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Grassroots organizing for food systems change in the San Joaquin Valley, California

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Abstract

California's San Joaquin Valley (SJV) is the wealthiest agricultural region in the United States, yet it has among the highest rates of concentrated poverty and food insecurity in the nation. Despite a growing movement to change the food system nationwide and around the world, wealth and health disparities linked to the dominant agricultural industry in the SJV are growing. This study draws upon critical philanthropy scholarship to understand the opportunities and limitations of grant funding for the food justice movement.

This qualitative research contributes a regional case study of grassroots organizing to change the food system from within a region dominated by industrial agriculture. To understand the challenges and potential for change from the perspectives of SJV grassroots organizers, this research draws on semi-structured interviews with 14 SJV organizers working for food systems change. Interviews were thematically analyzed and complemented with a review of activities across all identified organizations' websites to provide a snapshot of the food justice movement across the SJV. Particular attention is paid to how funding structures may influence organizing activity and discourse.

The findings demonstrate how grantmaking influences the dominant narrative in the SJV and shapes organizing priorities and activities. I argue that philanthropic funding may divert the food justice movement away from directly challenging powerful political and economic interests. This study advances a critical conversation in food movement scholarship to change the conditions under which structural inequality is growing.

Keywords

food movement, critical philanthropy, San Joaquin Valley, California, nonprofit industrial complex

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Introduction

California's San Joaquin Valley (SJV) is the most productive agricultural region in the world, situated at the center of the wealthiest state in the wealthiest country on earth (Buchholz, 2023; Credit Suisse, 2022; Guzman, 2018; Vegetable Research & Information Center, n.d). Yet, communities in this region are among the poorest and most food insecure in the nation (Ganesh & Smith, 2018; Shrider & Creamer, 2023). 'Poverty in the midst of plenty' is a global phenomenon, and many scholars view this as a problem of resource distribution and power (e.g., de Waal, 2018; Sen, 1981). The production and distribution of food is increasingly controlled by transnational corporations aiming to maximize profits, and the negative effects of this industrialized system have been well documented (Heinrich Böll Foundation et al., 2017; Lang & Heasman, 2015).[1]

Addressing issues in the food system is inextricably bound with changing economic, social, and political structures, and over the past few decades, a growing movement has called for systemic change to address injustices in the food system. Increasingly, the food justice movement in the U.S. has pushed the national conversation from a narrow focus on food security and aid provision toward an emphasis on social justice and systems change (Cadieux & Slocum, 2015).[2] However, the extent to which grassroots organizing around food is politicized is "inherently variable" (Fisher & DeFilippis, 2015, p. 364) and largely shaped by context. Grassroots organizations tend to rely on and be financially and legally accountable to grantmakers (e.g., government or private foundations); that is, they are reliant on the same economic system they are working to change. Evidence indicates that working within the context of grant-funding structures can have a depoliticizing effect (Finley & Esposito, 2012). Grantmakers often restrict or prohibit the use of funds for political organizing and instead give preference to "professionalized" (Finley & Esposito, 2012, p. 17), market-oriented service provision rather than movement-building work. How are SJV communities working to change a powerful multibillion-dollar food industry while being reliant on philanthropic wealth produced through socioeconomic inequality?

This study bridges critical food studies and critical philanthropy scholarship to understand the role of philanthropy in the food justice movement and identify opportunities for and barriers to change. Few studies have focused on the rural food justice movement in the U.S., even though food production primarily takes place in rural areas, and rural communities are among the most affected by the corporate food system (Alkon, 2017; McEntee, 2011; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2023).

Furthermore, very few critical food studies have applied a critical philanthropy lens to understand the conditions under which the movement operates, apart from Guthman (2008a, 2008b). This research helps to address these gaps and advances a critical conversation around the positioning of food justice organizations working in communities most directly impacted by the industrial food system. This study examines two main questions: (1) How are grant-funded grassroots organizations working for food justice and systems change in the SJV? and (2) What are the perspectives of grassroots organizers on working for food justice and systems change in the SJV while remaining accountable to grantmakers?

Working Definitions

In this study, *grassroots organizations* are operationalized as "locally based, ... formal [or semi-formal], not-for-profit groups … that manifest significant voluntary altruism" (Smith, 1997, p. 115). *Grassroots organizers* (hereafter, organizers) are operationalized as local residents who organize collective action to accomplish social change (Wittig, 1996).

[1] These impacts include, for example, growing rates of diet-related illnesses (Willet et al., 2019), environmental degradation and climate breakdown (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007, 2023), land-grabbing (GRAIN, 2014), and the exploitation of labor (International Labour Organization, 2003).

[2] Food justice has been defined as "the struggle against racism, exploitation, and oppression taking place within the food system that addresses inequality's root causes both within and beyond the food chain" (Hislop, 2014, p. 19). Although various definitions for food justice exist (e.g., see Rowe, 2016), the Hislop (2014) definition was identified by Alkon and Guthman (2017) as possibly the most thorough. This definition also has been more widely cited in academic literature (e.g., Bradley & Herrera, 2015; Herman et al., 2018).

Literature Review

Activists and scholars have worked extensively to develop shared analyses and definitions of food movement activity (e.g., La Via Campesina, 2007; Cadieux & Slocum, 2015). Perhaps one of the clearest delineations of different food movement orientations is the typology (Table 1) by Holt Giménez and Shattuck (2011); however, as the authors note, the progressive food movement is heterogeneous. The food movement might be best understood across a gradient, with efforts falling between a hegemonic food regime and radical praxis.

The dominant food movement narrative tends to focus on food security or sustainability, which often ignores structural race and class inequities (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011). However, there is a growing segment of the food movement calling for food justice, which extends concern over food security toward an analysis of the drivers of inequities within the food system, with an emphasis on the role of power.

Neoliberal Discourse in the Food Justice Movement

Neoliberalism describes an ideological commitment to free markets and state devolution, based on a premise of individualism and competition (Peck & Tickell, 2002). Extensively critiqued in the food justice literature, neoliberalization—that is, how neoliberalism is "produced and reproduced through institutional forms" (Peck & Tickell, 2002, p. 383)—recreates the conditions which give rise to oppression and exploitation within the food system (Fairbairn, 2012). Many scholars have observed the prevalence of neoliberal discourse and approaches in the food movement and call for deeper exploration beyond a free market-oriented strategy (e.g., Mares & Alkon, 2011; Pudup, 2008).

Yet, McClintock (2014) argues that scholars need to move beyond a "dualism" of whether food justice organizations are "radical" or "neoliberal" (pp. 165–166). McClintock examined urban agriculture initiatives and concluded that such organizations quell radical activism while still working to reclaim food production from the corporate food system. To imagine a "more just food system," we must understand the conditions under which food justice initiatives operate and embed these efforts "within a broader framework of justice and structural change" (McClintock, 2014, p. 166).

The Boundaries of Philanthropy

Others have noted the contradiction of working for systems change within existing economic and

Table 1. A Food Regime/Food Movements Framework

	Corporate Food Regime		Food Movements	
POLITICS	**NEOLIBERAL**	**REFORMIST**	**PROGRESSIVE**	**RADICAL**
Discourse	***Food Enterprise***	***Food Security***	***Food Justice***	***Food Sovereignty***
Orientation	***Corporate and Global Market***	***Development and Aid***	***Empowerment***	***Entitlement and Redistribution***
Model	Overproduction; corporate concentration; unregulated markets and monopolies; monocultures (including organic); genetically modified organisms; agrofuels; mass global consumption of industrial food; phasing out of peasant and family agriculture and local retail	Mainstreaming and/or certification of niche markets (e.g., organic, fair, sustainable); maintaining northern agricultural subsidies; market-led land reform; microcredit	Agroecologically produced local food; investment in underserved communities; new business models and community benefit packages for production, processing, and retail; better wages for farmworkers; solidarity economies; land access; regulated markets and supply	Dismantle corporate agri-foods monopoly power; parity; redistributive land reform; community rights to water and seed; regionally based food systems; democratization of the food system; sustainable livelihoods; protection from dumping and overproduction

Source: Reproduced from a larger table in Holt Giménez & Shattuck, 2011; reprinted by permission of the publisher (Taylor & Francis, http://www.tandfonline.com).

political structures. In a survey of urban agriculture organizations across the U.S. and Canada, McClintock and Simpson (2017) found that those with an explicit food justice aim were much less likely to have government funding and more likely to rely on funding from private foundations. However, philanthropic funding may also undermine the radical aims of these organizations and limit envisioning alternatives to the structures imposed by funders (INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, 2007; Skocpol, 2016).

Some progressive foundations have worked to make their funding processes more democratic and allow organizers more autonomy (Ostrander, 2005). Nonetheless, Dowie (2001) asserts that "because foundations are dependent on an unequal distribution of wealth, they will not directly address the injustices created by disproportionate wealth" (p. 245).

The structural constraints of the grantmaking practice are well illustrated in a case study conducted by Guthman (2008b), which centered on a two-year food justice project initiated by a coalition of private foundations. Guthman traces how governance practices of the funding coalition "delimited the thinkable" (p. 1248) among recipient food justice organizations. In her analysis, Guthman observes that the delimiting factor was primarily the processes of governance that privileged technocratic exercises and expertise, and not necessarily an ideological misalignment between the funder and grantees. Here, her analysis intersects with critical philanthropy scholarship and also reiterates the concept of neoliberalization raised above. Acquiescence within the governance structures of philanthropy may reproduce the very systems organizers are working to change.

Activists and scholars have termed this the *nonprofit industrial complex*, defined as "a system of relationships between the State (or local and federal governments), the owning classes, foundations, and nonprofit social service and social justice organizations that results in the surveillance, control, derailment, and everyday management of political movements" (INCITE!, n.d., para. 11). In the food justice literature, much attention has been paid to neoliberal rationalities manifested in food justice discourse and activities; however, the constraints inherent to working within philanthropic structures are often only mentioned in passing.[3] The apparent contradiction of working for systems change within philanthropy structures, as highlighted by critical philanthropy scholars, does not appear to feature as an analytical focus in food justice literature. Yet, such a focus is necessary to understand the conditions under which grassroots organizations operate.

To help fill this gap, this study is situated at the nexus of critical philanthropy scholarship and critical food studies. This study builds on the research of Kohl-Arenas, who focused on interactions between philanthropic foundations and the historic SJV farmworker movement in the SJV. With this work as its point of departure, this study explores the broader food movement in the SJV. The work of Kohl-Arenas provides both historical context for the SJV and an analytical framework to understand the role of philanthropy in social movements.

Theory of Philanthropy as a Consensus Broker

Kohl-Arenas (2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2017) examined the role of philanthropy in SJV farmworker movements throughout the twentieth century. By bringing together the Gramscian conceptual frames of "discursive power," "hegemony as politics," and "strategic articulation," Kohl-Arenas (2015b, p. 796) posited a framework for analyzing interactions between foundations and social movements (Table 2). Kohl-Arenas (2015b) proposed that the grantmaking process creates "idealized spaces of public participation and discursive theories of change" (p. 796) that build consensus and shift attention away from challenging structural inequality.

Through archival research and ethnography, Kohl-Arenas (2017) found that philanthropic foundations both catalyzed and constrained farmworker organizing by providing financial resources to expand organizing while ultimately delimiting permissible activities. Kohl-Arenas (2014) argues that while

[3] The work of Guthman (2008a, 2008b) is a notable exception.

Table 2. Analytical Framework for Understanding the Role of Philanthropy in Grassroots Movements

Discursive power	What assumptions, values, and beliefs are considered "common sense"? What ideas and activities are excluded?
Hegemony as political process	How might hegemony be reproduced through ongoing practices of self-governance? How are power relations negotiated in the process?
Strategic articulation	How do activists negotiate ideas, discourses, programs, and institutions to challenge or maintain the status quo? What strategic compromises are made, and what openings or closures does this create in the dominant frameworks of ideas and practice?

Note. Adapted from Kohl-Arenas, 2015b.

> foundations do not always have articulated or clear-cut political agendas to dilute organizing campaigns[,] ... lines [for organizing] are most often drawn at the point at which a nascent organizing campaign directly confronts the economic structures upon which philanthropic wealth is created and maintained. (pp. 494–495)

Through interviewing program officers in grantmaking institutions, Kohl-Arenas (2017) recognized foundation staff as inhabiting a contradictory space of serving as both "brokers of political opportunity" (p. 677) and manufacturers of consent to maintain "unchanged hegemonic institutions" (p. 679). Kohl-Arenas (2017) called on staff in philanthropic foundations to "not only change the script but also join in the movement to reconstruct the stage and the scaffolding that continues to hold it up" (p. 697).

This in-depth investigation led Kohl-Arenas (2015a) to draw similar conclusions as Guthman (2008b), which call into question the governance of social movement activity as potentially undermining imagination beyond the "neoliberal box" (p. 1250). Yet, importantly, Kohl-Arenas (2015a) and Guthman (2008b) observed that philanthropic governance is not blanketly uncontested by grassroots organizations. To move beyond a critique of the ways in which food justice organizations reproduce neoliberal rationalities, we must better understand the philanthropic structures in which they operate and how the boundaries of what is possible are imagined and negotiated. This study complements the work of Kohl-Arenas, who examined the role of foundation staff in brokering consensus, by focusing on the role of grant recipient organizers.

Research Methods

Sample Selection

Using Google Search to conduct a carefully documented internet search, I first compiled a list of grassroots organizations located in the SJV that (a) work on issues of food justice (in accordance with the framework in Table 1), (b) explicitly state aims of systems change and/or community empowerment, and (c) reference a funder or fiscal sponsor. Organizations that were extensions of organizations outside the SJV were included if they had a physical presence in the SJV (both a locally based office and paid or volunteer staff). In this way, I identified 16 grassroots organizations. To expand my search further, I asked interviewees whether they were aware of other SJV food justice organizations; however, this question did not generate any additions.

To recruit participants, I sent individualized emails to each organization requesting an interview. Fieldwork took place from late May to early June 2019, and 14 staff members from 12 organizations agreed to be interviewed.

Data Collection

Data were gathered using 12 semi-structured key informant interviews.[4] Interviews followed a guide

[4] I conducted 12 interviews with 14 organizers in total. Two interviews were each conducted with two staff members together. Both of these interviews ran for approximately 1.5 hours, or about 15 minutes longer than the median time (75 minutes).

(Appendix D) to facilitate the emergence of common themes while enabling more fluid conversation (Brinkmann, 2014). For three interviews where in-person meetings were not possible, I conducted interviews via conference call. All interviews were audio-recorded and ranged from 52 minutes to 2 hours in length, generating 917 minutes of audio. I transcribed the audio verbatim using oTranscribe, which resulted in 248 pages of text.

Data Analysis

I thematically analyzed the interview data according to guidelines developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). I coded data in NVivo to identify themes and patterns across responses, and I kept a detailed codebook to document the decisions made throughout the analysis and to facilitate reflexive inquiry. Rather than attempt to fit participants' responses into a preconstructed framework, I focused on drawing patterns from the data (Boyatzis, 1998). Given my positioning as a former organizer, this open-ended approach was important to attend to patterns I may have otherwise overlooked.

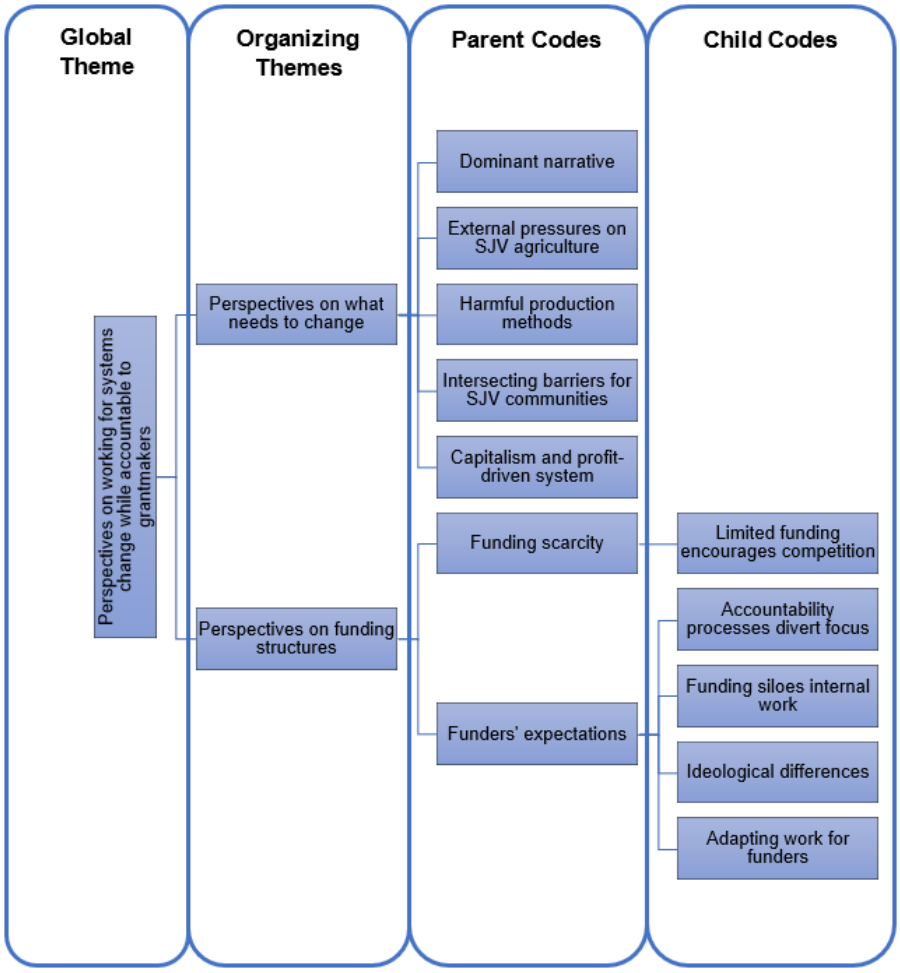
I familiarized myself with the interview data by listening to each audio recording multiple times during transcription and carefully re-reading each transcript. I then developed codes by systematically and iteratively reading through transcripts until I had coded all interviews and generated an initial codebook of 85 codes (Appendix C). I reviewed the coded references to merge or link significantly overlapping concepts, and I examined codes for common threads. I identified two organizing themes to address my research question, with seven parent codes and five child codes (Figure 1).

To explore the role of philanthropy in the SJV food movement, I analyzed these themes using the theoretical framework by Kohl-Arenas (2015b) for understanding the role of philanthropy in social movements (Table 2). To investigate the orientation of the SJV food movement, I drew on these themes when applying the food movement framework (Table 1) by Holt Giménez and Shattuck (2011).

Limitations

Because grassroots organizations were identified using a web-based search, this sample excludes organizations without an online presence. Consequently, the sample may have been skewed away from organizations that are small or very new.

Figure 1. Organizing Themes Identified in Interview Data



Moreover, this study did not include a detailed profile of the organizations' funders and the funding provided to each grantee. While this protects the anonymity of the organizations and the relationships of the grantees with their funders, this information would have further illustrated the funding landscape in the SJV and the activities that grantmakers tend to favor.

Ethics

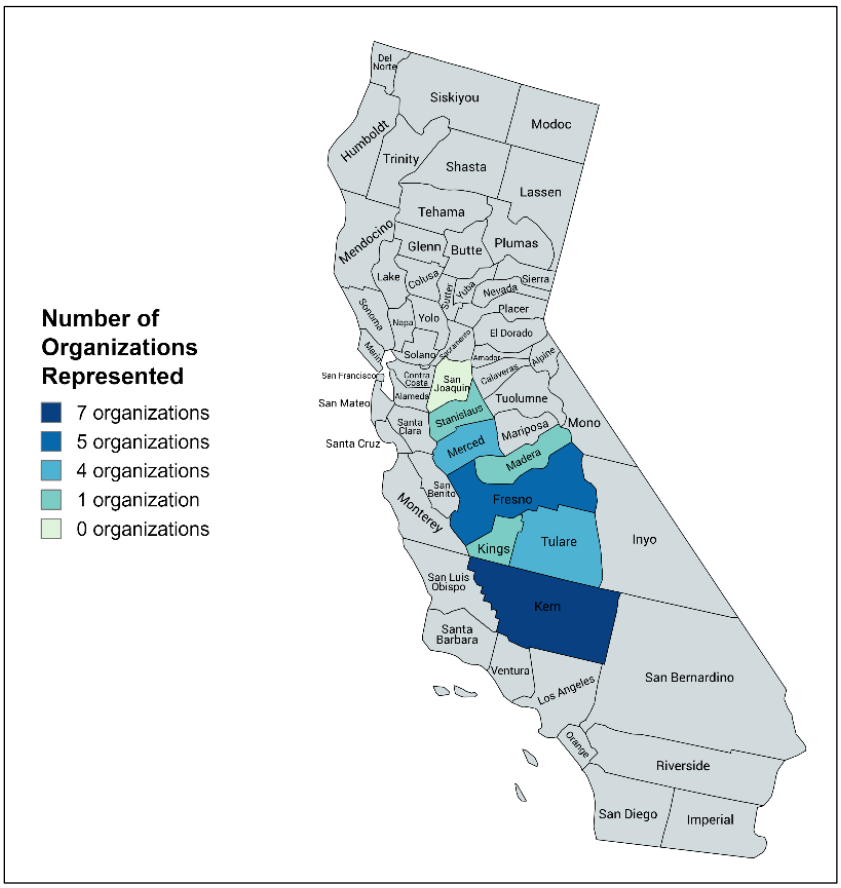
I followed British Sociological Association guidelines (2017) as well as the U.K. Data Protection Act (2018, c. 12). This research presents two notable ethical considerations given the population of interest: preserving anonymity and minimizing the burden placed on interviewees in participating.

Because this research explored organizers' perspectives on their current work, it was critical to maintain confidentiality to avoid compromising their position in their organization or with their organization's funders. In presenting the findings, I have taken care to preserve participants' anonymity, including organizational affiliation.

Additionally, throughout the course of the study, I was keenly aware that organizers are often extremely busy, underpaid, and at risk of burnout. I made sure to meet at a time and place convenient for each interviewee, and I ended each interview on a positive note. The full report and a research brief were shared with all participants.[5]

Figure 2. Distribution of San Joaquin Valley (SJV) Grassroots Organizations Working to Change the Food System, by County (*n* = 23)

Six of the 16 organizations had multiple sites (see Appendix A).



Map created using MapChart (https://www.mapchart.net).

Results

Findings below build a snapshot of the grassroots food justice movement in the San Joaquin Valley. I first offer an overview of grassroots food justice organizations, their activities, and the organizers involved, and then share organizers' views on the problems they are seeking to address and their root causes, as well as their perspectives on remaining accountable to funders while working to change the food system.

Overview of Food Justice Organizations in the SJV

Most of the organizations included in this study are located in four of the eight SJV counties: Kern, Fresno, Merced, and Tulare (Figure 2). Six organizations are based in multiple counties. Three organizations were coalitions with dedicated organizers based in the SJV. Most organizations had fewer than 10 staff. Nine organizations were fiscally sponsored, six were

[5] For the full thesis and research brief, please contact the author.

incorporated as a 501(c)(3), and one was incorporated as a 501(c)(5). The majority were founded after 2000, and newer organizations were less likely to be incorporated. Many organizations emphasized a range of foci on their websites: The majority emphasized environmental justice, several focused on public health, and a few emphasized social justice (see Appendix A for further summary).

Activities

An overview of the organizations' activities (Figure 3) was compiled by reviewing all 16 organizations' websites and supplementing this with information gleaned through the interviews. Nearly all the organizations participated in policy advocacy; only one focused exclusively on program management. Two organizations primarily advocated for policy change at the state or federal level on specific campaigns (e.g., banning certain pesticide use; implementing a statewide soda tax), often through involvement in regional or statewide coalitions. Many organizations focused on mobilizing community members around various issues, including infrastructure projects, pesticide use, clean air and water programs, healthy food access, and farmworker rights. Three organizations provided legal representation to marginalized communities and individuals, and two worked with unincorporated communities to establish local committees that represent their interests at the county level.

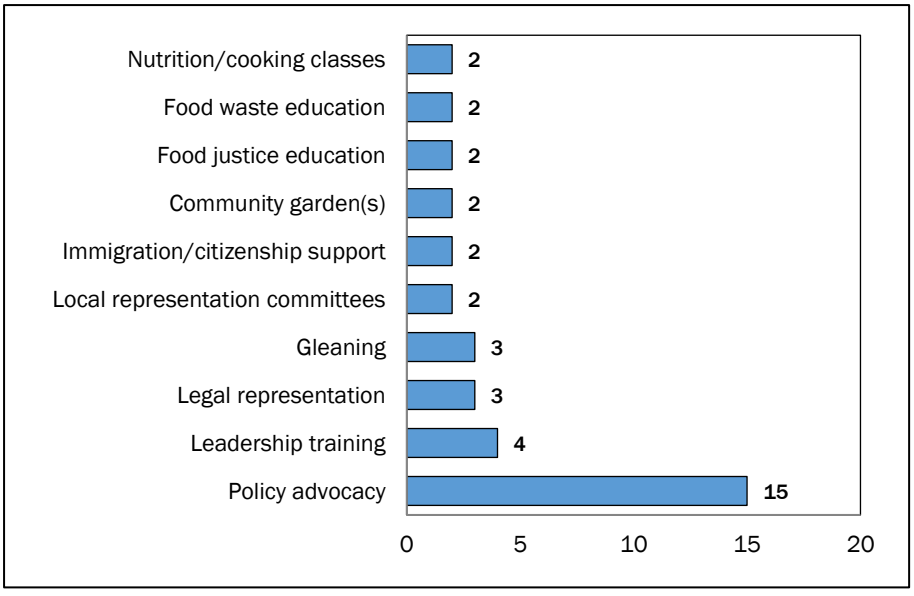
A few organizations had piloted entrepreneurial initiatives to expand access to healthy food, such as mobile produce vending. However, none of these continued beyond the funding period. Three organizations ran gleaning programs (one exclusively), which facilitated the transfer of food that would be wasted by institutions and farmers to others who might use it (often low-income community members). One organization was starting a community garden, while another had established multiple community gardens and was in the process of starting a permaculture farm. Several organizations facilitated workshops on nutrition, cooking, or reducing food waste.

The three coalitions coordinated efforts across member organizations. All three were involved in organizing conferences to convene members, as well as raising awareness of potential avenues to influence state and federal policy. Two focused on environmental justice, and one focused on sustainable agriculture. One coalition was beginning to coalesce efforts to start an agroecology center. Each coalition had community organizers involved in local campaigns in conjunction with member organizations, such as monitoring air pollution and holding community workshops on food justice.

Characteristics of Participants

Participants worked in a range of capacities in their organizations, and several worked with multiple organizations (e.g., one participant directed an organization and also spearheaded a regional coalition). In smaller organizations, organizers also held administrative roles. For larger organizations, organizers held a distinct, non-administrative role. All received payment for their work, and the

Figure 3. Activities of Grassroots Organizations (*n* = 16)



majority of participants were full-time organizers.[6] All but three participants were originally from the SJV. When asked about their motivations for working as an organizer, participants mentioned their passion for the cause, their strong bond with their communities, and finding the relational work extremely fulfilling. Several organizers mentioned having farmworker parents or relatives, and a few organizers had worked in the SJV fields themselves. They described being influenced by witnessing the injustices their farmworker parents faced while growing up; a few also mentioned being influenced by the political activism of their parents during the heyday of the farmworker movement and beyond.

Perspectives on What Needs to Change

In discussing the problems in the SJV, several recurring themes arose: a dominant narrative around SJV agriculture that ignores structural inequality; external pressures on the SJV agriculture industry; harmful methods of agricultural production; intersecting systemic barriers oppressing communities; and capitalism and a profit-driven food system. These are explored in turn below.

Dominant Narrative Ignores Structural Inequality

The majority of organizers referred to the paradox of California's wealth and agricultural abundance coinciding with poverty and food insecurity. Several organizers pointed to a dominant narrative in the SJV that industrial agriculture feeds the world, which they directly challenged:

> Because there's that narrative that's not true, that oh, we're the breadbasket and we feed the world, or we feed our country. We have a lot of crops here. But we're not feeding; we import a lot, right? You can't just blanket that just because you're concentrated on ag. Not everybody eats almonds. Like, almonds are sucking up all the damn water. Like, you have so many monocrops growing here. You're not feeding the world with just one type of crop, right? So, it's that mindset of how we're feeding the world, and my job and my livelihood depends on ag, there can't be any other way. (ID.1)[7]

The phrase "we feed the world" and "my job depends on ag" came up repeatedly in references to the conservative SJV context. One participant explained,

> "My job depends on ag" was a recent, ongoing marketing campaign that could be seen across the SJV on bumper stickers and yard signs, and was . . . started by a couple of local people. . . . Farmers. And then one teenager, this teenager just graduated from some local high school and now goes to [local community college] to study ag or something. So, they're also pro-conventional ag. Very conservative. And basically, it's a marketing campaign to talk about how everything you do, touch, whatever, involves ag. (ID.2)

This dominant narrative suggests that there is no better alternative to industrial agriculture, which organizers argued masks the reality of widespread poverty and hunger experienced in communities affected by this industry.

External Pressures on the SJV Agriculture Industry

One organizer was particularly concerned with helping farmers become more profitable in the global market to improve the wages and working conditions of SJV farmworkers. This participant explained that industrial farmers are

> . . . being squeezed from the top pushing down, driving—you know, the Walmarts—they're pushing the price down. And the grower's like hey, I've got less to do with—you know, how do I provide my workers a fair wage if I can't myself produce a product at the

[6] While all organizers received some payment for their work, not all received full salaries. A few indicated that they voluntarily worked far beyond a 40-hour work week without overtime pay, and a few organizers sometimes received stipends for projects, rather than drawing full wages.

[7] See Appendix B for a full list of participant ID codes, with detail on their respective organization.

> rates that I'm being asked to? And then with globalization coming from Mexico, coming from Chile, all driven by the U.S. consumer. 'Cause the U.S. consumer wants their product yesterday. They want it nice. They want it pretty. They want it big. (ID.3)

This participant expressed concern primarily over rapid shifts in agricultural production toward mechanized labor and an increasingly competitive market. The main problem their organization sought to address was a lack of recognition of farm labor as a skilled profession. From the perspective of this organizer, the focus needs to be on

> the entire supply chain, we have to be looking at the entire—and how one piece impacts the other. We have to figure out how to create these [farmworker] jobs. Again, as a profession. And growers have to compete. Just like any other industry. (ID.3)

Production Methods Cause Harm

From the perspective of the majority of organizers, the production methods of SJV industrial agriculture were problematic. Many organizers were involved in campaigns to regulate pesticide drift, which pollutes the water and air across the SJV and particularly affects low-income communities of color. Several organizers experienced the effects of pesticide drift personally. One organizer shared,

> We hear it like, constantly, oh, she died of cancer, oh she needs a liver transp[lant]—like things that you would never imagine from years before are happening now. And for us, it's that correlation that we live near a field. We're exposed to a lot of these chemicals. (ID.11)

This was echoed by another organizer in another part of the SJV, who observed, "… so many people that have passed away from cancer, respiratory illnesses, in our town. … It's bad for how very [few] people we have" (ID.14).

Although organizers were working to regulate the existing agriculture industry, many also described conventional growing practices as unsustainable because they degrade the environment, contribute to climate change, and negatively impact communities. One organizer explained that for their coalition,

> some of the key convening points were a shared analysis of how our dominant industrial agricultural model in the San Joaquin Valley touched on all of the issue areas that they work on with communities in the Valley, so whether their focus was on water, or air quality, or pesticides. All of it, like the root causes of those different environmental injustices were tied back to our food and farming system. Both as a root challenge, but where change needed to be happening. (ID.7)

Intersecting Problems Tied to SJV Food System

Repeatedly, participants emphasized the interconnectedness of issues in the SJV, many of which were linked to the predominance of the agriculture industry in the region. A couple of organizers stated that the food system encompassed multiple intersecting issues, and they use the food system as a lens to address different problems in the community. As one organizer stated,

> We know that people can't think about growing their own food if they're having to work 16-hour days just to pay for their rent. So, we need to look at affordable housing. We know that we can't talk about them growing their own food and having a local food economy if there's no land for them to plant on. Right? If all the big farmers are owning all the land around them, then there's no way that that system is gonna change. So, we're looking at it as a much more holistic idea of how food justice is intertwined with pesticide use and health outcomes from that. Affordable housing, land use, water use, like all of that stuff. We're looking at all of it together and how we can combine all of that stuff and really make it part of a larger idea of just organizing our communities in general. (ID.4)

A few participants also highlighted barriers to participation for marginalized communities, partic-

ularly undocumented immigrants at risk of deportation, and residents living in poverty without the time or energy to engage in long-term advocacy work. Many of the communities the organizers engaged with were small and unincorporated. Lacking basic infrastructure such as sidewalks and traffic lights, many unincorporated communities also lack access to affordable, healthy food. Residents in these communities rely on mini-markets for groceries, which offer an extremely limited selection of food at a premium cost. One participant described that they

> … have three little mom and pop stores, and they sell the basics, but if you run out of milk and you have to go there, it's really expensive. You're paying six bucks for a gallon of milk, and then you have to check expiration dates because they do sell, frequently they sell, expired food. (ID.5)

The nearest grocery store is typically miles away and requires time, personal transportation, and money for fuel to access. In this particular community, the nearest full-service grocery store was 35 miles away.

Only a few organizers brought up racism as a core issue in the SJV, even though the majority worked primarily in communities of color. It is possible the reality of racism in the SJV was broadly assumed. One organizer stated,

> And then the last thing I'll add, which I realized I don't always say, but I feel like for who I'm in dialogue with, it usually goes without saying is that, part of when we're saying power and inequities—I know equity can be kind of a buzzword, especially lately—but racial equity specifically, and like, recognizing environmental racism and just racism broadly in the Valley as part of that. What we see, and who is most impacted when we're talking about most impacted communities. Who that is. So, just to add that. It's inherent to the way that we think about our work and who we work with and who we are, but it might be worth saying out loud. (ID.7)

Root Causes: Capitalism and the Profit Motive

Participants were asked why they thought the problems in the SJV existed. Most referred to a fundamentally broken system, capitalism, or a drive for profit. For instance, the following response problematizes the commodification of food and the profit incentive for intensive agriculture:

> I mean, definitely just capitalism itself. Like, you cannot commodify a necessity. You know, it's like everybody has to eat. Healthy, nutritious, affordable food is a human right. And so, when we limit that access by commodifying it and making it profitable to grow monoculturally. Like, there's no way that we're ever going to get food justice until, like I said, we think holistically and we think about it economically as well. Right? So, if a community has control over their food system, we know that it's more resilient, that it fights climate change, it fights poverty. Like all of those things work together. But of course, that's not the way that Big Ag wants to do their business. (ID.4)

Another organizer echoed a similar sentiment, also highlighting the concentration of land ownership:

> I really think it's because a very small number of people own the land … The way we grow food has changed completely because it's now a business. It's really industrial business. It's not—you know, before, when you were a farmer, you owned your property, you worked in the property. You were the one that worried about the pests, took care of your trees, took care of irrigation, did everything. And now, there's farmers where they own the land, but they don't even live there. … It's [the work is] contracted. … The whole thing is just so industrial. And so, the goal is not to feed community. It's just to make money the cheapest way possible. (ID.1)

Another organizer more broadly asserted that capitalism is at the root of many issues in the SJV:

> … this is big and complicated and complex and can be argued from so many different angles, but the bottom line, and I truly believe this, is that the system of capitalism, which requires growth, which is really not a system that is meant to be sustainable, that it kind of, that the whole thing is based upon things growing and using up resources and not necessarily putting prices on externalities. … There's just these huge, uneven power dynamics in our society, which are usually based around the economic system, you know. Definitely a root cause of a lot of these issues. (ID.6)

Having outlined the perspective of organizers on problems in the SJV, I now turn to examine organizers' perspectives on addressing these problems within current funding structures.

Perspectives on Remaining Accountable to Grantmakers

The key themes around funding related to funding scarcity and funders' expectations. These are examined in turn below.

Scarcity of Funding for SJV Communities

When discussing funding availability, organizers described both a scarcity of funding for the SJV in general, and a scarcity of funding for the priorities of SJV communities in particular. A few SJV organizers explained that most funding is directed toward urban centers in California (particularly Los Angeles, Sacramento, and the Bay Area).

Finding resources to sustain organizations' overhead and increase the accessibility of community meetings can especially be a challenge. One organizer explained,

> We need to be able to have meaningful relationships and build that trust with folks. And through that, it doesn't happen overnight. We have to have ongoing meetings; we have to be providing food and childcare and translations and all these services. And oftentimes those types of things are things that, you know, the first things that [funders] wanna cut. (ID.8)

Yet, funders are more likely to fund new projects with tangible results. Another participant stated,

> If you're looking at funding for a program, it's only going to last a year or two. And then, again, how do we sustain it? How do we make sure to build sustainability into that program? And so, yeah, funders are looking for outcomes and for accountability within that one or two years, but that's not how it's going to work. We know that this a long haul. (ID.4)

The majority of participants expressed a similar sentiment and emphasized that the work they do centers on building ongoing relationships in the community, and the vision for enacting systemic change must be long-term.

Limited Funding Encourages Competition Between Organizations

Although all grassroots organizations partnered with other community groups in some form, several organizations indicated it was challenging having to compete for limited funds. Sometimes larger organizations would secure large federal or foundation grants and subcontract some of the work to smaller organizations. However, this can raise contention over ownership of the work and the distribution of funds. For example, one organizer noted,

> we were part of a coalition for many years. And we were getting grants through them, but in their reporting, they never mentioned us. And, um, the foundation that was giving us money, I had met with them, and they were like, well we don't even know who your organization is. I'm like, wait a minute, you've been giving me a grant for like the last 10 years! How do you not know who I am? And I had that discussion with a foundation about, well, because others are taking the credit for your work. … We've had to talk about it internally. How do we change that? How do we take ownership of our work without hurting our relationship with community members? (ID.1)

Another shared that they "learned a long time

ago that not all funding, not all money is good money.… [A partner will] get [US]$300,000 a year and they give us maybe less than [US]$10,000. We can't do that" (ID.12).

Accountability Requirements Divert Resources from Organizing

When organizations secure funding, grants may come with time-consuming accountability processes that tie organizers up in bureaucracy and detract from organizing. "Like you have to get other funding to do what you said you're going to do because all the money they give you is spent reporting on what you want to do" (ID.9). For instance, a few organizers mentioned that public health agencies secure large federal grants, which may be divided into smaller grants for organizers. However, the reporting burden tends to be high and the reimbursement process lengthy, which sometimes makes smaller grants "not even worth it" (ID.9). Ultimately, one organizer said, "there's gonna have to come a time where funders think differently about how their funds are being used and how they're holding organizations accountable and what their expectations are" (ID.4).

Piecemeal Funding Siloes Work

A particularly striking theme that arose was how funding may silo work within organizations. Because organizations may have different funding sources for various projects, funding streams are expected to remain separate. This means organizations are unable to leverage coinciding programming, even if the programs are complementary.

This was clearly illustrated through a small, fiscally sponsored organization that both ran a nutrition education program and promoted agroecology; however, these activities were kept strictly bounded. This organizer shared, "there's limits that you can do. I mean, my biggest frustration personally is always with the nutrition piece, because I'm like, it's [the agroecology work is] such an easy link" (ID.9). They later added that they wanted to "use those [nutrition workshops] as jumping off points, but it is a bit frustrating that there are so many strict black and white lines within that when it's like, this is the perfect opportunity to have this conversation" (ID.9).

Another organizer explained that although a foundation funds them "to do leadership development training, resident empowerment, and then the policy work" to reduce carbon emissions at the state level and safe routes to school "because that's their [the funder's] focus," they need to "find additional grants that will help support what the residents' goals are" (ID.12).

Ideological Differences Between Funders and Organizations

Private funders in the SJV seem to be more ideologically conservative in what they will fund. A few organizers described having to code-switch (e.g., focusing on alleviating hunger instead of talking about systemic change) when communicating with the funder. On the other hand, another organizer expressed discomfort at being encouraged by a funder from outside the SJV to take an antagonistic approach in making demands of elected officials:

> [Our foundation officer] goes, well, maybe [your organization] isn't the right organization to take the lead on the work. [I] said maybe you're right. Maybe you're right. Maybe it is somebody else to take the lead on this work because they wanted us to be those kind of—excuse my language—"fuck the police" approaches. We weren't raised that way. I wasn't raised that way, and I refuse. Refuse. If we can't build true, genuine partnership with our parents and school systems and city government, then it's not us. We have to change those systems and put people there that are responsive to people's needs. But I'm not going to disrespect anybody. (ID.12)

However, not all funders may be ideologically invested in supporting the success of funded projects. One organizer mentioned that "unfortunately, 90-some philanthropic communities just want to say, here's my money, give me my tax write-off" (ID.1). Of those who are invested, not all may understand or support the priorities of SJV communities. This organizer continued on to say,

> … [funders] trying to find those that are truly effective for not just the purpose of the money

> portion, but true change, and those are the ones that I'm saying who want to see the change, are really the ones who need to be invited to ground-level type of events. So there's a better understanding. 'Cause right now, I don't think the understanding is where it needs to be. (ID.1)

Consequently, organizers mediate between communities and philanthropic foundations, in addition to advocating within communities to change the food system.

Adapting to Funding Constraints

A couple of organizers stated that they may skip funding opportunities to remain autonomous and focus on community priorities. In the words of one organizer, "the heart of our work is leadership development work with community residents. I don't guide the work. They guide the work. My job is to support the project that they select" (ID.12). Yet, participants also described how the availability of funding shapes their work. For instance, one organization had shifted its focus from social justice toward environmental justice because of funding availability. Another had adapted by narrowing its focus to service provision:

> We really made a shift from advocacy and policy work to community-based organization and results. It was really, I mean, you can obviously see results with policy. You know, if you get policy change. But as you know, that's years of work. To go to the funders side of the conversation that you brought up, that is a lot harder to get funded than people want to see, where is my dollar going. Dollar for dollar ... we have it like an equation now where we can go and sell it. And people wanna invest in it, and funders wanna invest in it. (ID.10)

One organizer was exploring how to convince funders to offer grants based on community priorities. This organizer was in the process of developing "a menu for [funders] to decide what they want to do," which would show different components of the organization's operations (ID.1). Although a few organizers emphasized that they avoided initiating projects solely to maintain operations, the community priorities that they do pursue are clearly shaped by funding availability.

Despite the challenges of working within funding structures, organizers expressed optimism about the potential to transform the SJV. Several indicated that the number of funders interested in the SJV is increasing. Many organizers were hopeful of creating healthy communities with thriving local economies, representative democracies, and access to affordable, ethically grown food.

Discussion

From their perspectives in working in marginalized, food insecure SJV communities, many organizers sharply critiqued the dominant narrative that the agriculture industry feeds the world and identified the root causes of the problems their communities are facing as embedded in the current food system. However, although organizations' activities primarily focused on addressing the negative effects of industrial agriculture, they often stopped short of directly addressing or even making explicit these root causes. Many organizers emphasized the importance of work being community-driven. Yet, the organizing agenda, campaigns, and project lifespans are shaped by the funding available, and the narratives and boundaries of this work are often delimited by funders. These findings correspond with Kohl-Arenas's (2015b) findings that funders "broker consensus" with the neoliberal status quo through channeling and constraining grassroots organizing away from explicitly challenging and addressing the root causes of the problems that SJV communities face. However, some organizers recognized this contradiction and were seeking ways to contest this by educating and influencing funders.

How Are Grant-Funded Grassroots Organizations Working for Food Justice and Systems Change in the SJV?

Organizations' activities were largely directed toward engaging residents to advocate on behalf of their own communities and create policy changes, without directly confronting the agriculture industry. However, the primary activities of SJV organizations concentrate on addressing problems caused

by the agriculture industry. Nearly all organizations focused on policy advocacy to increase regulations on industrial agriculture and/or expand social services to increase access to healthy food. It is important to note that policy advocacy is often directed at changing state policy rather than local policy. This points to a fundamental power imbalance in the SJV that came up in interviews repeatedly: Elected officials are often conservative and, according to many interviewees, more likely to represent industry interests. Moreover, many SJV communities are unincorporated, and many residents lack citizenship documentation and elected representation. However, the activities of grassroots organizations appear to center on creating localized changes with residents, rather than challenging industrial power. While these activities are beneficial, they may divert resources away from challenging economic and political power and reproduce a hegemonic narrative emphasizing individual responsibility rather than structural disparities, as Kohl-Arenas (2015a) also found.

I found a wide heterogeneity of food justice efforts across the 16 SJV organizations identified. As Holt Giménez and Shattuck (2011) argued, the SJV food justice movement reflected tensions between a neoliberal or market reform stance and a radical food sovereignty position. While most organizations focused on policy advocacy and community organized projects, a few organizations had adopted a narrower focus to work with the agriculture industry. One organization promoted labor rights by mediating between farmworkers and farm owners. While advocating for farmworkers, this organization was concerned with keeping industrial agriculture competitive in an increasingly globalized market. By increasing profits for growers, they might convince farmers to improve work conditions for laborers. However, this approach does not challenge the power imbalance between workers and farm owners. Two organizations collaborated across sectors, including with industrial agriculture and corporate food retailers, to capture and redistribute otherwise wasted food. Yet, these organizations did not appear to challenge the system of agricultural subsidies and food overproduction, the harm caused to workers and the environment in food production, and the quality of food made available.

Few organizations were creating alternative food initiatives (which seems to be a greater focus in urban areas; e.g., Allen et al., 2003). The two organizations involved in community gardens emphasized the gardens' social benefits, and the food produced was intended to supplement (rather than supplant) industrially grown foods. Notably, the permaculture farm and agroecology center were developing almost simultaneously, but with different approaches. The agroecology center was a multi-organization collaboration to build a viable economic alternative to industrial agriculture, whereas the permaculture farm appeared to be oriented toward promoting health and entrepreneurship. While neither initiative directly confronts industrial agriculture, the initiative to build an agroecology center reflects a stronger critique of the dominant food system and greater alignment with a food sovereignty orientation.

What Are the Perspectives of Organizers on Working for Food Justice and Systems Change in the SJV While Remaining Accountable to Grantmakers?

The majority of organizers viewed current economic and political structures that incentivize the pursuit of profit and concentrate power and wealth as a root cause of issues in the SJV. However, it became clear that while funding was viewed as necessary to sustain organizing, grants fundamentally constrained organizing away from building a strong social movement. Despite a commonly shared aim to be community-driven, priorities were shaped by funding availability and organized in accordance with the timelines and demands set by grantmakers. Several organizers asserted that to address structural inequality, the expectations and accountability procedures of funders must change.

Although organizers may decline funding opportunities that do not align with (or detract from) community priorities, organizers more frequently described having to stretch to align grant objectives with ongoing work in the community. Scarcity of resources, combined with the structural constraints imposed by philanthropic governance, result in organizers adapting their work based on the demands of funders. These demands may be

negotiated, as illustrated by the innovative organizer developing a funding "menu" for grantmakers. Yet, the negotiating power primarily rests in the hands of wealthy benefactors determining the distribution of resources. While organizers work in communities to address systemic failings of the dominant food system, they are caught between the communities they serve and the U.S. philanthropic apparatus.

These findings further support the claim by Guthman (2008b) and Kohl-Arenas (2015b) that philanthropic governance diverts organizing efforts away from challenging power. Just as Kohl-Arenas (2015b) found, organizations' activities and how they are framed most often excluded "explicit antagonisms and questions of structural inequality unspeakable to those in power" (p. 812), even though organizers often personally held a more explicit critique of the root causes of problems in the SJV. This is further reflected in practice through organizers' adapting their priorities and the framing of their work to secure much-needed resources and support from those in power. By focusing activities on addressing problems caused by the agricultural industry rather than making explicit and confronting the root causes, philanthropy generates consensus to maintain the status quo. However, organizers are strategically contesting this through collaborating with each other and advocating for funders to shift their funding priorities and practices.

Recommendations

These findings could be used to advance critical conversation in the SJV food justice movement about working within philanthropic structures to address the structural oppression of SJV communities. Grassroots organizations seeking to rebalance some of the power that funders hold may also learn from the examples offered by SJV organizers. Rather than trying to fit a community's need into prescribed funding bids, organizations might try developing a funding 'menu' of projects based on residents' priorities, along with descriptions and costs, to approach funders. To build stronger regional networks, organizations might also ask funders what other organizations and projects they are funding, and to request opportunities for organizations to convene and learn from each other. Organizations might further collaborate to create a shared document explaining their aims and priorities, and the gaps and challenges collectively identified, to educate funders about the need in the region.

Funders could proactively shift grantmaking policies to better support grassroots organizations, rather than waiting for organizers to advocate for change. Funders might make more sustained core funding available and make the funding process less administratively cumbersome.[8] Moving toward a participatory grantmaking model, in which communities shape funding allocation and governance, may help rebalance power and better align resource distribution with community priorities.[9]

This exploratory study contributes insight into the food justice movement in a rural setting; further study into other rural regions in the U.S. could allow for a comparative analysis to understand the barriers and opportunities for change in rural areas. Follow-up research might explore whether philanthropic trends in the SJV are changing in response to the needs expressed by organizers. Additional study of how food justice organizations are working to change the same political and economic system upon which they rely would also offer greater insight into how organizers, funders, and allies might challenge the dominant narrative and build a strong movement for structural change.

Conclusion

This study explored the perspectives of organizers for food justice in a rural region dominated by industrial agriculture, with a particular focus on the influence of grant funding. Findings demonstrate that funding plays a critical role in influencing the aims, activities, and narrative of the food justice movement. I have argued that organizers' efforts to fundamentally change the food system are diverted

[8] See Soul Fire Farm's (n.d.) Equity Guidelines for Donors and Foundations.

[9] For further examples and resources, see Equal Measure's (2021) *Equitable Food-Orientated Development: The origin story*; Gibson's (Oct 2017) *Participatory Grantmaking: Has its time come?*; and Participatory Grantmakers' (n.d.) *Participatory Grantmaking 101*.

by their reliance on grant funding, and many organizers suggest that funding structures must change to address systemic inequality. However, despite the many challenges faced, organizers sometimes contest this power imbalance in creative and collaborative ways. These findings complement what Kohl-Arenas (2015b) found in interviews with SJV philanthropic program officers, with SJV grassroots organizers also caught between negotiating the demands and contradictions of working with funders while seeking to address the fundamental inequalities they and their communities experience.

This research offers a snapshot of organizing for food justice in the SJV, which can inform organizing work in the region while also contributing toward filling a gap in the literature on organizing for food justice in rural areas. Through bringing together critical philanthropy scholarship with critical food studies, this study may deepen the understanding of the complexities, challenges, and opportunities in working for food justice. To change the dominant food system, greater attention must be paid to the philanthropic structures under which the food justice movement operates.

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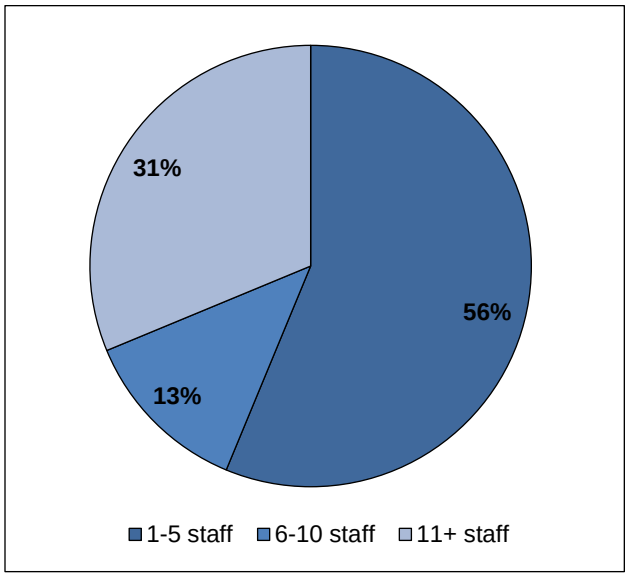
Appendix A. Detailed Overview of San Joaquin Valley (SJV) Organizations

Size of Organizations

Three of the organizations were coalitions with dedicated staff based in the SJV. Two were SJV regional coalitions, and one was a statewide coalition with community organizers based in two SJV counties. Six organizations had executive offices based outside of the SJV, which were located in urban centers (Sacramento, Los Angeles, or the Bay Area). Six of the organizations were based in multiple counties across the SJV, and 10 organizations were based in a single SJV county.

Five organizations had more than 10 staff members. Two organizations had 6–10 staff members, and the remaining nine organizations (including all three coalitions) had five or fewer staff (see Figure A1).

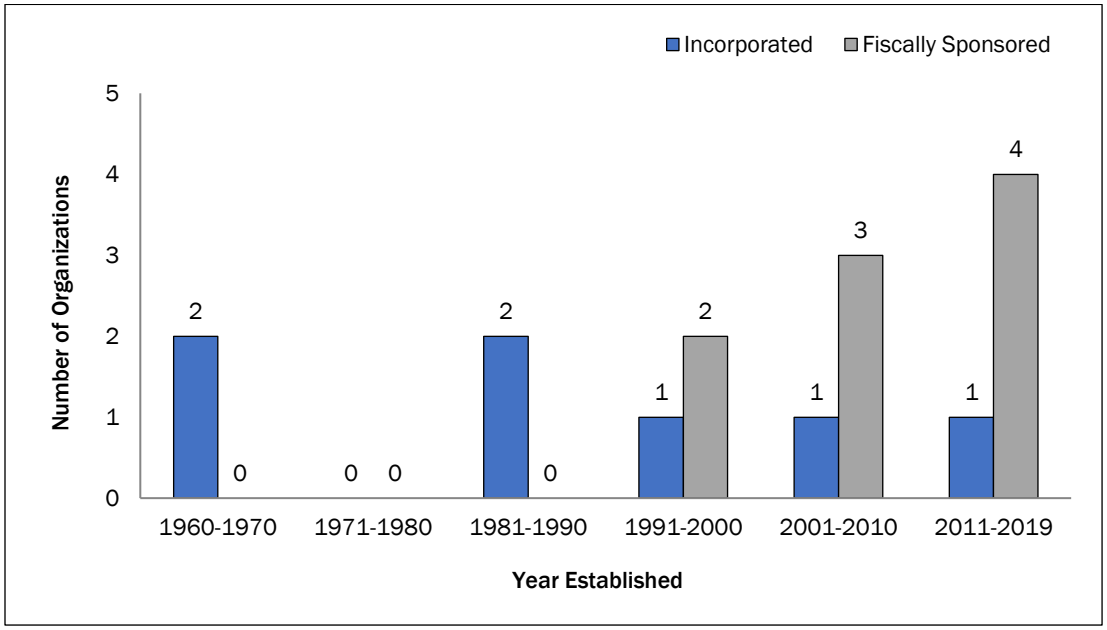
Figure A1. Distribution of Organization by Size, as Measured by Number of Staff Members (*n* = 16)



Year Established and Incorporation Status

Most of the 16 organizations identified were established within the past two decades, and the majority (9) appear to be unincorporated (see Figure A2). Of the nine organizations founded after 2000, only two had incorporated as 501(c)(3) tax exempt nonprofits. The remaining seven were fiscally sponsored by a parent 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

Figure A2. Distribution of Organizations by Year Established and Incorporation Status (*n* = 16)



Orientation: Environmental Justice, Social Justice, and Health Equity

While all organizations were identified as working on issues of food justice, only three of the 16 organizations explicitly mentioned “food justice” on their websites. Seven organizations stated a focus of environmental justice, five focused on public health and health equity, three emphasized a social justice lens, and one emphasized labor rights. Two also mentioned economic equality/justice.

Appendix B. Overview of Interviewees

To protect the anonymity of participants, information on organizations has been aggregated and personal identifiers for participants has been omitted. However, to provide a sense of participants' positioning, I have indicated the size, incorporation status, and orientation of participants' organizations (Table B1).

Table B1. Overview of Interviewees, by Organization

	Incorporation status of organization	Size of organization (no. of staff)	Primary orientation of organization
ID.1	Incorporated	11+	Social justice
ID.2	Fiscally sponsored	1–5	Food justice
ID.3	Incorporated	11+	Labor rights
ID.4	Incorporated	5–10	Food justice
ID.5	Incorporated	1–5	Environmental justice
ID.6	Fiscally sponsored	1–5	Environmental justice
ID.7	Fiscally sponsored	1–5	Food justice
ID.8	Incorporated	11+	Social justice
ID.9	Fiscally sponsored	5–10	Social justice
ID.10	Incorporated	11+	Social justice
ID.11	Fiscally sponsored	1–5	Social justice
ID.12	Fiscally sponsored	1–5	Social justice
ID.13	Incorporated	11+	Social justice
ID.14	Incorporated	1–5	Environmental justice

Note. Incorporation status indicates whether participants' organizations are legally incorporated as tax-exempt charities. Fiscally sponsored organizations operate under the umbrella of a parent 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

Appendix C. Codebook

Name	Sources	References
Advice for activists	12	14
Agroecology center	3	8
Antagonism	6	17
Attention to SJV	5	7
Autonomy	3	4
Big Ag	11	33
Broken system	8	16
CAFA	5	18
CalEnviroScreen	3	3
Capacity building	9	21
Capitalism	3	4
Climate	6	7
Code switching	6	7
Community leadership	4	17
Community self-determination	6	11
Competition	5	13
Conservative	7	17
Disconnect	2	3
Education	10	36
Existing knowledge	6	13
Expansion	1	1
Farmworker rights	2	10
Federal policy	3	5
Fiscal sponsorship	5	11
Focus	9	37
Food access	10	15
Food as human right	1	1
Food justice foci	1	4
Food security	3	7
Food sovereignty	1	3
Food trauma	1	1
Food waste	3	15
Funder disconnect	6	13
Funder education	5	15
Funders expectations	9	25
Funding fluctuations	8	8
Funding limits work	6	13
Funding scarcity	7	17
Funding source	12	42
Gov. agency partner	5	10
Gov. official partner	4	8

continued

Name	Sources	References
Growing interest & support	2	4
Hunger	2	3
Immigration	4	5
Industry partner	2	8
International connection	5	10
Issue interconnectedness	6	22
Lack of focus on food justice	5	8
Land	6	11
Lobbying	7	10
Local economy	3	3
Motivation	4	8
National coalition	1	1
Nonprofit partner	9	27
Origin story	7	11
Paradox	8	11
Participation barriers	5	10
Personal story	8	15
Policy advocacy	11	43
Poverty	7	10
Power	4	10
Profit-driven	5	12
Race	8	16
Regional coalition	10	20
Relationship building	9	30
Representation	8	24
Resources for activism	9	12
Respond to community needs	7	16
Root cause	5	7
Rural	5	10
Search for other models	4	10
Selecting collaborators	2	2
Siloed efforts	8	20
Size	3	4
SJV context	11	41
State coalition	9	15
State policy	10	21
Story	1	1
Time	5	14
Undocumented	4	5
Unincorporated	5	10
Values	3	5
We Feed the World	5	7
Website	1	1
Youth program	3	6

Appendix D. Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Note: Each interview began by discussing the project information sheet and consent form to reiterate the purpose of the research and allow participants to clarify questions or concerns in advance. I emphasized that any question could be skipped if desired. Although one participant did request a portion of the interview be struck off the record, interviews were conversational in style. I closed each interview by welcoming any questions and encouraging participants to contact me if any concerns later arose. To minimize distraction and practice active listening, I took few notes during each interview; however, I recorded reflections immediately afterward.

Be sure to share information sheet and consent form!
Ask about & start the audio recorder.
Express gratitude for their participation!

I want to learn from community organizers perspectives about what it is to work in the SJV toward changing the current food system, which of course intersects with many other systems. I really want a chance to hear from others who have been working around food issues in the Valley context. What I would like to focus on this morning is the perspective you have gained over the years of doing food systems work in the SJV. I'm also trying to better understand what I see as this tension inherent to grant-funded systems change work; that is, being funded by the same economic, political, and social systems that are integral to the food system we're trying to change.

1. Can you tell me a little about what attracted you to community organizing work?

2. What are *your* main goals with [your organization]? Thinking more broadly beyond the organization, what would you like to see—what's the vision?

3. Can you tell me a little about [your food justice project]?

4. Has [your organization] been involved in policy advocacy?

5. Many communities across the SJV and elsewhere are facing increased rates of poverty and food insecurity. Taking a step back, what do you see as the root causes of the issues you're working on in the Valley?

6. One thing that's come up in my own work as an organizer and in my reading is that grant funding and 501(c)(3) status restricts lobbying activity, which can be kind of a gray area.

7. How have you navigated these limitations in trying to challenge/change policy?

8. What role do you see funders playing in working toward systems change?

9. Have you negotiated with funders on activities, or gotten in trouble for lobbying?

10. What is your sense of progress in the work you do in the community vs. the reports you have to give to funders? What do envision as a way forward?

11. From your perspective, in terms of addressing these issues, how does this map onto grant funding? (i.e., having to adapt to align with funders' goals vs. finding funders that align with your goals)

12. What about issues of competing with other organizations for the same funds vs. building collaborations?

13. Thinking about building coalitions and a strong movement for change, how are you building coalitions both within your community and across communities? Who do you tend to collaborate with?

14. What do you know now that you wish you'd known back when you first started as a community organizer?

15. Are there any resources that you draw upon that you find particularly helpful that you'd recommend to other organizers/activists?

16. What advice would you have for other activists in the Valley?

Thank you again for participating! Do you have any questions for me?