What is social justice and why should we care? Most of us think of justice in legalistic terms of fairness or getting what one deserves. Our pastor defines social justice as being in right relationship with God, with family, with our neighbor. Catholic tradition provides us with a wonderful set of guidelines or principles that clarify what is meant by right relationship. These guidelines, known as Catholic Social Teaching, are 7 principles that, when followed, bring us into right relationship with others. Catholic Social Teaching is based upon Biblical teachings and especially Christ’s teachings and examples on “loving our neighbor.” Social justice, then, is a means of loving each other as Christ would have us do.

- **Life and Dignity of People**
- **Call to Family, Community and Participation**
- **Rights and Responsibilities**
- **Preferential Consideration for the Poor and Vulnerable**
- **Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers**
- **Solidarity with Our Neighbor**
- **Care for God’s Creation**

Breakdown of the Seven Principles. Underneath each is a brief summary of what the principle means in general, then I also found and included some information about how these principles relate to food and agriculture. (from [http://www.ncrle.com/1-pfd-files/FoodCrisis2-pagerCST-Policy.pdf](http://www.ncrle.com/1-pfd-files/FoodCrisis2-pagerCST-Policy.pdf))

1. **Life and Dignity of People:**
   From conception to death, human life is sacred and is to be revered. Every person is precious, created in the image of God, and has inborn dignity merely from being human. We are called to protect life. More than that, we are called to revere human life and to protect and uphold the dignity of every person always. The right to life includes the right to food and nutrition to sustain life and to enable a person to develop in dignity. The poverty and hunger that diminish the lives of millions across the world are threats to human life and dignity and demand a response from believers.

2. **Call to Family, Community and Participation:**
   People not only are sacred, but they also are social. People realize dignity and rights in relationship with others, in community. The Catholic Church teaches that people grow and achieve fulfillment in community. People have a right and a duty to participate in society to seek together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable. The role of government and other institutions is to protect human life and human dignity and to promote the common good. The way we organize our society impacts the ability of persons to live in vibrant and healthy communities. Policies that favor larger scale farm operations can lead to a loss of
economic viability for smaller scale family farms and the depopulation of rural communities. Hunger impacts families everywhere by interfering with children's ability to learn and develop and often forcing parents to sacrifice essentials, such as access to health care or children's education, in order to provide sufficient food for their families. Catholic social teaching urges that the voices of people suffering from hunger and smaller scale rural farmers and ranchers should be present in decision-making regarding policies that affect them.

3. Rights and Responsibilities:
Every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to the things required for development of life: food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care and the necessary social services. But with these rights come duties and responsibilities that each person has to each other, to our families and to the larger society. We can protect human dignity and achieve a healthy community only if we meet our responsibilities to each other and protect human rights.

4. Preferential Consideration for the Poor and Vulnerable:
In our world there is a growing prosperity for some and all-encompassing poverty for others. Catholic Social Teaching proclaims that a basic moral test is to ask how society’s most vulnerable people are doing and what that society is doing to help them. We must consider how every decision we make will affect them. We must do everything we can to integrate them into the decision-making process. We maintain a special concern for poor and vulnerable people, including those who are hungry here and abroad. The primary goal for food and agricultural policies should be access to food for all people and reducing poverty among the most vulnerable everywhere. Trade practices with poorer countries should be fair and should promote the dignity and welfare of farmers in those countries. Important moral measures of the global food and agricultural system are how their weakest participants are treated and whether the system provides access to basic nutrition for all.

5. Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
The Catholic Church believes that the economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continued participation in God’s creation. Workers have these basic rights: the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organize and join unions, to private property and to economic initiative. Only if employers and society respect these rights will the dignity of work be protected. Respect for these rights promotes an economy that protects human life, defends human rights and advances everyone’s well-being.

The economy, including the agricultural economy, must serve people, not the other way around. Trade policies should reflect the right to economic opportunity for all farmers, no matter where they live. Workers should have access to an adequate income that can provide for their families’ basic needs, including the need for food and nutrition. Farm industry employees and other workers should be able to support themselves and their families through their work and provide for important needs like education, health care and retirement.
6. Solidarity with Our Neighbor

Catholic Social Teaching proclaims that we are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they live. We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic and ideological differences. When we practice the virtue of solidarity we understand that “loving our neighbor” has global dimensions in this interdependent world. We are called to enhance the well-being of our brothers and sisters in need, ensuring the ability of all people to access food and to fulfill their other basic human needs. Solidarity leads us to support the development of organizations and institutions at the local, national, and international levels that serve the needs of all. The concept of subsidiarity reminds us of the limitations and responsibilities of these organizations and defends the freedom of initiative of every member of society. In the case of food and agriculture, solidarity and subsidiarity lead us to support policies that protect smaller, family-run farms that not only produce food but also provide livelihoods for families and a foundation for rural communities.

7. Care and Respect for God’s Creation

The Catholic tradition insists that we show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the Earth is not just an Earth Day slogan. Our faith requires it every day. We must protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God’s creation. We are managers of the Earth, not its owners. All of us are called to a special reverence and respect for God’s creation. Nurturing and tilling the soil, harnessing the vitality of water to grow food, and caring for animals – including animals raised for meat - and their habitats are forms of this stewardship. The Church has repeatedly taught that the misuse of God’s creation betrays the gift God has given us for the good of the entire human family. Many scientists believe that global climate change has led to changes in weather patterns that have impacted the ability of many persons to access food. We must be especially attentive to the impacts of climate change on the poor.

Some other resources to look at for catholic social teaching in reference to food and environmental ethics:

Catholic Social Teaching and Environmental Ethics
http://www.webofcreation.org/DenominationalStatements/catholic.htm

The tradition of Catholic social teaching offers a developing and distinctive perspective on environmental issues. We believe that the following themes drawn from this tradition are integral dimensions of ecological responsibility:

- God-centered and sacramental view of the universe, which grounds human accountability for the fate of the earth;
- Consistent respect for human life, which extends to respect for all creation;
- World view affirming the ethical significance of global interdependence and the common good;
- An ethics of solidarity promoting cooperation and a just structure of sharing in the world community;
An understanding of the universal purpose of created things, which requires equitable use of the earth's resources;
An option for the poor, which gives passion to the quest for an equitable and sustainable world;
A conception of authentic development, which offers a direction for progress that respects human dignity and the limits of material growth.

Agriculture and Catholic Social Teaching- Elements of an Agricultural Ethic

There are at least four areas where Catholic social teaching can make a contribution to our thinking about the structure of American agriculture, or what we should look for in a just agricultural system. They are: the right to food, the protection of creation, the support of rural communities, and respect for justice.