INTRODUCTION

In our continuous quest for a fair and sustainable food system, the recent panel discussion at the 2023 SNEB conference, titled "Cooking Up Empowerment Ingredients for Food Citizens Transformation," provided valuable insights and inspiration. These discussions emphasized the critical elements, such as the United Nations-endorsed right to food, necessary to bring this transformative vision to life, especially in a world where the demand for nutritious and accessible food is growing.1 The topics covered included connecting with the land and nature, engaging with the next generation, collaborating with community leaders, and involving policy makers in the conversation.

CONNECTING WITH THE LAND: NATURE, INDIGENOUS SEEDS AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

At the heart of a resilient food system lies indigenous seeds and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), carrying centuries of agricultural wisdom, adaptability, and cultural heritage.2 The Indigenous, culturally meaningful seeds connect people to the land, nourishing not only their bodies and their physical well-being, but also the spirit of communities and traditions.3 Collaborative efforts between Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) communities, researchers, policy-makers, and organizations are vital to safeguarding these invaluable resources.5 Indigenous wisdom, combined with modern knowledge and traditional agricultural practices, can create a harmonious coexistence, ensuring the protection and a sustainable use of these seeds.

EDUCATING AND EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION OF FOOD CITIZENS

To empower future food citizens, a Food Bill of Rights provides a powerful tool for active participation in the food system, guiding policy and practice.5 Cultivating future food citizens starts with creating positive experiences with nutritious food and the natural world for our children. Joyful, hands-on food education, incorporating school gardens, teaching kitchens, and involving students’ families, can transform the next generation’s approach to personal and planetary health.6,7 Farm-to-school programs connect classrooms with food sources, aligning educational and nutritional objectives. Collaborative efforts and advocacy for ongoing resources are essential for success.

CONNECTING AND ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement promotes unity, collective action, and innovation in food systems. Prioritizing the inclusion of all community members, especially youth, ensures that every voice is heard. Together, by pooling their resources, talents, and experiences, community members can more efficiently address food system challenges and promote sustainable practices.8,9 Inclusive community engagement initiatives involve creating coalitions, facilitating collaborations across various sectors, and encouraging youth leadership in decision-making processes.9 Multi-sector collaborations enhance community resiliency, and youth-adult collaboration empowers food citizens for sustainable community well-being.10,11

CONNECTING WITH POLICY MAKERS: POLICY AND ADVOCATING FOR AN EQUITABLE FOOD SYSTEM

Policy and advocacy are pivotal in driving transformative change in our food systems. Individuals and communities must actively engage in policy discussions. The Food Bill of Rights is
a powerful call to action, working towards universal food access as a fundamental human right, irrespective of socio-economic status. This shift empowers food citizens to demand change, representation, and accountability within the food system. Strong coalitions, direct engagement with policymakers, and grassroots efforts ensure our communities’ voices result in tangible improvements, enhancing food access, health, and sustainability.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the multifaceted discussions collectively underscored that achieving a fair and sustainable food system requires a blend of diverse, collaborative, and community-driven efforts. To bring this vision to fruition, it’s crucial to recognize the significance of key elements such as traditional ecological knowledge, cultural heritage, empowering the next generation, community engagement, and policy advocacy. By uniting and prioritizing these aspects, we can work towards a future where everyone has access to nutritious food and the opportunity to contribute to a more equitable world.

Virginie Zoumenou, PhD, CNS
Professor of Dietetics and Nutrition, Certified Nutrition Specialist, Nutrition and Health Program Director, University of Maryland Eastern Shore

Jenn Mampara
Director of Education, FRESHFARM FoodPrints

REFERENCES