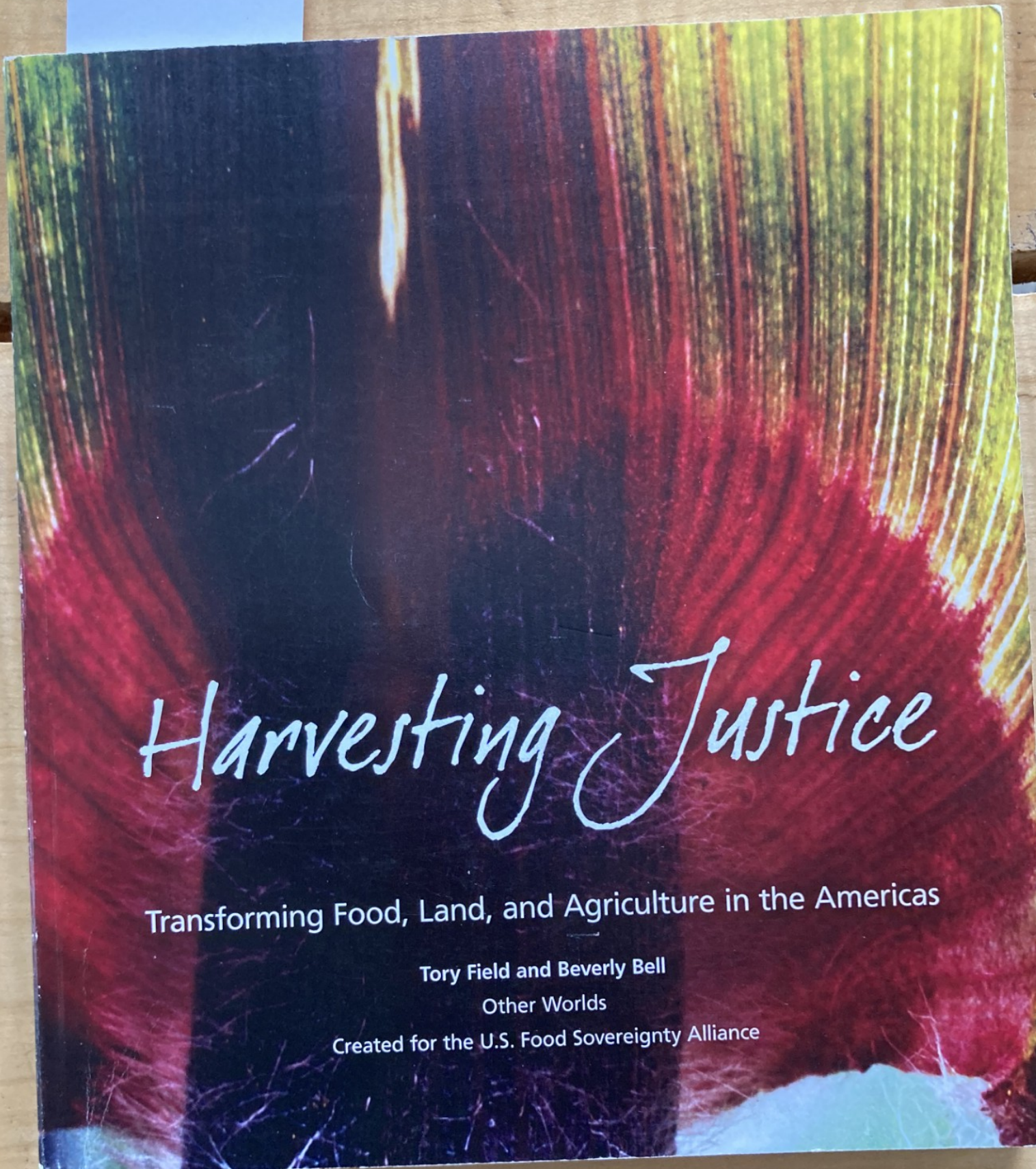




Harvesting Justice

Transforming Food, Land, and Agriculture in the Americas

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Other Worlds

Created for the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance

More than Just Food

Just Food in New York City builds food justice by making CSAs, farmers' markets, and gardens accessible in the city, and by helping small farmers survive – and even thrive – in the process. Co-founder Ruth Katz says the group grew out of a contradiction. "In New York City, we had these growing soup-kitchen lines of people who couldn't get food and, at the same time, nearby farmers going out of business because they couldn't sell their food anywhere. It seemed strange that you couldn't match farmers selling food with people needing food." Just Food connects urban communities interested in bringing CSAs to their neighborhoods with nearby farmers who can truck their goods into the city. They have developed different payment systems to make this food affordable, including helping CSAs and farmers' markets accept food stamps. They also work with CSAs to set up financial-aid programs. For example, higher-income members can contribute extra to subsidize other members within their own CSA, or two CSAs from different neighborhoods can be paired so that the members in the higher-income neighborhood pay higher costs and members in the lower-income neighborhood pay lower costs. "We always fear that everyone will want a lower-priced share, but in fact it's often the reverse. People are really willing to help out," says one Just Food staffer. So far, the organization has helped launch 100 CSA programs throughout New York City's five boroughs, bringing fresh food

to an estimated 30,000 people. To stock the CSAs, Just Food partners with about 100 farms outside the city, which bring in vegetables, eggs, fruit, grain, meat, and other products. Some formerly struggling rural farmers now have a viable outlet for their goods and make close to a 100 percent profit, as opposed to the 20 percent or so they would otherwise make through standard wholesale markets. As a result, a number of farmers have even been able to leave the second jobs they held to supplement their farm incomes, or to secure land on which they had a tenuous financial grip.

Ruth says, "It can be frustrating because the scale of what we're doing is so small. People say, 'You have to scale up to make a bigger impact.' Well, in this particular case, scaling up would defeat the purpose: farmer-to-consumer relationships that are creative and nimble enough to meet the unique needs of each neighborhood. Their smallness is part of their strength. That being said, we can scale up through replication, rather than super-sizing.

"Imagine that every tall building in NYC has a CSA! If one tall building or building complex has 500 families, then only 10 percent would need to become CSA members to support a small farm. And that 10 percent would be a lucky, well-fed group."

Just Food also supports city dwellers as they grow their own food. They offer a range of workshops including seed starting,

raised-bed building, food preservation, season extension, and pest management. Their City Chicken Project trains community-garden groups to build chicken coops. Each group agrees to use its newfound skills to help another group build a coop the following year. Just Food also helps community gardens start farmers' markets, and currently provides ongoing support to 18 markets in the city. While each market functions independently, Just Food assists with logistics like record-keeping, accessing supplemental food from rural farmers, and tapping into helpful state and federal programs.

Just Food also aims to empower people to change city-, state-, and federal-level food policy. They have created an NYC Food Justice Action Guide, which covers a host of issues such as the city's climate footprint and local food policies, as well as information on how to organize community campaigns and pressure lawmakers. In 2009, Just Foods convened the NYC Food & Climate Summit, bringing together community members and government leaders for workshops and policy sessions. In 2010, they won their two-year campaign to legalize beekeeping in the city.