



The Story of **Food Not Bombs**

Food Not Bombs [FNB] as a group began in the 1980s as an effort to feed anyone who was hungry. It has spawned into hundreds of autonomous chapters that collect surplus food that would otherwise go to waste from grocery stores, bakeries, markets, gardens, and generous people, and then prepares it into community meals which are then served for free to anyone who is hungry. The central belief behind FNB [Food Not Bombs] is that:

- If governments and corporations around the world spent as much time and energy on feeding people as they do on war, no one would go hungry.
- There is enough food in the world to feed everyone, but so much of it goes to waste needlessly, as a direct result of capitalism and militarism.
- Vegetarian food is both healthy and non violent.

Food Not Bombs calls attention to poverty and homelessness in society by sharing food in public places and facilitating gatherings of poor, homeless and other disenfranchised people. There are four tenets to the Food Not Bombs philosophy: **food recycling, consensus decision making, nonviolence, and vegetarianism.** Anyone who wants to cook may cook, and anyone who wants to eat may eat. FNB strives not to be exclusionary.

Beginnings

Food Not Bombs began in the early 80's in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston, when a group of anti-nuclear activists, who were protesting the nearby Seabrook nuclear project, began spray-painting the slogan "*Money for food, not for bombs*" around the city. The shortened slogan, "Food Not Bombs", then became the name of their group. They soon put their slogan into practice. At a meeting of rich bank executives, who were financing nuclear projects, the group showed up and served free food outside to a crowd of 300 homeless people. The action was so successful that the group started doing it on a regular basis, collecting surplus food from grocery stores and preparing it into meals.

In the late 1980s, a second chapter of Food Not Bombs was started in San Francisco. SF Food Not Bombs soon encountered tension with police and fought two "Soup Wars" with the city's Mayors, Art Agnos and Frank Jordan. Agnos initiated the first confrontation, using riot police to shut down an FNB serving. Members of the group were routinely beaten and jailed by police. The group was persistent, however, and despite being arrested over 1,000 times, managed to continue serving food on the street. Food Not Bombs had begun videotaping police action and using the court system in attempt to stop the police abuse. Support had grown and crowds of hundreds were at each serving. Media attention on the confrontations made police violence more difficult.

Food Not Bombs continued to gather strength throughout the 1990s, and held three international gatherings: in San Francisco in 1992 and 1995, in Atlanta the following year. Chapters of Food Not Bombs were involved in the rise of the Anti-Corporate Globalization Movement in the late 1990s, leading to the APEC resistance in Vancouver in 1997; the June 18,

1999 International Carnival Against Capitalism; and the Battle in Seattle later that year, which shut down the World Trade Organization meetings. Each independent FNB group serves free vegetarian meals at protests and other events.

Even though FNB is dedicated to nonviolence, Food Not Bombs activists in the United States have been under investigation by the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force, Pentagon and other intelligence agencies. A number of FNB volunteers have been arrested on terrorism charges but there has never been a conviction. Amnesty International states it will adopt Food Not Bombs volunteers who are arrested and convicted as "Prisoners of Conscience" and will work for their unconditional release.

Food Not Bombs is often the first to provide food and supplies to the survivors of natural disasters and terrorist attacks.

During the first three days after the 1989 Earthquake, FNB was the only organization in San Fran providing hot meals to the survivors. The Long Beach chapter provided food after the North Ridge Earthquake. Food Not Bombs was also the first to provide hot meals to the rescue workers responding to September 11th World Trade Center attacks. FNB volunteers were among the first to provide food and help to the survivors of the Asian Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina. FNB volunteers organized a national collection program and delivered bus and truckloads of food & supplies to the gulf region. FNB has been one of the only organizations sharing daily meals in New Orleans since Katrina.

Food Not Bombs works in coalition with groups like Earth First!, The Leonard Peltier Defense Committee, CopWatch, Anarchist Black Cross, the IWW, Homes Not Jails, Anti Racist Action, In Defense of Animals, the Free Radio Movement and other organizations/movements.

Food Not Bombs was also heavily involved in the anti-war movement which arose in 2002-2003 to oppose the war on Iraq, leading to the largest international protests in world history. FNB served thousands of people for days during the protests in late January 2003.

Today, there are about 200 chapters of Food Not Bombs all over the world, though most are in North America. FNB has a loose structure: every chapter embraces a few basic principles, and carries out the same sort of action, but is free to make its own decisions, based on the needs of its community. Likewise, every chapter operates on consensus: equally sharing work and say in making decisions. Besides collecting and distributing food for free, **FNB volunteers work in other ways for nonviolent social change & many are** involved in varied anti-poverty, anti-war, environmental, pro-immigrant, and other organizing. Because most FNB groups share similar values & because they operate in a generally anarchist fashion, Food Not Bombs is sometimes known as a "franchise anarchistic organization".

Food Not Bombs volunteers work for nonviolent social change Statement of Non-Violence

The name "Food Not Bombs" states our most fundamental principle: That our society needs things that give life not things that give death. Our society is dominated by violence and the threat of violence. This affects us both in our daily lives through the constant threat of crime and police abuse, and less directly but just as seriously through the threat of total annihilation from nuclear war. The authority and power of all governments is based on the threat and use of violence. Governments spend most of their time and resources developing, using, and threatening to use weapons of massive human and planetary destruction, rather than nurturing

and celebrating life. Food Not Bombs has chosen to take a stand against violence. FNB is committed to non-violent social change through the celebration and nurturing of life by giving out free vegetarian food.

Poverty is violence. Investing in bombs instead of addressing human needs, our government perpetuates and exacerbates the violence of poverty in our society. Hunger is one of the most direct physical expressions of the violence of poverty. Millions of Americans go hungry every day and childhood malnutrition contributes heavily to infant mortality rates, which are higher in parts of the U.S. than in some "Third World" nations. Inadequate or non-existent health care, police brutality, & various forms of discrimination are also forms of systemic violence against poor people. Poverty is also a key factor in the level of interpersonal violence. It can drive down people's self-esteem, causing people to lash out in the form of domestic violence and violent street crime. The violence of poverty also becomes internalized which can result in addictive behavior and suicide.

Food Not Bombs responds to the problems of poverty and self-esteem in two ways. First, by providing food to whoever wants it in an open respectful way. **We don't make people jump through bureaucratic hoops that are designed to control and often punish people for being poor.** Secondly, we invite people who eat with us to be involved in providing the food themselves. This helps people to regain a feeling of their own power.

The food we serve also expresses our commitment to non-violence. **Mainstream food production is an inherently violent process** involving the inhumane treatment and slaughtering of millions of animals, the death of 10,000 field workers a year, the poisoning and ruin of the air, water, soil, & our bodies with chemical fertilizers, pesticides, & genetically engineered organisms, and reckless abuse of the land.

Food Not Bombs works to ensure that the food we serve is never used as a weapon against anyone. At demonstrations and daily servings, we concentrate on serving food in a peaceful and respectful manner, thereby creating a safe environment for people to eat in. The food embodies our commitment to non-violence in so many ways. It is a humane response to poverty, a means of empowering people, & is ecologically safe.

Not Enough Food for Everybody?

There is a myth in this country, that there isn't enough food in the world to feed everyone. This is false. While hunger is a huge problem in the U.S., and the world, the problem is not a lack of food; it's with unequal distribution and the capitalist focus of profit over people. In the US, food insecurity and hunger has been growing. The USDA released a 2002 study showing that nearly 35 million Americans lived in households experiencing food insecurity. And yet, according to the California Waste Management Board over 21.9 million tons of food was wasted in the US alone in 1997.

While billions of pound of food go to waste around the world, people who could be eating the food are starving because they can't afford to pay for it. In 2002 in India, over 65 million tons of grain went to waste still in silos because no one could afford to buy it. This paradox of plenty has some explanations: in the US, companies get better tax deductions for unsold, wasted food than they would if they gave the food to people who need it. Some grocery stores even go to extremes to ensure that people cannot use food they discard in dumpsters, throwing bleach over the food, and locking their dumpsters.

Hunger is a huge problem, and it's systemic. Hunger can't be stopped by food drives, and it should be analyzed by looking at the bigger picture (which this writing has only touched on). a responsible analysis includes examining, for instance, systematically-imposed poverty and racism. Food is necessary for life. However, people continue to starve in a world where food is plentiful enough for everyone.

FNB groups salvage food that otherwise would be thrown away & cooks it into healthy, vegetarian meals. Simple activism: connecting hungry people with food that would have been needlessly wasted. We serve vegetarian food because of the extreme violence inherent in modern animal-based food production, because it is more ecologically efficient & because veggies & grains are far less likely to carry organisms like salmonella and e-coli. We serve in public spaces to bring the oft-hidden problems of homelessness and hunger into a wider spotlight.

Locally

Food Not Bombs in Arcata has an her/history that includes subjection to police repression, arrests for serving free food on the Plaza, and success in overcoming prohibitive city action, through persistent dedication to feeding hungry people. FNB serves in Eureka and at protests and community-building events in the area.

Basic Principles

FNB is a loose knit group of independent collectives, but we do share several unifying principles, defining us as Food Not Bombs. They are:

Food Recycling

Food Scarcity is a myth! Enough food is wasted each day to feed everyone who is hungry. FNB recovers healthy nutritious vegetarian food that would have been otherwise discarded & prepares & serves it to people. We collect food that may be unsellable because it's no longer "pretty."

Consensus Decision Making:

Rather than a system of winner-take-all, or some top-down hierarchy, FNB believes that each member of the group should have a full opportunity to participate in shaping all the group's decisions. Consensus process insures that the will of the majority doesn't dismiss the values and contributions of everyone else. Consensus process forces us to resolve conflicts through negotiation and compromise, rather than overruling and censoring.

Non-Violence:

In a society is dominated by violence, our lives are on a constant battlefield. FNB rejects the rule: Either work to eat or starve and struggle in streets. FNB is serious about creating society we want to live in, one motivated by love, sharing, and understanding- *not* violence, greed, and hate. FNB strives to create a movement that challenges the violence of society- through the free & open sharing of food and through actions that highlight the injustices of capitalism and poverty. While our society pursues the massive accumulation of wealth for the few, it relegates millions to hunger and homelessness. The commercial food industry is also predicated on violence against the air, water, land, animals, workers, and 'consumers', and allows tons of usable food to go to waste to insure profits.

Vegetarianism:

Food Not Bombs serves only vegetarian food & makes every effort to use organic produce.