



Healthy food should be a right not a privilege

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Healthful food should be a right for all — not a privilege for some. That is the message community activist [Karen Washington](#) chants in urban neighborhoods across the United States. Since the mid-'80s, she has been advocating for the elimination of food deserts in New York City.

“I want to open people’s eyes to what is happening around us,” said Washington, who is a Just Food trainer and does work with the Food Justice Program. “We have one planet. We can’t get into a spaceship and live someplace else. What are we going to leave for our future generations? We need to maintain open spaces permanently and create gardens that are not temporary.”

That’s why Washington works with La Familia Verde Garden Coalition, playing a key role in building thriving community gardens on empty lots once overridden with debris and a community farmers’ market to address hunger.

The La Familia Verde Farmers’ Market is stocked weekly from July to November with fresh fruits and vegetables, hearty breads, and eggs laid by chickens it shelters.

Work like this is paying off.

About 60 percent of farmers’ market shoppers in low-income neighborhoods say their markets have better prices than their local grocery store, according to the [Farmers Market Coalition](#), a nonprofit dedicated to strengthening farmers markets across the United States so that they can serve as community assets while providing real income opportunities for farmers.

Work like this is also getting noticed.

Aetna recently featured Washington as part of the company’s 2014 African American History Calendar, now in its 33rd year. The exposure brought nationwide attention to Washington’s efforts.

Washington is now devoting her next life chapter to spreading the food justice message. She also plans to write a book and visit unsung heroes who are making a positive impact on the food system.

“It’s the people on the ground who will change the world,” said the soon-to-be retired physical therapist. “Urban agriculture has to be a critical part of urban planning. The challenge is priorities change from administration to administration.”

To learn more, visit justfood.org/food-justice.