**Sustainability Fellowship 2011 – Food Justice**
**By Carolyn Hylander**

## Sustainability *and* Social Justice

The word "sustainability" is often associated primarily with environmentalism and the conservation of the "natural environment". However, Pacific Lutheran University has made a commitment to not only the sustainability of the planet, but also to the people and the prosperity of the university, surrounding communities, and of the earth. In the PLU 2020 paper written by faculty and staff members Kevin O'Brien, Lauri McCloud and Nicole Scheer, they discuss how they envision sustainability at PLU: "care for people, the planet, and prosperity, both now and in the future. It is a value that emphasizes the inseparable importance of environmental, economic, and ethical principles" (1). They also describe sustainability including the "long-term health of our society", and a commitment to social justice and the "equity, respect for the value of diversity, and full participation by all members" (1). Sustainability at PLU is to be greatly applauded for its work and achievements, and for the exceptional example that it sets for other institutions. However, there is always room for improvement and additional aspects to consider in the dialogue of values at our University. As our University is making efforts to more broadly define sustainability, I have proposed a fellowship that addresses one of the numerous environmental justice issues prevalent in our society today: food justice. Food justice is an issue that encompasses both sustainability and social justice. It is the idea connecting access to healthy food with race, class privilege, and health inequalities (Alkon and Norgaard). Using PLU's vision of sustainability, food justice is clearly a sustainability issue because access to healthy food is about people and the planet, about social inequalities and injustices that create barriers to access, and later influence the long-term health of consumers. By raising awareness about food injustices facing our globe, nation and our local area, our University may start and continue

efforts that advocate for social and environmental justice for our neighbors, and we may be able to better sustain relationships with those around us.

**What is Environmental Justice?**

Food justice is most definitely an environmental justice issue because it is about both environmental sustainability and social justice. Many scholars have written about the variable relationship between environmental sustainability and social justice such as Eileen McGurty in *Transforming Environmentalism.* She describes how social justice and environmental sustainability "speak different languages and have different objectives" (91), however she says that the environment is something to be distributed, and justice is "functional" for sustainability. She explains that environmental sustainability is about sustaining some feature of the 'natural' environment into an "indeterminate future" and, that social justice is about the fair distribution of benefits and burdens in a community (86). Therefore, when the models of environmental sustainability and social justice converge as "environmental justice", the objective becomes guaranteeing environmental benefits or burdens in a community being fairly distributed. Thus food justice is clearly an environmental justice issue because it is about the distribution of and access to the environmental benefit of nutritious food. Environmental inequality or environmental injustice refers to a situation in which a specific social group is disproportionately affected by environmental hazards (Pellow and Brulle, 105). "Environmental racism" is a specific form of environmental inequality which "refers to any policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color" (Pellow and Brulle, 105). Food injustice then, refers to certain social groups having poor access to nutritious foods compared to others because of historical and institutionalized inequalities in our society that are based on class and race. When

we learn about environmental justice issues such as food justice, and the privileges we may have as members of social groups that are not disproportionately burdened with environmental harms nor experienced poor access to environmental benefits, we can become conscious of the inequalities and injustices in our society that oppress others, and we may start being a part of the efforts for positive social and environmental change.

**The Environmental Justice Movement**

The environmental justice movement is a "political response to the deterioration of the conditions of everyday life as society reinforces existing social inequalities while exceeding the limits of growth" (Pellow and Brulle, 3). The environmental justice movement incorporates the principle that all individuals have the right to be protected from environmental degradation, reflects a public health model of prevention, shifts the burden of proof to those who do harm and discriminate, and do not give equal protection to racial and ethnic minorities and other "protected classes" (110).

The environmental justice movement began with hazardous waste dumping cases which burdened certain communities with environmental problems based on their race and the place that they lived. While food justice is not about the disproportionate burdens of environmental risks of toxic wastes, it is about the disproportionate burden of having poor access to the environmental benefits of nutritious foods.

**Perspectives within the Environmental Justice Movement**

Just like the environmental justice movement as a whole, there are varying perspectives with which to view food justice issues. In the environmental justice movement, in the white working-class community, the environmental justice movement took the shape as a "citizen-worker" or "anti-toxics" movement whereas in communities

with large populations of racial and ethnic minorities, it took shape as the "People of Color Environmental Movement" (Pellow and Brulle, 8). This shows that within the environmental justice movement, some identified race as one of the main factors of the disproportionate exposure of toxics in some neighborhoods, and others focusing on factors un-related to race instead. Similarly, some would argue that race is a large factor when it comes to communities that have poor access to nutritious foods, whereas others would argue that poor access to nutritious foods is determined by class. Some say that disregarding race as a factor in determining who experiences disproportionate exposure to environmental harms or lack access to environmental benefits reflects a "colorblind" viewpoint of racially privileged groups who ignore or are unaware of the realities of institutionalized racism in our society.

This perspective is similar to the political economy of race perspective, which acknowledges that environmental hazards are not coincidental but instead related to forms of institutional discrimination (556), and that racism is the most important factor in determining where environmental hazards are located. In the case of food justice, determining where access to environmental benefits are located.

The residential discrimination thesis provides an example of underlying social inequalities that determine who is disproportionately burdened with environmental harms. It identifies race as a determinant of exposure to environmental hazards and states that mobility patterns shape the racial and ethnic differences in exposure and proximity to environmental hazards as a result of "housing market discrimination [by real estate agents, local governments, and mortgage lenders] that restricts the housing options available to members of at least some minority groups" (5). Another perspective that

discusses how certain communities are disproportionately burdened with environmental harms is one discussed by Pellow and Brulle stating that there is deliberate placement of polluting facilities in certain communities rather than from population migration patterns. They say that some communities are systematically targeted for the location of polluting industries and other locally unwanted land uses (38). From a food justice case this would look like the deliberate placement of retailers or markets with the environmental benefits of healthy foods in certain areas, providing easy access for some and poor access for others.

Today, there is an extensive amount of literature showing evidence that "in U.S. urban areas, concentrations of pollution and industrial hazards tend to be highest in neighborhoods with large populations of African American and Hispanic residents"…and that there is "racial inequality in exposure of outcomes, including physical and physiological health, educational success, and perceptions of social order" (Crowder and Downey, 1). Similarly, studies show that proximity to the environmental benefits of nutritious foods is largely linked to poverty and race, and certain social groups experience food insecurity and diet-related health issues disproportionately. When we observe society from an environmental justice or food justice lens, we can become aware of social inequalities in our society such as institutionalized racism in the context of food access and food insecurity. From such awareness we can learn how to be advocates for those around us who are disproportionately affected by food justice issues.

**Nutritious Foods - A Choice?**

Access can mean both geographic access and economic access. Pellow and Brulle point out how people experience resource shortages in the form of price increases for basic

commodities like housing, food and energy, and describe how they can be better absorbed among the affluent than the poor, working-class, people of color and immigrant populations (1). However, food in particular "is an essential commodity, a window which allows us to look into any society and determine critically important things about its structure, especially with regard to social justice and the distribution of power and wealth," (Bedore, 1425). By learning about the food system in the U.S, observing who has access to food in certain geographic places in our society, and where food insecurity is prevalent, we are able to see how racial and economic inequalities are connected, giving us insight into racial and economic injustices in our society today.

While we like to think that we choose our food freely, "the overwhelming evidence is that our choices are constrained by history, class, gender, ethnicity, and market issues of access, affordability and global supply patterns." (Caraher and Conveney, 591). Similar to what Macias points out, Alison Hope Alkon and Kari Marie Norgaard discuss how the concept of food justice can help us understand race and class privilege because we will be able to see how access to healthy food is shaped not only by the economic ability to afford it, but also "the historical processes through which race has come to affect who lives where and who has access to what kind of services." (300) Assessing trends of disparities in food access and health from a food justice perspective is valuable because we can then understand the big picture: "the need for food security –access to healthy, affordable, culturally appropriate food-in the contexts of institutional racism, racial formation, and racialized geographies" (Alkon and Norgaard, 289).

**Access to Nutritious Foods**

When access to healthy foods is unequal, health inequalities emerge, disproportionately affecting certain social groups. While I cannot and do not claim that poverty, food insecurity, and

diet related health issues have causal relationships, I do assert that there are connections between these realities in our society, and they deserve attention and further research as well as critical assessment of how race and ethnicity are related.

The issue of access to healthy and nutritious foods is not a new phenomenon. There have been close ties between the nutritive values and the cost of foods for quite some time. In the article "The cost of US foods as related to their nutritive value" by Adam Drewnowski, he reports on comparisons that were given to the cost of foods in relation to their energy and nutritive value in the 1800s by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The article makes clear the historical inequality of foods with higher nutritive values being more costly and thus less accessible to the poor. Drewnoski reports that according to the 1902 yearbook of the USDA, foods were grouped according to their energy costs. "Cheap foods, providing more than 1900 calories for 10 cents were cereals, sugars, starches, lard, dried beans and peas, cheap cuts of meat, salt pork and bacon, potatoes, and sweet potatoes". In contrast, ""expensive" foods that provided less than 800 calories for 10 cents were lean meats and fish, chicken, eggs, green vegetables, and most fresh fruit. Then as now, grains and sugars were cheaper than fresh produce" (1). He reports that dry, energy-dense foods provided lower-cost calories than fresh produce and confirmed that foods with significantly lower energy costs were fats, grains, sugar, beans, and potatoes compared to lean meat, fish, lettuce, or fresh fruit (1). Drewnoski writes that energy cost was lowest for grains, fats, eggs, and milk, and that energy cost for vegetables was higher than that for every other food group except for fruit. He says "the mean energy cost for vegetables was more than five times that of grains and fats and more than double the cost of sugars" (5). According to what Drewnowski reports, today, as well as historically, the energy cost for fruits and vegetables is significantly higher than other foods with lower nutritive values.

This influences the socio-economically disadvantaged being confined to food choices of lower nutrient values, which affects diet related health issues.

Drenowski as well as other scholars argue that the reality of disparities in food prices is a result of long-established agricultural policies like subsidies to commodity crops such as wheat, soybeans and corn as opposed to vegetables and fruits that have led to "increasingly cheap calories and a food supply that is energy rich but nutrient poor" (7). In the U.S. the high quality diet and consumption of vegetables and fruit is linked to higher education and incomes (7) as well as diet-related health outcomes. When low nutrient foods are affordable and meet the immediate needs of hunger, long term health is compromised.

Today, inaccessibility to highly nutritious foods is not only an issue of cost, but is also one of geography, as not all neighborhoods which are already segregated by race and class, have equal access to markets that sell nutritious foods like fresh produce. Poor geographic access "confines [people's] choices to processed, fast, and commodity foods" (Alkon and Norgaard, 290). As Bedore explains, "urban retail food geographies are changing in ways that disadvantage low-income communities and create accessibility challenges for those with poor mobility, low income, or some other barrier to physical access"(1419). Bedore says that poverty, food insecurity, diet-related health inequalities are visible in communities with poor access to healthy, affordable food and whose population faces social exclusion (1419).

Thomas Macias writes, "Access to quality food is thus not just a matter of consumer tastes and affordability, but is directly tied to deeper structures of inequality that are themselves shaping the health profile of the nation along lines of race, gender, and socioeconomic status" (1089). These "deeper structures of inequality" that Macias refers to are historical and institutionalized inequalities such as residential discrimination and racial isolation, which has

influenced the demographic makeup of neighborhoods over time. Studies show that the makeup of neighborhoods later influences where markets are established. Markets with nutrient high, low-processed foods such as produce, and the access and affordability of such markets prove to be lacking in low-income communities and racially and ethnically diverse communities. Additionally, low-income communities and racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately affected with diet related health issues such as diabetes and obesity in the U.S., and thus we must look closer at the relationship between accessibility to nutritious foods and diet related health inequalities (Dowler, 760).

Many food justice activists in the U.S. use the term "food desert" to describe the lack of locally available healthy food, and link food insecurity to institutional racism and its historic and present-day effects on the built environment (Alkon and Norgaard, 295). Many reports have shown that "large grocery stores [have] closed urban locations in favor of suburban ones". This is called "supermarket redlining", likening racist lending policies" (295). Also, as Dowler explains, many retailers have been increasingly sited away from poor areas and are geared for car owning shoppers, making access to healthy foods very difficult for those without personal vehicles (763).

Also, often neighborhoods that are racially isolated and excluded are likely to be "disordered", which is related to high rates of poverty and violence, and can affect weight status "by discouraging physical activity and generating chronic stress". This can "promote weight gain via both physiological and behavioral mechanisms…chronic stress can lead to overeating as a coping mechanism, especially among women" (Chang, Hillier, and Mehta, 2064). Racially isolated neighborhoods are associated with a higher BMI and risk of obesity and other chronic health conditions (2067). Groups such as the West Oakland Food Collaborative (WOFC)

racialize and politicize diabetes in the same way that environmental justice activists portray asthma because of high rates of diet-related health problems among residents of the food desert experience (295).

**Poverty, Food Insecurity and Diet Related Health Issues in the United States**

When observing trends in our society with a food justice lens, we can see that poverty, food insecurity and diet related health issues are all prevalent issues and are likely to be connected to issues of access to healthy foods in our country. While I cannot and do not argue that poverty, food insecurity, and diet related health issues have causal relationships, I assert that they are connected issues and deserve attention and further research.

According to the University of Washington *West Coast Poverty Center*, "in 2009, 14.3% of the U.S. population – about 43.6 million people – were living below the poverty line"[i] (University of Washington). Poverty in the U.S. corresponds with food insecurity, but not perfectly. Further, although poverty often entitles individuals to food assistance, those who are in need of nutritional assistance don't always have access to the services needed. "Low income families who need help with food, shelter, health care, or other needs face a complex web of public and private providers and eligibility rules" (University of Washington). "In 2006, 11% of families in the U.S. reported food insecurity, and roughly 9% of the population received food stamp benefits" and in 2008, "roughly 15% of all U.S. households reported food insecurity at some point…up from 11% in 2007. That percentage translates into 17 million households with 49 million Americans, including 17 million children"(West Coast Poverty Center). When observing the high rates of poverty and food insecurity in the U.S., we can see that there are connections, and we must ask what inequalities in our society exist that affect certain groups to disproportionately experience poverty and food insecurity. Food insecurity also largely

influences diet-related health issues, and data on diet-related health inequalities in the U.S. suggest that food access issues are not only experienced disproportionately by those living in poverty, but also that racial and ethnic minorities. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "more than 72 million U.S. adults are obese", and "in 2009, about 2.4 million more adults were obese than in 2007. Obesity disproportionately affects people of color in the U.S.: "Non-Hispanic black women and Hispanics have the highest rates of obesity (41.9% and 30.7%)" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). These trends suggest that in the U.S., low income communities, racial and ethnic minorities, and women experience poverty and food insecurity disproportionately, and experience higher rates of diet related health issues in part as a result of such inequalities. We must be aware of the connections between these realities that point to food injustice in our society.

**Washington State**

These national patterns are consistent in the West Coast states of the U.S, including Washington State. According to the *West Coast Poverty Center*, "In the three west coast states of California, Oregon, and Washington, a total of nearly 6.5 million people were living in poverty in 2009, including almost 2.3 million children". Poverty disproportionately affects racial and ethnic minorities in Washington State. In Washington State, roughly one in four blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans are living below the federal poverty level[ii] (West Coast Poverty Center). Clearly poverty is a huge issue statewide too, and disproportionately affects certain racial and ethnic minority groups, which are trends that we need to be aware of in the context of food justice.

Among Washington's population, food insecurity, race and poverty are connected, and it is clear that racial and ethnic minorities and those living in poverty experience higher rates of

food insecurity. Although the bulk of households affected by food insecurity in Washington are white, "Hispanic households in Washington are nearly four times as likely to be food insecure as white families. Native American and African American households also experience rates of food insecurity well over twice white households" (Washington State Department of Health). Among households that experience higher rates of food insecurity than the national average, 37.7% are those with an income below the official poverty line, 22.2% are African American Households and 20.1% are Hispanic households (Washington State Department of Health).

While some may understand obesity to be an epidemic in the U.S. because of individual unhealthy consumer choices such as overeating or choosing high energy, low nutrient foods, evidence shows that such foods are cheapest and thus more accessible to low-income people than are high-nutrient foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables. More importantly, the geographic place where a person lives may confie their access to healthy foods. Therefore, we must keep in mind when observing these statistics that those experiencing poverty, and many racial and ethnic minorities experience higher rates of diet related health issues because of a lack of access to high-nutrient foods.

**Pierce County**

Food Justice is prevalent in Pierce County[iii] as well, because similar rates and trends of poverty, food insecurity and diet-related health issues are reflected. In Pierce County, an estimated 11.6% of individuals were living below the poverty level in 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau). Additionally, 28% of adults were classified as obese, 64% of adults are overweight or obese, and 10% of children are obese (Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department). Clearly both poverty and diet-related health issues are prevalent in Pierce County and are likely connected issues.

**Parkland**

Parkland[iv], Washington, the unincorporated suburb of Tacoma in which PLU is located, closely reflects the demographics of Pierce County in terms of race and ethnicity, income, education and poverty levels, and provides many examples of food justice issues. When compared to Pierce County as a whole, the number of high school graduates and those with a bachelor's degree or higher is less, and the percentage of families and individuals living below the poverty level is significantly larger. Given the demographic breakdown of Parkland in terms of income, race and ethnicity, and education, and observing trends within larger tracts that show the relationships between income, race, food insecurity, and diet-related health issues, similar trends are likely to exist in Parkland as well.

**Farmers Markets**

Given the astonishingly high poverty rate in Parkland, an estimated an estimated 19.2% of individuals living below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau), and when observing the surrounding businesses and retailers, it is clear that Parkland faces food justice issues. Parkland does not have the same access to highly nutritious foods than do other neighborhoods in Pierce County. This is clear when looking at the location of farmer's markets[v] and available retailers in proximity to Parkland neighborhoods. When looking at the demographics of Parkland in comparison to neighborhoods where such farmers markets or retailers are located, the lack of geographic access is connected to both the average income in the area and to the race and ethnicity demographics of the area. Approved farmers markets in Pierce County for 2011 are located in areas such as North Tacoma, Gig Harbor[vi], Steilacoom[vii] and Puyallup[viii], all of which have higher median household incomes, lower rates of poverty, and smaller populations of racial and ethnic minorities than Parkland. While Parkland does have Fresh Fridays, it is a market that

is significantly smaller than other famers markets in Pierce County and is not one of the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department approved farmers market.

When comparing census data of Parkland to areas in Pierce County that have farmers markets available such as Steilacoom, Gig Harbor or Puyallup, an economic and racial divide in who has access to healthy foods is apparent. Steilacoom, Gig Harbor, and Puyallup all have significantly higher percent of whites, and significantly lower percent of racial and ethnic minorities than does Parkland. The percent of people over the age of 25 that is a high school graduate or higher and the percent of people with a bachelor's degree or higher in the three areas is significantly larger than that of Parkland. Also, the median household and median family incomes in Steilacoom are drastically larger than that of Parkland and the percent of families and individuals living below the poverty level is significantly lower in Steilacoom than Parkland.

**SNAP Retailers**

Another reminder that poor access to highly nutritious foods is a prevalent issue in Parkland is by tracking the available retailers in the area that accept food stamps, meaning the proximity of retailers that provide food access to low-income individuals and families. It is apparent that many of the retailers in the area that accept food stamps are stores that carry mostly highly processed, low nutrient foods rather than fresh produce and other healthy foods. When searching Parkland, Washington on the USDA website's SNAP retail locator[ix], the nearest 25 retailers that accept food stamps are listed. Out of the twenty-five, twelve are convenience stores or gas stations, only three are chain grocers and six are discount grocers. It is clear that many of these retailers are not ones that sell primarily grocery items, and are likely to have a very limited supply of fresh produce and highly nutritious foods.

When compared to other areas of Pierce County that have higher average incomes, it is clear that several retailers that accept food stamps in those areas are still convenience stores and unlikely to carry healthy foods. However, in such areas there are many more main grocers and even specialty grocers that provide high-nutrient, low-processed foods compared to Parkland. For example, in Gig Harbor[x], where there are three different Farmers Market locations, out of the nearest 25 retailers that accept food stamps, seven are chain grocers, five are specialty grocers, and seven are convenience stores or gas stations. Again, comparing the demographics of Parkland compared to this area with better access to healthy foods, there is a higher average income, lower poverty rate and lower population of racial and ethnic minorities in Gig Harbor compared to Parkland, which are aspects to consider, and potential indicators of food injustices.

All of these local comparisons support food justice activists' arguments that access to healthy foods is in part an issue of place. Geographic areas with low-income communities and communities with high racial and ethnic minorities face poor access to retailers and markets with highly nutritious foods. Local data shows that poverty, race, food insecurity, and diet-related health issues are all connected in Pierce County.

**Flawed Efforts to Improve Food Justice Issues**

Some programs or proposals to address food insecurity and health disparities in the U.S. today are making positive changes, but are also flawed. Increasingly there are programs that place attention on health and nutrition, especially for children. For example, "First Lady Michelle Obama recently launched the Let's Move! Program, which seeks to eliminate childhood obesity within a generation. The campaign's main points of action are: empowering parents and caregivers, providing healthy food in schools, improving access to healthy, affordable foods, increasing physical activity" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

While it is important to note that the campaign does recognize issues of access, the focus is on individual choices, which ignores access issues. This sort of a campaign may make improvements to food insecurity and diet-related health issues on some level, however, it perpetuates the misperception that consuming unhealthy foods and diet-related health issues that in order to eliminate diet-related health issues such as obesity, people must simply make better choices. This ignores the fact that in reality, many factors such as geographic accessibility confines people's food choices, and influences diet-related health outcomes.

Nutrition assistance programs are examples of programs in place that contribute toward improvements to food insecurity in Washington, but are flawed as well. These programs do not meet the needs of all food insecure people and do not address the geographic accessibility that certain communities lack to nutritious foods, nor the racial and ethnic inequalities within the food insecure population. Examples of existing nutrition assistance programs include: Basic food (the state's food stamp program), USDA Nutrition Service: Women, Infants, and Children, The Washington State Summer Meal Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), and the Farmer's Market Program. All of these programs provide economic assistance with purchasing foods for those that qualify based on income. Not only do such assistance programs only reach those who qualify, but they are also flawed because while people are provided with economic assistance to purchase foods, if they live in an area that has poor access to retailers with healthy foods, they still may be limited to unhealthy food choices, which in the long run can contribute to health issues. Despite current nutrition assistance programs, trends show that diet related health issues and disparities among racial and ethnic minorities continue and worsen. Furthermore, the USDA reports that even those eligible for programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), not all

participate. Additional access issues exist such as a lack of education about nutrition assistance programs, and a lack of resources in the native language of all consumers, and with some programs, participants must prove citizenship. For example, in regards to the SNAP program, the USDA reports that "while the participation rate among all eligible individuals was 67 percent in 2008, only 35 percent of eligible elderly and 56 percent of eligible Hispanics participate". Additionally, in regards to farmers markets, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say that there are "1.7 farmers markets per 100,000 US residents, 8% of farmers markets accept electronic benefits transfer (EBT) and 28% of farmers markets accept WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program coupons".

**Effective Solutions for Food Justice Issues**

However, there are efforts that seem to address food justice more effectively. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, improvements are being made in schools to offer fresh produce: on average, across participating states, 21% of middle and high schools offer fruits and non-fried vegetables and 21 states have a state-level policy for Farm to School (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). This sort of program may be more beneficial than national campaigns such as Let's Move! Because states themselves are implementing healthy foods into schools and providing access to healthy foods, rather than simply blaming the consumer for their choices and diet-related health outcomes. With states implementing school programs that provide healthy foods, there is hope for continued improvements to a flawed and unjust system that leaves minorities with less access to nutritious foods and with higher diet related health issues. However, such programs lack focused attention on institutionalized racism and other inequalities that are a part of the complex web of issues linked to food justice.

These efforts are similar to what Thomas Macias proposes as effective solutions to food justice issues. He says "local food projects should consider promoting programs designed for broader social inclusion, including subsidized farmer-to-family coupons" (Macias, 1086). He discusses programs such as farm-to-family programs and cooperatives. For example, "A state-subsidized "farm-to-family" program allows lower-income and refugee families to afford purchases at this location…these subsidized purchases actually affect what crops the farm decides to grow throughout the year, including certain vegetable varieties only bought by Southeast Asian refugee families" (Macias, 1096). In our local area, such a program could be implemented through some of the numerous local farms that sell crops at farmers markets throughout Pierce County. However, this would require cooperation with state or county governments as well and could subsidize crops grown on these farms to be given to communities facing food injustices.

Another program that seems to address food justice more effectively a community garden program in Tacoma that is a part of countywide Community Garden Project aiming to create communities that connect people to their food supply and empower them to grow their own food. It also aims to promote healthy activity and better nutrition, and to create a more livable urban environment. Programs such as these that create gardens provide geographic access for disadvantaged communities to fresh and healthy foods as well as give people the resources to grow their own food. Deliberately placing community gardens in areas where access to healthy foods is limited because of inequalities based on race or class, is a progressive solution to food justice issues because it works towards creating better access to those who are disadvantaged unjustly.

Some claim however, that change needs to happen on a policy level. Discussing food policy as a means of improving diet related health inequalities, Caraher and Coveney point out that "There is ample evidence that people do possess the skills and knowledge but not always the resources necessary to put their intentions into action. Food policy should seek to make the social infrastructure conducive to healthy decisions about food" (595). In other words, economic and racially marginalized people may be aware of healthy food choices that they would like to make, but often lack the resources to make those choices.

This could be realized through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. To tackle childhood obesity and health issues, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention propose the establishment of "nutrition standards for competitive foods as part of school wellness policies" which would require that fruits and vegetables be available and affordable whenever food is offered to students. They also propose that policies be supported that address the availability of nutritious foods in schools, implement and enforce nutrition standards, and support Farm-to-School initiatives and policies so that schools are able to purchase food from local farms (Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ).

On a policy level, they propose that one could organize a Food Policy Council or a similar group to promote policy change initiatives for healthy eating. This sort of partnership would include government officials, farmers, representatives from local businesses, public health practitioners, institutional purchasers, neighborhood associations, and consumers. Such an association would adopt policies that encourage the production, distribution, or procurement of food from local farms (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

However, Others argue that urban planning and development is the solution to food justice issues. Melanie Bedore discusses how planners should see grocery stores as key

contributors to a neighborhood's well-being and quality of life through improved food access, rather than economic development tools that are essentially flawed (1419). In addition to influencing where grocery stores and other retailers that provide access to high nutrient foods are placed, Thomas Macias explains how it is important for people to be self-sufficient and "the ability of marginalized communities to provide, at least partially, for themselves" (1098).

**What I Will Do**

I will continue my work as a sustainability fellow through the '11-'12 academic year by utilizing my leadership position in the Diversity Center. I will have the opportunity to present my work by hosting Appetizers and Engaging Talk discussions or other dialogues surrounding food justice. In such dialogues I will present and discuss my research from this summer as well continue the conversation and raise new questions or concerns about such issues. A potential project that I could take on in my leadership in the Diversity center that I am very excited and passionate about is the possibility of being a part of an effort that brings local fruits and vegetables to local schools, such as "farm-to-school" programs discussed earlier in this paper. As a tutor at local elementary schools in Parkland where a startling population of students relies on free and reduced lunches, I believe that this could be one of the more effective ways to address food justice issues in the local area. It could not only establish a program to sustain local farmers economically that practice sustainable agriculture and sustain students nutritionally, but it could sustain the relationship that PLU has with both local farmers and local schools.

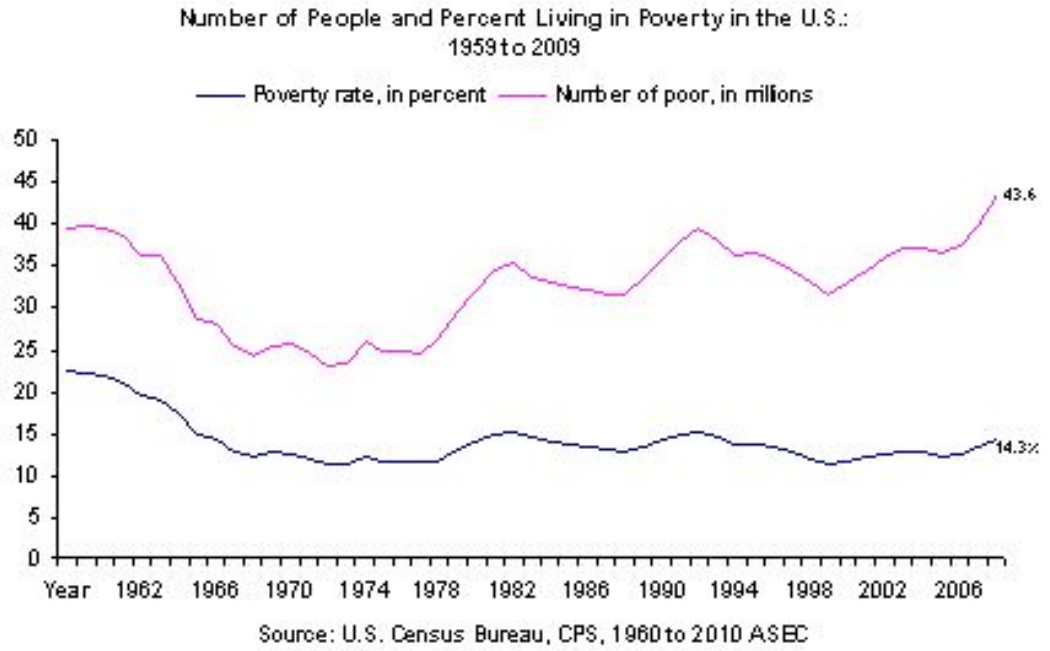
While I can do many small things within the PLU and Tacoma community, I also recognize that food justice is a huge issue that is historical, institutionalized and complex. While I can do work on a local level to improve issues of racism, poverty and food access to those who are marginalized, there is only so much I can do to influence where markets and retailers are

located, the types of foods that are available at such retailers, and food prices. I will do what I can to advocate for food justice in the way that I vote and communicate with elected government officials. However, systemic change is needed and I believe that the economic system in which the U.S. functions and influences how food is produced in this country is flawed. I have hope that with increased awareness about food justice issues, such issues will become mainstream, and consumer and activist demands may be able to shape a more just food system in the near future.

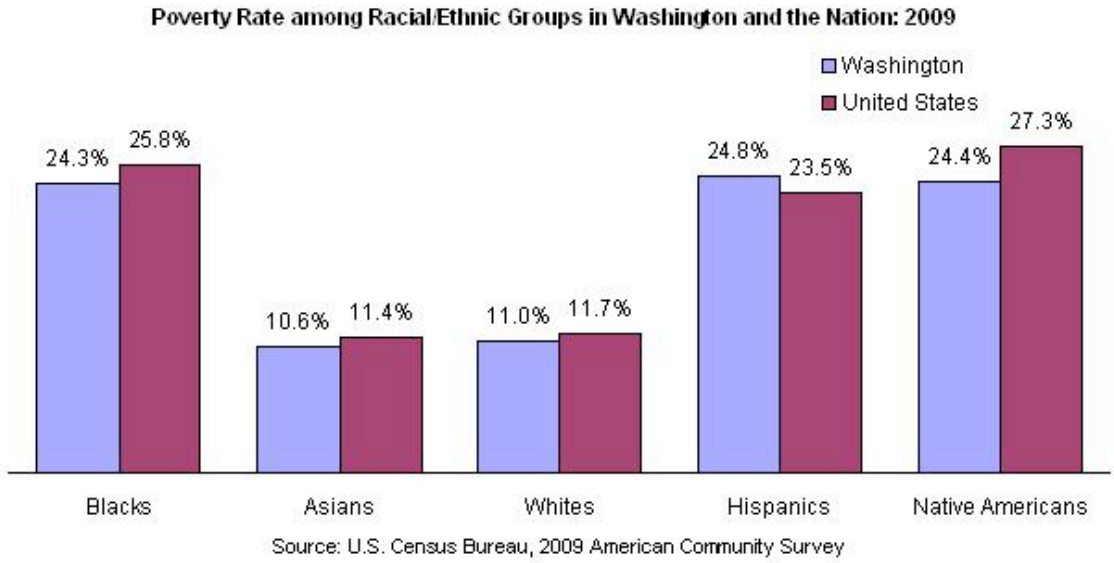
**What can PL-YOU do?**

The reality is that food justice is a huge, complex issue, just like many other environmental justice issues. It is often daunting to read statistics that reveal inequities and injustices, and discouraging to realize that such inequities have long, complex histories that are institutionalized and systemic problems. It is even more upsetting to realize that you may have a great amount of privilege over others. You may live in an area where you do not have to worry about or consider poor access to healthy foods, you may own a car that allows you to drive to supermarkets with healthy foods and have the time to do so, or you may have the ability to afford healthy food choices. You may not have ever experienced food insecurity at all, or food insecurity in the context of institutionalized racism. However, you can acknowledge your privilege and work towards becoming more aware of food justice around you. Often times when PLU students become aware of social or environmental injustices in our society, or become aware of their own privileges, their first reaction is "what can I *do*?" But we must remember that in order to make sustainable lasting social and environmental change in our society, we must first stop, think, and become aware of the issues at hand before we go looking for a "quick fix" to complex issues. I encourage you to consider some of the proposed social and environmental changes mentioned above by national, state, and community organizations. Think about what

programs are working, and which ones need improvement. However, I first and foremost ask you to stop, think, and shift your mindset. Shift your mindset to reflect upon the complex factors and institutionalized inequalities that influence poverty, food insecurity, health inequalities. Think about the social processes that inform food justice issues that aren't always visible on the surface. Constantly consider your economic and geographic privileges in terms of access to healthy foods. Think about who you are as a consumer that influences the types of foods on the market, and the privileges you have in being able to make certain food choices. Think about who you are as a citizen who votes for policies that influence food production, food access, and food insecurity in our society. Shift your mindset to include social justice in your understanding of sustainability and become aware of the fact that sustainability includes "planet, people and prosperity" and the "long term health of our society" (PLU 2020). In order to make sustainable, lasting social change in our world, we must first be willing to listen, learn, and shift our mindsets to become aware and understand the issues at hand.


Number of People and Percent Living in Poverty in the U.S.:
1959 to 2009
Poverty rate, in percent
Number of poor, in millions
50
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
43.6
14.3%
Year 1962 1966 1970 1974 1978 1982 1986 1990 1994 1998 2002 2006
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, CPS, 1960 to 2010 ASEC

i


Poverty Rate among Racial/Ethnic Groups in Washington and the Nation: 2009
Washington
United States
24.3%
25.8%
10.6%
11.4%
11.0%
11.7%
24.8%
23.5%
24.4%
27.3%
Blacks
Asians
Whites
Hispanics
Native Americans
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009 American Community Survey

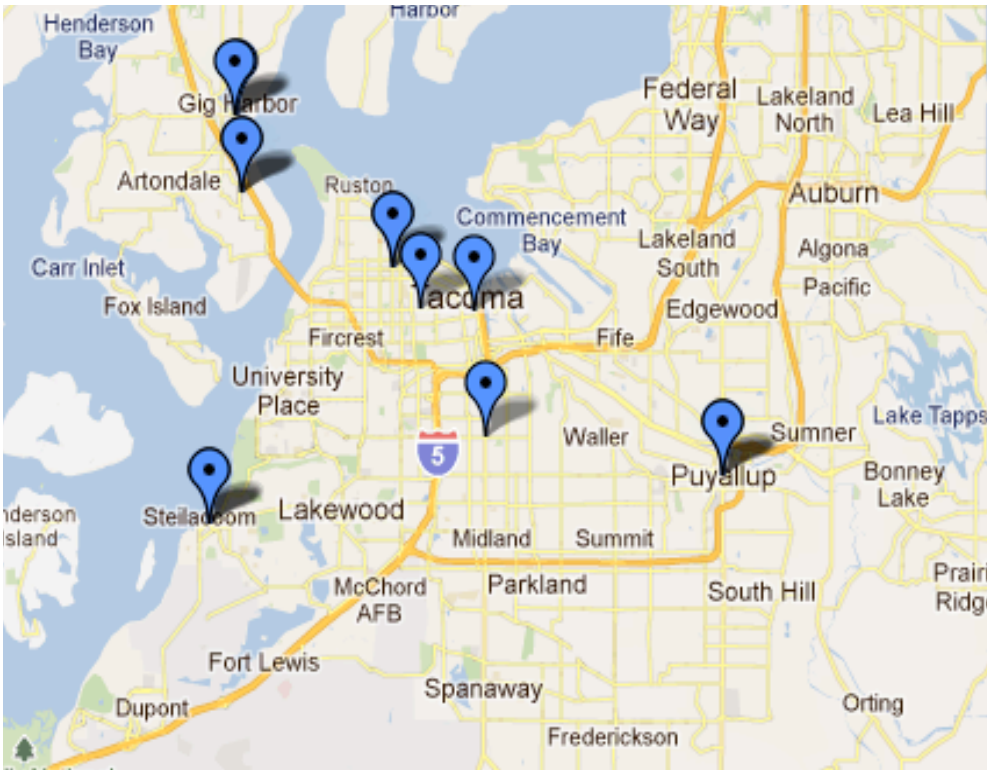
ii

iii

| **U.S. Census Bureau-Pierce County, WA** | Number (2000) | Percent (2000) | Number (2005-2009 5-year estimates) | Percent (2005-2009 5-year estimates) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total population | 700,820 | | | |
| White | | 78.4 | | 77.4 |
| Black or African American | | 7.0 | | 6.8 |
| American Indian and Alaska Native | | 1.4 | | 1.3 |
| Asian | | 5.1 | | 5.7 |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander | | 0.8 | | 0.9 |
| Some other race | | 2.2 | | 2.5 |
| Two or more races | | 5.1 | | 5.3 |
| Hispanic or Latino (of any race) | | 5.5 | | 7.6 |
| High School graduate or higher | | 86.9 | | 89.7 |
| Bachelor's degree or higher | | 20.6 | | 23.3 |
| Median household income in 1999 | 45,204 | | 56,773 | |
| Median family income in 1999 | 52,098 | | 67,348 | |
| Families below the poverty level | | 7.5 | | 8.1 |
| Individuals below poverty level | | 10.5 | | 11.6 |

iv

| **U.S. Census Bureau-Parkland CDP, WA** | Number (2000) | Percent (2000) | Number (2005-2009 estimates) | Percent (2005-2009 estimates) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total Population | 24,053 | | | |
| White | | 73.9 | | 69.1 |
| Black or African American | | 8.1 | | 10.5 |
| American Indian and Alaska Native | | 1.0 | | 0.8 |
| Asian | | 6.6 | | 7.1 |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander | | 1.8 | | 3.4 |
| Some other race | | 2.1 | | 2.7 |
| Two or more races | | 6.5 | | 6.5 |
| Hispanic or Latino (of any race) | | 5.3 | | 8.6 |
| High School graduate or higher | | 84.1 | | 87.0 |
| Bachelor's degree or higher | | 14.9 | | 13.2 |
| Median household income | 39,653 | | 45,350 | |
| Meidan family income | 46,210 | | 50,132 | |
| Families below poverty level | | 10.6 | | 14.2 |
| Individuals below poverty level | | 15.4 | | 19.2 |




v

Estimated **median household income** (in 2009):
**U.S.** – 51,425
**Tacoma** – 46,645
**Parkland** – 45,350
**Puyallup** – 56,572
**Gig Harbor** – 58,041
**Steilacoom** – 62,163

vi

| **U.S. Census Bureau 2000-Gig Harbor, WA** | Number (2000) | Percent (2000) | Number (2005-2009 estimates) | Percent (2005-2009) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total population | 6,465 | | | |
| White | | 94.2 | | 74.5 |
| Black or African American | | 1.1 | | 12.4 |
| American Indian and Alaska Native | | 0.6 | | 0.8 |
| Asian | | 1.5 | | 4.4 |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander | | 0.2 | | 0.1 |
| Some other race | | 0.5 | | 5.6 |
| Two or more races | | 1.8 | | 2.2 |
| Hispanic or Latino (of any race) | | 3.0 | | 15.1 |
| High school graduate or higher | | 89.4 | | 94.6 |
| Bachelor's degree or higher | | 30.9 | | 39.9 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Median household income 1999 | 43,456 | | 58,041 | |
| Median family income 1999 | 57,587 | | 72,766 | |
| Families below poverty level | | 3.5 | 6.0 | |
| Individuals below poverty level | | 5.9 | 10.1 | |

vii

| **U.S. Census Bureau-Steilacoom, WA** | Number (2000) | Percent (2000) | Number (2005-2009 estimates) | Percent (2005-2009 estimates) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total Population | 6,049 | | | |
| White | | 78.5 | | 74.4 |
| Black or African American | | 6.7 | | 7.9 |
| American Indian and Alaska Native | | 0.8 | | 1.0 |
| Asian | | 5.9 | | 7.8 |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander | | 0.6 | | 0.5 |
| Some other race | | 1.7 | | 2.3 |
| Two or more races | | 5.9 | | 6.1 |
| Hispanic or Latino (of any race) | | 5.4 | | 7.9 |
| High School graduate or higher | | 92.6 | | 95.9 |
| Bachelor's degree or higher | | 36.5 | | 38.5 |
| Meidan household income 1999 | 46,113 | | 62,163 | |
| Median family income 1999 | 54,725 | | 81,011 | |
| Families below poverty level | | 6.9 | | 9.0 |
| Individuals below poverty level | | 8.1 | | 10.2 |

viii

| **U.S. Census Bureau 2000-Puyallup, WA** | Number (2000) | Percent (2000) | Number (2005-2009 estimates) | Percent 2009 es |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total Population | 33,011 | | | |
| White | | 87.9 | | 74.5 |
| Black or African American | | 1.5 | | 12.4 |
| American Indian and Alaska Native | | 1.0 | | ( |
| Asian | | 3.3 | | 4.4 |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander | | 0.3 | | 0.1 |
| Some other race | | 1.9 | | 5.6 |
| Two or more races | | 4.1 | | 2.2 |
| Hispanic or Latino (of any race) | | 4.7 | | 15.1 |
| High School graduate or higher | | 86.7 | | 84.6 |
| Bachelor's degree or higher | | 22.8 | | 27.5 |
| Median household income 1999 | 47,269 | | 56,572 | |
| Median family income 1999 | 57,322 | | 72,169 | |
| Families below poverty level | | 4.7 | | 9.9 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Individuals below poverty level | | 6.7 | | 13.5 |
| | | | | |

ix

| | **Nearest 25 SNAP Retailers in Parkland** | Chain Grocer | Specialty Grocer | Discount Grocer | Conveneince Store/Gas Station | Drug Store | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Nile Corporation | | | | | | **X** |
| 2 | Fil-Am Deopt | | | | **X** | | |
| 3 | Walgreens | | | | | **X** | |
| 4 | R Smoke and Mart | | | | **X** | | |
| 5 | SS Quick Stop Grocery | | | | **X** | | |
| 6 | Handy Corner Grocery | | | | **X** | | |
| 7 | Parkland Shell Food Mart | | | | **X** | | |
| 8 | La Popular Cash and Carry Market | **X** | | | | | |
| 9 | QFC | **X** | | | | | |
| 10 | Parkland Market Place | | | **X** | | | |
| 11 | Papa Murphys | | | | | | **X** |
| 12 | Jackson Food Stores | | | | **X** | | |
| 13 | 7-Eleven | | | | **X** | | |
| 14 | Islander's Mini Mart | | | | **X** | | |
| 15 | PacWest Food Inc | **X** | | | | | |
| 16 | Food Mart | | | | **X** | | |
| 17 | Franz Bakery Outlet | | | **X** | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18 | Steele Street Chevron | | | | **X** | | |
| 19 | Wonder Hostess | | | **X** | | | |
| 20 | Smoke and Espresso | | | | **X** | | |
| 21 | Dollar Tree | | | **X** | | | |
| 22 | Save a lot | | | **X** | | | |
| 23 | Valley Liquidation | | | **X** | | | |
| 24 | Steele Street Shell | | | | **X** | | |
| 25 | Sales Corner Grocery | | | | **X** | | |

x

| | Nearest SNAP Retailers in Gig Harbor | Chain Grocer | Specialty Grocer | Discount Grocer | Convenience Store/Gas Station | Drug Store | Other/ Unknown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Pioneer 76** – 7101 Pioneer Way, Gig Harbor, WA 98335-126 | | | | **X** | | |
| 2 | **Bartell Drugs** 39 – 5500 Olympic Dr, Gig Harbor, WA 98335 | | | | | **X** | |
| 3 | **Fred Meyer** 00601-5500 Olympic Dr, Gig Harbor, WA 98335-1489 | **X** | | | | | |
| 4 | **Costco Wholesale** 0624 – 10990 Harbor Hill Dr NW, Gig Harbor, WA 98332-8945 | **X** | | | | | |
| 5 | **Harbor Greens** – 5225 Olympic Dr NW, Gig Harbor, WA 98335-1763 | | **X** | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | **Papa Murphys** WA-163 – 5114 Point Fosdick Dr NW, Gig Harbor, WA 98335-1734 | | | | | | **X** |
| 7 | **Walgreens** 12910 – 4840 Borgen Blvd NW, Gig Harbor, WA 98332-6826 | | | | | **X** | |
| 8 | **QFC** 864 – 5010 Point Fosdick Dr NW, Gig Harbor, WA 98335-1715 | **X** | | | | | |
| 9 | **Safeway** 541 – 4830 Point Fosdick Dr NW, Gig Harbor, WA 98335 | **X** | | | | | |
| 10 | **Albertsons** 406 – 11330 51st Ave NW, Gig Harbor, WA 98332-7890 | **X** | | | | | |
| 11 | **Target** 1205 – 11400 51st Ave NW, Gig Harbor, WA 98332-7891 | **X** | | | | | |
| 12 | **Rite Aid** 5255-4818 Point Fosdick Dr NW, Gig Harbor, WA 98335-1711 | | | | | **X** | |
| 13 | **Purdy Chevron** 2-14317 Purvy Drive NW, Gig Harbor WA 98332 | | | | **X** | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14 | **Purdy 76** – 1318 Purdy Dr NW, Gig Harbor, WA 98332-8641 | | | | **X** | | |
| 15 | **Ray's Meat Market** – 6702 Tyee Dr NW, Gig Harbor, WA 98332-8684 | | **X** | | | | |
| 16 | **Local Boys** – 6702 Tyee Dr NW, Gig Harbor, WA 98335 | | **X** | | | | |
| 17 | **Bridgeway Market** – 6707 Tyee Dr NW, Gig Harbor, WA 98332-8631 | | **X** | | | | |
| 18 | **Key Peninsula Market** – 9522 State Hwy 302, Wauna, WA 98395 | | | | | | **X** |
| 19 | **7-Eleven Inc** 27298-3701 N Pearl St., Tacoma, WA 98407-2609 | | | | **X** | | |
| 20 | **Walgreens** 07356-3450 N Pearl St, Tacoma, WA 98407 | | | **X** | | | |
| 21 | **Peninsula Markets #2** – 14220 92nd Ave NW, Gig Harbor, WA 98329-8710 | | **X** | | | | |
| 22 | **Jiffy Mart** – 4818 N 45th St, Tacoma, WA 98407-4326 | | | | **X** | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 23 | **Harvest Time Country Store**- 9507 State Route 302 NW, Gig Harbor, WA 98329-7102 | | | | **X** | | |
| 24 | **Safeway** 1978- 2637 N Pearl St, Tacoma, WA 98407-2416 | **X** | | | | | |
| 25 | **76 Circle K** 5529-2602 N Pearl St, Tacoma, WA 98407-2417 | | | | **X** | | |

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