



SAMUEL
LAWRENCE
FOUNDATION

SLF First Friday Series (7/7/23)

“Fighting Climate Change with a Fork”

Intro:

Bart Ziegler:

Hello, everyone, and thank you for joining us today for this very special webinar. My name is Bart Ziegler. I'm the president of the Samuel Lawrence Foundation. I am thrilled to have you here for this very important conversation about climate change and your children's health and wellness. Here at the Samuel Lawrence Foundation. We're dedicated to creating a sustainable future for the next generation.

[00:01:00] Our first Friday webinars have served as a platform for us to hear from experts in various fields, particularly nuclear safety. While we remain eternally passionate about nuclear safety, children's health and environmental protections are interconnected issues, and it's crucial that we address them holistically. These are all pieces of a unified puzzle that move us closer to creating a more sustainable future for generations that will inherit the world after us. Today, we're honored to have with us two incredible guests making significant impacts in their fields. Nora La Torre is the CEO and co-founder of Eat Real, which is an award-winning nonprofit focused on nourishing the future. Her organization transforms real food access for children through schools leads in. It [00:02:00] leads in advocacy and builds real food awareness. She is a distinguished speaker and an advisor at Tufts Nutrition Security Council. One Green Thing, and Aspen Institute Socrates Scholars Program. Let me see. Having a little computer glitch here, but what is a webinar without. Sonya is also equally impactful and pioneering. She is an author of books and also has been dealing with wellness and health in a very formidable way, which you can see on her TEDx talk. Today, Nora and

Sonya will explore the critical link between personal [00:03:00] health and wellbeing and how our food choices play a pivotal role in fighting climate change.

I want to express my gratitude to Nora and Sonia for sharing their time and wisdom with us. Without further ado, I will turn the conversation over to Nora and Sonya. Thank you once again for being here, and I hope you find this webinar enlightening and inspiring. Nora.

Nora LaTorre:

Incredible. Bart, thank you so much. You are a force for good in the world, and I'm so grateful for your leadership. Huge thanks to the Samuel Lawrence Foundation, to your incredible team we've been working closely with for hosting this important conversation. I'm particularly excited to be here today because the reality is that our food system today is failing the health of our children and the health of our planet. And I'm especially happy to be here today with one of my favorite people of all time, Sonia Hunt, to discuss not only our role, but [00:04:00] to discuss the role our food system plays in our children's health and the planet health.

Sonia Hunt:

Hi, Nora. Thank you, Bart. Thank you, Nora, for having me. So grateful to be here and talking about something that is so near and dear to both Nora's and my heart: food systems and really helping our children build a healthier and wonderful life for the future. Food systems absolutely have this dual role when it comes to health of people and health of the planet. So, when we think about human health, food systems are impacting our nutrition and our well-being for individuals. But the environmental impact of those food systems affects the health of the planet. In case you didn't know, an interesting statistic is that food systems account for about 21 to 37% of total human caused greenhouse [00:05:00] gas emissions. Right? And I know, Nora, this is something that you talk about in your Ted Talk as well.

Nora LaTorre:

Yeah. In that talk, climate change, actually, it just recently came out, I highlight how the Project Drawdown Tool, which is one of most reputable nonprofits out there on documenting how we can make help regenerate our planet. It shows that the top two solutions to climate change are food solutions. It's 'waste less food and eat more plants.' We know that our food system is the top two ways we can help heal the planet. Also it's our best chance at really healing our kids and healing our human health. To me in Minnesota, where I'm from, we call it a 'twofer.' If you improve the food system, it's a two for one because you can heal the planet and also you can help heal our health crisis.

And so today, we're actually witnessing something called American health collapse, where millennials and young people are on track to have shorter [00:06:00] lifespans than their parents for the first time in US history. And the number one reason is processed food related diseases. Our food system is causing the number one decline in our health and in the top diseases that are that are collapsing lifespan and health span. If we fix food, then we can help expand lifespan and health span and we can regenerate our planet. And so that's why at Eat Real, the nonprofit that I lead, we're focused on reimagining our food system with children's health and planet health at the center.

Sonia Hunt:

Yeah. And I've been such a big advocate and fan of the work that Eat Real is doing and so much around it is the fact and we've talked about this before, there's no formal health and well-being literacy in this country, right? So starting that at a young age onward really can help to change some of these statistics that we have seen, which are really scary, especially over the last few years. [00:07:00]

So I've got some interesting statistics to share. So 93% of Americans are metabolically sick. We have 133 Americans who have chronic health conditions, which is more than 40% of the total population of the United States. 50 million Americans have one or more autoimmune diseases, and approximately 75% of those affected are women. 32 million plus people in the United States have food allergies, including 5.6 million children under the age of 18, which is an insane number. That's about 1 in 13 children or roughly two in

each classroom with food allergies. And so the parents out there, I'm sure those numbers speak volumes. And I was one of those children as well all my life who had severe food allergies. And I wrote a bestselling book called Nut Job about my journey. And I cover this [00:08:00] rise in diet related disease and thoughts on why it's happening, but really about how we must become empowered around our food and our health beginning at a young age now. And Nora, you know a lot about this being the mom of two little ones.

Nora LaTorre:

Yes. I see firsthand in my own family how important it is to create those healthy habits early and to help them have access to the most nourishing food that helps their development and helps their immediate happiness. And I think we also know at the nonprofit that I lead how important it is to help kids develop healthy habits earlier. We are founded by some of the leading doctors and pediatricians who wanted to get to the root cause of these challenges, facing the top, challenges facing society and this health collapse and stop disease before it starts and get kids access to healthy food early on. And so, every day at Eat Real, we're focused on changing [00:09:00] our food system to prevent and reverse these stats that you just mentioned and the state of our children's health. I think on a personal level, it's super shocking to me. And that's really when I started to get even more involved was when I became a new mom. And now I have two little ones and I got hyper concerned about how do I care for them and nourish them and how do I help change our entire food system so every child has access to food that helps them thrive and helps our planet thrive. I think, you know, we both covered a lot of the statistics, especially the shocking one, that only 7% of Americans are metabolically healthy, walking around feeling good. That's unacceptable as one of the highest income countries in the world to then have the worst health outcomes around high income countries among high income countries is just unacceptable.

One thing that I've been thinking a lot about is not only the role that food plays in our metabolic, in our health [00:10:00] and in our planet's health, but also in our mental health.

Right now, the surgeon general just said that we have a mental health crisis on our hands. He put out an alert and they're talking a lot about the role of social media. But what's not being covered is actually the role of food in our mental health crisis facing our youth. 90% of our serotonin is made in our guts, and that's our happiness hormone. And so food plays a key role in our immediate levels of serotonin and in our kids happiness. I think also as a mom, I'm hyper aware of the rise of ADHD. It's gone up 36% from 2003 to 2019. And I hear of so many moms who are concerned and it was actually published that Western dietary patterns, our food system in the West, which for kids today is 67% ultra processed calories, is associated with ADHD. I think it's just so under discussed.

Again, why I'm so [00:11:00] happy to be discussing this with you, Sonia, how the role our food system has in our health crisis facing our kids. I don't think we realize how sick our kids are. And I think, you know, especially with record heat this week, two days of record heat and wildfires on the east, we are becoming more and more acutely aware of the concerns of our planet. But I'm hopeful that we can be. What we can talk about today is how not only do we have a planet health crisis, but we have a children's health crisis and how food is the best way to tackle those. Interconnected crises. And I know you started to hint at your personal story and your childhood. Could you talk a little bit about how the food system impacted you personally?

Sonia Hunt:

Yeah, and I'm so grateful to be able to share my personal story, and I hope it inspires everybody out there that's dealing with food related health issues. So when I was three, I was diagnosed with [00:12:00] severe food allergies, severe asthma and severe environmental allergies, which I had my entire life until I overcame them. And my journey was over 18 times in the E.R. in severe health related issues due to my allergies emergent issues over 100 times in the hospital due to non-emergent issues. But I've also been on the table almost dead four times due to anaphylaxis, due to my food allergies and my family background is from India.

My parents came in the 60s and they actually didn't even know that people could be allergic to food, which I mean, why would you know that? It was a difficult road to really figure out how to feed me when my siblings didn't have any of these issues. And I'm first generation [00:13:00] American. So there was always this duality as well between

health practices of Western and Eastern medicine of food systems. My parents grew up very farm to table, farm to fork. And here for the first time, when my mother went to a very large supermarket and saw everything prepackaged, it really was shocking. Shocking to them to start to cook this way. So for decades, the protocol for me was don't eat foods that you're allergic to. And that sounds very easy. But as we all know, it's not, especially with the labeling even today not being anywhere close where it needs to be. So what we ended up doing was we eliminated all the things that I couldn't eat.

But what I realized many years later was all of the things that I was eating, which were quote unquote safe foods, [00:14:00] were very processed, were very unhealthy for my whole-body health. And in 2008 was when I had my fourth anaphylaxis, and that was my most toxic anaphylaxis event-- it actually left me with one year of hives all over my body. I have truly seen the gamut of what living with food allergies can do. And again, it was kind of this duality of eliminating foods that I wasn't allergic to and things like cross-contamination were always in my world, right? So incidents would happen, but everything that I was consuming was processed and over processed and not good for my whole body health. And you talked about mental health there. The food we eat affects our mental health.

Coming back to where we are today, I talked a little bit about how there's no formal health and well-being literacy [00:15:00] in this country. And that's the extensive work that I'm doing right now with kids and with young adults that even that are entering college because there's so many barriers when they're on their own to figure out 'how do I eat healthy?' or 'how do I access healthier options?' when they just don't know. And as you mentioned, the USDA research really reinforces this, that affordability is the leading barrier to healthy eating among low-income Americans. So when we met a few years ago and

And we saw each other in person as well back then, and I learned about just, you know, how powerful Eat Real's mission and message is, especially on one of the most important leverage points that we can make food accessible [00:16:00] to affordable families which is in our schools, and that you guys are teaching kids about eating real food at young age onwards. This is exactly the kind of work and help from everybody, right? Helping eat real that we really need because I do believe that we absolutely can make these individual changes.

I always say small changes, you know, for big transformation. And that's why I've been, you know, a lifelong fan, because we have to get together to make these systemic changes or there's really no healthy future for our children. So I did want to talk a little bit about just Eat Real's model and your solutions, and how you're thinking about scaling the model that you have right throughout all the schools so all kids have access to this healthy to healthy food and healthy life, really.

Nora LaTorre:

Thank you so much for sharing your story and your personal [00:17:00] motivation. And it's just incredible to me that you've fully healed yourself from allergies I feel like you came back for the multiple times and now you're here. And I'm just grateful for your advocacy and you sharing your voice. I know you've been a strategic advisor to our organization and helping us really intentionally scale. And so just in terms of real so we are a children's health nonprofit and a climate change nonprofit that goes upstream and starts to be proactive.

We have kind of a three pronged approach. We change real food access, we raise real food awareness, and we do real food advocacy and policy change at the national and state level. In terms of our real food access, that's the heart and soul of our program. We change our food systems through what [00:18:00] is the largest fast food restaurant chain in America, which is not what people think. Arches. It's actually it's our public schools. So our public schools are the largest fast food restaurant chain in America. They're bigger than Starbucks, McDonald's and Subway combined. And they serve 7 billion meals a year. And it's where kids get 30 to 100% of their calories. So our theory of change is if we can change food, the largest of our foods, our theory of change is if you can change the food system, then you can help. It's the best chance at healing climate change and healing our children's health crisis. And within the food system, if you're going to focus on food because it's the top solution to the top two problems facing society, then you're going to look at the largest leverage point.

And we think the largest leverage point is our school food system. And so then we focus on the school food system. And since you and I met, we went from 50 schools to over

500 schools. We have thousands of schools on our wait list. We're impacting hundreds of millions of meals [00:19:00] of meals.

There are 7 billion meals that go through school. So we have a lot more to impact. But we've shown firsthand that you can radically transform our food system quickly, and it can be community driven where these community food leaders, the food service directors, they are the heroes in our story. They're the food buyers at schools come together with parents and students and they take the food system into their hands and into their control, and they overhaul it. So we do things like we remove 10 to 15 pounds of sugar per student per year, which has to do with gut health and mental health and brain development. We know that it can impact brain development. We remove harmful toxic ingredients, we remove overprocessing and reduce the processing levels. We added more scratch cooking. We add in plant powered options, minimally processed plant powered options because kids want climate options on their menu. Climate smart Options. Actually, one of our schools developed a plant-- what's it called? It was called Planet Cuisine, and they labeled it all that on the menu. [00:20:00] And so in San Luis Coastal, they have like a Thai lentil basil burger.

It's delicious and healthier for the kids and healthier for the planet. We added in grass fed options, no nitrates. We helped add in more salad bars, reduce food waste at scale, add in recycling like we really help communities and stand next to them and understanding what are the top ways they're really rocking it and then what are their top opportunities? And then over a multiyear partnership process, we help them totally transform their menus and create that food access. And so now what we've been doing is then trying to raise awareness around that and then taking it to the Hill and saying,

We know that that kids want better food and families want better food and that it should be made accessible because like you said, Sonia, it's the number one barrier to kids eating healthier and eating climate-smart and nutrient dense food. And so affordability and so an access point for it to have affordability and food access is our schools. And [00:21:00] so we go to the Hill and we say, it works and it's happening and families want it and they deserve it, and let's scale this. And so we've been making a lot of traction and it's really exciting and we have a lot more to do. I feel like we have been, you know, scaling rapidly, but we still have so, so, so much to do. And we're excited about the ten times growth that we've seen in the last few years, but we want to do so much more.

Sonia Hunt:

And I think one of the interesting things that you just talked about is, from a younger age onward, because again, we don't have this literacy, people are taking it upon themselves to become literate around their food, around their health and wellbeing. And I see the education portion of what you're doing as being part of that literacy. It's a similar world to where I am, is helping people understand what they're putting into their body. Understanding bodies as a system and the reactions that [00:22:00] are happening of processed food versus fresh food. And so I think it's really interesting that you have younger people, you know, kiddos starting to become really empowered to ask for these options now, right? Yeah. I'm sure you're starting to get that because they're becoming a more informed user at a young age.

Nora LaTorre:

Yeah, we see that left and right. We actually just had a school district join our program and they said we're most interested in being able to provide climate smart options for our kids and reduce food waste and increase recycling because we know our customers who are the most important customers on the planet, kids at their restaurant, at schools, kids, the customers. They want it and they're asking to have those options and to have those choices. So I'm really hopeful because of the next generation and because they are changing consumer demand and they are asking for better for them and better for the planet options.

Sonia Hunt:

Yeah. And all [00:23:00] of this kind of tied into, you know, all eyes needing to be on the farm bill. That piece of legislation, the package that's passed roughly every five years, has a large impact on farming livelihoods, how our food is grown and what kinds of food are grown in the US as well. So how is your mission at Eat Real looking to kind of change the meals in schools, tie into what's happening with the farm bill?

Nora LaTorre:

Yeah, and in my talk I talk about exactly that. All eyes do need to be on the farm bill. When we think about our advocacy work, we think about raising the bar for food in schools, more investment in school meals, just higher standards and more support for that food leverage point. Another key leverage point that we look at is the farm bill. And it's exactly what you said and it really determines [00:24:00] what crops are grown, what is subsidized, and what is made then available to low income families and communities, and what is pumped through our food system.

And so today, what's largely subsidized are corn, wheat, soy sugar, which go into animal feed, export and ultra processed food ingredients. And what we ask is what would it be like if we subsidize fruits and vegetables, organic food, regenerative organic food? And how would that change? What's farmed in America? It would change the quality of the soil, the nutrient density of our food. It would change what farmers are motivated to grow. It would make the farmers who are the backbone of America more invested. We really believe in a transformative, innovative farm bill. We're in multiple coalitions coming together with other nonprofits to raise our voice in unison. [00:25:00] We're briefing top decision makers. We think that the farm bill, other than working in schools, is one of the most important pieces of legislation and opportunities to make change in America. And we may be on a 5 or 10 year horizon. And it is super critical. We're really hopeful about the work there.

Sonia Hunt:

Yeah. Eat Real is fund raising right now and you're looking to raise 8 million to build a healthier future, and that would be to shift \$1 billion of school food purchasing power which is incredible. So how can everybody on this call get involved? Right. And I know that there's so much when we talk about food and health and how they tie together in terms of whole-body health. There's just so much that we can do. But how do we just again, those small steps for big transformation, how can everybody get involved [00:26:00] to help you on this incredibly important mission?

Nora LaTorre:

Thank you. And thank you for just asking that question. And I know you've gotten involved personally. You volunteer, you raise your voice for real. You fundraise for us. You're out there, guiding us and helping get resources to our nonprofits. So thank you, Sonia, for that. You know, there are a few key reasons why Eat Real's work is so urgent. Number one, front and center for a lot of people right now. And I know people on this webinar, climate change is getting worse. It's also becoming personal for everyone. And our kids are suffering, too. And we're seeing American health collapse. Our kids' health is measurably getting worse. With the wildfires on the East Coast and the world record heat, this is so urgent and so important, this work and this conversation.

So, [00:27:00] again, huge thanks to Samuel Lawrence for hosting us on this. I think also with our kids getting sicker there, people are starting to wake up to that. And the White House just had a White House hunger, nutrition and health conference and I was an adviser to that. And it's really exciting because they said by 2030, we want to end hunger and end diet related disease. But since that conference last Fall, it's actually gone in the wrong direction. And our health is actually getting worse, and we have these bold goals as a nation, but we need to do a lot more and bet on some underdog nonprofits that can really do things differently, because what's what has been done in the past is failing our kids. And we need to think differently and think boldly.

And that's what Eat Real is about. We know that cancers in children, diabetes, obesity are all on the rise in children. Our kids' health is getting worse. As we talked about at length today, our food system is our greatest hope for them. I believe with every part of me that our food system is our greatest hope for the top issues of our time.

Eat Real has a proven model that can transform the food system and a special playbook and approach for creating health for children on our planet. So we need people to get involved. Today. They can give and become a monthly sustaining donor. They can talk to us about themselves or friends that they know or foundations that they know that can make transformative gifts to help us raise that \$8 million so we can shift \$1 billion of school food purchasing by 2025 and do a whole lot more, too. And they can sign up for our newsletter on EatReal.org and they can join us on social media. We're @ Eat Real Certified on LinkedIn, I'm on LinkedIn and active there. People can join with

me, they can join on Instagram, Eat Real Certified will be on Threads soon. We just really hope people will give today. We hope that [00:29:00] they'll volunteer and advocate and connect us to other people who can support us. And we hope that they'll join the conversation.

Sonia Hunt:

I will say again, just in being very grateful to have me share my own story around this. It was it was always a love hate relationship with food because of what it did to my body system. But at the end of the day, I did eliminate all of my severe food allergies. And one of the biggest levers to do that was learning how to eat real food, and being on 80 to 90% on the outside of the supermarket. Not even within the aisles.

These are the kinds of concepts that I believe that if we can teach kids from a young age onward and make it fun, and show them how to bring these beautiful flavors together [00:30:00] in starting to even cook at a young age becomes really fun for them. And they start to understand more about their health and that journey. For me, I had to keep going through over and over and over. And there so many realizations right about, 'oh, I thought I was eating healthy food, but it was actually just over processed.' You have to really spend time to dig deep to understand what's in the food. In particular, before you can understand what's happening in your system. And I think, again, like this is exactly what I do in my work is helping everybody start from that place of understanding their bodies as a system, understanding the food that they're putting into it. It's almost like the 'eat this, not that' kind of methodology.

Nora LaTorre:

How do we help? How do we help kids and families become more alive and feel more energetic and more vibrant and [00:31:00] happier and doing that through food? I think having people that are listening today bring thoughts to their school food service director, their nutrition director, and say, hey, Eat Real is an option, and they could support our school district. And should we look at having Eat Real support us? That's one way. But I love these hacks that you just shared of like at a personal level, some fun things. I totally agree on Shop-the-perimeter and bring the kids in the shopping cart. Have them come and have them make their own list in advance or have them have their

bag. I just thought that was the most Minnesotan thing. I say bag, have them bring their bag and fill it with their things. I think also we talk about helping kids build kitchen confidence. My two year old with a pretty dull knife chops their strawberries for special Saturday buckwheat pancakes. Have them chop. I think my daughter loves coming to local farmer's market.

In a lot of places they started double bucks programs where if you're [00:32:00] actually on SNAP, then you can get two. You know, for every dollar, you can actually get \$2 worth of vegetables. So we're seeing a lot in farmers markets of SNAP dollars being used. But so anybody can go to farmer's markets and it's starting, you know, even more being even more accessible. But bring the kids.

And my daughter, her favorite color is purple right now. And she goes she buys all the purple cabbage, all the purple lettuce, all the purple radishes, and the girl will eat all of it. And like it takes 15 times of exposure for a kid to expand their palate. So sometimes also then I throw in some other colors and I'm like, Just one bite. Just try one bite. But bring them to the farmer's market and then having them get involved. It's been shown that family meals together help increase vegetable intake and kids. Today, only 7% of kids get eat the daily recommended amount of vegetables. Our kids just aren't getting enough vitamins and nutrients to help them support their development. And so around the table, having just conversation and I know people are really busy and it's really hard, but even once [00:33:00] a week, having that family meal together, getting the kids involved in the chopping and the measuring, which can be math and science, and then sitting down at the table together, that can be really powerful.

I love what you said of like, make it fun, turn on the music, like let them have a fun game afterwards. Like my daughter just learned Uno. We're also after dinner playing Uno at the table and make the table a really fun centerpiece in the house. I think it's so important. I think people can think about 'what can I do structurally', like raising them, raising awareness and doing advocacy and helping your local school, but then also at home doing what you can when you can is really key.

Sonia Hunt:

I love what you're saying because if you can start it within and at home, then when you go into your school and you see that difference, which is so shocking, that's when the advocacy is going to begin to start changing those systems as well. But if that's all, you know, it's [00:34:00] also very hard, right? So yeah, so I think if you can.

Nora LaTorre:

Also when the farmer's behind my food, it feels different. I'm more grateful. I'm more connected. I know the local farmer. I know that they have certain practices like organic, etcetera. So it does make a difference in your overall experience and how you feel immediately and long term.

Sonia Hunt:

Yes. Your body, mind, spirit and your emotions.

Nora LaTorre:

Yeah. Then just maybe we can see it, you know, have some incredible people here with us today and see if anyone else has any questions or thoughts that came up. Here's a question. I'll read it. "How do we educate and reach more parents, educators and school administrators that schools are the largest fast food system in our society?" [00:35:00] Ooh, great question. Shout it from the rooftops. Let everyone know. Tell everyone. Share that fun fact at the next barbecue that you're at on the next walk you on with a friend like shout it to the rooftop. Use social media. Like, think of yourselves as advocates. Like tag us at certified. Share it like that. Knowledge is yours to share now, so please share it. Let people know the power. It's not school food can't be delicious and also keeping it positive like it is. My favorite meals are in schools. It can be delicious. It can be sustainable. It can be the best restaurant in town. Letting people know that today it is the largest fast food restaurant chain, especially in terms of volume. But it can be and should be the best restaurant in our nation. And so sharing it broadly, one on one in your family, talking about a dinner and then sharing it on social media and then getting involved in our nonprofit, sign up for our newsletter. They'll be calls to

action so that you can help. You know, as we do campaigns, we'll ask you to reshare. We'll ask you to raise your voice [00:36:00] for advocacy. Et cetera.

Sonia, what would you add to that question around “How do we educate and reach more parents?”

Sonia Hunt:

I was going to say that one of the greatest places to also have this discussion is at the PTA meetings, right? So to actually bring this subject up of like, what's being served in the food, how can it be better? And if you do start to even do this at home, you can talk about the changes that you've seen which are for sure going to be things that people are interested in incorporating into their own lives. So I think that's another area that I would add, in addition to everything Nora is saying. Just really becoming an [00:37:00] advocate for the food you eat and your own health and planetary health is the biggest step. I think if everyone can make that small step to just start having these conversations in as many places as you can be, whether it's your schools or with friends or at restaurants or PTA meetings. It's really just not being afraid anymore to really talk about how important this is.

Nora LaTorre:

Great. Okay. Another question: How will changing our food system in school and beyond affect climate change? Yes, in so many ways and pretty quickly, which is exciting. Like I said, the project drawdown says that the top two ways to mitigate climate change, regenerate our planet and to draw down carbon are food solutions, waste less food and eat more plants. And [00:38:00] so if you do that, help schools cut waste and cut and add in more plants, like more, just add in more, right? More plant-based options, more salad bars, more vegetables. Et cetera. That then is doing those top two solutions at the largest scale possible in our nation. It's been scientifically measured that if we can do those two things, that's the best way that we can draw down carbon. Also, really interestingly, the Rodale Institute, which I'm a big fan of, they have said that the solution to climate change is within our soil, and so our soil can draw down carbon. So when you change food, you change what's being grown in the soil and how it's being grown.

Regenerative, organic, etcetera. Then you're going to be able to have it be drawing down more carbon. And so that is huge.

I think the top solutions to climate [00:39:00] change are literally underneath our feet. They're in the soil, they're in how our food is grown and they're in what we do with food and not wasting it. Since 40% of food today is wasted, that's inefficient and unnecessary and not good for the planet.

Schools can buy seconds, or food that was about to be lost on the at the farm level. They can take food that, you know ugly produce or food that was about to be under and process it. They can also reduce food waste at the cafeteria, etcetera. So that is that is a little bit more on how it can affect climate change. I also just announced that last year over extreme weather, etcetera, cost over \$165 billion for the United States. Climate change is becoming a very expensive problem for the United States. I just want to say that this underscores why it's so urgent and connected. Human health and planet health.

Bart and I spoke when we met in San Diego [00:40:00] a lot about how not only is our inefficient, unhealthy food system not working for climate, it's not working for our health either. Today we spend over \$3 trillion, a huge percent of our GDP on health care, which is mostly sick care to treat processed food related diseases. So if we gave access to people to real food, they wouldn't develop those same diseases and it wouldn't be costing the country so much money. We talked about how changing real food is beneficial for the planet. Just now we talked about how it helps heal disease and it also helps with economic issues as well in reducing these extreme costs to our government.

Sonia Hunt:

I love what you said about the food waste. I mean it is such a big, big, big problem. Let me see if I'm going to word this correctly. Buy [00:41:00] what you know that you will eat rather than what you think you will, right? Because we're tending to overbuy and then we don't finish it. And then we think it's, you know, gone bad because of the expiration, which is a whole other long subject. We end up having a ton of food waste. When you're purchasing, actually purchase things that you know you will eat and you will finish. the other side of it is going back to and we talked about this earlier, your local farmers

market, right? Think about when you're buying products that takes planes, trains and automobiles and all the carbon emissions right out there to get to you. If you happen to have a farmer's market that is close by, not even everything has to be organic, but just reducing all those carbon emissions. You know, we talked about that statistic about food systems account for about 21 to 40% of total human greenhouse [00:42:00] gas emissions. Just by doing that step, those two steps, you'll reduce food waste and you'll also help with the emissions issue that we're dealing with.

Nora LaTorre:

I just love these personal hacks like. We are on our house. My husband does a search and rescue meal to where we're just like, if anything's about to go bad, like we make a meal out of that and he's really good at that. He's captain of that. So that's also some way like know where you're buying it. And then this idea of food miles is really key. There's more and more research out about how that does impact things. We actually are grantees of the California Department of Food and AG, which is very invested. The first partner, Jennifer Siebel Newsom and Senator Skinner and Cat Taylor office have been advocating for more farm to school in California, reducing those food miles and making things more local. And our standards really help regionalize the food system. And some of our schools now will have a map. They'll have their school and then they'll have all their local farmers and [00:43:00] and we increase it, you know, 20, 40, 50% to be more local farmers. What additional progress will help the farm bill? Get involved. We need people to get involved.

Sign up for our newsletter. We're going to be activating you. That will help. Big time. There are some good documentaries we'll be sharing. We're updating our website next month, so we'll be sharing more resources. I think getting people signing up for our newsletter, getting involved in our nonprofit, but also like then sharing broadly about the farm bill will be huge. Also do some research on yourself. Get out Google and go and look up how the money is being spent today. Like it is transparent out there. Get curious and do some research and ask ChatGPT about the farm bill.? Just get knowledgeable about the farm bill and get involved and get curious and [00:44:00] start talking about it. And that will help if everybody realizes the importance and starts getting curious about it and finds organizations like ours and maybe a few organizations that you think have a

good chance at making progress. Back them. Get involved and see yourselves as a farm bill Champion. What would you add, Sonia?

Sonia Hunt:

That was perfect. I think possibly many people don't even know what a farm bill is or that we have one, right? Again, it's really about like what we're growing and how we're growing it, and you have the power to affect that. I think exactly what Nora said is like, get curious, you know, take some time to educate yourself on it and through the newsletter and the campaigns that you're going to see through Eat Real, you can actually get involved with your thoughts, your opinion, donations. There's so many different ways [00:45:00] to give. But that first step is really just understanding that there is legislation around this and then what does it actually mean? And then hopefully that is very important to you because it affects everything that we're talking about with kids and having a healthier future with the food that they're consuming. So then you can kind of really get involved in different ways that you want to.

Nora LaTorre:

I'm such an optimist and I believe in us. I know leaders like you are just tireless. And this work Sonia and Bart and the entire Samuel Lawrence Foundation. And so I'm hopeful. I'm determined [00:46:00] and I think I my prognosis is that we can together nourish the future if we all come together and if we work hard and we raise our voices together and collaborate. I am hopeful and I am confident.

Sonia Hunt:

And I as well. My journey was a very, very long journey to get to where I am today, having dealt with this my entire life. And now I can happily say I'm thriving. And, you know, that is something that I absolutely want to see for every single person on the planet. I am very hopeful because I always say, if I could do it, you can too. Anybody who doesn't give you that hope, I'm here giving you that hope today. So really give yourself permission to learn and [00:47:00] be curious and to learn about your food and eat healthy and want to see systemic change and how things have been being done to where we really dream a little bit. Think about like, what's that future you want to see?

And I believe that every single person as Nora said, coming together can absolutely make that happen. It does take, though, organizations like Eat Real being around to really push, you know, bring us all together and kind of, you know, push us forward. And that's why I've always been such a big advocate for the work that they're doing. And especially, you know, kind of starting at that young age onward is so, so important.

Bart Ziegler:

This has been really a wonderful opportunity. And the one thing that I forgot to mention, Sonia, is you're with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Group. [00:48:00] And so I want to focus back across to a larger macro vision of the United States, because I do have some people online from Alabama community we serve. That's a food desert that doesn't have a bodega within 16 country miles of their small city. My question is these people don't even have access to what we think of in California as normal because this is being broadcast from California. So the question is really, what is the farm bill for all of us who, you know, really want to know what's the farm bill and how is it going to affect a lot of the food deserts in America?

Sonia Hunt:

And Nora, do you want to talk about how Eat Real is kind of helping with that and then I can jump in?

Nora LaTorre:

Yeah, I think I think that [00:49:00] it is a big challenge of like, how do we make sure every community has access to nutrient dense climate-smart food? The USDA is making progress on investing in that as well. I just want to say we're actually USDA subgrantees to work in Tennessee, Mississippi and Arkansas in the Delta, which when you look at process food related diseases in America, access to food, as you're discussing, is one of the continuously disproportionately impacted communities in America. We're working there and we are seeing progress happen. The farm bill is one piece of it. But also in making community change, like with organizations like it is possible. We were just on a call with a school in Arkansas that's sourcing from much more. They figured out what agriculture is actually being trucked out, that they could

actually keep in the community, that then they can sell through the school. So it's about exploring what is accessible and then working with the farmers.

Now some of the farmers are growing, especially [00:50:00] for schools. It is possible at a local level, even where places have historically had limited access so communities can make the change. And then the farm bill really determines what subsidies go out and then what crops farmers are motivated to grow. If they're more motivated to grow healthier foods, then they will financially, based on economics. Additionally, the farm bill subsidizes SNAP or historically called food stamps. And so that also determines what people have access to in SNAP. And today in SNAP, the number one redeem item is soda, which is corn syrup, and not helping with planet health or human health. By looking at the farm bill closely and changing some of the policies and making vegetables and fruit and regenerative products more subsidized, that instead of subsidizing junk, subsidize healthy [00:51:00] real food. We can change what is available at those bodegas that you mentioned.

Sonia Hunt:

Yeah I totally agree with everything Nora is saying and especially with like it will take time, but there's small, small, small, small progress being made. And tying this back again is that when you yourself start to advocate for this being a must eat real food, real food being a must, we're going to start to get those communities together to see more local farming, to see more of the food that we need that is healthier for our bodies in our areas. And especially as companies like Eat Real start to take their mission all across the US, right? Everybody on this call can get involved to really bring them even into their school system. It's these kinds of changes.

But [00:52:00] just by first getting really curious and informed about like what that food is that you're consuming and where does it come from to bring kind of things like this into those food desert areas? I think it will take time, but all of these are wonderful steps that then lead to small steps that lead to big transformation.

Nora LaTorre:

And it happens slowly and then it happens really quickly. That's why I'm hopeful.

Bart Ziegler:

Climate change is 10 or 12 years away. We really have a lot of immediate concerns. You have a lot to do on your kitchen table. The question is where is where is the best focus for people? Should they be working on curricula for the students? Should they be working for should they be aware of legislative policy changes? I mean, we can't do everything all at once. But how [00:53:00] do you to see policy changes versus getting to the ground and working with parents and children and curriculum changes for the students?

Nora LaTorre:

Yeah, I have asked this question to a lot of top leaders like, what will really be the acceleration point and is it more top down policy change or is it more community driven, grassroots change? And they consistently tell me when I ask them a similar quiz, part is both—like, we need to be working on both. And I think what we need from people is to bring their experience and their passions like so their superpowers in that, in other words, to this movement. If they're really good at curriculum, help us work on that and partner with other nonprofits that work on curriculum, et-cetera. If they're expert at awareness building and they have a voice on social media, use it. If they have financial capacity, whether that's \$5 a month or \$5 [00:54:00] million a month, that's a dream like help us scale this organization and this work. I think everybody has different superpowers. We need people to bring their expertise and their passion to this work and get involved.

Sonia Hunt:

I would just add that I think that work starts from within to really kind of almost take a checklist of like what's even going on your table, right? And when you start to really do some research and become educated around that, then you start to see these differences in what's happening that's improving your own health at home and then

what's happening in the school systems, and how we are not. But yet, by the food that we have in the school systems today, that is one form of like health literacy, which is not the health literacy that we want. Right?

When you start doing this for yourself in the home and you start seeing those beautiful changes and improvements in health, now you can [00:55:00] start to build outward and build that community and really get involved in helping an organization like reel to scale their mission and their vision.

Nora LaTorre:

I love that. How am I moving my life, my personal lifestyle to real food? How am I transforming my family and moving my family towards real food? And then how do I transform my community and my nation towards more real food? I love that framework, Sonia.

Bart Ziegler:

I'll put it in a little pitch for us. A small organization called Barrio Botany that we've been supporting for a while. And it's a tireless advocate as you two are energized and focused and productive. She's taken one school and now she has ten inner city schools and they're growing their own crops and they have kids fighting over fried kale. So it's a really kind of a two pronged approach. [00:56:00]

Nora LaTorre:

Yeah. Your local nonprofit, just like we have portfolios of investment, have portfolios of the nonprofits and the causes that you care about and get involved. I love that. I love that example too. And it takes all of us. Yeah. We partner with guardian nonprofits. We partner with curriculum, nonprofits we partner with. We have a huge collaborative ecosystem of nonprofits that we partner with. I think other nonprofits doing that and then individuals doing that is so key.

Bart Ziegler:

I think the most important thing that we have here, and I'll close it out because we're 2 minutes or 1 minute till the hour, unless there's anything you'd like to add, is there anything that some final words of wisdom for us? Nora, just tremendous. The passion you bring.

Nora LaTorre:

And to the entire Samuel Lawrence Foundation team, thank you for making space and time and your dedication.

Sonia Hunt:

Yes. Yeah, I agree.

Bart Ziegler:

“Fighting climate change with the fork.” That's got to be a bumper [00:57:00] sticker. We need to put on everyone's car.

Nora LaTorre:

I promise you, I would have like my closing statement. You and your fork are the most powerful weapons against climate change.

Bart Ziegler:

This is really an engaging discussion. And I'd like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Nora LaTorre. Thank you very much. And Sonia Hunt, really been a pleasure to meet you. Your expertise, your dedication, your innovation, your commitment is just undoubtedly a lasting impact on everyone who's watched this call. I think we see how important diet and nutrition is to the climate change crisis.

I would also like to recognize utterly tremendous efforts put forth by our organizing team. They are tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure this webinar runs smoothly. We are still working out the little challenges, but their dedication of all the people I work with is just phenomenal. Piliialoha, Farley, Grace, Jill, Madeline, Adam, and Leslie want to express my gratitude to our sponsors and partners whose support and generosity makes this all of our events a reality.

The sponsors for Eat Real, the sponsors for every nonprofit that really need support, the belief, and collective mission and vision. Allow us to deliver this crucial information to individuals and organizations across the country. On behalf of the Samuel Lawrence Foundation, thank you. We look forward to welcoming you to another First Friday series in the future. Get in touch with us through our website or social media and we can continue this conversation and about how food choices play a pivotal role in fighting climate change and [00:59:00] creating a more sustainable future for those who come after us.

And with that, we thank you very much.