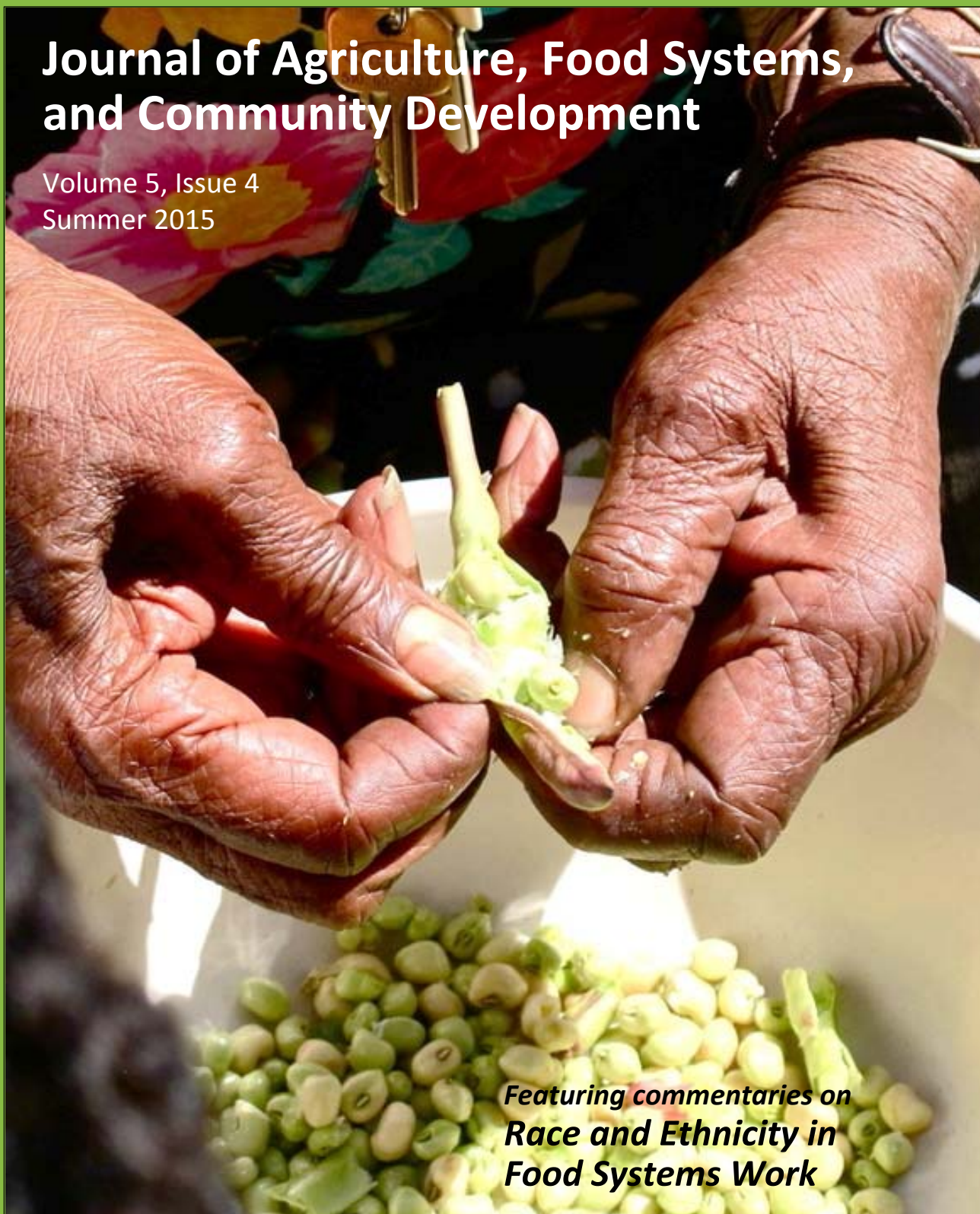


# Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development

Volume 5, Issue 4  
Summer 2015



*Featuring commentaries on  
Race and Ethnicity in  
Food Systems Work*



[www.AgDevJournal.com](http://www.AgDevJournal.com)  
ISSN 2152-0801 (online only)

Published by the Thomas A. Lyson Center for Civic Agriculture and Food Systems with the support of:



# Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development

*Published by the Thomas A. Lyson Center for Civic Agriculture and Food Systems, a project of the Center for Transformative Action, and with the support of our founding institutional sponsors:*



## Lyson Center Leadership Team

Ardyth Harris Gillespie, Nutritional Sciences (Retired), Cornell University (cochair)  
Heidi Mouillesseaux-Kunzman, Development Sociology, Cornell University (cochair)\*  
Cheryl Danley, FoodCorps  
Gilbert W. Gillespie, Development Sociology, Cornell University (Retired)\*  
Joanna Green, Groundswell Center for Local Food & Farming, Ithaca, New York  
Scott Peters, Imagining America, Syracuse University  
Ricardo Salvador, Union of Concerned Scientists

## JAFSCD Advisors

Laura Brown, University of Connecticut Extension (USA)\*  
Kate Clancy, Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (USA)†  
Craig Chase, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University (USA)  
Nevin Cohen, The New School (USA)\*  
David Conner, University of Vermont (USA)\*  
Cornelia Butler Flora, Iowa State University (USA)  
Julia Freedgood, American Farmland Trust (USA)\*  
Gilbert Gillespie, Jr., Cornell University (Retired) (USA)\*  
R. Bruce Gregory, Farmer, Mitchell Bay Farm & Nursery (USA)\*  
Shermain Hardesty, University of California (USA)\*  
John Ikerd, University of Missouri, Columbia (Emeritus) (USA)†  
Anupama Joshi, National Farm to School Network/Occidental College (USA)\*  
Jane Kolodinsky, Food Systems Initiative, University of Vermont (USA)\*  
Larry Lev, Oregon State University (USA)

Joseph McIntyre, Ag Innovations Network (USA)\*  
Shawn McKenzie, Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (USA)  
Ken Meter, Crossroads Resource Center (USA)\*†  
Kent Mullinix, Institute for Sustainable Food Systems, Kwantlen Polytechnic University (Canada)  
Rich Pirog, Center for Regional Food Systems at Michigan State University (USA)  
Ken Robinson, Clemson University (USA)  
John Smithers, University of Guelph (Canada)  
G. W. (Steve) Stevenson, University of Wisconsin-Madison (USA)  
Dawn Thilmany McFadden, Colorado State University (USA)  
Larry Yee, Fairhaven Strategy Group (USA)  
Rami Zurayk, American University of Beirut (Lebanon)\*†

\* Also serves on reviewer team

† Also writes a regular column

## JAFSCD Staff

Publisher and Editor in Chief: Duncan L. Hilchey [duncan@NewLeafNet.com](mailto:duncan@NewLeafNet.com) / +1-607-342-0259 / Skype: duncan.hilchey  
Managing Editor: Amy S. Christian / [amy@NewLeafNet.com](mailto:amy@NewLeafNet.com) / +1-607-342-0258 / Skype: amy.christian295

The *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, ISSN 2152-0801 (online only), is published quarterly (Summer, Fall, Winter, Spring) by the Thomas A. Lyson Center for Civic Agriculture and Food Systems, a project of the Center for Transformative Action (an affiliate of Cornell University). Journal office: 295 Hook Place, Ithaca, NY 14850 USA.

Online subscriptions: Farmer/Student/Sole Proprietor/Retiree: US\$39; Agency/Nonprofit Staffperson: US\$49; Faculty/Consultant/Corporate Employee: US\$69; Institutional Library: US\$250–US\$725 (based on FTE students).

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc. All rights reserved. The publisher assumes no responsibility for any statements of fact or opinion expressed in these published papers. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, transmitted, or disseminated in any form or by any means without prior written permission from the Food Systems Development Project. For permission to reuse material, go to [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com) or contact the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, Massachusetts 01923 USA; +1-978-750-8400. CCC is a not-for-profit organization that provides licenses and registration for a variety of uses.



## JAFSCD Reviewers

Paivi Abernethy, U of Waterloo (Canada)	Sheila L. Gray, Washington State U–Lewis County Extension (USA)	Bethann G. Merkle, Independent consultant (USA)
Mahbubul Alam, Ehime U (Japan)	Arthur Green, Okanagan College (Canada)	Farhad Mirzaei, Animal Sciences Research Institute of Iran (Iran)
Colin R. Anderson, Coventry U (UK)	R. Bruce Gregory, Mitchell Bay Farm & Nursery (USA)	Kelly Monaghan, U of Florida (USA)
Molly Anderson, College of the Atlantic (USA)	J. Dominique Gumirakiza, Western Kentucky U (USA)	Bernadette Montanari, U of Kent, Canterbury (UK)
Hossein Azadi, Ghent U (Belgium)	John Guskowski, CME Associates, Inc. (USA)	Alfonso Morales, U of Wisconsin–Madison (USA)
Sandip Banerjee, Hawassa U (India)	Lauren Gwin, Oregon State U (USA)	Elizabeth Morgan, Macquarie U (Australia)
Mary Margaret Barth, Responsible Source, UIUC (USA)	Ella Haley, Athabasca U (Canada)	Vicki Morrone, Michigan State U (USA)
Ricky Martin Bates, Penn State U (USA)	Edmund Harris, Clark U (USA)	Phil Mount, U of Guelph (Canada)
Mark Bauermeister, Iowa State U (USA)	Neva Hassanein, U of Montana (USA)	Joe Nasr, Centre for Studies in Food Security, Ryerson U (Canada)
Molly K. Bean, The Ohio State U (USA)	Lena Hatchett, Loyola U Chicago (USA)	Lenore Newman, U of the Fraser Valley (Canada)
Mihaela Begea, Institute of Food Research (Romania)	Tia Henderson, Upstream Public Health (USA)	Kim L. Niewolny, Virginia Tech (USA)
Ghose Bishwajit, Tong Ji Medical College (China)	Mary Hendrickson, U of Missouri (USA)	Samantha Noll, Michigan State U (USA)
Eliav Bitan, Darden School of Business, U of Virginia (USA)	Leslie Hossfeld, U of North Carolina–Wilmington (USA)	Kimberly Norris, U of Maryland (USA)
Rachelle Bostwick, Farmer, Earthkeeper Farm (USA)	Guiping Hu, Iowa State U (USA)	Lydia Oberholtzer, Penn State U (USA)
Laura Brown, U of Connecticut Extension (USA)	Sarah Huang, Purdue U (USA)	Fernando Ona, Tufts U (USA)
Mladen Brnčić, U of Zagreb (Croatia)	Lauren Hunter, Coop. Extension, U of Idaho–Blaine County (USA)	Aleck Ostry, U of Victoria (Canada)
William Butler, Florida State U (USA)	Lucilla Iacumin, U of Udine (Italy)	Isidro Ovando-Medina, U of Chiapas (Mexico)
Megan Carney, U.C.–Santa Barbara (USA)	Valerie Imbruce, Binghamton U (USA)	Laxmi Prasad Pant, U of Guelph (Canada)
Michelle Carnegie, U of New England (Australia)	Ann Myatt James, Pennsylvania State U (USA)	Tapan B. Pathak, U of Nebraska (USA)
Marcia Caton Campbell, Center for Resilient Cities (USA)	Chelsea Johnson, Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA) (USA)	François Pelatan, AMAP Dordogne (France)
Kuo-Chiang (Matt) Chang, South Dakota State U (USA)	Martin Kabaluapa, World Food Programme (Kenya)	Robert Perry, U of Kentucky (USA)
Hannah Chiswell, U of Exeter (UK)	Mariam Kadzamia, International Food Policy Research Institute (USA)	Greg Pillar, Queens U of Charlotte (USA)
Elizabeth Church, Jacobs Farm/DelCabo (USA)	Sanjay Kharod, New Orleans Food and Farm Network (USA)	Emily Piltch, Tufts U (USA)
Renee Ciulla, Istituto Ricerche Economico Sociale (USA)	David A. Knauff, U of Georgia (USA)	Michael Pinto, Osborn Architects (USA)
Sean Connelly, Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance Centre for Sustainable Community Development (Canada)	Fiona Knight, Private food system consulting practice (Canada)	Madeleine Pullman, Portland State U (USA)
Christine Costello, Cornell U (USA)	Uma Koirala, Tribhuvan U (Nepal)	Masud Parves Rana, Rajshahi U (Bangladesh)
Sasha Cuerda, U of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (USA)	Jane Kolodinsky, U of Vermont (USA)	Shivaugn M. Rayl, Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (USA)
Kynda R. Curtis, Utah State U (USA)	Laura Lavid, Florida Organic Growers (USA)	Taylor Reid, Michigan State U (USA)
Carolyn Dimitri, New York U (USA)	Dale Levering, LCC International U (Lithuania)	Kristin A. Reynolds, The New School (USA)
Michael L. Dougherty, Illinois State U (USA)	Matt Lobley, U of Exeter (UK)	David Richey, Lane Council of Governments (USA)
Ayman Ekram Fahim, Suez Canal U (Egypt)	Bohdan Lojka, Czech U of Life Sciences (Czech Republic)	Suzana Rimac Brnčić, U of Zagreb (Croatia)
Hamid El Bilali, Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari (CIHEAM-MAIB) (Italy)	Samya Lutz, Whatcom County (USA)	Antonio Roman-Alcalá, Alemany Farm (USA)
Patti Taranto Erickson, Salisbury U (USA)	Helena C. Lyson, U of California Berkeley	Natalie R. Sampson, U of Michigan (USA)
Mark Estep, Montana Mobile Processing Co. (USA)	Uford A. Madden, Florida A&M U (USA)	Joshua Sbicca, Colorado State U (USA)
James R. Farmer, Earlham College (USA)	William Armand Mala, U of Yaounde I (Cameroon)	Brian J. Schilling, Rutgers U (USA)
David Fazzino, Bloomsburg U of Pennsylvania (USA)	Christian Man, Bring It Food Hub (USA)	Syed Suhail Mumtaz Shah, The Agronomy Institute (Scotland)
Melissa Fernandez Arrigoitia, London School of Economics (UK)	Lisa Markowitz, U of Louisville (USA)	Uma i Shankari, Rashtriya Raithu Seva Samithi, a farmers' organization (India)
Paula Fernández-Wulff, U of Louvain (Belgium)	Matthew Mars, U of Arizona (USA)	Garry Stephenson, Oregon State U (USA)
Ian Finch, U of Montana (USA)	Wende Marshall, Independent scholar (USA)	Bill Swanson, Valentine Hill Farm (USA)
Rok Fink, Univerza v Ljubljani (Slovenia)	Derek Masselink, Masselink Environmental Design (Canada)	Nicole Elizabeth Tichenor, Tufts U (USA)
Danielle Fisher, Eagle Ridge Ranch Beef (USA)	Florentina Matei, Universitatea de Stiinte Agronomice si Medicina Veterinara – Bucuresti (Romania)	Michele D. Vachon, U of Idaho (USA)
Jill Ann Fitzsimmons, U of Massachusetts–Amherst (USA)	Nathan McClintock, Portland State U (USA)	Diana Vergis Vinh, Public Health Department, Seattle (USA)
Nancy Franz, Iowa State U (USA)	Jesse C. McEntee, Food Systems Research Institute, LLC (USA)	Matteo Vittuari, U of Bologna (Italy)
Kathlee Freeman, Food Tank (USA)	Devan McGranahan, North Dakota State U (USA)	Gerald W. Warmann, South Dakota State U (USA)
Vanessa Fry, Boise State U (USA)	Kim McMann, Berkshire Community Action Council (USA)	Amy Webb Girard, Emory U (USA)
Jasenka Gajdoš Kljusurić, U of Zagreb (Croatia)	Mahbubur R. Meenar, Temple U (USA)	E. Christian Wells, U of South Florida (USA)
Stephan Goetz, Pennsylvania State U (USA)		Robert Wengronowitz, U of Chicago (USA)
Angela Gordon Glore, Building Healthy Communities (USA)		Spencer D. Wood, Kansas State U (USA)
Carol Goland, Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (USA)		Stephen Wood, Columbia U (USA)
		Jen Wrye, Carleton U (USA)
		Steve Young-Burns, PastureLand Cooperative and freelance food writer (USA)
		Lorna Zach, U of Wisconsin (USA)
		Gregory Zimmerman, Lake Superior State U (USA)



## Contents | Volume 5, Issue 4 / Summer 2015

**On the cover:** The hands of the Freedom Farmers Market's elder, Ms. Mattie, as she participates in the market's pea-shelling contest in Oakland, California. See *Decolonizing a Food System: Freedom Farmers Market as a Place for Resistance and Analysis* in this issue. (Photo by Adrionna Fike; used with permission)



### Editorials

In This Issue: Race and Ethnicity in Food Systems Work / *Duncan Hilchey* 1

Guest Editorial: Working with Indigenous Peoples to Foster Sustainable Food Systems / *Kent Mullinix* 3

### Columns

The Economic Pamphleteer: Ethnicity and the War on Big Food / *John Ikerd* 7

Metrics from the Field: Allowing Ethnic Heritage To Emerge in Farm and Food Policy / *Ken Meter* 11

### General Commentary

Reviving Farming Interest in the Philippines Through Agricultural Entrepreneurship Education / *Andrea Santiago and Fernando Roxas* 15

### Open Call Papers

Unraveling the Differences Between Organic and Non-Organic Thai Rice Farmers' Environmental Views and Perceptions of Well-being / *Alexander Harrow Kaufman* 29

Potential National Economic Benefits of the Food Insecurity and Nutrition Incentives Program of the U.S. Agricultural Act of 2014 / *Carolyn Dimitri and Lydia Oberholtzer* 49

### Commentaries on Race and Ethnicity in Food Systems Work

1. Solidarity and Sweat Equity: For Reciprocal Food Justice Research / *Joshua Shicca* 63

2. Alternative Agrifood Projects in Communities of Color: A Civic Engagement Perspective / *Glennon Sweeney, Christy Rogers, Casey Hoy, Jill K. Clark, Kareem Usher, Kip Holley, and Colleen Spees* 69

(Continued)



3. Race, Food, and Borders: Situating Migrant Struggle in the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia / <i>Elise Hjalmarson, Robyn Bunn, Amy Cohen, Edna Terbasket, and Levi Gahman</i>	77
4. Race, Ethnicity, and the Promise of “Good Food” for Michigan: A Three-voice Commentary / <i>Rich Pirog, Kaitlin Koch, and Anel Guel</i>	83
5. Lost in Translation: Delivering Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Interventions to Hispanic Populations / <i>Ivette Valenzuela</i>	87
6. Organizing the New Food Labor Movement: From Neoliberal Alternatives to Worker-based Justice / <i>Billy Hall</i>	91
7. A Community Engagement Case Study of the Somerville Mobile Farmers’ Market / <i>Erica Satin-Hernandez and Lisa Robinson</i>	95
8. Beyond Inclusion: Toward an Anti-colonial Food Justice Praxis / <i>Lauren Kepkiewicz, Michael Chrobok, Madeline Whetung, Madelaine Cabuas, Jina Gill, Sam Walker, and Sarah Wakefield</i>	99
9. The Food System Should Unite Us, Not Divide Us / <i>Lindsey Haynes-Maslow and Ricardo Salvador</i>	105
10. Valuing All Knowledges Through an Expanded Definition of Access / <i>Kareem M. Usher</i>	109
11. The Food Movement: Growing White Privilege, Diversity, or Empowerment? / <i>Kelly Moore and Marilyn E. Swisher</i>	115
12. Diversity Education at Land-Grant Universities from the Perspective of a Female Student of Color / <i>Olivia A. Peña</i>	121
13. To the American Food Justice Movements: A Critique That Is Also an Offering / <i>Marcelo Felipe Garzo Montalvo</i>	125
14. Critical Food Systems Education and the Question of Race / <i>David Meek and Rebecca Tarlau</i>	131
15. A Native Perspective: Food is More Than Consumption / <i>Rachel V. Vernon</i>	137
16. The Rohingyas of Myanmar and the Biopolitics of Hunger / <i>Tamara Nair</i>	143
17. Decolonizing a Food System: Freedom Farmers’ Market as a Place for Resistance and Analysis / <i>Gail P. Myers</i>	149
18. Identity and Group Dynamics in Urban Food Systems / <i>Neetu Choudhary</i>	153
19. Using the Interconnections and Complexities of Food Systems to Teach About Human Diversity and White Privilege / <i>Jason S. Parker</i>	159
20. Food Solutions New England: Racial Equity, Food Justice, and Food System Transformation / <i>Joanne D. Burke and Karen A. Spiller</i>	165

(Continued)

21. Privilege and Allyship in Nonprofit Food Justice Organizations / <i>Danny W. Tarn</i>	173
22. Concerning the Unbearable Whiteness of Urban Farming / <i>Antonio Roman-Alcalá</i>	179
23. Three Strategies to Foster Diversity in the Food Movement / <i>Hilary King</i>	183
24. Engaged Advocacy and Learning to Represent the Self: Positioning People of Color in Our Contemporary Food Movement / <i>Regina A. Bernard-Carreño</i>	189

## **Reviews**

A Portrait of American Farmers / <i>Kathlee Freeman</i>	195
Notes from an Intentional Farm Community / <i>Gregory Zimmerman</i>	199
Harnessing the Power of Imagination / <i>Elizabeth Morgan</i>	203





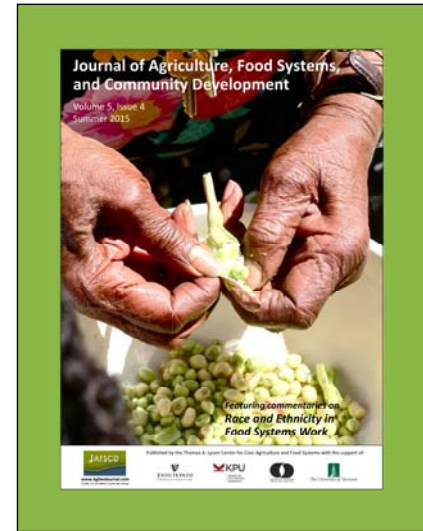
## IN THIS ISSUE DUNCAN HILCHEY

### Race and ethnicity in food systems work

Published online September 22, 2015

Citation: Hilchey, D. (2015). Race and ethnicity in food systems work [Editorial].  
*Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 1–2.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.034>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.



It is no secret that despite the best intentions of many, the food movement manifests levels of whiteness and privilege that tend to exclude significant parts of society, and thus does not address the needs of those who are excluded. To be effective in addressing issues like food insecurity, urban agriculture, food policy, small and new farmer expansion, and access to farmland, markets, and capital, organizations need to address lack of racial equity and lack of diversity in organizational leadership. They need to more intentionally embrace diverse leadership and ownership of the food movement by having formal conversations with those currently excluded. It is not just the right thing to do; it is a practical thing to do, since the food movement will not flourish without this diversity and organizations seem unlikely to succeed in their missions without formal anti-racist policies in place.

To advance research and practice in the context of race and ethnicity in food systems work, JAFSCD sought commentaries this summer from activists of color, leaders, consultants, white advocates and project partners, nonprofit organization staff and board members, public agency staff, and academics (scholars, students, and program staff). In this issue we offer 24 thoughtful and challenging commentaries spanning a wide range of communities: Native peoples, migrant workers, African Americans, and exploited ethnic groups, to name a few. The authors speak of the misperceptions, stereotypes, and misunderstandings that happen when well-meaning folks arrive in their communities with ready-made tools, strategies, and programs—many under the guise of empowerment. This is an uncomfortable topic for all concerned.

We hope this issue stimulates both scholars' and practitioners' thinking about how we move forward during a time of renewed interest in civil rights. For me the bottom line after reading these was that while advocacy and service by white allies is generally appreciated and helpful in meeting immediate and short-term needs for food security, this *outside* support can also be frustrating and disempowering to those on the *inside*. We've known for some time that it is not enough to provide handouts, and we must now acknowledge that teaching people to eat better or produce their own food is also not enough. From my perspective the collective call of these commentaries is for transformation, including training trainers and cultivating leaders by supporting people of color to *be* the community nutritionists, the dietitians, the garden developers, the small farm specialists, the food co-op director, the food hub managers, the extension agents, the land-use planners,

the researchers, the land-grant college deans, and the elected officials. Only when the food movement deliberately fosters and embraces the leadership of underrepresented peoples as service and information generators and providers—not just service and information recipients in the ghetto, the barrio, and on the reservation and other isolated rural areas—will the goals of food justice and food sovereignty in some of our most troubled communities be appropriately addressed. JAFSCD looks forward to seeing this leadership arise and take the reins.

The issue begins with a guest editorial by **Kent Mullinix**, professor and director of the Institute for Sustainable Food Systems at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, entitled *Working with Indigenous Peoples to Foster Sustainable Food Systems* that discusses his program's approaches to moving Native interests to the center of their programming.

In his Economic Pamphleteer column, *Ethnicity and the War on Big Food*, **John Ikerd** argues that our food systems cannot be transformed without the rich cultural contributions of people of color, who tend to place higher value on community and social relationships than on achievement and monetary gain.

And in his final column for JAFSCD, entitled *Allowing Ethnic Heritage To Emerge in Farm and Food Policy*, **Ken Meter** similarly points out that food policy is increasingly being formulated and implemented by those who are out of touch with the realities of intended beneficiaries.

In addition to the above commentaries and columns on race and ethnicity in the food system, we also offer a general commentary and several peer-reviewed papers and book reviews. In their commentary *Reviving Farming Interest in the Philippines Through Agricultural Entrepreneurship Education*, **Andrea Santiago** and **Fernando Roxas** lay the groundwork for the Philippines to “decommodify” and fully embrace a more diverse, high-value agricultural industry through a young and entrepreneurial class of farmers.

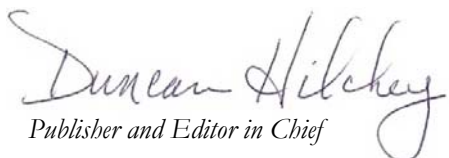
Next **Carolyn Dimitri** and **Lydia Oberholtzer** explore the impacts and tradeoffs of the new federal SNAP benefit redemption matching incentives in *Potential National Economic Benefits of Food Insecurity and Nutrition Incentives of the Agricultural Act of 2014*.

**Alexander Kaufman** finds there may be tradeoffs to adopting organic production in the Global South. He suggests that program planners should take participants' environmental views and perceptions of well-being into account in *Unraveling the Differences Between Organic and Non-Organic Thai Rice Farmers' Environmental Views and Perceptions of Well-being*.

We conclude the issue with three book reviews. **Kathlee Freeman** reviews *The Color of Food: Stories of Race, Resilience and Farming*, by Natasha Bowens. **Gregory Zimmerman** reviews *The Community-Scale Permaculture Farm: The D Acres Model for Creating and Managing an Ecologically Designed Educational Center*, by Joshua Trought; and **Elizabeth Morgan** reviews *Food Utopias: Reimagining Citizenship, Ethics and Community*, edited by Paul V. Stock, Michael Carolan, and Christopher Rosin.

We are sorry to have to share the passing of JAFSCD reviewer **Valencia Coty-Barker**. Valencia was on the faculty at Ashford University in San Diego, California. As a woman of color and a reviewer for the past year and a half, she gave thoughtful and valuable feedback on papers on food deserts and environmental justice, two areas of research about which she was very passionate. While we never met Valencia in person, we appreciated her sharing her expertise to the JAFSCD community and making this contribution to the food movement.

*Final note:* As I mentioned above, this is Ken Meter's last column. Ken has been with us since the launch of the journal and has provided a unique and valuable perspective as a nonacademic professional in the field of food systems. He has taught us alternative ways of measuring progress in food systems work, gently questioned authority in both academia and government, and provided a candid perspective from someone working in the trenches. We wish Ken well and look forward to seeing applied research manuscripts from him and his team at the Crossroads Resource Center in the future!

  
 Publisher and Editor in Chief

## Working with Indigenous Peoples to foster sustainable food systems

**GUEST EDITORIAL BY KENT MULLINIX**  
**INSTITUTE FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS**  
**KWANTLEN POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY**

Published online August 6, 2015

Citation: Mullinix, K. (2015). Working with Indigenous Peoples to foster sustainable food systems [Guest editorial]. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 3–6.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.008>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

In order for sustainable, regional food systems to be so they must embody the vision and aspirations of all people and communities therein. In Canada, Indigenous Peoples and First Nations are an important, though often marginalized, element of our communities and society (Gray, 2011). Therefore I proffer that sustainable, regional food system planning, advocacy, and action in Canada (and elsewhere) should include the perspectives and support the predilections of Indigenous Peoples and communities. Though there are important, examples of effective efforts to do so (Food Matters Manitoba, 2015; Tu'wusht Project [Vancouver Native Health Society, 2014] in Vancouver; Food Secure Canada, 2015), in my experience working in Western Canada and elsewhere North American, sustainable food system researchers, activists, and others have been substantially remiss in this regard, with a resultant impoverishment of the movement in terms of perspective, inclusivity, and strategy. At the Institute for Sustainable Food Systems (ISFS) at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, an applied research institute that works to advance regionalized food systems by delineating their economic, food self-reliance, environmental stewardship, and community development potentials, we are trying to do otherwise.

To begin the ISFS journey to better understand Indigenous food system perspectives and predilections we recruited Dawn Morrison of the Secwepemc Nation (Interior Salish) to join our research team. A horticulturist and long-time Indigenous food system advocate, Morrison is the founder and current chair of the British Columbia Food System Network Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (Morrison, 2008). For the past two years she has worked directly with the rest of the ISFS team to advance our understanding of what it might mean to bring together Indigenous food systems thinking with sustainable farming and food systems thinking, as well as the challenges inherent in this pursuit.

---

Kent Mullinix, Institute for Sustainable Food Systems, Kwantlen Polytechnic University; 12666-72<sup>nd</sup> Avenue; Surrey, British Columbia V3W 2M8 Canada; +1-604-612-1252; [kent.mullinix@kpu.ca](mailto:kent.mullinix@kpu.ca)

Soon after joining the ISFS team Morrison recruited members for and convened an Indigenous Research Advisory Committee (IRAC). The IRAC is made up of individuals representing areas of focus important to Indigenous Peoples in our region, as opposed to representing organizational, political, or governmental entities. The IRAC has provided guidance and feedback on our work. It is an understatement to say that we have found it critical and enlightening to obtain direct input and feedback from Indigenous Peoples. For example, we have been challenged to think of farming as a colonialist enterprise, as well as to better understand the deep cultural significance of certain foods and traditional foodways.

The ISFS has focused on soil-based agriculture as the foundation of a regionalized, sustainable food systems. We describe our focus generally as small-scale, human-intensive, decommoditized, diversified, focused on community and alternate markets, environmentally and economically sound, reflective of and responsive to diverse cultural predilections, and with commensurately scaled and operated ancillary pre- and postproduction businesses. Working with IRAC however, we were compelled to acknowledge that our focus neglected to include salmon, the “keystone” and iconic food of British Columbia’s Coastal Salish Peoples. Despite this acknowledgment we still struggle to incorporate marine elements into our southwest British Columbia bioregional food system design and planning work, due to the political sensitivity and scientific complexity of doing so. The closest we have come, at this juncture, is elucidating some of the potential of incorporating habitat improvement to salmon-bearing waterways in agro-ecosystems and the region’s agriculture landscape.

To more fully inform our efforts to include Indigenous perspectives and predilections in our food systems work, Morrison, with the IRAC and others, has focused on assessing and delineating food system predilection and aspirations of Indigenous Peoples in southwest British Columbia (BC). She reminds us that this is no simple endeavor as the Indigenous Nations and Peoples of our region are many and diverse, and that generalizing and speaking for other Peoples is not appropriate. Based on this we are working to develop a framework or matrix whereby food system planning and action in southwest BC can be evaluated based on the food system attributes and outcomes desired by Indigenous Peoples here. We hope this framework might motivate and inform similar food system assessment in other regions.

The ISFS has also been working with the Tsawwassen First Nation (TFN), whose traditional (and now treaty) lands are located on the rich delta of the Fraser River, one of BC’s most productive agriculture areas. Last year, at the behest of and in full partnership with the TFN government, we began developing a farm school to be implemented in spring 2015 (Kwantlen Polytechnic University, n.d.). The Tsawwassen First Nation–Kwantlen Polytechnic University (TFN–KPU) Farm School, modeled after our first farm school in neighboring Richmond, BC, is designed and intended to expediently and effectively train TFN citizens (and others) in the art and science of small-scale, alternate market farming. The program, which is conducted over a nine-month period, is composed of approximately 350 hours of classroom teaching and learning complemented by at least 350 hours of experiential teaching and learning on a small, human-intensive, organic market crop, tree fruit and small animal farm. The program culminates with a farm business planning course in which students develop a business plan of their own. Successful completion of the program and business plan qualifies students to access a half-acre (0.2 hectare) incubator farm plot and shared equipment for up to four years. During those four years incubator farmers, with the support of TFN–KPU Farm School teachers and staff, have the opportunity to hone their farming and farm business management acumen in a low risk-environment, in preparation for eventually securing their own land for farming independently over the longer term. TFN has about 640 acres (260 hectares) of agricultural land that potentially could be farmed by TFN citizens for their community and the larger Metro Vancouver market.

To initiate the program, TFN matched ISFS’s start-up funding and provided 20 acres (8 hectares) for the teaching and incubator farm parcels. ISFS developed the curriculum, the teaching and incubator farms and facilities, and oversees the farm school. In addition to production and agricultural science classes, the curriculum also includes a class on Indigenous foods and food systems. Working with TFN we also anticipate developing additional courses and programming that are especially relevant to the Tsawwassen First Nation

community (for example, traditional food preservation, medicinal plant identification and cultivation, and a children's pumpkin patch). Ultimately we (TFN and ISFS) envision the teaching and incubator farms becoming a community gathering place in addition to an educational facility—the true integration of agriculture, education and community.

The TFN–KPU Farm School operates on a cost recovery basis with a target enrollment of 12 students. Preference is afforded first to TFN citizens and then to other Indigenous individuals. Our inaugural class was over-subscribed with 16 students coming from six Coast Salish Nations (Coast Salish peoples are a group of Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest coast). We view this level of interest as a great success.

In working with TFN I have come to learn that my perspective of sustainable farming as inherently positive may or may not be shared by Indigenous Canadians. It has been communicated to me that for some, agriculture is regarded as a mechanism of colonization. A Tsawwassen Nation Elder told me that when agriculture in their traditional territories was being concertedly developed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the provincial government purposefully excluded Tsawwassen First Nation citizens from receiving support that others were afforded to develop farming expertise and to be part of the nascent agriculture sector. Animosity toward farming and farmers resulted and persists to some extent today. What is more, the pain and destructive impact of Residential Schools (as recent as the 1990's) reverberates through Indigenous and Canadian society (Anishinabek Nation, n.d.; Gray, 2011). Residential schools were a network of boarding schools for First Nations, Métis and Inuit children, funded by the Canadian government and administered predominantly by the Catholic and Anglican churches. The objective was to remove children from the influence of their families and culture and assimilate them into the dominant Canadian culture. I have been told that working in the vegetable gardens at residential schools was one form of punishment some experienced, and therefore for some agriculture is a source of on-going pain and is held in disdain. It has also been expressed to me by Indigenous people that sincere efforts to include Indigenous communities' perspectives and predilections in conceptualization and development of a sustainable regional agriculture and food system may be one means of contributing toward reconciliation (revealing and resolving past wrong-doings) and healing (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

In addition to our partnership with TFN we have also begun discussion with the Lil'wat Nation, whose traditional and treaty lands are north of Vancouver, regarding a partnership to establish and operate a farm school on their lands for their people. Additionally we are now working with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'n First Nation in Dawson City, Yukon, to develop a business and operations plan for their nascent community farm and farm school. Both of these First Nations, like the Tsawwassen First Nation, see enormous potential for food self-reliance, food security, economic (monetary or other) and community development in engaging in small-scale, alternate-market, and community-focused farming on their lands. Equally important to Tr'ondëk Hwëch'n citizens is the potential of a community farm to offer a safe, healthful environment, respectful of wellness, that provides opportunity for working on their traditional and settlement lands and for a traditional and cultural experience. During an ISFS project working with Carcross Tagish First Nation (CTFN), in the southern Yukon, citizens of that self-governing First Nation also expressed their trepidations and aspirations regarding their food system (Dorward, Kassi, Chiu, & Mullinix, 2014). They are concerned with food insecurity and the sustainability of their food system going forward. A dominant concern is the loss of traditional knowledge and ways (hunting, fishing, preserving, and gathering) that they want to remain an important part of their food system, and which they wish to pass on to their youth. CTFN citizens also recognize the vulnerability of communities, especially those in the far north, that are highly dependent upon costly, imported foods. As such, CTFN members are looking for ways to become more food self-reliant, create job and income opportunities, and contribute to community health via the production of nutritious, healthy food by the community, for the community. CTFN citizens also envision community food system infrastructure for preservation, processing, and storage. Finally there is recognition that some young CTFN members are interested in community-focused food production.

Community and environmental health and well-being has been central to all sustainable food system

discourse I have had with Indigenous people, including leaders and Elders. Not once has interest in conventional, commodity agriculture been expressed.

My perception is that most Indigenous people with whom I have interacted regarding farming and food systems, as well as those representing their interests (e.g., planners, resource managers), embrace a perspective akin to “deep sustainability.” They operate from the perspective that our health and well-being is entirely interdependent with the health and well-being of Creation and therefore that we, notably inclusive of our food system, must nurture and respect Mother Earth. I see this perspective very much aligned with the sustainable agriculture and food system paradigm and this strengthens my conviction that Indigenous perspectives, communities, and governments can and should play a leading, powerful role in the sustainable agriculture and food system movement. Moreover, if the sustainable food systems we envision are to truly embrace the concept of social equality and justness, then it is absolutely imperative that Indigenous peoples be integral to it. To do otherwise is to perpetuate the imposition of a food system upon this segment of our communities and marginalization of their preferences. We must find a mutual way forward with our food system; it is incumbent on us to foster the circumstance in which this can occur.

## References

- Anishinabek Nation. (n.d.). Indian Residential Schools Commemorative Project: About Indian residential schools. Retrieved June 4, 2015, from <http://www.anishinabek.ca/irscp/irscp-about-residential.asp>
- Dorward, C., Kassi, N., Chiu, C., & Mullinix, K. (2014). *Our food security today and tomorrow in Carcross/Tagish First Nation*. Richmond, BC: Institute for Sustainable Food Systems, Kwantlen Polytechnic University. Retrieved from [http://www.kpu.ca/sites/default/files/ISFS/CTFN%20Community%20Food%20Report\\_2014.12.16\\_FINAL%20APPROVED.pdf](http://www.kpu.ca/sites/default/files/ISFS/CTFN%20Community%20Food%20Report_2014.12.16_FINAL%20APPROVED.pdf)
- Food Matters Manitoba. (2015). *Resetting the table: A people's food policy for Canada* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Retrieved from <http://foodsecurecanada.org/resettingthetable>
- Food Secure Canada. (2015). *Resetting the table: A people's food policy for Canada* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Montreal, Quebec: Author. Retrieved from <http://foodsecurecanada.org/resettingthetable>
- Gray, L. (2011). *First Nations 101: Tons of stuff you need to know about First Nations people*. Vancouver: Adaawx Publishing.
- Kwantlen Polytechnic University. (n.d.). Tsawwassen First Nation Farm School. Retrieved June 4, 2015, from <http://www.kpu.ca/tfnfarm>
- Morrison, D. (2008). *B.C. Food Systems Network – Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty: Final activity report*. Vancouver: B.C. Food Systems Network and Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty. Retrieved from <http://www.indigenousfoodsystems.org/content/bc-food-systems-network-working-group-indigenous-food-sovereignty-final-report>
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Retrieved from [http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Exec\\_Summary\\_2015\\_05\\_31\\_web\\_o.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Exec_Summary_2015_05_31_web_o.pdf)
- Vancouver Native Health Society. (2014, August 7). *Tu'wusht project* [Press release]. Retrieved from <http://www.vnhs.net/programs-services/tuwusht-project>





## THE ECONOMIC PAMPHLETEER

### JOHN IKERD

## Ethnicity and the war on big food

Published online July 17, 2015

Citation: Ikerd, J. (2015). Ethnicity and the war on big food. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 7–10. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.001>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

A recent *Fortune* magazine story, “Special Report: The war on big food” begins, “Major packaged-food companies lost [US]\$4 billion in market share alone last year, as shoppers swerved to fresh and organic alternatives. Can the supermarket giants win you back?” (Kowitt, 2015, para. 1). The story describes how a wide range of consumer concerns is eroding the market power of

the large corporate food companies. The consumer concerns include artificial colors and flavors, pesticides, preservatives, high-fructose corn syrup, growth hormones, antibiotics, gluten, and genetically modified organisms. All of these concerns stem directly or indirectly from the industrial paradigm of food production and distribution, including industrial agriculture.

*John Ikerd is professor emeritus of agricultural economics, University of Missouri, Columbia. He was raised on a small dairy farm in southwest Missouri and received his BS, MS, and Ph.D. degrees in agricultural economics from the University of Missouri. He worked in private industry for a time and spent 30 years in various professorial positions at North Carolina State University, Oklahoma State University, the University of Georgia, and the University of Missouri before retiring in 2000. Since retiring, he spends most of his time writing and speaking on issues related to sustainability, with an emphasis on economics and agriculture. He is author of Sustainable Capitalism; A Return to Common Sense; Small Farms Are Real Farms; Crisis and Opportunity: Sustainability in American Agriculture; A Revolution of the Middle; and The Essentials of Economic Sustainability. More background and selected writings are at <http://johnikerd.com> and <http://web.missouri.edu/~ikerdj>*

*Why did I name my column “The Economic Pamphleteer”? Pamphlets historically were short, thoughtfully written opinion pieces and were at the center of every revolution in western history. Current ways of economic thinking aren’t working and aren’t going to work in the future. Nowhere are the negative consequences more apparent than in foods, farms, and communities. I know where today’s economists are coming from; I have been there. I spent the first half of my 30-year academic career as a very conventional free-market, bottom-line agricultural economist. I eventually became convinced that the economics I had been taught and was teaching wasn’t good for farmers, wasn’t good for rural communities, and didn’t even produce food that was good for people. I have spent the 25 years since learning and teaching the principles of a new economics of sustainability. Hopefully my “pamphlets” will help spark a revolution in economic thinking.*



No one has more at stake in the outcome of this war than America's ethnic minorities. Today's industrial food system has failed in its fundamental purpose of providing food security, leaving many Americans without adequate quantities or qualities of foods to support active, healthy lifestyles. In 2012, nearly 15% of all Americans were classified as food insecure (RTI International, 2014, p. 1-6), and more than 20% of American children lived in food-insecure homes (RTI International, 2014, p. 1-7). Ethnic minorities experience significantly higher levels of food insecurity than the U.S. population as a whole. In 2012, 25% of African American and 23% of Hispanic households experienced food insecurity (RTI International, 2014, p. 1-7). One study found that 40% of American Indians lived in food insecure households (RTI International, 2014, p. 1-7). This level of insecurity is far higher today than during the 1960s—the early years of “big food” and “big farms.”

Furthermore, the industrial food system is linked to a new kind of food insecurity: unhealthy foods. There is growing evidence that America's diet-related health problems are not limited to unhealthy lifestyles or food choices but begin with a lack of nutrient density in food crops produced on industrial farms (Ikerd, 2013). A recent global report by 500 scientists from 50 countries suggested that “obesity is [now] a bigger health crisis than hunger” (Dellorto, 2012). Obesity rates in the U.S. for 2011–2012 indicated that about 35% of all adults were classified as obese (Trust for America's Health [TFAH], 2014; TFAH & Robert Wood Johnson Foundation [RWJF], n.d.). The overall childhood obesity rate was just under 17% (TFAH & Robert Wood Johnson Foundation [RWJF], n.d.). Again, ethnic minorities fare far worse than average. Nearly 48% of Blacks and 42% of Latinos were obese, compared with less than 33% of all Whites (TFAH & RWJF, n.d.). For minority women, the differences were even more glaring, with 57% of Black women and 44% of Latino

women classified as obese compared with 32% of White women (TFAH & RWJF, n.d.). More than 20% of Black children and 22% of Latino children were obese, compared with 14% of White children (TFAH & RWJF, n.d.). Limited studies show that obesity rates for American Indians are even higher than for other ethnic minorities (RTI International, 2014, p. 1-7).

Ethnic minorities have much to lose in the big food war, but they also have much to contribute to an ultimate victory. The post-industrial paradigm of food production and distribution must be fun-

---

**The traditional cultural  
values of ethnic minorities  
could be of tremendous  
value in developing a new  
paradigm for sustainable  
food production.**

---

damentally different from the industrial paradigm of today. The traditional cultural values of ethnic minorities could be of tremendous value in developing a new paradigm for sustainable food production. Unfortunately, ethnic minorities have been scarce on the front lines of the sustainable food movement. As Duncan Hilchey pointed out in his call for papers for this issue of JAFSCD, “It is really no secret that the food movement has a level of whiteness that,

even with the best of intentions, can still be exclusionary” (JAFSCD, 2015, para. 1).

One reason for the scarcity may be that relatively fewer ethnic minorities are farmers, although their numbers are growing. In the 2012 Census of Agriculture, 95.4% of principal operators reported being White (USDA, ERS, 2014a). Hispanic farmers made up the largest percentage of non-White farmers with 3.2%, African Americans made up 1.6%, American Indians or Alaska Natives, 1.8%, and Asians, 0.6% (USDA, ERS, 2014a). Admittedly, about half of all hired farmworkers in the U.S. are Hispanic or Latino, but most are laborers in industrial farming operations (USDA, ERS, 2014b, “Demographic characteristics”).

The greatest contributions by ethnic minorities to creating a new food system are likely to be cultural rather than economic. This conclusion and my perspectives regarding cultural diversity reflect seven years of service on the Diversity in Extension task force at the University of Missouri during

the 1990s. The task force was ethnically diverse, with equal representation from the faculties of the University of Missouri and Lincoln University—Missouri’s historically Black or 1890 Land-Grant University. Over time, we became an effective team by going through the essential processes of forming, storming, norming, and performing. None had more to learn than the “persons of privilege”—including the “token old White man,” as I jokingly called myself.

One important lesson was the difference between diversity and discrimination. Cultural diversity refers to cultural differences among groups identifiable by features such as gender, age, social status, and ethnicity. Discrimination occurs when individual members of such groups are indiscriminately treated as if they possess the stereotypical characteristics of their specific group. Individual members of an ethnic minority may or may not possess the cultural differences associated with their particular ethnicity. To create new sustainable farms and food systems, we must understand that the value of gender, age, social status, and ethnic diversity can be realized only in the absence of discrimination.

The industrial food system, and industrialization in general, fits the stereotypical culture of the White, European male. Specialization, standardization, and control through domination are characteristics associated with “old White men.” White boys are taught to be ambitious, assertive, competitive, and aggressive if they expect to succeed. Success is measured in terms of wealth, power, or fame. It should not be surprising that today’s business, politics, food industry, and farming are dominated by men who have these stereotypical characteristics. Women and minorities also find it far easier to “succeed” if they learn to think and act like old White men.

Like most other people, I know far less about the cultures of other ethnic groups than I know about my own. However, I know that African

American and other traditional tribal cultures tend to place far higher priorities on social relationships than do European cultures. American Indian and other indigenous cultures place far higher values on

relationships with nature than do European cultures. Females tend to be conciliatory or nurturing rather than competitive or dominating, and among ethnic minorities, women traditionally provided and continue to provide most of the farm labor. Somehow, we must create a new sustainable food and farming culture that balances the economic efficiency of the dominant culture with the social and ecological integrity of minority cultures. Such values will be essential in

winning the war on big food and ensuring that everyone, globally, has enough good food to sustain active, healthy lifestyles—including both current and future generations.

## References

- Dellorto, D. (2012, December 14). Global report: Obesity bigger health crisis than hunger. CNN News. <http://www.cnn.com/2012/12/13/health/global-burden-report/>
- Ikerd, J. (2013). Forward. In W. A. Albrecht (Ed.), *Soil Fertility & Human and Animal Health* (pp. xv-xxvi). Austin, Texas: Acres U.S.A. Available at <https://sites.google.com/site/albrechtlecture/home/text-of-2011-albrecht-lecture>
- Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* [JAFSCD]. (2015). *Call for papers: Commentaries on race and ethnicity in food systems work*. Retrieved from <http://www.agdevjournal.com/attachments/article/495/JAFSCD-Race-and-Ethnicity-Call-for-Papers-2015.pdf>
- Kowitt, B. (2015, May 21). Special report: The war on big food. *Fortune*. Retrieved from <http://fortune.com/2015/05/21/the-war-on-big-food/>
- RTI International. (2014). *Current and prospective scope of hunger and food security in America: A review of current research*. Research Triangle Park, North Carolina: RTI International Center for Health and Environmental Modeling. Retrieved from [http://www.rti.org/pubs/full\\_hunger\\_report\\_final\\_07-24-14.pdf](http://www.rti.org/pubs/full_hunger_report_final_07-24-14.pdf). Pages 1-6 & 1-7

Trust for America's Health [TFAH] & Robert Wood Johnson Foundation [RWJF]. (n.d.) . *Special report: Racial and ethnic disparities in obesity*. Retrieved from the State of Obesity website:  
<http://stateofobesity.org/disparities/>

Trust for America's Health. (2014, September). *Reports: The state of obesity: Better policies for a healthier America*. Retrieved from the Trust for America's Health HealthyAmericans.org website:  
<http://healthyamericans.org/report/115/>

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service [USDA, ERS]. (2014a). *Socially disadvantaged farmers: Race, Hispanic, origin, and gender*. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/beginning-disadvantaged-farmers/socially-disadvantaged-farmers-race,-hispanic-origin,-and-gender.aspx#.VEaDsRax39V>

USDA, ERS. (2014b). *Farm labor: Background*. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-labor/background.aspx#demographic>



## METRICS FROM THE FIELD

*Blending insights from research with insights from practice*

**KEN METER**

### Allowing ethnic heritage to emerge in farm and food policy

Submitted July 27, 2015 / Published online September 21, 2015

*Citation:* Meter, K. (2015). Allowing ethnic heritage to emerge in farm and food policy. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 11–13.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.032>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

Many people who work at the grassroots building community-based food systems aim to create local food networks that build health, wealth, connection, and capacity (Meter, 2010). This vision implies that stronger cultural connections, including vibrant ethnic identity and heritage,

---

**Ken Meter** is one of the most experienced food system analysts in the U.S., integrating market analysis, business development, systems thinking, and social concerns. At the Crossroads Resource Center, Meter continues to work with regions, and state and federal governments, to assess food systems and the feasibility of proposed new food businesses and business clusters. He is a co-author of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Agricultural Marketing Service's Economic Impacts of Local and Regional Food Systems Toolkit (<http://www.localfood.economics.com>). He is also the co-author of *Border People*, the first published account of German-Bohemian emigration to the U.S. He recently purchased a ceramic crock for making sauerkraut.

must be among the outcomes of food policy.

Yet our policy discourse frequently suggests that economic efficiency constitutes the primary measure of success. This is clearly a narrow view. As long as one's viewpoint is limited to ways of squeezing production costs to the lowest possible levels, or raising prices as high as the market will bear, the basic humanity of food will dissipate and the transformative potential of local foods will be lost. From a systems perspective, measuring success solely using any one indicator, such as efficiency, amidst a complex and rapidly changing system will distort one's understanding of that system, leading to skewed outcomes.

The economics-centered view is also debilitating because it suggests that the only role consumers should play is to passively accept options that are defined by others and to remain content to accept a limited voice—to decide whether they are willing to pay for a certain good or service. This view suggests that consumers should let go of the

notion that they can help create the menu of options available to them.

Yet culture is something that is *produced*, not the outcome of *consumption*. I claim a certain privilege when I purchase produce that was harvested 1,800 miles distant by farmworkers bending to sun-scalded fields for minimum wage. I advance a heritage if I put up food following my ancestors' recipes.

The fabric of my life is thin when compared to what my ancestors enjoyed. Poor people who worked the land, my forebears would have rejected as inferior many foods now prized as fresh at the grocery, because they knew tastier, more nutritionally dense foods, harvested with their own labor. Though many were challenged in their attitudes about race, they did recognize that food is an essential foundation of culture. They understood that all cultures need access to the resources that allow them to determine food choices for themselves.

As one example, my father's ancestors dwelled in Alsace (currently eastern France) for over a century. As Alsace constructed a regional identity, it elevated specific costumes, lace designs, wines, and foods. One such food was sauerkraut. This was not selected because of its status or gourmet appeal; it was chosen because cabbage grew easily in the temperate climate of Alsace with few energy inputs, and stored well as sauerkraut. Almost any farmer could grow cabbage and then ferment it for safekeeping. So you could count on sauerkraut being available to everyone year-round.

Moreover, the dish could be adapted to serve as a vehicle for very local identity: perhaps imbued with juniper berries in one village, fortified with Riesling wine in another, or accompanied by the special sausages or pork cures that local butchers created. Certain cooks preferred goose or chicken preparations. Various dumplings or shredded potatoes added flavor and body. The dish might be slanted toward either French or German preparation in a region with mixed heritage. Preparing and serving this dish was to express an identity: "We belong to this particular place, where our people

have built a heritage."

Unfortunately, it appears that the health insight that also made sauerkraut attractive as a cultural icon became lost in the commercialization of place and identity. Fermented cabbage provides essential bacteria, folklore says, which ease digestion of meat and outcompete undesirable biota. Now I am rediscovering these insights.

A century after my great-grandfather abandoned Alsace, I grew up in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Cabbages had become a commodity. Though

easy to grow in this climate, cabbages were primarily shipped in from California, or shredded and salt-packed into a tin can. Many of the distinctive tangy flavors, and likely many of the health benefits, were now tempered by commercial convenience.

My family ate sauerkraut almost as a covert gesture, mindful of neighbors who pursued an American identity that aspired to whiteness that was correlated with leaving the land. Similarly, my mother Margaret, an exceptional cook, was bound strictly to her German-Bohemian roots. She invented a new tradition that would express her family's new life in America. To do so, significantly, she had to look back to her own childhood, rather than integrating her current life. Her decision was to create a deeply ritualized Christmas Eve meal, centered around oxtail soup. By so doing, she gave herself a vehicle for reminding her sons of a critical juncture in her past.

When she was 16, Margaret's father had died suddenly after a massive heart attack. Her Uncle Louis, who ran a butcher shop in her Michigan hometown, would swing by her house late on a typical Saturday afternoon, bringing the meats that had not sold at his shop that day. He did this to lift the family's spirits, and also to make sure they had enough protein. Among the items that his customers often overlooked were oxtails. Though unpopular, they made exceptional soup stock.

Thus my mother created a holiday meal that conveyed a cultural reminder: "We did not always have it this easy; we had considerable help." Although I did not grasp this as a youth, it was a

---

**Culture is something that  
is *produced*, not the  
outcome of *consumption*.**

---

message that also suggested considerable equality with other cultures. The foods themselves were cultural outcasts.

My mother was simultaneously asserting her right to make cultural choices, for reasons that might change over time. This choice was possible only because the family was connected to the production of the foods it ate. After all, to claim a culture solely on the basis of foods that must be imported holds little integrity and is expensive. In both the maternal and paternal two branches of my family, despite being poor people created healthy meals unique to place, using whatever was readily available.

In my column, I often ponder what we actually mean when we strive for “local” foods. The weight of the evidence is that locality involves connection to people and place, not simply the raw cost nor the number of miles food travels. Local food, in a very deep sense, is food we grow, purchase, and eat because it helps us understand that we belong, and how to welcome others into our circle. These transactions build social connectivity, and also stronger local economies.

Yet in a society where computers are easier to come by than farm fields, many policy-makers assert that locality must be measured using a standard national definition, in the hope that economic factors can be compared across places. In reality, the definition of “local” is also inherently a local one, implicitly taking heritage and place into account. Clever public policy will collect and use insights from multiple cultural perspectives, avoiding the reductionism of solely quantitative approaches.

One quick example might be drawn from local foods activity in South Carolina, amid cultures quite different from those in which I grew up.

When the state government asked me to prepare an investment plan for local foods two years ago, several aspects of life struck me as curious. First, several housing developments in the Lowcountry were named, with no apparent sense of irony, as “plantations.” Second, the contemporary discussion of farm labor had been largely distilled to asking

how to find immigrants to move to the state; few had considered that there might be something amiss when youth (of all colors) who grow up on farms know little about either food preparation or farming. The two food crops that are most closely identified with the state, tomatoes and peaches, are largely exported to eastern seaboard metro areas, which may help explain the persistence of the plantation mentality.

Projecting future sales for South Carolina foods to South Carolina consumers was deeply interesting, but had it been performed in isolation from these qualitative cultural insights, several central issues would have been overlooked.

Building food systems that foster racial and ethnic pride, a strong sense of self-determination, and lasting heritage requires that policy embrace potent ethnicity as both an important core of discovery and a desired outcome. Yet we are allowing, perhaps for the first time in history, farm and food policy to be set by those who understand neither the heritage of farming nor, on a deep level, the culture of food, and many are asking the wrong questions.

## Reference

Meter, K. (2010). Letting food systems emerge. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 1(1), 23–26.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2010.011.006>

---

**In reality, the definition of  
“local” is also inherently a  
local one, implicitly taking  
heritage and place into  
account.**

---





## Reviving farming interest in the Philippines through agricultural entrepreneurship education

Andrea Santiago <sup>a \*</sup>  
De La Salle University

Fernando Roxas <sup>b</sup>  
Asian Institute of Management

Submitted July 20, 2014 / Revised September 15 and December 26, 2014, and January 25, 2015 /  
Accepted May 1, 2015 / Published online August 25, 2015

Citation: Santiago, A., & Roxas, F. (2015). Reviving farming interest in the Philippines through agricultural entrepreneurship education. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 15–27. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.016>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

There is a need to entice a new generation of Filipinos to practice value-added agriculture to replace the current farmers expected to retire in a decade or so. But persistent poverty levels in agricultural areas have dissuaded Filipino youth from pursuing opportunities in this sector. In this commentary, we propose that the Philippine government work with private investors and socio-civic organizations to revive interest in agriculture by positioning it as an attractive and viable option.

---

<sup>a \*</sup> *Corresponding author:* Andrea Santiago, Professor, Management and Organization Department, De La Salle University; 2401 Taft Avenue; Manila, Philippines 1004; [ma.andrea.santiago@dlsu.edu.ph](mailto:ma.andrea.santiago@dlsu.edu.ph)

<sup>b</sup> Fernando Roxas, Associate Professor, Asian Institute of Management, Washington Sycip Graduate School of Business, Asian Institute of Management; 123 Paseo de Roxas; Makati, Philippines; [fyaroxas@aim.edu](mailto:fyaroxas@aim.edu)

This can be done by stimulating entrepreneurial activities in agriculture, through targeted agricultural entrepreneurship education. Entrepreneurship shifts attention from producing more of the same things to producing value-added goods and services through managed agricultural risks. To encourage opportunity seeking and value creation in this sector, there is need to train current farmers to become more entrepreneurial and to educate future generations to become agricultural entrepreneurs. This commentary presents four current strategies to increase interest in agricultural entrepreneurship in the Philippines—Family Farm Schools, the SAKA program, Farm Business Schools, and the Social Enterprise approach of Gawad Kalinga. Clearly, a more concerted effort among government, socio-civic organizations, and private investors is needed for substantial outcomes to materialize.

## Keywords

rural education, agricultural entrepreneurship, agribusiness, farming, Philippines

## Introduction

Eradication of poverty is part of the main agenda of international and multilateral organizations, such as the Asian Development Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and the World Bank (UN, 2013). The UN claims that to eradicate poverty, economic growth must be inclusive; that is, the benefits of economic growth are shared among all sectors of society, so that no sector is left behind (Islam, 2004). The fact that poverty persists especially in the countryside in some developing countries, despite reported economic growth, may mean that growth has not been inclusive (Hull, 2009).

Karnani (2007) states that the only way to truly help the poor is to increase their real income. This is to be achieved by reducing the price of goods and services that they purchase, increasing their earning capacity, or—ideally—both. One way to increase earning capacity is to move towards a cycle of growth, employment, and poverty reduction through encouraging entrepreneurial activity (Islam, 2004). A healthy entrepreneurial environment means more jobs, greater purchasing power, higher tax contributions, and better community service delivery. Consequently, it makes sense for developing countries interested in inclusive growth to create structures that support entrepreneurial activity (Acs & Szerb, 2007).

There is general acceptance that entrepreneurial activity spurs economic growth, although not all agree as to whether it encompasses all forms of activity (including self-employment, rent, and job creation) or only those that introduce innovation in products, services, processes, or delivery (Busenitz, Gomez, & Spencer, 2000; van Stel, Carree, & Thurik, 2005; Williams & McGuire 2010). In the absence of a universal definition or measurement, we favor the theory that any entrepreneurial activity spurs the economy. This is because we believe entrepreneurship creates jobs. If developing economies provide livelihood opportunities that bridge the income divide, then government should support entrepreneurial activities, particularly in last

mile rural areas. Lamb and Sherman (2010) are optimistic that with proper support rural areas can become more productive.

## In Support of Agricultural Entrepreneurship

The Philippines is still considered an agricultural country; yet the average age of farmers is 57 years (Pangilinan, cited in Casauay, 2014). This suggests that in a decade or so, there will be no more Filipino farmers unless a youthful generation replaces them. Unfortunately, children of farmers take no interest after seeing their parents remain in poverty (Cariño, 2013).

Farmers, fishermen, and foresters are among the poorest citizens of the Philippines. They pay more for basic services and commodities than those who have the capacity to pay, because investment costs to extend electricity lines escalate the farther the lines are from the electricity grid (Mendoza, 2011). They often have to borrow from micro-financiers and repay the loan in weekly installments; they end up paying higher interest charges as compared to bank rates (Carroll, 2010). The focus on short-term credit is counterproductive, since the farmers prioritize survival needs before loan repayments. Longer gestation crops need longer repayment periods because farmers cannot generate income to pay the loan until they are able to sell their harvest (Audinet & Haralambous, 2005). Typically, farmers cultivate small farm lands, averaging 1.5 hectares, which makes them more vulnerable to the effects of climate change as well as to forces brought about by economic liberalization (Kahan, 2007).

Trade liberalization has opened new markets for farmers but tends to favor commercial farms (Kahan, 2007), presenting more challenges to the greater number of farmers who own smaller portions of land (von Braun & Diaz-Bonilla, 2008). Since the farmers are at a disadvantage, it is no surprise that hunger persists even if they grow food on their farms. To survive, farmers will have to be more equipped to compete or they will have to band together to enjoy the advantages of large farms. This initiative should go beyond contract-growing agreements, where large companies provide guaranteed purchase of produce provided certain standards are met. Under such contracts,

farmers bear all the production risks even if they gain only small margins. It thus makes sense for farmers to integrate forward, alone or in partnership with entrepreneurs, and become agricultural entrepreneurs.

Smit (cited in Richards & Bulkley, 2007) believes that entrepreneurship should be at the core of farming. If a farm can be considered a firm, and the farmer the owner, then certainly the farmer must be equipped with entrepreneurial skills to manage the farm profitably and to surmount the challenges faced by the agricultural sector. We refer to these special skills as agripreneurial skills, while we label the farmer turned entrepreneur as the agricultural entrepreneur or agripreneur. We provide new terminology for ease in referencing, as the generic terms of entrepreneur, entrepreneurial, and entrepreneurship are usually associated with industrial or non-farm activity (Richards & Bulkley, 2007; Singh & Krishna, 1994). We also need to differentiate the farmer and farm manager from the agripreneur. A farmer is concerned with cultivating land, a farm manager oversees farm operations, but an agripreneur finds opportunities to make the most of agricultural output.

Following the proposition that increased entrepreneurial activity can break the poverty cycle, we expect that the rise of agripreneurs will improve the standard of living of the rural poor. This debunks the common misconception of youth that farming is a poor person's job. When agripreneurs are able to utilize business processes and resources to convert agricultural commodities into higher-margin products, they can compete even in the export market. Value creation at the farm level stimulates greater farm production, bringing more income to the agripreneurs. Improving the purchasing power of agripreneurs and farmers makes them a viable consumer market base, thus further stimulating economic activity (Timmer, 2005). An ideal outcome of agripreneurship education would be the stabilization of rural populations, numbers of farms, and farm acreage under production.

An additional benefit might also include less congestion in urban areas: currently, rural dwellers abandon farmlands in favor of employment in urban cities to obtain predictable income streams (McElwee & Annibal, 2009). The migration toward

urban areas is a phenomenon typical of many developing countries, the Philippines included. Urban migration places a strain on resources which have to be diverted to addressing the ills of densely populated areas, such as increasing criminality and unsanitary conditions (Tacoli, 2011). The attraction of moving to the cities has also led to young people leaving the farms they grew up on, leaving the tilling of the soil to the older generation, who have no one to pass the farms to. Some farmers near cities are able to sell their land to investors who convert the land to non-agricultural uses (Vallianatos, Gottlieb, & Haase, 2004), but the rest simply cultivate their farms for subsistence purposes alone. Consequently, there are fewer agricultural producers feeding a growing population. It is said that developing countries would need to almost double their agricultural production to meet their population levels in 2050 (FAO cited in AMIS, 2011). Together with increased productivity, improving farm incomes through entrepreneurial means contributes to the economic sustainability of agricultural communities.

Since the economy of many developing countries is agriculture-based, we believe that various sectors in society should collaborate in a more focused manner to arrest urban migration. This collaboration is possible by supporting agricultural entrepreneurship (or agripreneurship) education. Beyond farming and farm management training, emphasis should be given to the entrepreneurship side, providing skills related to opportunity seeking, value creation, risk management, resource generation, and commercialization, among others (Knudson, Wysocki, Champagne, & Peterson, 2004; O'Neill, Hershauer, & Golden, 2009). With more individuals exposed to agripreneurship, developing countries can generate more agripreneurs, who will be able to create more value for their produce.

### **The Case of the Philippines**

Moves by the Philippine government to support agripreneurship are timely. Despite efforts to increase farm productivity, crop production from 13 million hectares of land grew marginally from 87 million in 2011 to 88 million metric tons in 2012. Despite the increase in output, crop production in

2012 was valued at P797 million, down from P802 million in 2011 (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2013). Even for rice, a basic staple of Filipinos, unmilled rice production reached only 18 million metric tons, resulting in only 11 million metric tons of rice. Assuming an average annual consumption of 115 kilograms per person, the Department of Agriculture estimates that production should reach at least 20 million metric tons to feed close to 100 million people (Cai, 2013). The difference between what is milled and what is needed for consumption has been covered so far by importation. Milled rice is imported primarily from Vietnam, which produces rice at a small fraction of Filipino rice production cost (Bordey & Litonjua, 2013).

The Department of Agriculture has boldly promised that the Philippines will be self-sufficient in rice, but continued exposure to natural disasters threatens this goal, even assuming that rice self-sufficiency is an efficient economic policy (Fernandez-San Valentin & Berja, 2012). Indeed, climate change has not made it easy on Filipino farmers, who have to contend with hotter dry seasons and wetter rainy seasons, even in areas previously unaffected by unpredictable weather conditions. Efforts continue to enhance agricultural as well as fisheries productivity, however. Enabling laws have been enacted to introduce reform in agriculture, such as the Organic Agricultural Act of 2010 and the Agriculture and Agrarian Reform Credit and Financing System through Banking Institutions, known as the Agri-Agra Reform Credit Act of 2009. Despite the law compelling banks to allocate ten percent of their loan portfolio to the agricultural sector, the Philippine Central Bank reports that there is a huge shortfall in lending, forcing banks to comply with their legal mandate by channeling funds to infrastructure projects in the agricultural sector (Martin, 2014).

We believe that one of the main causes of the failure of government initiatives to grow the agriculture sector has been the focus on productivity rather than on entrepreneurial activity. Investments in better technology, improved irrigation systems, disaster-resistant crop species, and even in better farm-to-market roads will not result in expected

outcomes if the farmers remain focused only on land cultivation. While agricultural productivity is important, training programs must emphasize the development of entrepreneurial qualities. We believe farmers and their next generation kin need to be equipped not only with farming skills but, more importantly, with entrepreneurial skills. This allows a shift from producing more of the same crops to selling value-added produce.

It is encouraging that the Philippines Department of Agriculture has finally recognized the importance of agripreneurship, as embodied in the Philippine Agriculture (PA) 2020 plan. This strategic plan aims to have a “farmer-focused, market-driven agriculture that attempts to transform traditional small farmers into entrepreneurs” (Santiago, 2014). With this aim clearly in place, we are hopeful that other government agencies and lending institutions will give Filipino agripreneurs a fighting chance to rise above poverty.

### **Addressing the Gap with Education**

Education plays a critical role in changing mind-sets. For the PA 2020 plan to be achieved, the formal education system will need to emphasize the relevance of agricultural entrepreneurship. In the Philippine education system, the Department of Education supervises basic education, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority supervises technical and vocational training, and the Commission on Higher Education supervises higher education. A problem with the basic education system is that for decades it has focused on preparing students for college. This emphasis is to encourage students to take the route of higher education to improve their employability. Unfortunately, not all college graduates are able to obtain employment in their field of study (Rosero, 2013). Often they are overqualified for available jobs. This is one of the reasons why the Department of Education has adopted a 12-year basic education program, beginning with the academic year 2012-2013, which introduced a two-year senior high school program that allows high school students to choose tracks other than college preparation (Okabe, 2013).

For this analysis, we focused on two tracks introduced by the Department of Education in the

12-year program: a technical-vocational livelihood track in agricrop, animal and fish production; and an entrepreneurship track. For agricultural entrepreneurship to work, the two tracks should be combined. In this way, hard technical know-how can be combined with innovative and entrepreneurial skills. Graduates would be familiar with the challenges of agricultural production as well business skills. Thus the learning curve of bringing goods from farm to market is shortened. Unfortunately, the two tracks are separate in the Department of Education curriculum, with the agriculture track still focused on production while the entrepreneurship track is biased towards non-agricultural products. We posit that a combined agricultural livelihood track would be an opportunity to introduce entrepreneurial skills instead of concentrating on the production aspect of farming and fishing, and that the entrepreneurship track should introduce the farm sector as an area for entrepreneurial activity.

At this point, it is too early to tell whether the livelihood track will produce the desired outcomes in the agriculture sector. There is still a question of drop-out rates due to poverty constraints. Another problem is that even in rural areas the mandated basic education calendar, does not conform with agriculture planting and harvesting cycles. Naturally, educational programs should take into account the agricultural cycle so as not to disrupt learning. Consequently, students might not even reach senior high school. To have more students engaged in agripreneurship, alternative learning systems must be introduced at the basic education level. A good model is the Family Farm School (FFS).

**Family Farm Schools.** The FFS educational concept originated in France in 1937. The Maison Familiales Rurales movement introduced the alternation concept, through which students learn in the classroom and in the farms on alternating schedules in order to enrich both theoretical and technical understanding of agriculture (Plougastel, n. d.). The Spanish educational system adapted the model in the 1960s, to lift up the lives of rural families, and the idea has spread to many

other countries (Romana, 2012). In 1988, Pamfamilyang Paaralang Agrikultura, Inc., a non-stock, nonprofit organization, established the first FFS in the Philippines. It drew the attention of other foundations and families and led to the formation of the Philippine Federation of Family Farm/Rural Schools, Inc. (Philfeffars).

The salient feature of the FFS is the *alternancia* or “sandwich” program, in which students spend one whole week in school and the next week or two in their farm homes. In the homes specially assigned tutors give them structured assignments that revolve around farm life. These tutors also visit them at their homes to offer values-formation courses to the parents.

The Department of Education considers the FFS a “private special school” in the special secondary agriculture school category (Hernando-Malipot, 2012). As such, the FFS is able to offer courses not found in the national secondary curriculum. The alternation component of the program helps remedy the high absenteeism and dropout rate of regular schools that result when parents require their children to tend to the farm or the family enterprise rather than go to school (Claro, 2011). Since the farm or enterprise is now part of the program, there is no excuse not to complete the program. A student can already earn a living while studying.

The Philippine government has found merit in the unique offering of the FFS. Members of Congress and the Senate have recognized that the teaching strategy might revive interest in farming and repopulate rural communities, and approved in September 2013 a policy “establishing rural farm schools as alternative delivery mode of secondary education” (RA 10618, 2013). Under the law, each of the 80 provinces will establish one public rural farm school that will introduce farm entrepreneurship theory and practice in the last two years of high school.

The FFS is an alternative learning system for youngsters still in school. For those no longer in

the school system, the Pilipinas Shell Foundation Inc. (PSFI) introduced the Sanayan sa Kakayahang Agrikultura (SAKA) project in the mid-1990s, which helps out-of-school youth to transition into agripreneurship. Similarly, the Management Association of the Philippines (MAP) has also introduced its version of the FFS, but this time catering to high school graduates who were unable to pursue higher education.

**SAKA Program.** Recognizing the need to support agriculture education, the PSFI originally designed a two-year, non-degree program for out-of-school youth that eventually became a one-year program. In the program, 70 percent of the time the students are in the field. Graduates of the SAKA program earn a certificate in farm management. The PSFI then helps them gain access to microcredit to implement their back-to-farm projects.

Habaradas (2012) presents many stories of how SAKA has influenced the lives of its graduates. For instance, Warlito Ligot, a native of Cagayan Valley, studied under the SAKA program supervised by Cavite State University in 1995. He immediately applied what he learned by setting up a modest farm. He was able to make his farm productive even when the entire province where his farm was located suffered from a drought. He learned he had to spread production risks so he engaged in a variety of farm activities. In 1999, the Department of Agriculture named him “Most Outstanding Young Farmer.” Marinez Seracarpio-Dingcol, a 1998 SAKA scholar who studied at Pampanga Agricultural College, used a livelihood loan she availed herself of from the Land Bank of the Philippines upon her graduation to convert her father’s idle farmland into an integrated animal-plant agricultural system. She quickly turned around her investment, earning enough to purchase her own farm. As she gained repute for her skills and knowledge, other farm owners invited her to manage their farms.

**Farm Business Schools.** The FBS uses the

FFS concept with slight variations in target market and delivery. Instead of providing an alternative high school, the FBS aims to teach agricultural entrepreneurship to out-of-school youth who have finished their secondary education, and who are not necessarily children of farmers. FBS students have a study-now, pay-later plan. The privately funded school led by the Meralco Foundation Inc. (MFI) is located on a 60-hectare farm, where students immediately apply what they learn (Morales, 2008). The MFI collaborates with the University of Rizal System, so that students who finish their coursework can continue to a college degree in entrepreneurial management (MFI, 2009).

The MFI expects students to spend one month in school and three months in a farm selected by the school, a cycle followed six times through the program. Thus, students receive exposure to six different farms in two years (R. Gayo, MFI executive director, personal communication, July 16, 2012). When in school, students learn management and entrepreneurship skills. After completing the program, the graduates either pursue further education in agriculture and manage small farms.

Young adults pursuing higher education generally prefer to enroll in programs that will lead to employment. The latest education report of the Philippine Statistics Authority reveals that 3.3 million students enrolled in tertiary education for academic year 2012–2013. The top five discipline groups with an aggregate enrolment of 2.4 million students were business administration, education, engineering, information technology, and medicine. The discipline group of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, and Veterinary Medicine had a total of 81,000 students. For the last eight years, enrollment for this group has been constant at two percent of the higher education population (PSA, 2015).

The low enrollment in the agricultural discipline group, despite its priority status, reflects a disinterest in pursuing a life in agriculture (Suarez, 2012). Packaged as a bachelor of science in agriculture program with an emphasis on crop

production, it has been a course of study for those interested in research, and thus does not have general appeal.

The Commission on Higher Education approved the offering of a bachelor of science in entrepreneurship in 2005, and a bachelor of science in agribusiness in 2007. A review of the entrepreneurship program shows specialized subjects that hone some entrepreneurial skills, as well as one possible elective on Agricultural Entrepreneurship, while the agribusiness degree offers agriculture and management courses, but no subjects on entrepreneurship. A gap still exists, because entrepreneurial activities in the agriculture sector require an appreciation of the cultivation side—a mastery of managerial responsibilities—as well as the skills and determination of an entrepreneurial mind. This gap can be addressed by the introduction of a bachelor of science in agricultural entrepreneurship. No Philippine university or college is offering this course. In the absence of such a degree, however, the Gawad Kalinga Foundation, a nongovernmental organization, has created an agriculture laboratory where university graduates are given opportunities to venture into agribusinesses.

**Social Enterprise Model.** The Gawad Kalinga Foundation (GK) is a nongovernment organization that sprang from a desire to help build community. It began with volunteers building houses for the poor and eventually evolved to include education, health, environment, and livelihood (Habaradas & Aquino, 2010). In 2011, GK officially launched the GK Center for Social Innovation (CSI). Its target is to generate 500,000 social entrepreneurs who will create five million jobs in agriculture, technology, and tourism—ending poverty for five million—by 2024 (Meloto, 2011). GK launched the program in the GK Enchanted Farm, which serves as a business incubator for enterprises in agriculture. The 34-hectare farm in Angat, Bulacan, is the first of 24 such sites that the CSI hopes to establish in major provinces.

The three components of the GK Enchanted Farm are the university village for

sustainable community development, “Silicon Valley” for social entrepreneurship, and “Disneyland” for social tourism (GK, 2014). For its first site, GK invited families to relocate to an unproductive farmland, where volunteers built their homes in an adjacent area. Then, GK invited young college graduates to start enterprise using the farmland produce as the main ingredients of their products or to employ the community members. In exchange, the entrepreneurs could sell their farm-processed goods in the village farm, which attracts thousands of local and foreign tourists weekly through various activities organized by GK. From the social innovation concept arose Bayani Brew, a brand of healthy drinks; Golden Duck, producer of turmeric-soaked salted duck eggs; Gourmet Keso, producer of artisan cheeses; Theo&Philo Artisan Chocolates, producer of artisan chocolates; and Human Nature, producer of personal care products.

The CEO of GK, Antonio Meloto, claims that the GK Enchanted Farm is the first farm village university in the world (personal communication, August 20, 2012). Meloto, explained that the GK model uses its village farms as a live business incubator for budding entrepreneurs from middle-class families in urban areas. He targeted the middle-class because he believes they have more means to pursue entrepreneurial activities than the lower classes. He has personally convinced graduates of prestigious universities in the Philippines to invest in agriculture-related businesses.

The young entrepreneurs are required to follow fair-trade policies, and by doing so are able to market their produce as GK brands. As their businesses prosper, the communities they work with prosper as well. Meloto envisions that the community workers will develop entrepreneurial skills due to their exposure to the young entrepreneurs. Once they have saved enough, the community workers can start their own enterprises (Meloto, personal communication, August 20, 2012). Already, community workers have



begun to venture into small home-based businesses (Dehesa, 2013).

To encourage the younger generation to take an interest in the agricultural sector, GK has started a campaign called “AgriCool” designed to show that agriculture is trendy (C. Atilano, GK entrepreneur, personal communication, August 20, 2012). Through this program, GK sponsors the education of 44 students taking undergraduate degrees in agriculture or agribusiness. Eventually, they will be able to use the GK farm as a business incubator.

A good deal of work still needs to be done to change mindsets. In August 2014, a group of young women with roots in the Philippines opened the School for Experiential and Entrepreneurial Development (SEED), a countryside college for social entrepreneurs. SEED aims to address the entrepreneurial skills shortage via practical and experiential rural-based education. Partly influenced by the GK model, US-born Leslie Espinosa convinced foreign-based friends Laurence Defontaines and Vicki Cabrera to join her in the mission in providing quality, practical education for those with the least opportunity, mostly children of subsistence farmers. They envision that this agri-entrepreneurial school will produce 20,000 social entrepreneurs and innovators in the province of Bulacan, where the school is based. For two years, the initial group of 47 young scholars who reside near Gawad Kalinga, will be exposed to the various aspects of agriculture and entrepreneurship (Graham, 2014).

### **Discussion and Implications**

Effective focus on building an entrepreneurial mindset among agriculturalists is still lacking. The usual response of governments to improve output in the agricultural sector is to invest in physical structures or to provide training for better farm productivity. These efforts are important but wasteful if not paired with a shift in mindset (Audinet & Haralambous, 2005). Farmers need to become more equipped to help themselves so that they can rise above poverty (UNDP, 2008). Atchoarena and Gasperini (2003) conclude that

educated farmers tend to be more productive since they are receptive to new technology. Research by Corbett (2005) indicates that prior knowledge, creativity and cognitive mechanisms contribute significantly to the process of opportunity identification and exploitation—the foundations of entrepreneurship. This supports the case not just for universal education, but also for education focused on the needs of farmers.

This commentary presented four models introduced by various sectors in Philippine society. Each model is appropriate for particular groups, but the scale is too small and the length of program too short to expect any real impact in the immediate future. This means that the country does not expect to have a sudden upsurge of young, educated agripreneurs yet. The almost simultaneous introduction of these programs is gaining attention, however, and it is important to sustain the momentum.

The advantage of the family farm school is that it takes into account the farming cycle. When children of farmers are pulled out of school to help their parents during planting and harvesting time, these children are unable to complete their studies. Consequently, they fail to develop holistically and do not gain confidence about their abilities. The FFS alternative learning system, integrating farming operation with school activities, encourages continued classroom education of the children while inculcating in children a love for the farm. Combined with values education for both children and parents, this model helps build stronger family bonds, which supports the Filipino value of love for family. While there are only anecdotal accounts about how young students and graduates eventually pursued agriculture, the Philippine government has acknowledged that this applied farming education model is appropriate in rural areas and thus legislated the establishment of one public farm school in each of the 80 provinces in the country (RA 10618, 2013). Establishment of public farm schools will complement the 15 or so farm schools currently managed by the private sector.

The FFS is a farm school without a farm within the school premises, attracting children of farmers to study and live in the school compound during classroom sessions and return to their

families on designated farm weeks (Bolido, 2014). The Farm Business School, on the other hand, is aimed at attracting out-of-school youth who do not necessarily belong to farming families. The students reside on the campus grounds, and rather than return to their families, learn about farming on the school's farm land. They also train for three straight months with agripreneurs who have partnered with the school. The immersion of students who have had no prior exposure to farming with agripreneurs who have transformed their farmland into highly profitable ventures, exposes these students to innovative farming practices and provides opportunities to become familiar with the value chain. This training with agripreneurs cycles six times through the curriculum.

Working as apprentices, these students learn from successful agripreneurs; it is hoped that this apprenticeship will translate into establishing their own farms. The Meralco Foundation Inc., proponent of the FBS, has yet to report officially on the status of its graduates; however, from a population of six students when it first opened in 2009, enrollment has risen to 200.

Similar to FFS and FBS, the SAKA program integrates classroom learning with actual field work. Habaradas (2012) reported several success stories of graduates who started agriculture entrepreneurial ventures with funding support from financiers who had been tapped by the Pilipinas Shell Foundation, which manages SAKA. Upon finishing their SAKA education, these scholars are older than typical graduates from the FFS and FBS programs. This age difference could explain why the SAKA scholars are more likely to pursue agricultural ventures within a shorter time after graduation. For FFS and FBS graduates, it would appear that they would pursue advanced education in farm management or serve as apprentices while looking for opportunities.

The Social Enterprise Model of Gawad Kalinga is different from the first three in that the nonprofit organization targets fresh graduates from prominent schools in Manila and encourages them to pursue entrepreneurial activities within the organization's 34-hectare farm, called the farm village university. Because graduates from prominent schools are likely to come from well-to-do

families, they generally have the means to start businesses quickly. The young entrepreneurs work within the existing farm community and help improve the income stream of the community. Through persistent observation and shared activities, the community workers learn from the entrepreneurs how to account for their time and resources, how to care for the quality of the produce, and how to deal with buyers. This gives them more confidence to begin businesses of their own. Meloto (personal communication, August 20, 2012) relates how some women have begun processing jams from organically grown produce and marketing these in the university village after observing how the young entrepreneurs conducted their operations.

The GK model works because the organization is highly credible. The organization is multi-awarded and its founder, Antonio Meloto, is an internationally recognized social entrepreneur who has won several awards. He inspires young adults, investors, and government leaders to support his cause. He believes that it is possible to end poverty in the Philippines if the poor become more productive. Since many of the poor are located in rural areas, it makes sense to encourage entrepreneurship in agriculture.

The foregoing discussions clearly show that the Philippines is gaining headway in agripreneurship. Government officials and legislators are picking up from the initiatives of the private sector by enacting laws in support of agripreneurship education and developing programs in harmony with those mentioned in this paper. The Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) of the Department of Agriculture as well as the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) have redesigned some offerings to ensure that agricultural education takes into account the realities of the rhythms of farm life (TESDA, 2011). The current approaches described show how cohort progression is improved by allowing students to spend time on farms and by involving the family in the education process.

Likewise, agripreneurship curriculum design addresses the gap in the skill set of existing agriculture programs. Opportunity seeking and opportunity screening aptitude, and development of

enterprise and marketing skills, are required for agripreneurs to be able to create value on farms. Rather than for the government to focus on farm productivity, only to have depressed prices rendering a bumper crop useless, an education that hones the skills for spotting opportunities and looking towards value-creating products and services may be more sustaining. This specialized education becomes even more valuable as the Philippines opens its doors to Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) economic integration. Since the Philippines is not likely to be price-competitive compared to Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam, which have economies of scale or efficient logistics chains, the country would be better off competing on the basis of product differentiation rather than farm productivity and of innovation rather than lower prices. This scenario can be achieved if Filipino farmers become more entrepreneurial.

## Conclusion

Despite being a predominantly agriculture-based economy, the Philippines has become a net importer of agricultural goods. Part of the problem is the apparent disinterest to till the soil, largely because farming is not viewed as exciting and worthwhile. Previous education techniques have focused only on the technical aspects of agriculture. To enhance interest in agriculture, there is a need to invest not only in agriculture education, but also specifically in agricultural entrepreneurship education.

This commentary presents various ways of marrying agriculture and entrepreneurship as drawn from small pockets of nongovernment intervention in the Philippines. There is the FFS model for young children of farmers who attend classroom work and who can help their parents in their farms during pre-determined alternate periods. There is the FBS model for older out-of-school youth who are trained in farms managed by successful agripreneurs, also with alternate classroom-field sessions. There is the SAKA model for even older adults, who earn an associate or full degree in agripreneurship and who may be more prepared to begin agricultural ventures. And there is the Social Enterprise Model, targeted at young

graduates who can finance entrepreneurial businesses in the farm village university.

We believe that investing in agricultural entrepreneurship is one answer to the poverty gap that exists in agriculture-based communities where poor Filipinos are heavily represented. Farmers need to learn to become innovators and risk managers. They need to be more market-oriented and focused on adding value to produce rather than just farming and selling their produce at farm-gate prices. This is where education—not only for current farmers but also for next-generation agripreneurs—comes in.

Obviously, agripreneurs would need more than just skills to make a significant impact in far-flung agricultural communities. The government continues to invest in the farm-to-market roads, bridges, and nautical highways required for efficient and effective inter-island transfer of goods in an archipelago of 7,000 islands. These investments constitute the “hardware” needed to empower agripreneurs. The Department of Education and the Commission on Higher Education need to make available the “software”—the agripreneurship curriculum—to those Filipinos willing to stake their future in agricultural communities.

Poverty in the Philippines continues to be a rural phenomenon. While the desire of government to educate the rural poor and make them self-reliant is strong, the resources needed for such a program are wanting. Thus, the participation of civil service organizations and the private sector is a tremendous boost in this direction. There are many approaches to take, which are not mutually exclusive. What is clear is the goal of making the agricultural poor more productive by equipping them with entrepreneurial skills and making available financial resources to do so.

Finally, the various models presented were initiated by the private sector at different times. The FFS model has taken much more time to gain momentum than the GK model. Yet all four models seem to converge. It would be interesting for researchers to map the progress of each of these models and to assess their impact. The results of the FFS model can also be compared to its counterparts in France and Spain, where the

program originated, and other countries, with the caveat that the agriculture sector in the country faces much more constraints and challenges than those in more developed countries. In the process, specific enabling and deterring factors can be determined.

## References

- Acs, Z., & Szerb, L. (2007). Entrepreneurship, economic growth, and public policy. *Small Business Economics*, 28(2–3), 109–122. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11187-006-9012-3>
- Agricultural Market Information System. (2011). *Enhancing market transparency*. Rome: AMIS Secretariat. Retrieved from <http://www.ifad.org/english/market/amis.pdf>
- Atchoarena, D., & Gasperini, L. (2003). *Education for rural development: Towards new policy responses*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and Paris, France: UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001329/132994e.pdf>
- Audinet, J. P., & Haralambous, S. (2005). *Achieving the Millennium Development Goals: Rural investment and enabling policy*. Rome: International Fund for Agricultural Development. Retrieved from <http://www.ifad.org/events/gc/28/panel/e.pdf>
- Bolido, L. (2014, February 11). The farm school without a farm. *The Philippine Daily Inquirer*. Retrieved from <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/576450/the-farm-school-without-a-farm>
- Bordey, F., & Litonjua, A. (2013). Curing the cause rather than the symptom: The case of rice smuggling. *Rice Science for Decision Makers*, 4(1).
- Busenitz, L., Gomez, C., & Spencer, J. (2000). Country institutional profiles: Unlocking entrepreneurial phenomena. *Academy of Management Journal*, 43(5), 994–1003. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1556423>
- Cai, O. (2013, March 21). PH may continue rice imports after 2013. *Rappler*. Retrieved from <http://www.rappler.com/business/industries/247-agriculture/24331-ph-may-continue-rice-imports-after-2013>
- Cariño, C. (2013, June 22). Aging Filipino farmers to affect food security. *Manila Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.manilatimes.net/aging-filipino-farmers-to-affect-food-security/12166/>
- Carroll, N. (2010, January). Microfinance in the Philippines. *Asia Focus*. Retrieved from <http://www.frbsf.org/banking-supervision/publications/asia-focus/2010/january/microfinance-philippines/january.pdf>
- Casauay, A. (2014, May 22). PH farmers endangered specials. *Rappler*. Retrieved from <http://www.rappler.com/business/special-report/world-economic-forum/2014/58607-ph-farmers-endangered-species-panglilan>
- Claro, J. (2011, June 8). Learning is fun in family farm schools. *Philippine Star*. Retrieved from <http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=693630&publicationSubCategoryId=80>
- Corbett, A. (2005). Experiential learning within the process of opportunity identification and exploitation. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 29(4), 473–491.
- Dehesa, T. (2013). *The journey out of poverty*. Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Gawad Kalinga Community Development Foundation. Retrieved from <http://www.gk1world.com/journey-out-of-poverty>
- Fernandez–San Valentin, C., & Berja, J. (2012). *Philippine food and nutrition security atlas*. Makati City, Philippines: World Food Programme–Philippines. Retrieved from <http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp246455.pdf>
- Gawad Kalinga. (2014). About the Gawad Kalinga Enchanted Forest. Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.gk1world.com/gk-enchanted-farm>
- Graham, T. (2014, September 14). Chasing the Filipino dream. *The Philippine Star*. Retrieved from <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2014/09/14/1368909/chasing-filipino-dream>
- Habaradas, R. & Aquino, M. (2010). *Gawad Kalinga: Innovation in the city (and beyond)* (Working Paper Series 2010-01C). Manila: De La Salle University–Angelo King Institute. Retrieved from <http://gk1world.com/innovation-in-the-city-%28and-beyond%29>
- Habaradas, R. (2012). *Corporate social initiatives in the Philippines: The experiences of two corporate foundations* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Organization and Management Department, De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines.

- Hernando-Malipot, I. (2012, June 3). School merges farm and classroom. *Manila Bulletin*. Retrieved from <http://mb.com.ph/articles/361073/school-merges-farm-and-classroom>
- Hull, K. (2009). Understanding the relationship between economic growth, employment and poverty reduction. In Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Ed.), *Promoting pro-poor growth: employment* (pp. 69–93). Paris: OECD Press. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/dac/povertyreduction/43514554.pdf>
- Islam, R. (2004). *The nexus of economic growth, employment and poverty reduction: An empirical analysis* (Discussion Paper 14). Geneva: International Labour Office. Retrieved from [http://ilo.int/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_120690.pdf](http://ilo.int/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_120690.pdf)
- Kahan, D. (2007). *Farm management extension services: A review of global experience* (Occasional Paper 21). Rome: Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN. Retrieved from <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/010/a1494e/a1494e00.pdf>
- Karnani, A. (2007). Misfortune at the bottom of the pyramid. *Greener Management International*, 51, 99–110.
- Knudson, W., Wysocki, A., Champagne, J., & Peterson, H. C. (2004). Entrepreneurship and innovation in the agri-food system. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 86(5), 1330–1336. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.0002-9092.2004.00685.x>
- Lamb, W., & Sherman, H. (2010). Developing high-growth businesses in rural areas: A study of four US states. *New England Journal of Entrepreneurship*, 13(2), 9–19.
- Martin, K. (2014, July 20). Banks' agra loans still below law's mandate. *The Philippine Star*. Retrieved from <http://www.philstar.com/business/2014/07/20/1348130/banks-agra-loans-still-below-laws-mandate>
- McElwee, G., & Annibal, I. (2009). Business support for farmers: A necessary evil? *International Journal of Rural Management*, 5(2), 175–195. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/097300521000500203>
- Meloto, T. (2011). *P-Noy at the GK Enchanted Farm*. Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Gawad Kalinga Community Development Foundation. Retrieved from <http://gk1world.com/p-noy-at-the-gk-enchanted-farm>
- Mendoza, R. (2011). Why do the poor pay more? Exploring the poverty penalty concept. *Journal of International Development*, 23(1), 1–28.
- Meralco Foundation Inc. (2009). *MFI-FBI partners with URS and MAP for ladderized farm business curriculum*. Manila: MFI. Retrieved from <http://www.mfi.org.ph/news/mfi-fbi-partners-urs-map-ladderized-farm-business-curriculum/>
- Morales, N. J. (2008, September 11). Farm school to teach entrepreneurship. Manila: GMA Network. Retrieved from <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/119502/news/nation/farm-school-to-teach-entrepreneurship>
- National Economic and Development Authority. (2011). *Philippine development plan 2011–2016*. Pasig City, Philippines: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.neda.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/pdprm2011-2016.pdf>
- O'Neill, G., Hershauer, J., & Golden, J. (2009). The cultural context of sustainability entrepreneurship. *Greener Management International*, 55, 33–46.
- Okabe, M. (2013). *Where does Philippine education go? The 'K-to-12' program and reform of the Philippine basic education system* (Discussion Paper 425). Chiba City, Japan: Institute of Developing Economies. Retrieved from <http://www.ide.go.jp/English/Publish/Download/Dp/pdf/425.pdf>
- Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA]. (2013). *Selected statistics on agriculture 2013*. Quezon City, Philippines: PSA. Retrieved from [http://www.bas.gov.ph/?ids=downloads\\_view&id=653](http://www.bas.gov.ph/?ids=downloads_view&id=653)
- PSA. (2015). *Higher education enrolment in government and private schools by discipline group*. Quezon City, Philippines: PSA. Retrieved from [http://www.nscb.gov.ph/secstat/d\\_educ.asp](http://www.nscb.gov.ph/secstat/d_educ.asp)
- Plougastel, V. K. (n. d.). *The MFR in France and in the world*. Paris: Union Nationale des Maisons Familiales Rurales. Retrieved from <http://www.mfr.asso.fr/mfr-dans-le-monde/Documents/presentation-des-MFR-en-anglais.pdf>
- Republic Act 10618. (2013). *Rural Farm Schools Act*. Manila: Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines. Retrieved from <http://www.gov.ph/2013/09/03/republic-act-no-10618/>
- Richards, S., & Bulkley, S. (2007). *Agricultural entrepreneurs: The first and the forgotten?* (Hudson Institute: Entrepreneurship Research Paper Series 07-01). Washington, D.C.: Hudson Institute. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1020697>

- Romano. (2012). Family farm schools: An effective formation for finding a first job. *Romana: Bulletin of the Prelature of the Holy Cross*. Rome: Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei. Retrieved from [http://en.romana.org/art/54\\_6.0\\_1](http://en.romana.org/art/54_6.0_1)
- Rosero, E.V. (2013, March 17). Ranks of underemployed plus jobless Pinoys swell to 10.8M — NSO survey. Manila: GMA Network. Retrieved from <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/299663/economy/business/ranks-of-underemployed-plusjobless-pinoys-swell-to-10-8m-nsa-survey>
- Santiago, A. (2014, August 4). From farmer to agripreneurs. *Manila Times Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.manilatimes.net/farmer-agripreneurs/116435/>
- Singh, A., & Krishna, K. V. S. M. (1994). Entrepreneurship and agricultural development. *Journal of Entrepreneurship*, 3(1), 97–111.
- Suarez, K.D. (2012). ‘Unpopular’ courses the road less travelled. *Rappler*. Retrieved from <http://www.rappler.com/nation/7394-the-less-popular-route>
- Tacoli, C. (2011). Links between rural and urban development in Africa and Asia. In UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Population Division (Ed.), *Population distribution, urbanization, internal migration and development: An international perspective* (pp. 110–122). New York: UN DESA.
- Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (2011). *Investing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century skilled Filipino workforce*. Taguig, Philippines: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.tesda.gov.ph/uploads/File/LMIR2011/july2012/NTESDP%20Final%20asofScpt12.pdf>
- Timmer, C.P. (2005). *Agriculture and pro-poor growth: An Asian perspective* (Working Paper 63). Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development. Retrieved from [http://www.cgdev.org/files/2986\\_file\\_WP63\\_1.pdf](http://www.cgdev.org/files/2986_file_WP63_1.pdf)
- United Nations General Assembly. (2013). *A life of dignity for all: Accelerating progress towards the millennium development goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015*. New York: Report of the Director-General, Sixty-Eighth Session, UN. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/A%20Life%20of%20Dignity%20for%20All.pdf>
- United Nations Development Programme. (2008). *Creating value for all: Strategies for doing business with the poor. Executive summary*. New York: Author. Retrieved from [http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rwanda/docs/povred/RW\\_rp\\_Creating\\_Value\\_for\\_All\\_Doing\\_Business\\_with\\_the\\_Poor.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rwanda/docs/povred/RW_rp_Creating_Value_for_All_Doing_Business_with_the_Poor.pdf)
- Vallianatos, M., Gottlieb, R., & Haase, M.A. (2004). Farm-to-school: Strategies for urban health, combating sprawl, and establishing a community food systems approach. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 23(4), 414–423. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0739456X04264765>
- van Stel, A., Carree, M., & Thurik, R. (2005). The effect of entrepreneurial activity on national economic growth. *Small Business Economics*, 24(3), 311–321.
- von Braun, J., & Diaz-Bonilla, E. (2008). *Globalization of food and agriculture and the poor* (Issue Brief 52). Washington, D.C.: International Food Policy Research Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.ifpri.org/sites/default/files/publications/ib52.pdf>
- Williams, L., & McGuire, S. (2010). Economic creativity and innovation implementation: The entrepreneurial drivers of growth? Evidence from 63 countries. *Small Business Economics*, 34(4), 391–412. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11187-008-9145-7>





## Unraveling the differences between organic and non-organic Thai rice farmers' environmental views and perceptions of well-being

Alexander Harrow Kaufman \*  
Khon Kaen University

Submitted September 25, 2014 / Revised January 21, March 4, April 14, and May 4, 2015 / Accepted May 4, 2015 / Published online July 17, 2015

Citation: Kaufman, A. H. (2015). Unraveling the differences between organic and non-organic Thai rice farmers' environmental views and perceptions of well-being. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 29–47. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.002>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

Food production, a critical aspect of human development, depends on the regulating and supporting services of the ecosystem. However, the expansion and intensification of agriculture to meet rising human consumption levels have played havoc with ecosystem provisioning services by way of climate change, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and water pollution. Development experts argue that modern agricultural methods also have led to the exodus of farmers from rural to urban areas and the disintegration of rural social safety nets. Few studies have explored the impacts of a shift to modern agricultural methods on farmers' well-being from a holistic perspective. This research sheds light on organic and non-organic farmers' environmental views, well-being, and production

methods in the impoverished Northeast Region of Thailand. Structured questionnaires were used to examine differences in farmers' perspectives on their own well-being. Analysis shows that a Buddhist environmental worldview was not exclusive to either organic or non-organic farmers. Organic rice farmers were no more food secure than those farmers who used synthetic agrochemicals to raise productivity. Participants from both groups also suffered from similar levels of stress due to outstanding loans. While some organic farmers sustained high levels of food security and were able to lower debts by using organic fertilizer methods, they also were bound by the financial demands of their families. It is highly recommended that experts consider farmers' environmental views and perceptions of well-being before deciding on ways to attract them to organic agriculture.

### Keywords

organic agriculture, Buddhism, environmental, well-being, world views

---

\* Alexander Harrow Kaufman, MSc, Ph.D., Research Fellow, Research Group on Wellbeing and Sustainable Development; 2405-2406, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Building HS 02; Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences; Khon Kaen University; 123 Mitraparb Road, Muang District 40002; Khon Kaen Province, Thailand; [kaufman.alex@gmail.com](mailto:kaufman.alex@gmail.com)

## Introduction

Food production, a critical aspect of human well-being, depends on the regulating and supporting services of the ecosystem<sup>1</sup> through nutrient cycling, primary production, and soil formation (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment [MA], 2005). Over the last century, humankind has greatly expanded the food supply through technological innovations in agriculture: hybrid seeds, synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides. On the other hand, the expansion and intensification of agriculture to meet rising human consumption levels have played havoc with ecosystem provisioning services (e.g., food, water, fiber, and fuel) by way of climate change, biodiversity loss, and soil degradation (Drinkwater, Letouneau, Workneh, van Bruggen, & Shennan, 1995; Sandhu, Wratten, & Cullen, 2010; United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2007). The excessive use of synthetic fertilizers to raise farm productivity also has degraded water quality and caused a decline in fisheries (McIsaac, David, Gertner, & Goolsby, 2001). While experts argue that synthetic fertilizers are integral to expanding food production, studies show that organic methods of stimulating soil fertility offer equivalent yields (Pimentel, Hepperly, Hanson, Douds, & Seidel, 2005). Moreover, researchers have found that farming methods heavily reliant on pesticides cause serious health problems for farmers and their families (Schreinemachers, Schad, Tipraqsa, Williams, Neef, Riwthong, Sangchan & Grovermann, 2012). Despite greater knowledge of the impacts of high input, intensive agriculture on ecosystem services, the pursuit of increased yields continues to be a dominant factor in the decision-making of farmers, governmental agencies, and nonprofit organizations.

Responding to these challenges, alternative agriculturalists have called for a shift to organic agriculture methods (Pretty, 2003). Scholars contend that organic agriculture represents an alternative paradigm of development rooted in renewable inputs, traditional knowledge, communal labor, fresh markets, and localized food networks. Critics

of what has been named “conventional agriculture” contend that the use of intensive agriculture methods has degraded food quality (Allen, 2004; Beus & Dunlap, 1990). Moreover, the expansion of global food supply chains has dislocated consumers from their “foodsheds” (Feagan, 2007). Jarosz (2000) found that this reconfiguration of the food production system has eroded the “relations of trust” that once existed between farmers and consumers. Further changes associated with “conventional” forms of agricultural development have been blamed for the gradual decay of rural society in both developing and developed economies (Pretty, 2003).

Although scholarship has uncovered some of the societal benefits of alternative agriculture, the composition of food production systems in developing countries differ greatly from the that described in North American and European agro-food literature (Bacongus & Cruz, 2005; Curry, 2000; Duram, 2000). A major distinction is that Western supermarkets stock large quantities of organic and non-organic crops cultivated in developing countries. Moreover, North American organic farms depend on a largely migrant workforce and have reached an industrial scale (Allen, 2004). In contrast, the Thai organic marketplace is dominated by locally grown crops produced on smallholder farms of less than 12.4 acres (5 hectares) (Panyakul & Wanlop, 2007). Smallholder farmers also have benefited from a growth in consumer demand for organic products. Then again, certified organic agriculture has only reached one percent of Thailand’s arable land (McNeely & Scherr, 2003; Willer & Yussefi, 2004). With an aim to increase these numbers, experts have sought to explore the reasons so few Thai farmers have made the shift to organic agriculture (Hutanawat & Hutanawat, 2006; Samerpak, 2006; Thongtawee, 2006; Kaufman & Mock, 2014). However, less is known about the ways farmers benefit from a shift to organic agricultural methods. This article explores differences between Thai organic and non-organic rice farmers by asking two principal

---

<sup>1</sup> “An ecosystem is a dynamic complex of plant, animal, and microorganism communities and the nonliving environment interacting as a functional unit. Humans are an integral part of

ecosystems” (Millennium Ecosystems Assessment [MA], 2005, p. 23).

questions: Is there a fundamental difference between the environmental views of organic and non-organic farmers? Do farmers who use only organic agricultural methods experience well-being differently than farmers who rely on agro-chemicals?

#### *Ecosystems Services and Human Well-being*

To achieve adequate levels of well-being, human society depends upon the integrity of ecosystem services. However, the ways in which people access these services directly affect their culture, food security, health, social relationships, socio-economic status, and perceptions of well-being. Of further significance, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) Conceptual Framework highlights the intangible benefits of a healthy ecosystem to human well-being: “spiritual and religious value, knowledge systems, educational value, inspiration, aesthetic value, social relations, sense of place, cultural heritage and recreation” (MA, 2005, p. vii). Along these lines, decision-makers have shown greater interest in using “subjective” measures of well-being to evaluate the quality of people’s lives, particularly in developing countries (Rojas, 2007).

Building on the MA, this research examines the premise of an interrelationship between farmers’ perceptions of their wellness and the integrity of their agro-ecosystems. As Paknawin-Mock (2000) explains, “Thais believe that mental, spiritual and bodily well-being are intertwined one with another” (p. 11). In other words, Thais experience health from a holistic perspective, rather than only through an “absence of disease and infirmity” (World Health Organization, 1946, p. 2). Experts have found that a single question designed to evaluate participants’ overall wellness is often an accurate indicator of “good” health (Bowling, 2005). Drentea and Lavrakas (2000) revealed that debt bears on health through related increases in stress levels. Researchers also have linked reduced access to culturally appropriate and nutritious foods with a decline in the health of some indigenous people (Kuhnlein et al., 2006). In addition, as many farmer households no longer cultivate a diversity of food products, their ability to meet their dietary demands hinges upon the

prices they attain for their goods in the marketplace (Sen, 1986).

#### *The Development of Organic Agriculture in Thailand*

During the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, development policies pursued by the Thai government resulted in widespread environmental degradation. A combined increase in dam projects, logging concessions, and commercial farming led to unprecedented levels of deforestation. To expand forest cover, the government established a number of national parks and reserves throughout the Thai state (Hardwick, Healey, Elliott, & Blakesley, 2004). In the process, forests became more secure. However, communities along the periphery of these reserves were prevented from access to wild foods, barter, and places of spiritual value. While social activists fought for the rights of villagers to the forest, others sought to prevent encroachment, on the grounds that nature has an intrinsic value (Darlington, 2012).

In the 1980s, local civil society organizations (CSOs) began to invoke specific Buddhist scriptures with the intent of fostering an environmental consciousness in the rural population. In doing so environmental and social activists were constructing an environmental ethic upon the teachings of the Four Noble Truths (related to the reduction of *dukkha* or suffering). According to Kabilsingh (2010), practicing Buddhists have an obligation to diminish *dukkha* by radiating loving-kindness towards both sentient and insentient beings. Henning (2002) further explains, “Buddhist teachings recognize that all living things are interdependent and conditional upon each other” (p. 12).

As a means to translate these abstract teachings into concrete actions, some Thai Buddhist monks took it upon themselves to ordain trees by wrapping them with saffron robes. However, this spiritual defense from the chainsaws of villagers and logging companies led to increased tensions over land rights. As a result of these actions, some prominent forest monks were arrested, intimidated, and even murdered by purportedly “influential people” (Darlington, 2012). In spite of the good intentions of these monks, a number of Buddhist scholars have questioned the legitimacy of using

ceremonies reserved for humankind in the name of the forest (Falvey, 2000).

In the 1980s, a growing awareness of the environmental and health impacts of using synthetic agro-chemicals convinced some farmers to adopt alternative agriculture methods. Inspired by the sermons of the late Buddhahassa Bhikku (former abbot of the Suan Mokh Temple, Surathani Province, Southern Thailand), CSOs funded programs aimed at restoring dignity to the profession of farming (Bhikkhu, 1991/2002) and forestalling environmental degradation through *Buddhakaset* (Buddhist agriculture) (Bhikkhu, 1991/2002). Social activists worked with alternative agriculture leaders to ensure they were developing courses for farmers that emphasized the value of a Thai traditional way of life informed by Buddhist values (Wasi, 1988).

The Santi Asoke (SA) religious sect called upon these interpretations of the Buddhist scriptures as a road map for development. Led by the former monk Samana Bodhirak,<sup>2</sup> SA was one of the first to take on *Buddhakaset* at a community level. To bring their concept of a Buddhist utopia to fruition, a strict dogma was enacted based on principles of morality, reduced consumption and hard work (Essen, 2005). Members also took a vow to follow the Five Precepts: (1) not to kill any living being; (2) not to take what is not freely given by the owner (stealing); (3) not to indulge in sexual misconduct; (4) not to lie; and (5) not to consume intoxicants. To abide by the First Precept, followers elected to use only natural agriculture methods (Henning, 2002; Payutto, 1998). They also manufactured their own organic food products and adhered to a strict vegan diet. In this way, SA members succeeded in both raising their level of self-sufficiency and warding off the influences of an increasingly materialist society (at least within the walls of their communes). Bodhirak and his followers established nine long-standing Buddhist

communes with funding from private donations, vegan restaurants, and cooperatives stores (Kaewthep, 2008).

Although alternative agriculture CSOs have invoked abstract Buddhist scriptures to advocate for agriculture methods that cause minimal harm to nature, experts also have developed a number of scientific techniques used by organic and non-organic farmers alike. Setboonsarng and Gilman (1999) note the popularity of Thai versions of the Japanese biofertilizer Effective Microorganisms (EM). Many CSOs have taught farmers how to make EM by mixing a combination of food scraps, beneficial microbes, and molasses and fermenting them in water. In addition, the secular Bangkok-based Green Net Cooperative/Earth Net Foundation has provided training on organic certification requirements<sup>3</sup> as well as entered into purchasing agreements with member farmers (International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements [IFOAM], n.d.; Samerpak, 2006). Trainers from diverse organizations have emphasized the importance of growing and consuming organic products as a preventive health measure. Increasingly, courses have included modules on detoxification and the use of traditional Thai herbal medicines (Kaufman & Mock, 2014).

In the 1990s, the interests of alternative agriculture CSOs began to merge with various programs under financial support from the Thai Royal family, in particular the Sufficiency Economy (SE) philosophy. Formulated by the king of Thailand, Bhumipol Adulyadej, SE is a flexible set of guidelines aimed at encouraging the public to moderate consumption patterns, sustain reasonable levels of development and provide immunity from fluctuations in external markets (Chantalakhana & Falvey, 2008). To promote SE, CSOs and government organizations have developed training courses around the concept of a three-stage process: building integrated farms (also referred to

<sup>2</sup> In 1992, Samana Bodhirak was defrocked by the Central Buddhist Order in Bangkok for breaching monastic precepts.

<sup>3</sup> According to the *Guidance Document for Compliance with Organic Agriculture Certification Thailand (ACT)*: (1) Synthetic fertilizers are prohibited; (2) Insecticides and herbicides are prohibited; (3) Synthetic hormones are prohibited; (4) Farm equipment used for conventional

farming shall not be used for organic farming; (5) The farmer must maintain records of sources of all farm inputs; (6) Crops in organic fields must be separate from crops in conventional fields; (7) Organic crops must be at a minimum 3.3 feet (1 meter) away from conventional crops. Note: ACT guidelines have been abbreviated for use in this paper.

as New Theory Agriculture), raising community-level integrity and setting up supportive regional networks (Sathirathai & Piboolsravut, 2004). Under the government's Ninth National Social and Economic Development Plan (2002–2006), SE philosophy was formally integrated into a set of policy directives aimed at sustainable agricultural development: integrated farming systems, organic farming, natural farming and agro-forestry (Thongtawee, 2006). Government agencies worked closely with alternative agriculture CSOs to deliver SE training programs to farmers nationwide.

In spite of the value of external support, the availability of family-based labor and access to key resources are critical to sustaining organic agriculture in Thailand (Kiatsuphimol, 2002). Researchers found that in the northeastern Thai province of Yasothon, organic farmers who built up small-scale, village-based collectives were better equipped to sustain organic rice production. These small-scale collectives provided access to fertilizer components, machinery, and rice-milling machines (Hutanawat & Hutanawat, 2006). The benefits participants accrued played a part in increased levels of social capital among members (Putnam, 2008). Importantly, these social connections provided a basis for sharing information about organic agriculture (Kaufman, 2012). Thongtawee (2006) reported that Thai organic farmers used the term *kalyanamitta* (“virtuous friends” in Pali, the language of Theravada Buddhism) to describe the benefits of working together. Recent research shows a correlation between membership in organic fertilizer collectives and a reduction in debt among members of the Dharma Garden (Buddhist) Temple in Yasothon Province (Kaufman & Mock, 2014). While these studies suggest that membership in organic agriculture collectives offers multiple benefits, critics claim that these systems are less profitable due to the additional labor demands required of individual farmers (Becchetti, Conzo & Gianfreda, 2012). Although the aforementioned arguments are noteworthy, few studies have exhibited the nonfinancial benefits of a shift to organic agriculture through quantitative research methods. Notwithstanding, this research also examines financial status as one of several

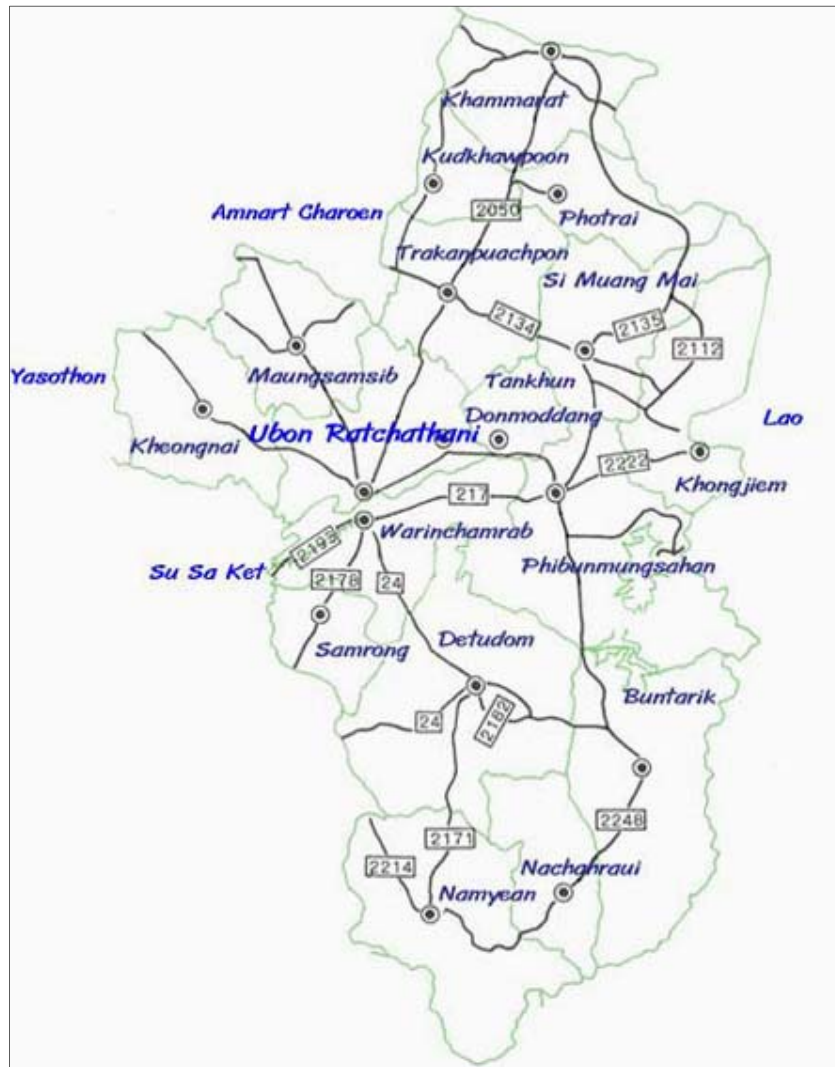
components that determine Thai farmers' perceptions of their well-being.

### Scope of the Study

Fearing that rapid population growth in Asia would overtake food production levels, policy-makers sought ways to raise the food supply. Researchers at the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines assisted by developing new breeds of rice that grew faster, produced more edible flesh than traditional varieties, and were resistant to specific predator species (White, 1994). Rice production levels were improved through an increase in synthetic fertilizers and a steady water supply. Later, pesticides, herbicides, and machinery were introduced to manage pest problems and reduce labor requirements. To exploit this so-called Green Revolution technology, the Thai government enacted a series of policy changes to assist farmers (Shiva, 1991; UNDP, 1994). The first measure was “security of land title,” which enabled farmers to use their land as collateral for agricultural loans (Panyakul & Wanlop, 2007). A national system of cooperatives was instituted to provide farmers with improved access to agro-chemicals and market access. These initiatives were solidified in the 1960s by the national government's decision to set up a cooperative banking system, later renamed the Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives, or BAAC (Ratanamalai, 1998). Whereas access to capital helped cooperative members negotiate lower purchase prices, most of the funds were used to purchase synthetic fertilizers (Preedasak & NaRanong, 1998).

Significantly, the expansion of these government supported credit systems enabled farmers in Thailand's Central Region to raise production levels. However, farmers in the Northeast Region (*Issan*) (Figure 1) have been hindered by poor soil quality, infrequent rainfall, and a lack of access to irrigated water (Grandstaff, Grandstaff, Limpinuntana, & Suphanchaimat, 2008). Further data show that *Issan* farmers have suffered from high debt levels and lower wages than their counterparts in the Central Region (National Statistics Office, 2011). To raise earnings, *Issan* farmers have shifted from seasonal production



**Figure 1. Ubon Ratchathani, Northeast Region of Thailand**

schedules to multiple cropping systems. To afford mechanical innovations, such as the *kway lhek* (iron buffalo, a Kubota brand hand-held tractor), farmers have taken temporary jobs in Bangkok (Falvey, 2000; Funahasi, 1996). The concomitant shortage of village-based labor has led to the virtual disappearance of nonmonetary labor exchange (Tanabe, 1994). While these problems are endemic to much of Thailand, the socio-economic and environmental challenges of raising agricultural productivity in *Issan* have continued to obstruct

attempts to raise household income levels (National Statistics Office, 2011; Rigg, 1997).

Although Theravada Buddhism<sup>4</sup> forms an integral part of the social structure of *Issan* rural life, many people also pay reverence to *Mae Thoranee* (Earth Mother), *Mae Khongka* (River Mother), *Mae Phosop* (Rice Mother), and *Khwan Khao* (Rice soul) (Sirisai, 1990). However, as part of the centralization of government authority in the early 1900s, many of these animist beliefs were brought under the auspices of the Thai *Sangha* (Buddhist administration based in Bangkok). One critical aspect of the resulting changes was the incorporation of animist rituals into what the Thai government called the *Heed Sipsong* (twelve customs): “offering food to ancestors and guardians; receiving great sermons; showering festival; praying for rain; offering food and respect to house and community; Buddhist lent; offering food and making merit to ancestors; offering food and paying respect to paddy guardians; completion of

lent; making grand merit; praying for forgiveness” (Panya, 1995, p. 163). As part of their duties, rural government officers worked to make these new customs a part of community life. From a development perspective, the imposition of the *Heed Sipsong* helped set the stage for a shift from a village-based to a planned economy (Panya, 1995). This article examines the lives of rice farmers in Ubon Ratchathani, one of 19 provinces in *Issan*. Similar to most *Issan* people, the inhabitants of Ubon Ratchathani are primarily of the Laotian

<sup>4</sup> Theravada Buddhism, or the “Teaching of the Elders,” is said to have migrated from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and to have taken hold on the Siam (Thai) Peninsula between the sixth and

ninth centuries. The Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the Dependent Origination, and the law of Karma are the key principles of Theravada Buddhism (Payutto, 2001).

ethnic group. Although most speak Thai (the official language), the *Issan* language (a dialect of Lao) is widely used by rural dwellers and government officials. Ubon Ratchathani is historically significant, having served as the seat of administration for the Northeast Region during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868–1910) (Wyatt, 1982). Ubon Ratchathani is also a major trading center, bordering Laos to the east and Cambodia to the south. Despite its strategic location, agriculture is still a principal form of employment. As in most parts of *Issan*, Ubon farmers grow jasmine rice for sale and glutinous (sticky) rice primarily for home consumption. *Issan* farmers supplement dietary requirements by gathering food in community forests and fish, frogs, and wild vegetables from their rice paddies. In the rainy season, these naturally occurring food sources may make up to half of their dietary requirements (Lovelace, Subhadhira & Simarks, 1998). In the last few decades *Issan* farmers have shifted away from subsistence rice farming to cultivate a variety of cash crops, such as cassava, corn, sugar cane, eucalyptus, and rubber trees (Falvey, 2000).

## Methods

Pondering the ways in which people in rural and urban areas relate to the natural environment, Western researchers have increasingly turned to mixed methods (Duram, 2000; Modell, 2009; Sullivan, McCann, De Young, & Erickson, 1996). Beus and Dunlap (1990) used qualitative methods to explore differences between two “competing paradigms” of agricultural development. Kempton, Boster, and Hartley (1997) used structured questionnaires to show that environmental decision-making in North America was based on “cultural models,” or the beliefs and values shared by a community or society. The architects of the “New Environmental Paradigm” employed statistical models to measure human “beliefs concerning their relationship to the natural world” (Mayer & Frantz, 2004, p. 505). Although the tools they employed provided a useful framework for designing this research, the aforementioned studies speak to people in developed economies whose values are largely influenced by a “built environment” and

formal education systems (Franklin, 2002).

## *Sampling and Data*

Due to the challenges of independently gaining access to farmers in rural areas of Northeast Thailand, I requested assistance from the BAAC provincial office in Ubon Ratchathani in the recruitment of participants. The BAAC provided a list of 247 farmers that had enrolled in the Sufficiency Economy (SE) Philosophy Community Pilot Project in 2012. This BAAC-sponsored training program aimed to teach participants ways to raise their level of self-reliance by reducing household expenses. Participants also learned how to account for monthly expenses, make organic fertilizers, grow vegetables for household consumption, work in groups, and retain local knowledge of farming practices.

An exhaustive review of the participant list revealed that roughly half of the organic farmers used organic methods on only a small portion of their landholdings (less than 2.5 acres or 1 hectare). Moreover, many participants reported that they had given up cultivating these so-called “experimental” plots a few years after the initial BAAC trainings. As such, a purposive sampling method was decided upon to choose organic and non-organic farmers for this research. The total sample of 139 (75 organic and 64 non-organic) farmers who participated in this study were located in seven districts of Ubon Ratchathani Province: Trakan Phutphon, Det Udom, Samrong, Khuan Nai, Muang Samsip, and Tan Sum. The distribution of the sample was based on the number of participants who presented themselves for interviews at the dates and locations set by the BAAC. Interviews were conducted around participants’ farms, collectives, and meeting areas, and at BAAC district offices.

A structured questionnaire was designed to elicit information about participants’ households, environmental views, perception of well-being, and production methods. Well-being was examined in terms of participants’ ability to achieve “good” health and fulfill dietary requirements, material needs, and social and family aspirations (MA, 2005; Rojas, 2007). Queries were formulated based on

Northeastern Thai beliefs, customs, and farming practices, and as well as teachings disseminated by Thai alternative agriculture CSOs (Author name(s) removed, 2012; Essen, 2005; Hutanawat & Hutanawat, 2006; Thongtawee, 2006). The construction of questions and responses were adopted from previous research on farmers in North America and Thailand (Kaufman, 2012; National Institute of Health, 2006).

Demographic data, items with responses measured on a Likert scale, and multiple-choice items from the questionnaires were analyzed by generating descriptive statistics with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v.18) computer

software. As a method to provide greater congruence between responses, these variables were transformed (recoded in a consistent direction). The variables selected for use in this article were chosen based on congruence, relevance, and a positive association through preliminary analyses using Pearson's correlations (see Table 1).

Cross tabulations were used to interpret demographic variations between organic and non-organic farmers. One-way ANOVAs were used to compare mean differences on measures for the two groups (organic and non-organic farmers). *F* tests of significance were used to determine whether the *F* values were significant at a 5% level ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 1. Key Categories, Related Questions, and Responses**

Subject	Variables	Scales
Environmental Views	(a) First Precept means "not to kill living things on the farm" (b) Farmers have a duty to protect the environment on their farms (c) Agro-chemicals damage the natural environment (d) Agro-chemicals produce harmful food for consumers	(a) and (b) high score=high level of agreement with a Buddhist environmental ethic (1-5) (c) and (d) high scores=pro-environmental worldview (1-5)
Health Views	(a) Sad, angry, depressed due to financial situation (b) Physical pain interrupted farm work in last 3 months (c) Stamina compared with other farmers your age (d) Describe your current health status	(a) high score=low incidence of feeling sad and/or angry (1-4) (b) high score=low incidence of pain (1-4) (c) high score=high level of stamina (1-4) (d) high score=high level of health (1-5)
Financial Views	(a) Non-agricultural income (b) Loan status over last 5 years (c) Income trend over the last 5 years	(a) dichotomous variables (0, 1), 0=no, 1=yes (b) high score=low level of loans (1-6) (c) high score=high level of income stability (1-5)
Social Relations	(a) Member of a fertilizer collective (b) Good friends in collective (c) Expert knowledge of organic in collective (d) Do you exchange labor in collective (e) Exchange of labor for how many tasks	(a) and (d) dichotomous variables (0, 1), 0=no, 1=yes (b) high score=high level of social relations (0-2) (c) high score=high level of knowledge (1-4) (e) high score=high number of tasks (0-2)
Production Methods	(a) Use of effective microorganisms (b) Use of wood vinegar (c) Use of green manure (d) Use of manure	dichotomous variables (0, 1), 0=no, 1=yes
Food Security	(a) Diversity of household food from your farm (b) Lacking sufficient food for household (times per month) (c) Percentage of household food provided by naturally occurring sources on your farm	(a) high score=high diversity of farm-based food access (1-5) (b) high score=infrequency of days lacking sufficient food (1-5) (c) high score=high percentage of food from natural sources (1-5)



## Results and Discussion

### *Demographic Differences Between Organic and Non-Organic Farmers*

The farmers who participated in this research used both organic and non-organic methods to stimulate the productivity of their rice fields. Of a total sample of 139 farmers, 54% were classified as organic farmers based on the non-use of synthetic agro-chemicals (i.e., synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides). The non-organic farmers group (46% of the sample) was composed of those who employed one or more agro-chemicals. While 75 participants reported using exclusively organic agriculture methods, only 19 exhibited the capacity and knowledge to follow organic certification requirements.

In terms of gender differences (Table 2), there was a slightly higher percentage (45%) of female organic farmers compared with non-organic farmers (39%). While organic farmers supported more children, non-organic farmers had more adults in their households. This data suggest that the elder children of non-organic farmers have gained employment or pursued educational opportunities outside of their community. More than half (60%) of organic farmers had not studied beyond primary school, which suggests that a higher level of education completed was not directly related to a decision to adopt organic methods. While the BAAC promoted the diversification of landholdings, a similar percentage of farmers from both groups cultivated

vegetables and cash crops (cassava and rubber). Notwithstanding, a greater percentage (57%) of organic farmers engaged in animal husbandry, which indicates they had access to fresh manure and an additional source of income. Despite the use of an artificial water supply by non-organic farmers to cultivate a second rice crop, a higher percentage (44%) of organic farmers reported having access to irrigated water. A substantial share (more than two-thirds) of participants from both groups rented additional farmland to earn a living. These data indicate that farmers owned insufficient

**Table 2. Demographic Differences Between Organic and Non-Organic Farmers**

Variables	Organic (n=75)		Non-Organic (n=65)	
	#	(%)	#	(%)
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	41	54.7	39	60.9
Female	34	45.3	25	39.1
<b>Marital Status</b>				
Single	2	2.7	0	0
Married	63	84.0	61	95.3
Separate, divorced, or widowed	10	13.3	3	4.7
<b>Age</b>				
18 to 40	13	17.3	9	14.1
41 or older	62	82.7	55	85.9
<b>Education level</b>				
6th grade or less	38	50.7	25	39.1
7th grade and higher	37	49.3	39	60.9
<b>Number of children in household</b>				
2 or less	56	74.7	52	81.2
More than 3	19	25.3	12	18.8
<b>Number of adults in household</b>				
2 or fewer	34	45.3	25	39.1
More than 3	41	54.7	39	60.9
<b>Other variables</b>				
Cultivate vegetables	21	28.0	23	35.9
Cultivate rubber	17	22.7	18	28.1
Cultivate cassava	15	20.0	16	25.0
Animal husbandry <sup>a</sup>	43	57.3	35	54.7
Access to irrigation	33	44.0	24	37.5
Rent portion of farmland	56	74.7	53	82.8
Part-, full-time, or temporary work off-farm	38	50.7	36	56.2
Children send support funds	14	18.7	13	20.3

<sup>a</sup> Participants primarily raised pigs, chickens, ducks, cows, and buffaloes.

landholdings to support their families. Findings also show that farmers from both groups were dependent on income from additional work off their farms. Moreover, a roughly equal percentage of participants relied on remittances from their children working outside their community. Generally speaking, there were only minor variations in the demographic information reported by organic and non-organic farmers.

### *The Environmental Worldviews of Organic and Non-Organic Farmers*

Organic and non-organic farmers were asked about their environmental views to examine if there was a relationship with the methods they selected to raise the fertility of their rice paddies. Participants' environmental views were judged on their level of agreement with the following phrases on a five-point scale: (1) Five Precepts means not to kill living things on the farm; (2) Farmer's duty is to protect the environment on the farm; (3) Agro-chemical farming damages the environment; (4) Agro-chemical farming produces food harmful to consumers. See Table 3 for results.

Despite the use of the First Precept "not to kill" by Thai alternative agriculture groups to

promote organic agriculture methods, organic farmers showed lower means (3.58) than non-organic farmers (row 1). Organic and non-organic farmers also displayed a similar mean on the item a "farmer's duty is to protect the environment." Markedly, organic farmers exhibited a significantly ( $p<0.05$ ) lower mean on responses to the statement "agro-chemical farming damages the environment." These findings indicate that the organic farmers in this sample did not select organic agriculture methods out of an interest in protecting the natural environment. Furthermore, non-organic farmers also displayed a higher mean score (4.57) on the item "agro-chemical farming produces food harmful to consumers" (row 4). In contrast with Hutanawat and Hutanawat's (2006) research, this data suggest that non-organic farmers were more aware of the negative impacts of synthetic agro-chemical use than organic farmers. However, the reasons non-organic farmers failed to act on this knowledge are inconclusive.

### *Health Views*

Although this study employed the concept of self-reported health, a medical study of 606 farmers in Northeast Thailand revealed that more than half of

its participants displayed "signs and symptoms of pesticide poisoning" (IPM DANIDA, 2004, p. 3). And while experts found that better knowledge of health status has encouraged some farmers to use organic methods, non-organic respondents also were well aware of the health risks associated with agro-chemical use (Thongtawee, 2006). Participants also displayed a similar mean score on queries related to their perceived health status, as displayed in the first section of Table 4.

While Drentea and Lavrakas (2000) have linked the incidence of debt with increased stress levels,

**Table 3. Differences Between the Environmental Views of Organic and Non-Organic Farmers**

	Organic Farmer (n=75)	Non-Organic Farmer (n=64)	Statistic/ Significance
<b>Five Precepts means "not to kill living things on the farm"</b>			
Mean	3.58	3.78	$F=1.05$
SD	1.16	1.06	n.s. <sup>a</sup>
<b>Farmer's duty is to protect the environment</b>			
Mean	4.62	4.56	$F=0.161$
SD	0.91	0.97	n.s.
<b>Agro-chemical farming damages the environment</b>			
Mean	4.17	4.58	$F=5.02$
SD	1.16	0.92	$p<0.05$
<b>Agro-chemical farming produces food harmful to consumers</b>			
Mean	4.32	4.57	$F=2.07$
SD	1.06	1.03	n.s.

<sup>a</sup> Abbreviation: n.s.=not significant

findings imply that non-organic farmers in Ubon Ratchathani were generally happier than organic farmers. Nonetheless, ANOVAs show a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) in means between organic and non-organic farmers related to their perceived feelings of sadness, anger, or depression over debt levels (row 2). It is noteworthy that non-organic farmers displayed a higher mean score (3.47), suggesting that they had a more positive attitude about their financial status. Non-organic farmers also reported experiencing a lower frequency of physical pain over the last 3 months, as displayed by a higher mean score (3.47). This finding suggests that due to the high labor inputs required to sustain organic agriculture, the organic farmers in this study suffered from added physical stress.

Whereas this study relied on participants' ability to report on their own health, results indicate there were no significant differences between organic and non-organic farmers' health status. Despite the limitations of this questionnaire, single questions about health status were deemed sufficient to measure health as part of participants' overall perception of their well-being (Bowling, 2005). As few studies have examined the relationship between health and financial status, it was important to examine specific variables that influenced farmers' perspective of their financial status (Kaufman & Mock, 2014).

#### *Financial Views*

Although the participants in this study were primarily farmers, they engaged in diverse forms of

**Table 4. Differences Between the Health Views of Organic and Non-Organic Farmers**

	Organic Farmer (n=75)	Non-Organic Farmer (n=64)	Statistic/ Significance
<b>Health status in last 3 years</b>			
Mean	3.10	3.18	$F=0.140$
SD	1.20	1.34	n.s. <sup>a</sup>
<b>Sad, angry, or depressed over debts</b>			
Mean	3.27	3.47	$F=4.33$
SD	0.55	0.59	$p < 0.05$
<b>Incidence of pain or illness in last three months</b>			
Mean	3.25	3.46	$F=4.21$
SD	0.55	0.69	$p < 0.05$
<b>Stamina compared to other farmers your age</b>			
Mean	3.45	3.50	$F=0.084$
SD	0.90	0.99	n.s.
<b>Describe overall health status</b>			
Mean	3.12	3.20	$F=0.218$
SD	1.03	1.05	n.s.

<sup>a</sup> Abbreviation: n.s.=not significant

employment to support their household needs. As shown by their income from agriculture, participants from both groups earned similar amounts (Table 5). Significantly, the agricultural income reported by both organic and non-organic farmers was below the Thai legally mandated minimum daily wage of 300 Baht (US\$1=32 Thai Baht) in the industrial sector.

On the other hand, Table 6 shows there was a higher percentage (23%) of organic farmer households with an income of less than 40,000 Baht

**Table 5. Differences in the Range of Income from Agriculture Between Organic and Non-Organic Farmers (2013)**

Thai Baht	Organic Farmer <sup>a</sup> (n=75)		Non-organic Farmer <sup>b</sup> (n=64)	
	#	(%)	#	(%)
0-40,000	17	22.7	12	18.8
41,000-60,000	9	12.0	10	15.6
61,000-100,000	21	28.0	11	17.2
101,000-200,000	16	21.3	12	16.0
201,000 or more	12	16.0	16	25.0

<sup>a</sup> Average agricultural income: 136,320 Baht.

<sup>b</sup> Average agricultural income: 139,338 Baht.

derived from non-agricultural work. Similar to the findings of Becchetti, Conzo, and Gianfreda (2012), these results suggest that due to higher labor inputs, organic farmers were less likely to engage in outside sources of employment. Despite the purported labor demands of engaging in organic agriculture, there was little difference in participants' median non-agricultural income (Table 6).

Table 7 shows that there only were minor variations in participants' perceptions of their financial status. Notably, the majority of participants carried some level of debt, and few participants reported low levels of debt (or carried no loans at all). While organic agriculture programs are designed to reduce farmer debt, organic farmer participants displayed an only slightly higher mean score (3.14) in their "loan status over the last 5 years." This data suggests that farmers were not able to substantially reduce their loans by employing only organic agriculture methods.

Findings also suggest that both groups of farmers made up for a shortfall in agricultural earnings through non-agricultural income (e.g., casual labor on other farms, sewing garments, or employment in the government). As for the previously mentioned demographic differences (Table 2), roughly 20% of farmers from both groups were dependent on remittances from their children. In spite of a diversity of income sources, organic and non-organic farmers experienced a wide range of financial difficulties. Based on observations and interviews at rural BAAC branches, a large number of clients were lined up waiting to receive a partial payment for rice sold to the government, while others reported they were requesting deferment of their loan payments. BAAC staff explained that these problems were due to a shortfall in the budget

**Table 6. Differences in the Non-Agricultural Income Range between Organic and Non-Organic Farmers (2013)**

Thai Baht	Organic Farmer <sup>a</sup> (n=75)		Non-organic Farmer <sup>b</sup> (n=64)	
	#	(%)	#	(%)
0–20,000	47	62.7	32	50.0
21,000–40,000	7	9.3	8	12.5
41,000–60,000	13	17.3	6	9.4
61,000–80,000	2	2.7	3	4.7
81,000 or more	6	8.0	15	23.4

<sup>a</sup> Median non-agricultural income: 28,544 Baht.

<sup>b</sup> Median non-agricultural income: 45,769 Baht.

allocated by the government for its "rice pledging" scheme (2013–2014). Participants reported they had been attracted to the rice pledging scheme with high farm-gate prices. Furthermore, BAAC officers explained that the prices offered to farmers under the rice pledging scheme were higher than premium prices offered by CSOs for organic certified rice. While organic and non-organic farmers grappled with fluctuations in the rice market, collectives offered another way to improve debt status.

### *Social Relations*

Several studies on Thai organic farming groups discuss the significance of *kalayanamitta* (virtuous friends) as a factor in sustaining collectives (Hutanawat & Hutanawat 2006; Thongtawee, 2006). In order to determine the incidence of *kalayanamitta* in farmer groups, participants were asked about the level of social relations in their

**Table 7. Differences Between the Financial Views of Organic and Non-Organic Farmers**

	Organic Farmer (n=75)	Non-Organic Farmer (n=64)	Statistic/ Significance
<b>Loan status over the last 5 years</b>			
Mean	3.14	3.12	$F=0.008$
SD	1.45	1.44	n.s. <sup>a</sup>
<b>Income stability over the last 5 year</b>			
Mean	3.48	3.73	$F=2.02$
SD	1.10	0.98	n.s.
<b>Non-agricultural Income</b>			
Mean	0.69	0.73	$F=0.280$
SD	0.46	0.45	n.s.

<sup>a</sup> Abbreviation: n.s.=not significant

collective. Findings showed that collectives are important as a place to acquire and produce key resources for organic agriculture. In addition, farmers exchange knowledge and engaged socially with fellow organic farmers in collectives. Table 8 shows the fundamental differences between farmers' social relations in this study.

Overall, there only were minor differences in the "Social Relations" among the two groups. And there were moderately significant variations ( $p < 0.05$ ) in scores on "Good Friends in Collective" as analyzed through the use of ANOVAs. As exhibited by a higher mean score (1.68) on this item, organic farmers were more likely to have social support in their collective. This finding concurs with other studies of the social dynamics that emerge in the collectives of organic farmers (e.g., Tisenkopf, Lace & Mierina, 2008). On the other hand, as shown by a slightly higher mean score (3.43) on "Organic Knowledge from Collective," non-organic farmers reported better access to organic agriculture experts in their collectives. Hence, farmers from both groups experienced similar benefits from working in collectives.

### *Food Security*

In many countries, rural and urban dwellers lack access to culturally appropriate and sufficient food (Kuhnlein et al., 2006). Findings herein show that despite per capita monthly earnings lower than Bangkok residents (National Statistics Office, 2011), most participants reported

**Table 8. Differences in Social Relations Views Between Organic and Non-Organic Farmers**

	Organic Farmer (n=75)	Non-Organic Farmer (n=64)	Statistic/ Significance
<b>Member of fertilizer group</b>			
Mean	0.55	0.63	$F=0.864$
SD	0.50	0.49	n.s. <sup>a</sup>
<b>Good friends in collective (<i>kalayanamitta</i>)</b>			
Mean	1.68	1.40	$F=4.68$
SD	0.70	0.79	$p < 0.05$
<b>Organic knowledge from collective</b>			
Mean	3.37	3.43	$F=0.192$
SD	0.91	0.79	n.s.
<b>Shared labor</b>			
Mean	0.72	0.66	$F=0.650$
SD	0.45	0.48	n.s.
<b>Shared labor by tasks</b>			
Mean	0.91	0.88	$F=0.068$
SD	0.68	0.75	n.s.

<sup>a</sup> Abbreviation: n.s.=not significant

sufficient access to culturally appropriate foods. Furthermore, there were only minor differences in "Food Security" between the organic and non-organic farmers in this study (Table 9).

While ANOVAs show no statistically significant differences on indicators of "Food Security," organic farmers displayed a slightly higher means (4.52) on the "diversity of food" cultivated on their farm. In addition, non-organic

**Table 9. Differences in Food Security Between Organic and Non-Organic Farmers**

	Organic Farmer (n=75)	Non-Organic Farmer (n=64)	Statistic/ Significance
<b>Diversity of food from farm</b>			
Mean	4.52	4.35	$F=0.989$
SD	0.81	1.08	n.s. <sup>a</sup>
<b>Lack of food (times per month)</b>			
Mean	4.81	4.76	$F=0.156$
SD	0.75	0.66	n.s.
<b>Percentage of Food from naturally occurring sources</b>			
Mean	3.17	3.34	$F=0.281$
SD	0.90	0.95	n.s.

<sup>a</sup> Abbreviation: n.s.=not significant

**Table 10. Differences in Organic Production Methods<sup>a</sup>**

	Organic Farmer (n=75)	Non-Organic Farmer (n=64)	Statistic/ Significance
<b>Effective Microorganisms</b>			
Mean	0.13	0.31	F=6.77
SD	0.34	0.47	p<0.01
<b>Wood Vinegar</b>			
Mean	0.20	0.40	F=6.31
SD	0.40	0.49	p<0.05
<b>Green Manure</b>			
Mean	0.81	0.77	F=0.471
SD	0.39	0.43	n.s. <sup>b</sup>
<b>Animal Manure</b>			
Mean	0.05	0.24	F=0.053
SD	0.06	0.23	n.s.

<sup>a</sup> Use of Effective Microorganisms (EM), green manure, wood vinegar, and animal manure expressed as dichotomous variables, (1, 2); 1=no, 2=yes.

<sup>b</sup> Abbreviation: n.s.=not significant

farmers lacked sufficient food to meet their dietary needs more frequently than organic farmers. This data suggest that the organic farmers in this study had achieved only slightly higher levels of food security. Furthermore, organic farmers showed a lower mean score (3.17) on the item related to “naturally occurring food sources.” Lovelace, Subhadhira and Simarks (1998) argue that the use of synthetic pesticides bears on the abundance and quality of natural foods. However, the organic rice farmers in this study experienced lower levels of wild frogs, fish, and vegetables around their farms than their non-organic counterparts. Findings from this study also suggest that both groups found it more important to raise income levels as a way to acquire food than to achieve higher levels of food self-sufficiency on their farms (Sen, 1986). As such, diversification of landholdings translated into expanded cultivation of cash crops rather than an increase in the amount of vegetables (or other food) available for home consumption.

### *Production Methods*

To uncover the ways farmers worked, participants were asked detailed questions about the methods

they used to raise productivity in their rice fields. Similar to Tisenkopf, Lace, and Mierina’s (2008) study of Dutch cooperatives, Thai farmers built up social capital through the relationships forged to produce organic fertilizer. There was only one collective found in Ubon Ratchathani that produced sufficient organic fertilizer for its members. Notably, only a few of their collective members were not certified organic rice farmers.

Like Bhatta and Doppler’s (2011) research in Nepal, many of the participants were “default organic”

due to an inability to access synthetic fertilizers. However, in contrast to rural areas of Nepal, synthetic fertilizers are widely available in Thailand through provincial cooperatives (Preedasak & NaRanong, 1998). Some participants reported that they used organic fertilizers because they lacked the funds to purchase synthetic fertilizers. Roughly half of the non-organic participants used animal manure as a cost reduction measure. Table 10 shows the organic agriculture methods used by both groups of participants in their rice paddies.

Data indicate that the use of organic agriculture methods was not exclusive to either group of participants. This phenomenon suggests that some BAAC extension officers were successful at introducing organic agriculture methods. Based on further discussions with farmers, their decisions to use biofertilizers such as EM and green manure<sup>5</sup> were dependent upon the availability of labor and seeds. While many Thai CSOs prescribed EM as a fundamental component of organic agriculture programs, organic farmer participants displayed a significantly lower mean on the use of EM ( $p<0.01$ ) and wood vinegar ( $p<0.05$ ). This data suggest that non-organic farmers also benefited

nitrogen in the soil.

<sup>5</sup> Green manure refers to the planting and plowing under of legumes or other cover crops that naturally raise the level of

from using organic agriculture methods. Although some non-organic farmers reported using bagged organic fertilizers, examination of the labeling on these products indicated they also contained inorganic compounds. Overall findings suggest that non-organic farmers were not opposed to organic methods, but had a greater confidence in synthetic fertilizers as a means of raising productivity. When prompted to further explain the reasons they no longer farmed organically, a few farmers (who had experimented with organic rice plots) told interviewers that they experienced low yields. For some of the participants, the initial investment of 3 years to gain organic certification was too long to wait for a positive result (IFOAM, 2012). Some participants also stated that they used agro-chemicals as they lacked access to organic marketing channels. It is notable that the 19 participants who reported being certified under international organic standards produced their own fertilizer and had gained access to a niche market in Italy.

## Conclusions

Although global economic institutions have gone to great lengths to promote human development, they have done so at the expense of the ecosystem (Daly, 1996). While modern agriculture methods have been essential to expanding the global food supply, many experts are critical of the adverse impacts of these innovations on farmer households (Falvey, 2000; Rigg, 1997; Shiva, 1991; UNDP, 1994). The present study shows that to some extent a dependence on modern agriculture methods has played a part in a decline in the well-being of smallholder farmer households. Despite arguments that organic agriculture holds the potential to raise farmers' well-being, the elimination of agro-chemicals does not guarantee they will improve their financial status (Feenstra, 1997; Pretty, 2003). Therefore, appropriate development means not only sustaining local agro-ecosystems, but also providing a means of inclusion for farmers in the global economy. More precisely, farmers' well-being should be measured in terms of their ability to purchase the latest agricultural technology and fulfill the material needs of their family members.

This research aimed to draw out fundamental differences between organic and non-organic farmers. However, comparisons showed that participants from both groups espoused similar environmental values and perceptions of well-being. Despite the importance of delving deeper into farmers' values, environmental views played only a small part in participants' decisions to adopt organic agriculture methods. In other words, a Buddhist environmental ethic had failed to reach a substantial number of the organic farmers in Ubon Ratchathani Province. As such, many participants were "default organic" due to insufficient funds rather than out of a desire to protect the natural environment or produce "safe" food for consumers.

The ways organic and non-organic farmers experienced well-being was examined through a comprehensive analysis of their health, financial status, social relations, and food security levels. Whereas some participants believed that adopting organic agriculture led to an improvement in their health, farmers from both groups suffered from similar levels of stress related to their debt burden. On the other hand, non-organic farmers reported a lower incidence of illness and greater stamina than organic farmers. These anomalies are partially explained by the additional labor requirements required to sustain organic agriculture. Notwithstanding, medical examinations could have disclosed a different perspective of participants' health.

The way participants viewed the benefits of organic agriculture also was related to the availability of labor in their households and collectives. Membership in a collective helped many farmers access additional labor, but there was little variation in the incidence of "shared labor" between organic and non-organic farmers. Notwithstanding, in the one collective accredited to organic agriculture standards, members pooled labor and resources to manufacture sufficient quantities of organic fertilizer. There were, however, no formal mechanisms that supported the barter of food in the collectives of either organic or non-organic farmers. In addition, neither group showed a greater tendency toward building household food security.

Even though the views and perceptions of participants were not significantly different, this study represents only a small portion of Thai farmers. Admittedly, there also was some bias in the sample as all the participants had attended BAAC organic agriculture training programs. In spite of the limitations of this research, the findings and tools developed in the course of this study offer a foundation for more in-depth research. More importantly, similarities in the socio-economic characteristics of Southeast Asian agricultural systems offer fertile territory for comparative studies of well-being.

Increasingly, CSOs and governmental institutions in developing countries have looked to organic agriculture programs as a strategy to alleviate poverty. To ensure that organic support programs do more than absorb already scarce funding, it is important that policy-makers understand the reasons so few farmers are able to sustain organic agriculture. Development assistance should not only focus on conserving local agro-ecosystems, but also on providing farmer groups with the technology (e.g., harvesters, rice mills, packaging equipment) to reduce costs and engage more directly with the marketplace.

While adopting less capital-intensive agriculture methods has helped some farmers to improve their quality of life, they also have become dependent on governmental loans and subsidies. As a measure to make organic and non-organic farmers more self-reliant, policy-makers should aim to decrease direct financial support, especially personal loans. Instead, funding should be aimed at building the strength of small-scale, community-based collectives. These collectives should be provided with the know-how and technology to produce organic inputs with local resources. Organic farmers also stand to benefit from access to niche markets. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that farmers' livelihoods are indelibly linked to the integrity of their agro-ecosystems. Consequently it is highly recommended that CSOs and governmental agencies properly evaluate participants' environmental views and perceptions of well-being before deciding upon the best ways to introduce organic agriculture development programs.



## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the Research Group on Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (WeSD), Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Khon Kaen University, Thailand, for providing financial support. I am especially grateful to the farmers who took time out of their busy schedules to participate in this study. I also wish to thank my Thai co-researchers for adapting and clarifying research questions. Without the assistance of the officers of the Ubon Ratchathani Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC) with logistics and providing access to farmer groups, this research would not have been possible. Finally, I would like express my gratitude to the JAFCD reviewers for their thoughtful comments and suggestions.

## References

- Allen, P. (2004). *Together at the table: Sustainability and sustenance in the American agrifood system*. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Baconguis, R. T., & Cruz, F. A. (2005). Paradigmatic outlook of alternative and conventional rice farmers in southern Philippines. *The Philippines Scientist*, 42, 15–39.
- Becchetti, L., Conzo, P., & Gianfreda, G. (2012). Market access, organic farming and productivity: The effects of Fair Trade affiliation on Thai farmer producer groups. *Australian Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics*, 56(1), 117–140.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8489.2011.00574.x>
- Beus, C. E., & Dunlap, R. E. (1990). Conventional versus organic agriculture: The paradigmatic roots of the debate. *Rural Sociology*, 55(4), 590–616.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1549-0831.1990.tb00699.x>
- Bhatta, G. D., & Doppler, W. (2011). Smallholder peri-urban organic farming in Nepal: A comparative analysis of farming systems. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 1(3), 163–180.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2011.013.002>
- Bhikkhu, B. (1991, March/2002). *AgriDhamma: The duty of professional agriculturalists* (L. Falvey, Trans.). Lecture at Suan Mokkhapharam, Chaiya, Surat Thani Province, Thailand. Hackney, South Australia: Institute for International Development.  
<http://www.iid.org/uploads/6/2/0/6/6206024/buddhadasa.pdf>



- Bowling, A. (2005). Just one question: If one question works, why ask several? *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 59, 342–345.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jech.2004.021204>
- Chantalakhana, C., & Falvey, L. (2008). *Sufficiency economy: An approach for smallholder agricultural development to enhance peace and stability*. Bangkok: Sermmmit Printing.
- Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Curry, J. M. (2000). Community worldview and rural systems: A study of five communities in Iowa. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 90(4), 693–712. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/0004-5608.00218>
- Daly, H. E. (1996). *Beyond growth: The economics of sustainable development*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Books.
- Darlington, S. (2012). *The ordination of a tree: The Thai Buddhist environmental movement*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.
- Drentea, P., & Lavrakas, P. J. (2000). Over the limit: The association among health, race and debt. *Social Science & Medicine*, 50(4), 517–529.  
[http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536\(99\)00298-1](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536(99)00298-1)
- Drinkwater, L. E., Letouneau, D. K., Workneh, F., van Bruggen, A. H. C., & Shennan, C. (1995). Fundamental differences between conventional and organic tomato agroecosystems in California, *Ecological Applications*, 5(4), 1098–1112.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2269357>
- Duram, L. (2000). Agents' perceptions of structure: How Illinois organic farmers view political, economic, social, and ecological factors. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 17(1), 35–48.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/A:1007632810301>
- Essen, J. (2005). "Right development": *The Santi Asoke Buddhist Reform Movement of Thailand*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.
- Falvey, L. (2000). *Thai agriculture: Golden cradle of millennia*. Bangkok: Kasetsart University Press.
- Feagan, R. (2007). The place of food: Mapping out the "local" in local food systems. *Progress in Human Geography*, 31(1), 23–42.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0309132507073527>
- Feenstra, G. W. (1997). Local food systems and sustainable communities, *American Journal of Alternative Agriculture*, 12(1), 28–36.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0889189300007165>
- Franklin, A. (2002). *Nature and social theory*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Funahashi, K. (1996). Farming by the older generation: The exodus of young labor in Yasothon Province. *Southeast Asian Studies* 33(4), 625–639.
- Grandstaff, T. B., Grandstaff, S., Limpinuntana, V., & Suphanchaimat, N. (2008). Rainfed revolution in northeast Thailand. *Southeast Asian Studies*, 46(3), 289–376.
- Hardwick, K., Healey, J. R., Elliott, S., & Blakesley, D. (2004). Research needs for restoring seasonal tropical forests in Thailand: Accelerated natural regeneration. *New Forest*, 27(3), 285–302.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/B:NEFO.0000022228.08887.d2>
- Henning, D. H. (2002). *A manual for Buddhism and deep ecology*. Bangkok: The World Buddhist University.
- Hutanawat, N., & Hutanawat, N. (2006). Kasetagam Yangyun Krabuantat Krabuankan leh Tuachiwat [*Sustainable agriculture: Vision process and indicators*]. Nonthaburi, Thailand: Kledthai Company.
- International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements [IFOAM]. (n.d.). *Definitions*. Retrieved March 2012 from <http://www.ifoam.bio/en/organic-landmarks/definition-organic-agriculture>
- IPM DANIDA. (2004). *Pesticides-health surveys: Data of 606 farmers in Thailand* (Report No. 62). Bangkok: IPM DANIDA. Retrieved from [http://thailand.ipm-info.org/download\\_documents.htm](http://thailand.ipm-info.org/download_documents.htm)
- Jarosz, L. (2000). Understanding agri-food networks as social relations, *Agriculture and Human Values*, 17(3), 279–283.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/A:1007692303118>
- Kabilsingh, C. (2010). *Buddhism and nature conservation*. Bangkok: Thai Tibet Center.
- Kaufman, A. H. (2012). Organic farmers' connectedness with nature: Exploring Thailand's alternative agriculture network. *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*, 16(2), 154–178.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/156853512X640851>
- Kaufman, A. H., & Mock, J. (2014). Cultivating greater well-being: The benefits Thai organic farmers experience from adopting Buddhist eco-spirituality. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 27(6), 871–893.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10806-014-9500-4>

- Kaewthep, K. (2008). An “imagining” community: The case of Sisa Asoke, Si Sa Ket Province. In S. Tanabe (Ed.), *Imagining communities in Thailand: Ethnographic approaches* (pp. 59–82). Chiang Mai, Thailand: Mekong Press.
- Kempton, W., Boster, J. S., & Hartley, J. A. (1997). *Environmental values in American culture*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Kiatuphimol, J. (2002). *A strategy for Green Net to promote an organic farming product in Bangkok, Thailand* (Unpublished master’s thesis). Asian Institute of Management, Manila.
- Kuhnlein H., Erasmus, B., Creed-Kanashiro, H., Englberger, L., Okeke, C., Turner, N.,... Bhattacharjee, L. (2006). Indigenous peoples’ food systems for health: Finding interventions that work. *Public Health Nutrition*, 9(8), 1013–1019. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/PHN2006987>
- Lovelace, G., Subhadhira, S., & Simarks, S. (1998). Introduction. In G. Lovelace, S. Subhadhira, & S. Simarks (Eds.), *Rapid Rural Appraisal in northeast Thailand: Case studies* (pp. 3-19). Khon Khen, Thailand: KRU-Ford Rural Systems Research Project.
- Mayer, F. S., & Frantz, C. M. (2004). The connectedness to nature scale: A measure of individuals’ feeling in community with nature, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 24(4), 503–515. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2004.10.001>
- McIsaac, G. F., David, M. B., Gertner, G. Z., & Goolsby, D. A. (2001). Eutrophication: Nitrate flux in the Mississippi River *Nature*, 414, 166–167. <http://www.nature.com/nature/index.html>
- McNeely, J. A., & Scherr, S. J. (2003). *Ecoagriculture: Strategies to feed the world and save wild biodiversity*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.
- Millennium Ecosystem Assessment [MA]. (2005). *Ecosystems and human well-being: General synthesis*, Washington D.C.: Island Press. Retrieved from <http://www.millenniumassessment.org/en/Synthesis.html>
- Modell, S. (2009). In defense of triangulation: A critical realist approach to mixed methods research in management accounting. *Management Accounting Research*, 20(3), 208–221. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.mar.2009.04.001>
- National Institute of Health. (2006). Agricultural Health Study: Phase III Survey Instrument. Retrieved from <http://aghealth.nih.gov/collaboration/qx/phase3.pdf>
- National Statistics Office Thailand. (2011 December). *2010 Thailand statistical yearbook*. Retrieved from [http://web.nso.go.th/en/pub/oth/pub\\_oth.htm](http://web.nso.go.th/en/pub/oth/pub_oth.htm)
- Paknawin-Mock, J. (2000). *Thai views of wellness, sabaay, smoking, and Buddhist health promotion* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of California, San Francisco, San Francisco.
- Panya, O. (1995). *Change from within: Adaptation and self-determination in three rural communities of northeast Thailand 1900–1992* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.
- Panyakul, V., & Wanlop, P. (2007, December). Country paper: Thailand. Proceedings from the Regional Conference on Organic Agriculture in Asia, Bangkok, Thailand. Retrieved from <http://www.intracen.org/Technical-Assistance-Projects-Overview-Regional-Conference-in-Asia/>
- Payutto, P. A. (1998). *A dictionary of Buddhist terms*. Bangkok: Mahachulalongkorn University.
- Payutto, P. A. (2001). *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist world*. Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation.
- Pimentel, D., Hepperly, P., Hanson, J., Douds, D., & Seidel, R. (2005). Environmental, energetic, and economic comparisons of organic and conventional farming systems. *BioScience*, 55(7), 573–582. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1641/0006-3568\(2005\)055%5B0573:EEAECO%5D2.0.CO;2](http://dx.doi.org/10.1641/0006-3568(2005)055%5B0573:EEAECO%5D2.0.CO;2)
- Preedasak, P., & NaRanong, V. (1998, November). Roles of agricultural cooperatives and village credit unions in rural financial markets in Thailand. Session at *Decentralized rural development and the role of self help organizations: A regional workshop*, offered by the Food and Agriculture Organization Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Thailand. Retrieved from <http://www.fao.org/docrep/004/ac158e/ac158e08.htm#bm08.5>
- Pretty, J. (2003). *Agri-culture: Reconnecting people, land and nature*. London: Earthscan Publications.
- Putnam, R. (2008). Tuning in, tuning out: The strange disappearance of social capital in America. In T. Donovan & K. Hoover (Eds.), *The elements of social scientific thinking* (pp. 145–172). Boston: Thomson Wadsworth.

- Ratanamalai, A. (1998, November). Thailand cooperatives role in decentralized rural development for poverty alleviation and food security at the community level. Session at *Decentralized rural development and the role of self help organizations: A regional workshop*, offered by the Food and Agriculture Organization Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Thailand. Retrieved from <http://www.fao.org/docrep/004/ac158e/ac158e08.htm#bm08.2>
- Rigg, J. (1997). *Southeast Asia: the human landscape of modernization and development*, London: Routledge.
- Rojas, M. (2007). The complexity of wellbeing: A life-satisfaction conception and a domains-of-life approach. In I. Gough & J. A. McGregor (Eds.), *Wellbeing in developing countries: From theory to research* (pp. 259–280). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Samerpak, P. (2006). *A strategy for sustainable agriculture system by Rak Thammachat Club in Kudchum District, Yasothon Province, Thailand* (Unpublished master's thesis). Manila: Asian Institute of Management.
- Sandhu, H. S., Wratten, S. D., & Cullen, R. (2010). Organic agriculture and ecosystem services. *Environmental Science and Policy*, 13(1), 1–7. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2009.11.002>
- Sathirathai, S., & Piboolsravut, P. (2004, November). *Sufficiency economy and a healthy community*. Presentation at the 3<sup>rd</sup> IUCN World Conservation Congress, Bangkok. Retrieved from <http://www.sufficiencyeconomy.org>
- Schreinemachers, P., Schad, I., Tipraqsa P., Williams, P. M., Neef, A., Riwthong, S., ... Grovermann, C. (2012). Can public GAP standards reduce agricultural pesticide use? The case of fruit and vegetable farming in northern Thailand, *Agriculture and Human Values*, 29(4), 519–529. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10460-012-9378-6>
- Sen, A. (1986). Food, economics and entitlements (Working paper 1). Helsinki: United Nations University-World Institute for Development Economics Research.
- Setboonsarng, S., & Gilman, J. (1999). *Alternative agriculture in Thailand and Japan*. Retrieved from the Horizon International Solutions Site website: <http://www.solutions-site.org/node/47>
- Shiva, V. (1991). *The violence of the Green Revolution: Third world agriculture, ecology and politics*. Penang: Third World Network.
- Sirisai, S. (1990). Rice Goddess and rice farming in Thailand. In T. U. Kyaw & P. Ratanakul (Eds.), *Development, modernization and tradition in southeast Asia* (pp. 163–177). Salaya, Thailand: Center of Human Resources Development, Mahidol University.
- Sullivan, S., McCann, E., De Young, R., & Erickson, D. (1996). Farmers' attitudes about farming and the environment: A survey of conventional and organic farmers. *Journal of Agriculture and Environmental Ethics*, 9(2), 123–143. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF03055298>
- Tanabe, S. (1994). *Ecology and practical technology: Peasant farming systems in Thailand*. Bangkok: White Lotus.
- Thongtawee, C. (2006). *Attractors in paradigm shift process towards sustainable agriculture of farmers* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Mahidol University, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand.
- Tisenkopf, T., Lace, I., & Mierina, I. (2008). Social capital. In J. D. van der Ploeg & T. Marsden (Eds.), *Unfolding webs: The dynamics of regional rural development* (pp. 87–110). Assen, the Netherlands: Van Gorcum.
- United Nations Development Program [UNDP]. (1994). *Sustainable human development and agriculture*. New York: Author.
- UNDP. (2007). *Global environment outlook 4 (GEO-4): Environment for development*. Malta: Progress Press.
- Wasi, P. (1988). Buddhist agriculture and the tranquility of Thai society. In S. Phongphit & R. Bennoun (Eds.), *Turning point of Thai farmers* (pp. 1–43). Bangkok: Thai Institute for Rural Development.
- White, P. T. (1994). Rice: The essential harvest. *National Geographic*, 185(5), 48–79.
- Willer, H., & Yussefi, M. (Eds.). (2004). *The world of organic agriculture 2004: Statistics and emerging trends*. Bonn: IFOAM. Retrieved from <http://www.organic-world.net/yearbook/former-editions.html?L=0>
- World Health Organization. (1946). *Constitution of the World Health Organization*. Geneva: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/library/collections/historical/en/index3.html>
- Wyatt, D. K. (1982). *Thailand: A short history*. Bangkok: Silkworm Books.



# Potential national economic benefits of the Food Insecurity and Nutrition Incentives Program of the U.S. Agricultural Act of 2014

Carolyn Dimitri<sup>a\*</sup>  
New York University

Lydia Oberholtzer<sup>b</sup>  
Penn State University

Submitted August 7, 2014 / Revised December 10, 2014, and March 6, April 29, and April 30, 2015 /  
Accepted April 30, 2015 / Published online July 30, 2015

Citation: Dimitri, C., & Oberholtzer, L. (2015). Potential national economic benefits of the Food Insecurity and Nutrition Incentives Program of the U.S. Agricultural Act of 2014. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 49–61. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.006>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

## Abstract

The use of nutrition incentives in conjunction with federal nutrition benefits is intended in part to improve the diet of low-income consumers. The new program created by the U.S. Agricultural Act of 2014 is similar to the nutrition incentives that have been operated by select nonprofits and cities since the early part of the 2010s. The nutrition incentives as specified in the act will match redemptions of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and be used for

purchasing only fruits and vegetables. In addition to the potential to provide health benefits, the proposed Food Insecurity and Nutrition Incentive Program may also create economic benefits. Extrapolations of data from a grassroots organization (Wholesome Wave) suggest that the economic benefits of the federal program are an estimated US\$58–US\$174 million per year, or 922–2,767 jobs per year, depending on how the program is implemented. The effectiveness and impact of the program hinges on the capacity of participating retail outlets, the size of the matching nutrition incentive, and the types of outlets where the SNAP nutrition incentives can be redeemed.

## Keywords

Agricultural Act of 2014, farm bill, federal nutrition benefits, SNAP, nutrition incentives, economic impacts

---

<sup>a\*</sup> *Corresponding author:* Carolyn Dimitri, Department of Nutrition, Food Studies and Public Health, New York University; 411 Lafayette Street; New York, NY 10003 USA; +1-212-992-7899; [carolyn.dimitri@nyu.edu](mailto:carolyn.dimitri@nyu.edu)

<sup>b</sup> Lydia Oberholtzer, Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education, Penn State University; 103 Armsby; University Park, Pennsylvania 16802 USA; +1-301-891-0470; [lso3@psu.edu](mailto:lso3@psu.edu)

## Introduction

Federal nutrition policy is designed to enhance the food security of low-income households, with the bulk of benefits distributed to individuals and families via the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Despite the strides federal programs have made in reducing hunger, obstacles to achieving a high-quality diet remain, with low-income individuals experiencing high incidences of diet-related disease (Sugiyama & Shapiro, 2014). This has prompted discussions among policy-makers about incorporating “carrot and stick” approaches in policies to encourage consumers to eat less junk food and more fruits and vegetables (Barnhill, 2011; Blumenthal et al., 2014). One proposed “stick,” restricting the use of food assistance by prohibiting purchases of junk food, was met with resistance (May, 2013). In contrast, a “carrot” proposed by advocates to encourage more fruit and vegetable purchasing was more successful, and the Agricultural Act of 2014 (the farm bill) created and funded a new food assistance program that provides incentives for purchasing fruits and vegetables, the Food Insecurity and Nutrition Incentives Program (FINI). The new “nutrition incentives” are funds distributed at the point of purchase; the incentives match a consumer’s redemption of SNAP on fruits and vegetables, and are to be used for purchases of additional produce. Omitted from this discussion of policy levers is whether such policies have potential economic benefits for consumers beyond dietary changes.

The program is predicated on the premise that participating households will consume more fruits and vegetables if given incentives for doing so. The idea that people will eat more fruits and vegetables is intuitively appealing, but as the behavioral economics literature indicates, food choices are driven by more than just economic factors (see for example, Just, 2011). As a result, the Agricultural Act requires an evaluation of the efficacy of the program, asking whether those receiving nutrition incentives consume more fruits and vegetables. FINI’s inclusion in the 2014 Act was the result of a lengthy political process and follows a mandate of the previous farm bill (2008) to conduct a pilot study evaluating the impact of nutrition incentives on fruit and vegetable consumption (Bartlett,

Klerman, Wilde, Olsho, Blocklin, Logan, & Enver, 2013). While details were not specified in the Agricultural Act of 2014, the evaluation of FINI will likely follow the protocol established by the pilot study. An ancillary benefit of the FINI program—in addition to the potential for better nutrition—is the ability to create new economic activity. The ability to influence economic activity, we argue, makes this federal program more powerful in that the unintended consequences of FINI may provide additional benefits to communities.

Federal funds authorized in the Agricultural Act of 2014 (US\$100 million over 5 years, with an additional US\$5 million per year until 2018) are to be awarded as grants by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the first request for applications for the FINI program was released in fall 2014 (USDA, NIFA, 2014). Current eligible organizations, under the rules of the act, are government agencies and nonprofit organizations. The act furthermore requires that the funds be used for programs that match SNAP benefits redeemed for fruits and vegetables (USDA, ERS, 2014). Other forms of federal nutrition assistance, such as those targeting specific groups, including women, infants, and children, and senior citizens, have been omitted from FINI. A possible explanation for this decision is maintaining simplicity of administration while reaching as many consumers as possible: in 2014, an average of 47 million people were receiving SNAP each month, in contrast to 8 million receiving WIC (USDA, FNS, 2015). By restricting the usage to SNAP, many people, along with their communities, can benefit from FINI, and the organizations administering the incentives are able to focus on providing the matches at the point of sale for just one federal nutrition benefit.

In many aspects, FINI is similar to programs currently administered by several nonprofit organizations and cities, where consumers receive a complete or partial match of federal benefits redeemed for fruit and vegetable purchases at participating farmers markets. The “double-coupon” or “healthy bucks” programs, as they are popularly called, have dual goals. The first is to improve the diet quality of low-income consumers, and more specifically underserved consumers who live in communities with limited access to healthy food. A second goal



is to support local and regional farmers by developing new markets for them. Two of the key funding priorities in FINI preserve the spirit of the existing programs operated by cities and nonprofits: the focus on underserved communities and the preference for using funds to purchase locally and regionally produced fruits and vegetables. That said, FINI's impact on farmers and communities will ultimately depend on how the program is implemented, which will be a function of how the grant applicants propose using the funds in their communities and which organizations receive the funding.

The focus of policy-makers and researchers on potential benefits to consumers and farmers has spurred a growing body of literature. Recently published research examines the contribution of nutrition incentives to increased food access (Dimitri, Oberholtzer, & Nischan, 2013; Schumacher, Nischan, & Simon, 2011); benefits to farmers and farmers markets, including increased revenues to farmers (Baronberg, Dunn, Nonas, Dannefer, & Sacks, 2013; Freedman, Mattison-Faye, Alia, Guest, & Hébert, 2014; Lindsay et al., 2013; Oberholtzer, Dimitri, & Schumacher, 2012); and to fruit and vegetable consumption (Dimitri, Oberholtzer, Zive, & Sandolo, 2015; Klerman, Bartlett, Wilde, & Olsho, 2014). A related body of research examines a broader question than how nutrition incentives influence farmers' revenues, and instead focuses on the relationship between farmers' use of local markets and farm success. Most research suggests that profits earned at farmers markets may be quite small, yet this general finding may be skewed by the fact that farmers directly marketing to consumers tend to have small farms and are likely to have a source of off-farm income (Low & Vogel, 2011). Marketing exclusively through farmers markets is associated with lower gross farm income or earnings, while farm earnings for those who market through other local channels, or through multiple channels, were related to higher gross farm income (Park, Mishra, & Wozniak, 2014; Uematsu & Mishra, 2011). Growth in farmers markets in the Southeast, furthermore, was related to the higher profitability of farms marketing locally (Ahearn & Sterns, 2013).

Overall, the research conducted to date suggests that many consumers and farmers perceive

and realize positive benefits from the use of nutrition incentives. The research also suggests that the expansion of nutrition incentive programming into multiple channels (retail outlets in addition to farmers markets) may bring additional economic benefits to farmers.

Advocates argue that potential benefits to consumers and farmers are significant, but also point out that nutrition incentive programs may have a larger social impact in terms of economic activity and job creation (Andrés, 2014). The discussions tend to focus on the concept of buying locally, such as the recent campaign in Illinois that urges consumers to buy US\$10 of Illinois-raised food products in order to create a local reinvestment of US\$2.4 billion each year (Illinois Department of Agriculture, n.d.). The concept of community benefits is similarly reflected in the language of the SNAP program, which states "SNAP ...provides economic benefits to communities" (USDA, FNS, 2014). While the popular literature focuses on local spending, economic benefits can also be viewed from a national level, giving insight into the broad economic benefits of increased government spending rather than gains accruing to a specific community.

Quantifying economic benefits is an important component of community development research for both urban and rural communities. One method for doing so is the multiplier model, which recognizes that the effect of government spending on economic activity may be much higher than the initial injection of cash into the economy (Martinez et al., 2010). This paper adds to the literature on both economic benefits and nutrition incentives of the new FINI program and presents a policy analysis. In doing so, we discuss the potential national level economic benefits of the FINI program. The analysis draws on the 2012 experience of Wholesome Wave, one of the first nonprofits to operate nutrition incentive programs in underserved communities.<sup>1</sup> Using its experience as a baseline, we address the potential economic impact of the new program, policy goals, and impacts on communities and research needs.

---

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.wholesomewave.org> for more information on the organization.

## Background on Grassroots Programs and Related Literature

Several cities and nonprofit organizations have extensive experience with nutrition incentives. Current programs are diverse, particularly in terms of the percent of federal nutrition benefits that are matched, and most face binding budget constraints. Some organizations match SNAP redemptions, dollar for dollar, up to a predetermined level, such as to US\$20 or US\$25 per visit (Fair Food Network, n.d.-a; Market Umbrella, 2012). Others match all purchases without a limit. Still others provide a 40 percent match (New York City), 50 percent match (Evanston, Illinois), or limit matches to lower amounts, such as US\$5 (Portland) or US\$10 (Boston) (SNAP to Health, n.d.). The USDA's Healthy Incentives Pilot, which was based on purchases of fruits and vegetables made in supermarkets, provided participants with a 30 percent match (Klerman et al., 2014). Many organizations are able to provide matches for only part of the season, until their grant funds run out (Market Umbrella, 2012). While some organizations match all types of farmers market-based federal nutrition benefits, others restrict usage to one form, such as SNAP.

One organization, Wholesome Wave, widely shares detailed information about its programs, which provides a useful starting point for the assessment of the new federal nutrition incentive program (Wholesome Wave, n.d.). Wholesome Wave's network includes hundreds of nutrition incentive programs in farmers markets across the country run by community organizations. The community-based organizations and markets that implement the programs have wide latitude in how the incentive programs are implemented in their markets; they decide which federal nutrition programs to match and how to administer the programs. The basic element is uniform across all markets: consumers receive an incentive that matches federal nutrition benefits when they buy fruits and vegetables at a participating farmers market. Variations in implementation include the amount a consumer can receive (some programs limit to US\$5 or US\$10 match per week), the percent of the match, and the type of nutrition assistance matched (SNAP, Senior FMNP, or women, infants and

children [WIC FMNP and WIC CVV]).

Between 2009 and 2012 the number of markets sponsoring incentive programs in partnership with Wholesome Wave grew from 26 markets in 7 states and the District of Columbia to 306 markets in 24 states and the District of Columbia (see Table 1). During that time period, the average match ranged from 59 percent to 89 percent (note that these matches represent redeemed nutrition incentives, or the actual amounts spent by consumers). In 2009, the average dollar amount of federal nutrition benefit and incentives spent was nearly US\$13,000 per market; in 2012 the average was about US\$7,800 per market. In 2012, approximately US\$1.5 million of federal nutrition benefits were redeemed under these programs, along with matching nutrition incentives of about US\$885,000 (Table 1). The growth in the total number of farmers markets, federal nutrition benefits, and incentives was accompanied by declining matches (in terms of percent) as well as a decrease in the average federal nutrition benefits and incentives in dollars per market. In these early years of the nutrition incentives, the programs were available in markets with substantial organizational capacity and a strong motivation to serve underserved consumers, in locations with many federal nutrition benefit customers.

Under FINI, nutrition incentives will match redeemed SNAP benefits; thus the number of consumers eventually using nutrition incentives will depend on (1) how many vendors, farmers markets, and food stores accept SNAP, and (2) how many will accept FINI incentives. In comparison to food stores, where acceptance of federal nutrition benefits is common, only select farmers markets are equipped to accept federal nutrition benefits. Thus the USDA has actively promoted the use of federal nutrition benefits at farmers markets, with some success; in 2008, 750 farmers markets accepted federal nutrition benefits for payment, and in 2012, this number had increased to approximately 3,200 (USDA, FNS, 2013). In 2014, according to the USDA, about half of all farmers markets listed in the USDA Farmers Market Directory accepted federal nutrition benefits (USDA, AMS, 2013). As a result, redemption of federal nutrition benefits at farmers markets has grown (see Table



**Table 1: Federal Nutrition Benefits, Nutrition Incentives and Participating Farmers Markets: Wholesome Wave, 2009–2012** (all dollar values in US\$)

Variable	2009	2010	2011	2012
Federal nutrition benefits redeemed at farmers markets	\$175,379	\$596,279	\$1,072,408	\$1,494,860
Nutrition incentives	\$155,571	\$409,339	\$816,581	\$884,800
Average match	89%	69%	76%	59%
Participating farmers	N/A	1,718	2,279	3,240
Participating farmers markets	26	116	225	306
Average farmers per market	N/A	15	10	11
Average benefit & incentive per farmer	N/A	\$585	\$829	\$734
Average benefit & incentive per farmers market	\$12,929	\$8,669	\$8,396	\$7,777

Source: Authors' calculations of Wholesome Wave data, retrieved July 2015 from <http://66.39.100.79/dvcp/>

2). In 2012, farmers markets accepting federal nutrition benefits for payment received, on average, approximately US\$17,000 in benefits.

The legislation specifies that nonprofits and governments are eligible to receive FINI funds, which will be distributed as incentives matching SNAP redemptions at authorized SNAP retail locations. Given that, at the time of writing, the first round of funds has not yet been distributed, we can only speculate about the community-level detail concerning the use of FINI matching incentives. Important aspects regarding implementation ultimately depend on how the nonprofit organizations and government agencies seeking

grant funding will structure programs for their communities. Also key is how closely USDA, when awarding the grants, adheres to the stated priority of locally and regionally produced foods. While the majority of nutrition incentives have been used at farmers markets that tend to sell locally and regionally produced food, FINI nutrition incentives will also be distributed through food retail stores. There is precedence for their use in grocery stores, as Fair Food Network piloted the use of “double up bucks” for Michigan-grown produce in three independent grocery stores in 2013 (Fair Food Network, n.d.-b). In addition, since the nutrition incentives will be distributed via community groups, the capacity of those groups will influence the success of the program.

Farmers markets are likely to remain an important venue for FINI benefits, at least initially, largely because the nonprofits administering grassroots-based nutrition incentive programs already have the capacity to operate programs under FINI. Furthermore, lobbying by advocates of nutrition incentive programs was largely conducted by those with experience operating programs at farmers markets. That does not mean, however, that farmers

**Table 2. Number of Farmers Markets and Redemption of Federal Nutrition Benefits in Farmers Markets: U.S., 2008–2013**

Year	Farmers markets	Markets accepting SNAP benefits	SNAP	Senior and WIC FMNP
	<i>Number</i>		<i>Millions of US\$</i>	
2008	4,685	750	~\$2.0	~\$41.6
2009	5,274	936	4.2	~40.4
2010	6,132	2,445	7.5	38.2
2011	7,175	1,040	11.7	37.4
2012	7,864	3,214	16.6	37.1
2013	8,144	4,000+	20.4	34.7

Note: Does not include WIC Cash Value Vouchers (CVV) spent at market because data are not available.

Sources: Farmers Market Coalition, n.d.; USDA, AMS, 2013.

markets will be the only venue for nutrition incentive programs. Nonprofits and government agencies may view food cooperatives, neighborhood stores, convenience shops, and small, independent grocery stores as likely other locations for matching SNAP redemptions with nutrition incentives, particularly in urban areas where such stores are common. At this point in time, little is known about the extent of participation in the FINI programs by larger, chain supermarkets. On the one hand, large supermarkets already meet the demand of many low-income consumers; in 2009, 84 percent of federal nutrition benefits were redeemed in supermarkets or supercenters (Ver Ploeg et al., 2009). Just 2 percent were redeemed in small groceries and 4 percent were redeemed in other venues, which includes farmers markets (Castner & Henke, 2011).<sup>2</sup> Clearly the raw numbers suggest that FINI might be able to reach a greater number of consumers through large supermarkets; the target populations are those living in impoverished urban or rural communities with few large supermarkets, and, most likely, with few farmers markets (Ver Ploeg et al., 2009). Exactly how FINI unfolds, including where the nutrition incentives can be redeemed, depends on the organizations applying for the funds and their partner retail outlets.

### **Assessing Economic Impact: Methodology**

“Input-output” models are a commonly used method for quantifying economic impacts of government spending. The models trace expenditures through the economy, working on the assumption that of every dollar received, only a portion will be spent. A “multiplier” summarizes the total amount of economic activity created from beginning to end and is based on the proportions spent and saved, as well as on the flow of expenditures through the economy. Two methods widely used for assessing economic activity at a regional level are IMPLAN, a software package initially developed by the U.S. Forest Service and now owned by IMPLAN

Group LLC (IMPLAN Group LLC, 2012), and RIMS II, developed by the U.S. Commerce Department’s Bureau of Economic Analysis (Bureau of Economic Analysis [BEA], n.d.). Both methods are easy to use, as the complexities of the sectoral flows of funds are modeled behind the scenes. Studies of the economic impact of different aspects of the food system on the community level have relied on IMPLAN (see for example, Allen, Gabe, & McConnon, 2006; Henneberry, Whitacre, & Agustini, 2009; Organic Trade Association, 2012; Otto & Varner, 2005; Tootelian, Mikhailitchenko, & Varshney, 2012). However, quantifying regional or local benefits, particularly of food systems, is a challenging task for multiple reasons, two of which are the uncertainty regarding regional boundaries and the lack of accurate data for specific regions (O’Hara & Pirog, 2013).

This analysis relies on a different input-output model, which was specifically designed for conducting a national-level assessment of the economic benefits of food assistance. The Food Assistance National Input-Output Multiplier (FANIOM) model, developed by USDA’s Economic Research Service (ERS), models linkages among domestic food assistance, agriculture, and the economy at the national level (Hanson, 2010). One appeal of the FANIOM model is its suitability to a national-level analysis of SNAP spending, which makes it directly applicable to this paper. Using the FANIOM input-output model, ERS researchers developed a range of multipliers that assess the effect of SNAP purchases on economic activity as measured by gross domestic product (GDP) and employment.

The multipliers take into account that federal nutrition benefit recipients tend to use their benefits right away, with the funds expended entering the economy quickly. Analysis of expenditure patterns indicate that in 2009 more than half of households used nearly all of their benefits within the first two weeks of receiving them (Castner & Henke, 2011). Empirical research indicates that, for each dollar of SNAP benefits received, food expenditures increase by 23 to 35 percent (Hanson, 2010). The percentage of federal benefits spent on food is less than one hundred because, while households do buy more food, they also shift

---

<sup>2</sup> Other venues include “groceries in combination with other stores, delivery routes, farmers markets, non-profit food buying cooperatives, and wholesalers” (Castner & Henke, 2011, p xxx).

expenditure of existing funds from food to other uses, so they purchase more nonfood items as well. Given the range of empirical estimates, ERS researchers rely on a midrange consumption change of 26 percent when calculating the FANIOM multiplier (Hanson, 2010).

Using different sets of assumptions about spending, ERS developed three multipliers that can be used to predict the level of economic activity generated from the redemption of federal nutrition benefits. The estimated multipliers range from 0.89 to 1.79, and imply that for each US\$1,000 of benefits, the economic activity created ranges from US\$890 to US\$1,790 (Table 3). The first, type I, includes the direct and indirect effects that result from SNAP expenditures. The direct effects in this case accrue to the firms producing and distributing the food purchased by the federal nutrition benefit customers. The indirect effects result from the increased demand for food products, which is heavily weighted towards farm products. The type II multiplier expands on the type I multiplier by adding the multiplicative induced effects of labor income (jobs saved and created) on economic activity. These effects come from the amount of spending on goods and services that result from the increased or preserved labor earnings. The type III multiplier adds the induced effects from capital income, which include dividends, interest, rent, retained earnings, depreciation, and profit tax (Hanson, 2010). This analysis relies on the type II multiplier, which projects the amount of economic activity associated with direct and indirect effects of the increased spending, as well as the commen-

surate induced effects of labor income.

The jobs impact (or employment multiplier) is measured in terms of the number of full-time, part-time and self-employed positions created or preserved. However, it is important to note that ERS suggests that the employment multiplier is more appropriate when assessing the creation of a new industry than when looking at increased household expenditure (such as increased SNAP spending). The ERS researchers state that the type III multipliers from input-output models tend to overestimate the number of jobs created when compared to other methods, such as the number of jobs per 1 percent change in GDP. Thus the estimated number of jobs created (based on the employment multiplier) likely exceeds the actual employment change.

The multipliers predict economic activity generated by what the macroeconomics literature refers to as the government's injection of new funds into the economy, also called government spending. All federal nutrition benefits are a form of government spending, and thus the multipliers project how much economic activity they will spur. We assume the funds allocated under FINI are new government spending, with an effect on the economy equivalent to SNAP expenditures.

Crucial differences exist between the assumptions underlying the FANIOM model and the food system that produces the locally and regionally produced fruits and vegetables that FINI targets. The FANIOM multipliers are based on the assumption that the food purchased is the product of conventional marketing channels. This assumption is based on the concept that agricultural products move from the farm, through the processing and distribution channels, and finally to the retail store. ERS estimates that the distribution of food expenditures is approximately 6 percent to producers, 57 percent to processors, 12 percent to distributors, and 26 percent to retailers. The first difference is that fruits and vegetables are not as highly processed as other foods that are included in the model. Second, locally and regionally produced fruits and vegetables are distributed via a short supply chain. These differences suggest that expenditures for fruits and vegetables will not be distributed along the food supply chain in the

**Table 3. Multipliers for SNAP's Impact on Macroeconomic Variables**

Multiplier Type	GDP multiplier	Jobs per million US\$ GDP
Type I	0.89	9.8
Type II	1.45	15.9
Type III	1.79	19.8

Note: GDP multiplier is the increase in GDP that results from the government's distribution of SNAP benefits. Jobs per million dollars of GDP were inferred by the authors based on work by Hanson, 2010.

Source: Hanson, 2010.

proportions ERS indicates. Furthermore, local and regional purchases, such as those made in farmers markets or other short supply chains, are thought to generate higher levels of economic activity, although this has not been definitively established and remains an important research question (O'Hara & Pirog, 2013; Sadler, Clark, & Gilliland, 2013).

An advantage of the input-output models is their ease of use, and this is likely why they are widely used in assessments of economic impact. There are drawbacks, however, to their use beyond those directly related to the food system. One shortcoming is the assumption that increases in sales and output have no effect on prices. Second, all firms within a sector are assumed to be identical. Thus, the multiplier, along with any of the standard input-output models (IMPLAN or RIMS II), is best interpreted as a way of describing potential economic activity of closely related spending; it provides a reasonable estimate, and possibly a lower bound, of economic benefits at a national scale.

### Potential Economic Activity Associated with Nutrition Incentives and Federal Nutrition Benefits

In order to understand the potential effects of the new FINI nutrition incentives program, we assess the economic impact of the funds allocated for nutrition incentives at different matching rates. The total amount allotted (US\$100 million over 5 years) translates into US\$20 million each year.<sup>3</sup> USDA's request for proposals does not specify a specific match percentage (Agricultural Act of 2014, n.d.). Several assumptions underlie the estimates of economic activity that follow. The first assumption is that the entire annual distribution of US\$20 million of nutrition incentives is distributed, and

**Table 4. Projected Annual Economic Impact of the Food Insecurity and Nutrition Incentive Program**

	Percent of SNAP redemption matched				
	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
	<i>Millions of US\$</i>				
SNAP redemptions	\$100	\$50	\$33	\$25	\$20
Nutrition incentives	\$20	\$20	\$20	\$20	\$20
Economic activity	\$174	\$102	\$77	\$65	\$58
	<i>Number of jobs created and/or retained</i>				
Jobs created	2,767	1,613	1,230	1,037	922

Notes: The table assumes that US\$20 million of incentives are allocated in one year. Economic activity and jobs created are based on ERS type II multipliers from Hanson (2010).

that the entire amount is used for incentives. In practice, a portion of the US\$20 million will likely be used for administrative costs, so this represents an upper bound. Next, projections of potential economic benefits are evaluated for different levels of match, in increments of 20 cents, ranging from 20 cents per US\$1 of SNAP redeemed to a full dollar-for-dollar match (Table 4). The third assumption is that all of the incentives will be redeemed at farmers markets.

The economic benefits are sensitive to the percentage of SNAP benefits matched, as demonstrated when backing into the amount of SNAP redemption that would be needed. For example, in order to distribute the entire US\$20 million allocated for nutrition incentives in the farm bill, given the assumption that the match provided is 20 percent, participants need to redeem US\$100 million in SNAP benefits on fruit and vegetables. Note that in practice organizations will provide matches at different levels. For the sake of simplicity, the match amount given in the table can be thought of as a uniform match, provided by all organizations, or the average match provided by the participating organizations.

The level of economic activity and number of jobs created are based on both the SNAP expenditures and nutrition incentives, and use the type II multipliers as specified in Hanson (2010). Economic activity created by the SNAP benefits and nutrition incentives is about 3 times greater when the match is 20 percent, in comparison to the 100

<sup>3</sup> The additional US\$5 million authorized for a portion of the years covered by the Agricultural Act of 2014 is excluded from the projections.

percent match. At a match rate of 100 percent, the nutrition incentives and SNAP expenditures would both equal US\$20 million, and with it, economic activity of US\$58 million and 922 jobs. A match of 20 percent would create US\$174 million of economic activity and 2,767 jobs. Thus there is an inverse relationship between the amount of the match and the amount of economic activity generated. When the match is small, in terms of percentage, the required redemption of SNAP is large, which is associated with a greater the level of economic activity.

#### *Farmers Market Capacity and Nutrition Incentives*

Capacity in terms of market supply at markets that accept federal nutrition benefits will likely be a binding constraint on the ability of farmers markets to expand nutrition incentive programs. To demonstrate this, assuming all of the available funding for nutrition incentives is used and that the entire program is implemented at farmers markets, SNAP benefit redemption would be in the range of US\$20 million to US\$100 million, depending on the match share (see Table 4). In comparison, in 2013 (see Table 2), approximately US\$20 million of SNAP benefits were redeemed at farmers markets. Thus, with the exception of the 100 percent match, the dollar value of SNAP benefits used at farmers markets would increase over the baseline. Furthermore, at a 20 percent match, the value of SNAP benefits redeemed would increase fivefold over the 2013 baseline, to US\$100 million. Farmers markets, however, may be unable to process the higher amounts of SNAP benefits and nutrition incentives implied in these scenarios. Because fewer than half of farmers markets accepted federal nutrition benefits in 2012, a natural answer is to increase the number of farmers markets accepting SNAP. Yet this may not be a plausible solution, since the farmers markets currently accepting SNAP benefits are also those with the greatest capacity to administer the benefits.

Capacity issues are also associated with the supply of local and regional fruits and vegetables. With the heightened focus of FINI on local and regional production, the ability to meet this demand depends on whether farmers either increase their production or shift some of their

sales into local and regional marketing channels. Research on existing community-based programs suggests that in markets with nutrition incentives farmers' sales are higher, and that farmers are increasing production to meet the demand of their customers at the farmers markets (Oberholtzer et al., 2012). The growth in demand that might be spurred by FINI has the potential to increase farmers' sales to local markets, but distribution, storage, aggregation, and labor are examples of obstacles facing farmers who seek to market their products locally. Regional food hubs may be instrumental in bridging the needs of retailers and farmers. However, many smaller independent grocers—particularly those currently offering inadequate amounts of healthy food for sale—may be unable to shift their buying patterns or even find local and regional produce. This suggests that success may rest in the hands of the community organizations and their efforts to work with farmers, retailers, and distributors. One unfortunate outcome of the FINI program could be that smaller stores might be unable to adapt to the program in terms of increasing their produce offerings, or might end up relying on fruits and vegetables that are not locally or regionally produced.


#### **Competing Goals and the Relative Importance of Economic Benefits**

The combination of nutrition incentives, farmers markets, and underserved communities has much promise: greater financial and geographic access to healthy foods for underserved consumers and new markets for farmers are the two most obvious. Additional potential benefits of the FINI program are adding dollars of economic activity and job creation. One currently unexplored area is the sensitivity of consumption of fruits and vegetables to the size of the match a consumer receives. While this research has not been undertaken, related research is suggestive. Price reductions or coupons may encourage increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables (Dong & Leibtag, 2010; Dong & Lin, 2009; Guthrie, Lin, Ver Ploeg, & Frazao, 2007). Prior research suggests that produce consumption does not respond to price reductions until an income threshold has been passed; empirical work suggests this point is where household



income reaches 130 percent of the poverty level (Stewart & Blisard, 2008). One implication is that consumers are sensitive to the amount of the nutrition incentive, but the sensitivity appears to vary with income level. Those with lower income may need larger incentives before their food purchasing and consumption behaviors respond. In practice, this may translate to difficulty in reducing food insecurity for the poorest households.

We conclude that if the policy goal is to encourage people to eat more fruits and vegetables, nutrition incentives should be larger. However, larger incentives create smaller economic benefits. At the same time, a smaller match means that a greater number of consumers receive nutrition incentives. The trade-offs are clear: the greater the incentive, the more responsive consumption is, but the smaller the economic impact. Similarly, there is tension between the number of participants in nutrition incentive programs and the potential increase in consumption of fruits and vegetables. Research to determine the right size of the nutrition incentive would guide policy-makers in setting the best match percentage. The ability to fine-tune the match percentage, perhaps by neighborhood characteristics, would balance the needs of communities in terms of food access, economic activity, number of people that FINI potential reaches, and expenditure of federal nutrition benefits.

Finally, markets consist of both supply and demand. While there is no guarantee that purchases of fruits and vegetables will increase in response to the nutrition incentives, what happens if there is an increase? Will there be a supply response at the retail level, including a removal or reduction of the barriers that are currently preventing food purveyors from offering fruits and vegetables for sale in underserved communities? While FINI does not explicitly address supply, the availability of fruits and vegetables is critical to the success of this program. We suggest that the next efforts of grassroots organizations and policy-makers more explicitly focuses on farm-level supply factors. 

### Acknowledgements

The authors thank two anonymous JAFSCD reviewers for helpful comments and suggestions.

### References

- Agricultural Act of 2014, § 4208. (n.d.). Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive. HR 113-333. Retrieved from [http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/cpquery/?&dbname=cp113&sid=cp113bmWzI&refer=&r\\_n=hr333.113&item=&&&sel=TOC\\_566460&](http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/cpquery/?&dbname=cp113&sid=cp113bmWzI&refer=&r_n=hr333.113&item=&&&sel=TOC_566460&)
- Ahearn, M., & Sterns, J. (2013). Direct-to-consumer sales of farm products: Producers and supply chains in the Southeast. *Journal of Agricultural and Applied Economics*, 45(3), 497–508. <http://purl.umn.edu/155424>
- Allen, T. G., Gabe, T. M., & McConnon, J. C. (2006). *The economic contribution of agri-tourism to the Maine economy* (REP Staff Paper No. 563). Orono, Maine: University of Maine, Department of Resource Economics and Policy. Retrieved from [https://www.uvm.edu/~snrvtdc/agritourism/UMaine\\_repstaffpaper563.pdf](https://www.uvm.edu/~snrvtdc/agritourism/UMaine_repstaffpaper563.pdf)
- Andrés, J. (2014, August 28). José Andrés interviews fellow chef Michel Nischan [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://theplate.nationalgeographic.com/2014/08/28/jose-andres-interviews-fellow-chef-michel-nischan/>
- Barnhill, A. (2011). Impact and ethics of excluding sweetened beverages from the SNAP program. *American Journal of Public Health*, 101(11), 2037–2043. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300225>
- Baronberg, S., Dunn, L., Nonas, C., Dannefer, R., & Sacks, R. (2013). The impact of New York City's Health Bucks Program on Electronic Benefit Transfer spending at farmers markets, 2006–2009. *Preventing Chronic Disease*, 10, E163. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd10.130113>
- Bartlett, S., Klerman, J., Wilde, P., Olsho, L., Blocklin, M., Logan, C., & Enver, A. (2013). *Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP) interim report*. Washington, D.C.: USDA, FNS, Office of Policy Support. Retrieved from [http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/HIP\\_Interim.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/HIP_Interim.pdf)
- Blumenthal, S. J., Hoffnagle, E. E., Leung, C. W., Lofink, H., Jensen, H. H., Foerster, S. B.,... Willett, W. C. (2014). Strategies to improve the dietary quality of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) beneficiaries: An assessment of stakeholder opinions. *Public Health Nutrition*, 17(12), 2824–2833. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1368980013002942>

- Bureau of Economic Analysis. (n.d.). *Regional Input-Output Modeling System (RIMS II)*. Retrieved September 2013 from <https://www.bea.gov/regional/rims/index.cfm>
- Castner, L., & Henke, J. (2011). *Benefit redemption patterns in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Final report*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ARRASpendingPatterns.pdf>
- Dimitri, C., L. Oberholtzer & M. Nischan. (2013). "Reducing the geographic and financial barriers to food access: perceived benefits of farmers markets and monetary incentives." *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition*. Vol. 8. Issue 4. pp 429-444. DOI:10.1080/19320248.2013.840547
- Dimitri, C., Oberholtzer, L., Zive, M., & Sandolo, C. (2015). Enhancing food security of low-income consumers: An investigation of financial incentives for use at farmers markets. *Food Policy*, 52, 64-70.
- Dong, D., & Leibtag, E. (2010). *Promoting fruit and vegetable consumption: Are coupons more effective than pure price discounts?* (Economic Research Report No. ERR-96). Washington, D.C.: USDA, Economic Research Service. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err96.aspx>
- Dong, D., & Lin, B.-H. (2009). *Fruit and vegetable consumption by low-income Americans: Would a price reduction make a difference?* (Economic Research Report No. ERR-70). Washington, D.C.: USDA, Economic Research Service. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err70.aspx>
- Fair Food Network. (n.d.-a). Double Up Food Bucks. Retrieved October 2014 from <http://www.fairfoodnetwork.org/what-we-do/projects/double-up-food-bucks>
- Fair Food Network. (n.d.-b). Double Up Grocery Project. Retrieved October 2014 from <http://www.fairfoodnetwork.org/what-we-do/improving-healthy-food-access/double-up-food-bucks/grocery-project>
- Farmers Market Coalition. (n.d.). Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Retrieved July 2015 from <http://farmersmarketcoalition.org/advocacy/snap/>
- Freedman, D. A., Mattison-Faye, A., Alia, K., Guest, M. A., & Hébert, J. R. (2014). Comparing farmers' market revenue trends before and after the implementation of a monetary incentive for recipients of food assistance. *Preventing Chronic Disease*, 11, 130347. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd11.130347>
- Guthrie, J., Lin, B.-H., Ver Ploeg, M., & Frazao, E. (2007). *Overview: Can food stamps do more to improve food choices? An economic perspective* (Economic Information Bulletin No. EIB 29-1). Washington, D.C.: USDA, Economic Research Service. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/eib-economic-information-bulletin/eib29-1.aspx>
- Hanson, K. (2010). *The Food Assistance National Input-Output Multiplier (FANIOM) model and the stimulus effects of SNAP* (Economic Research Report No. ERR-103). Washington, D.C.: USDA, Economic Research Service. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err103.aspx>
- Henneberry, S. R., Whitacre, B., & Agustini, H. N. (2009). An evaluation of the economic impacts of Oklahoma farmers markets. *Journal of Food Distribution Research*, 40(3), 64-78. <http://purl.umn.edu/99760>
- Illinois Department of Agriculture. (n.d.). IL Product FFA Challenge - overview. Retrieved July 2015 from <http://www.agriculture.illinois.gov/ffa/overview.html>
- IMPLAN Group LLC [formerly Minnesota IMPLAN Group, Inc.]. (2012). Home page. Retrieved September 2013 from <http://www.implan.com>
- Just, D. R. (2011). Behavioral economics and the food consumer. In J. L. Lusk, J. Roosen, and J. F. Shogren (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Economics of Food Consumption and Policy* (pp. 99-118). Oxford University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199569441.013.0005>
- Klerman, J. A., Bartlett, S., Wilde, P., & Olsho, L. (2014). The short-run impact of the Healthy Incentives Pilot program on fruit and vegetable intake. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 96(5), 1372-1382. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ajae/aau023>

- Lindsay, S., Lambert, J., Penn, T., Hedges, S., Ortwine, K., Mei, A.,...Wooten, W. J. (2013). Monetary matched incentives to encourage the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers markets in underserved communities. *Preventing Chronic Disease*, 10, 130124.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd10.130124>
- Low, S. A., & Vogel, S. (2011). Direct and intermediated marketing of local foods in the United States (Economic Research Report No. ERR-128). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err128.aspx>
- Market Umbrella. (2012). *MarketMatch SNAP Incentive Program*. Retrieved from <http://www.marketumbrella.org/uploads/case-studies/case-study-marketmatch-snap-incentive.pdf>
- Martinez, S., Hand, M. S., Da Pra, M., Pollack, S., Ralston, K., Smith, T.,...Newman, C. (2010). *Local food systems: Concepts, impacts, and issues* (Economic Research Report No. ERR-97). Washington, D.C.: USDA, Economic Research Service. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err97.aspx>
- May, C. (2013, August 1). Restrict food stamps for junk food? Health organizations urge USDA to test limits. *The Daily Caller*. Retrieved from <http://dailycaller.com/2013/08/01/restrict-food-stamps-for-junk-food-health-organizations-urge-usda-to-test-limits/>
- Oberholtzer, L., Dimitri, C., & Schumacher, G. (2012). Linking farmers, healthy foods, and underserved consumers: exploring the impact of nutrition incentive programs on farmers and farmers' markets. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 2(4), 63-77.
- O'Hara, J. K., & Pirog, R. (2013). Economic impacts of local food systems: Future research priorities. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 3(4), 35-42.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2013.034.003>
- Organic Trade Association. (2012, April 25). *Organic foods industry creates more than a half million jobs* [Press release]. Retrieved from [http://www.organicnewsroom.com/2012/04/organic\\_foods\\_industry\\_creates.html](http://www.organicnewsroom.com/2012/04/organic_foods_industry_creates.html)
- Otto, D., & Varner, T. (2005). *Consumers, vendors, and the economic importance of Iowa farmers' markets: An economic impact survey analysis*. Ames, Iowa: Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University. Retrieved from <https://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2005-05-farmers-markets>
- Park, T., Mishra, A. K., & Wozniak, S. J. (2014). Do farm operators benefit from direct to consumer marketing strategies? *Agricultural Economics*, 45(2), 213-224. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/agec.12042>
- Sadler, R. C., Clark, M. A. R., & Gilliland, J. A. (2013). An economic impact comparative analysis of farmers' markets in Michigan and Ontario. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 3(3), 61-81.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2013.033.009>
- Schumacher, G., Nischan, M., & Simon, D. B. (2011). Healthy food access and affordability: "We can pay the farmer or we can pay the hospital." *Maine Policy Review*, 20(1), 124-139.  
<http://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mpr>
- SNAP to Health. (n.d.). SNAP at farmers' markets. Retrieved October 2014 from <http://www.snapttohealth.org/snap-innovations/snap-at-farmers-markets/>
- Stewart, H., & Blisard, N. (2008). *Are lower income consumers willing and able to budget for fruits and vegetables?* (Economic Research Report No. ERR-54). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err54.aspx>
- Sugiyama, T., & Shapiro, M. F. (2014). The growing socioeconomic disparity in dietary quality: Mind the gap. *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 174(10), 1595-1596.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1001/jamainternmed.2014.3048>
- Tootelian, D. H., Mikhailitchenko, A., & Varshney, S. B. (2012). Can producing and marketing healthy foods create a healthy economy? *Journal of Food Products Marketing*, 18(3), 242-256.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10454446.2012.668376>
- Uematsu, H., & Mishra, A. K. (2011). Use of direct marketing strategies by farmers and their impact on farm business income. *Agricultural and Resource Economics Review*, 40(1), 1-19.  
<http://purl.umn.edu/105457>



- U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], Agricultural Marketing Service [AMS]. (2013). Farmers markets and local food marketing. Retrieved from <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateS&leftNav=WholesaleandFarmersMarkets&page=WFMFarmersMarketGrowth&description=Farmers%20Market%20Growth&acct=frmrdirnkt>
- USDA, Economic Research Service [ERS]. (2014). Agricultural Act of 2014: Highlights and implications: Nutrition. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/agricultural-act-of-2014-highlights-and-implications/nutrition.aspx>
- USDA, Food and Nutrition Service [FNS]. (2013, April 29). *USDA expands support for farmers markets to accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits* [Press Release No. FNS-0008.13]. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pressrelease/2013/fns-000813>
- USDA, FNS. (2014). Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>
- USDA, FNS. (2015). Program data: Overview. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/overview>
- USDA, National Institute of Food and Agriculture [NIFA]. (2014). *Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) grant program: 2014/2015 request for applications (RFA)*. Retrieved from [http://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/rfa/1415\\_FINI.pdf](http://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/rfa/1415_FINI.pdf)
- Ver Ploeg, M., Breneman, V., Farrigan, T., Hamrick, K., Hopkins, D., Kaufman, P.,...Tuckermanty, E. (2009). *Access to affordable and nutritious food—Measuring and understanding food deserts and their consequences: Report to Congress* (Administrative Publication No. AP-036). Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/ap-administrative-publication/ap-036.aspx>
- Wholesome Wave. (n.d.). *Wholesome Wave's Double Value Coupon Program*. Retrieved from [http://www.wholesomewave.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/2014\\_double\\_value\\_coupon\\_program.pdf](http://www.wholesomewave.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/2014_double_value_coupon_program.pdf)



## Solidarity and sweat equity: For reciprocal food justice research

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS WORK

Joshua Sbicca \*  
Colorado State University

Submitted May 29, 2015 / Published online July 17, 2015

Citation: Sbicca, J. (2015). Solidarity and sweat equity: For reciprocal food justice research. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 63–67. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.004>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

Researchers committed to food justice often enter communities and nonprofits with a desire to help. They often think there is a scarcity, such as food, that they want to understand and help to increase. At the same time, research obligations may lead to extracting “findings” without advancing food justice. Such actions may unintentionally work against food justice, especially the goal of dismantling structural inequalities and advancing social equity. This commentary chronicles the ongoing and incomplete process by which I have carried out food justice research and worked toward food justice. In short, reciprocal research requires working *with*, not *for*, organizations and communities. This entails ongoing acts of

solidarity. One way to express this is through flexibility with research goals in order to tailor all or parts of one’s project to answer questions that increase understanding of how to challenge structural inequalities and advance social equity. Relatedly, openness to how food justice activists and organizations confront the food movement and society more broadly to address whiteness, privilege, racial inequality, and notions of diversity can enrich critical social science. Of equal importance is sweat equity. Most food justice activists and organizations have few resources and cannot serve the whims of researchers. Therefore, providing labor is an important allied act. This increases the researchers’ empathy with activists, organizations, and communities, and creates opportunities to build trust and dissolve social boundaries. To enter into a situation that deepens our knowledge of the food justice movement *and* advances food justice requires solidarity and sweat equity.

### Keywords

allyship, anti-oppression, anti-racism, food studies, food movement, food justice, methodology, public sociology, solidarity, sweat equity

---

\* Joshua Sbicca, PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Colorado State University; B258 Clark Building; Fort Collins, Colorado 80523 USA; [j.sbicca@colostate.edu](mailto:j.sbicca@colostate.edu)

*Author note:* Joshua Sbicca’s research focuses on the contentious politics of food and agriculture, social movements, and inequalities. This currently includes investigations into food labor and land use politics and the economic and social conditions of coalition development in the food movement.

In the fall of 2008, I found myself on the phone with Brahm Ahmadi, then executive director of People's Grocery, a well-known food justice organization in West Oakland, California. I was a graduate student in the Department of Sociology and Criminology & Law at the University of Florida who wanted to write a master's thesis on the food justice movement. After attending university and working in the San Francisco Bay area for six years, building community and social movement ties in many places and seeing friends link food to social justice, I was inspired to return from the swamplands of Florida for fieldwork. When Brahm asked why I wanted to learn about People's Grocery, I told him that it was one of the only organizations I could find deliberately using food justice to explain its work. I wanted to know how they linked food, as an environmental benefit, to fights for social justice in a place with a long history of labor, black power, and environmental justice movements. Brahm told me that while my question was important, he wanted to know that the time I would take away from People's Grocery for interviews would somehow benefit the organization. Thus began a journey to learn about the merits of sweat equity and the necessary acts of solidarity required to do research with resource-strapped organizations in low-income communities of color.

For the next year, I became an interlocutor, translating my experiences and those of interns and volunteers that were part of People's Grocery's "allyship" into words reflecting the anti-oppression framework guiding the organization. My conversation with Brahm ended with him noting that the organization wanted to know how their allyship program was working, what interns and volunteers thought about their role in the organization, and whether this translated into deeper community engagement. Therefore, along with a set of my own questions, these organizational needs shaped the direction of my research. Whereas I had sought to describe how this pioneering organization understood food justice, I instead came away with an appreciation of the opportunities and obstacles faced by food justice organizations adopting an anti-oppression framework (Sbicca, 2012).

Flexibility and openness are basic modes of

solidarity from which researchers can build relationships with potential collaborators and respondents. Flexibility during early stages of research development is important if one hopes to gain the trust of activists and organizations engaged in the daily tasks of movement building. This is especially true if one is asking for interviews or surveys, requesting participants to draw maps or take photographs, or engaging in any other time-intensive qualitative method. Food justice activists, like many activists, are working on a shoestring budget. Coupled with the entrenched social inequalities facing low-income communities of color and the perceived immediacy of problems such as hunger, poverty, and mass incarceration, researchers must recognize how activists might see their work as less important. When one is an outsider with few or no previous ties, remaining open to organizational or community needs can signal sensitivity to the challenges of combating institutionalized racism and cultivating a commitment to food justice in the food movement. We may want to parachute in with a tidy set of questions and then scramble away once we arrive at answers, but this would be to the detriment of future scholar/activist collaborations. Strictly extractive models of research, then, undermine the social change potential of more reciprocal relationships.

Openness to the questions food justice activists and organizations ask about their own work and the critical role they play in pushing the food movement to address whiteness, privilege, racial inequality, and notions of diversity sets up the researcher to play a supportive role. This also positions the researcher to broadcast more widely some of the strategies used by the food justice movement to challenge colonialism, institutionalized racism, racial inequality, and discrimination, and to build alliances across race and class lines. The venues where a researcher shares these strategies may include academic and popular journals and magazines, newspapers, organizational newsletters, webcasts, blogs, and/or talks given at churches, schools, food justice organizations, and food policy councils. The point is that the researcher is in a key strategic position, a position of privilege they can use to advance racial equity.

For example, my time with People's Grocery included attendance at a required anti-oppression training. At the outset of this training, a facilitator noted that food justice could be broken down between "food," which entails cultivating and growing, and "justice," which represents the larger struggle. In essence, the purpose of the training was to cultivate and grow the struggle for social justice. The group in attendance agreed upon a set of rules to create a safe space for the day. The facilitator wrote these up on a number of large easel pads: No judgment; step up and step back; one mic; speak in order; what is said here, stays here; no assumptions about people's identity; bring things up in love; "I" statements instead of "you" statements; stay open-minded to others. After this, we went through an activity called "Community Tree," which began with the group listing problems in West Oakland. These included unemployment, pollution, the number of liquor stores and lack of grocery stores, gentrification, empty lots and foreclosures, drug use and alcoholism, health problems, poor schools, and lack of public facilities. We then listed causes, such as institutionalized racism, the white dominant culture's ability to define other cultures, inequality in the justice system, redlining, capitalism, city officials, unequal distribution of resources, polluting industry, and how the Gold Rush brought people who displaced the Ohlone tribe in the Bay Area. The idea behind making these connections was to point out the structural nature of many social problems intersecting with the work of the food justice movement. We then free-associated solutions like building community, alliances, and a local economy, empowerment, reshaping the environment, creating space for community voice, shifting power, drawing upon community assets, public policy, and education. In addition to these power mapping and solution-generation exercises, we investigated our own privileges, role-played scenarios we might encounter while working with People's Grocery, listened to a talk about what it means to fight for food justice, and came up with one concrete way we were going to live out working as an ally.

For me, working as an ally means leveraging my privilege to support food justice work as a white male professor at a large public university

with many resources. This requires active listening, reflection, and patience in order to resist reproducing asymmetrical power relationships between academia and the food justice movement (Bradley and Herrera 2015). Practice as a graduate student was central to helping me adjust what this looks like depending on the context. I found that People's Grocery offered a powerful anti-oppression framework for building food justice allies, but volunteers and interns understood this differently depending on their social position and previous life experiences. In the years following my allyship, leaders deepened the program by including a regular anti-oppression reading group, which created a space to work through becoming an ally. The reflexive space interviews offered people to think about how to improve their work and informal conversations about movement building while gardening alongside staff and interns enriched the process of making this organizational change. Although a small modification, it led me to believe that researchers can foster reciprocity and active solidarity with food justice organizations.

Sweat equity is another way researchers can build trust. My experience as an unpaid intern at People's Grocery, which included working in urban gardens and a small farm, led me to the conclusion that providing labor is an important act as an ally. When planning my doctoral dissertation, I took into account how food organizations perceive the costs of granting access to researchers. Because I wanted to embed myself with their daily work, I knew that I could not just sit in a corner and scribble notes about what I was witnessing. I had to work with people on their projects and campaigns. Because the three organizations I based my dissertation on sought to improve the food system in distinct ways, I had to meet each organization where they were at and lend my labor where they saw fit. This included paying to attend organic farming workshops, and farming alongside interns and volunteers with San Diego Roots Sustainable Food Project; building edible landscapes, designing surveys, and canvassing with Planting Justice; and recruiting community partners for Black Friday strikes against Wal-Mart, attending protests, and writing a briefing on the All-China Federation of Trade Unions for United Food and Commercial


Workers Local 770.

Beyond the practical benefits of providing labor in whatever ways were most useful to organizations, there were prefigurative benefits. These benefits emerged through the process of working across social boundaries, reflecting in interviews on the race dynamics of the organization, and changing individual and organizational practices accordingly. Each organization had different race, class, and gender dynamics, which to dissect in any depth is beyond the scope of this commentary (for more, see Myers & Sbicca, 2015; Sbicca, 2014, 2015a, 2015b). The point I want to make is that the role that a researcher plays as ally is contingent on the needs of the organization as well as the economic, political, and social context. In one instance, my role was to ask pointed questions about an organization's relationship to a local low-income community of color, which had the unintended consequence of starting conversations about organizational diversity and the problems of color-blind programming. In another instance, my role was to build gardens with formerly incarcerated men, all of whom were black, listen to their experiences, offer help when asked, and relay their stories to a food movement happy to buy prison-produced tilapia at Whole Foods, but afraid of the stereotype Kathryn Russell Brown (2009) refers to as the "criminalblackman." In the final instance, my role was to support the confrontational political tactics driven by low-income communities and communities of color such as strikes, protests, and lobbying. Thus, sweat equity is not an instrumental tool to gain research access, but a means by which to prefigure anti-oppressive scholar/activist ties capable of challenging structural inequalities, and advancing diversity within the food movement and racial equity in the food system.

Food justice research devoid of praxis will not empower low-income communities and communities of color or advance racial equity. This is especially the case when research perpetuates moralist and colonizing practices that elevate the scholar above the activist and ignore the situated knowledge of communities of color (Bradley and Herrera 2015). Alternatively, food justice research can be a means to enrich relationships, start conversations, strategize solutions, and create

institutions to advance food justice while contesting those that do not. To do food justice would require at a minimum, as Cadieux and Slocum (2015) suggest, confronting and acknowledging historical trauma and inequity, developing autonomous and community-controlled exchange systems, creating non-, anti-, and despite-capitalist relationships with land, and pursuing fair labor practices. This requires an initial and then ongoing acts of solidarity. Paulo Freire (2000) put it this way:

Solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is solidary; it is a radical posture... True solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the objective reality which has made them these "beings for another." The oppressor is solidary with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice, cheated in the sale of their labor—when he stops making pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love. True solidarity is found only in the plenitude of this act of love, in its existentiality, in its praxis. To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce. (pp. 49–50)

Sweat equity is one of the chief principles that can guide researchers to "enter into the situation." Once present, this principle requires ongoing support for the food justice movement, a process predicated on active listening and strategic action while also doing research. 

## References

- Bradley, K. & Herrera, H. (2015). Decolonizing food justice: Naming, resisting, and researching colonizing forces in the movement. *Antipode*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/anti.12165>
- Cadieux, K. V., & Slocum, R. (2015). What does it mean to *do* food justice? *Journal of Political Ecology*, 22, 1–26. [http://jpe.library.arizona.edu/Volume22/Volume\\_22.html](http://jpe.library.arizona.edu/Volume22/Volume_22.html)

- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed.; trans. by M. B. Ramos). New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Myers, J. S., & Sbicca, J. (2015). Bridging good food and good jobs: From secession to confrontation within alternative food movement politics. *Geoforum*, 61, 17–26.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.02.003>
- Russell-Brown, K. (2009). *The color of crime: Racial hoaxes, White fear, Black protectionism, police harassment, and other macroaggressions* (2nd ed.). New York: New York University Press.
- Sbicca, J. (2012). Growing food justice by planting an anti-oppression foundation: Opportunities and obstacles for a budding social movement. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 29(4), 455–466.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10460-012-9363-0>
- Sbicca, J. (2014). The need to feed: Urban metabolic struggles of actually existing radical projects. *Critical Sociology*, 40(6), 817–834.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0896920513497375>
- Sbicca, J. (2015a). Farming while confronting the other: The production and maintenance of boundaries in the borderlands. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 39, 1–10.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2015.03.004>
- Sbicca, J. (2015b). Food labor, economic inequality, and the imperfect politics of process in the alternative food movement. *Agriculture and Human Values*. Advance online publication.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10460-015-9582-2>





## Alternative agrifood projects in communities of color: A civic engagement perspective

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS WORK

Glennon Sweeney,<sup>a</sup> \* Christy Rogers,<sup>a</sup> Casey Hoy,<sup>b</sup> Jill K. Clark,<sup>c</sup>  
Kareem Usher,<sup>d</sup> Kip Holley,<sup>a</sup> and Colleen Spees<sup>e</sup>  
The Ohio State University

Submitted June 15, 2015 / Published online July 23, 2015

Citation: Sweeney, G., Rogers, C., Hoy, C., Clark, J. K., Usher, K., Holley, K., & Spees, C. (2015). Alternative agrifood projects in communities of color: A civic engagement perspective. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 69–75. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.005>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

In this commentary we very briefly highlight farming- and land-related historical injustices impacting African Americans, and outline useful ways for racially diverse food justice organizations, activists, and academics to collaborate on place-based interventions in an equitable and inclusive way. Place-based strategies to address inequity in the food system must begin with an equitable and

inclusive environment within which residents can engage in developing solutions. Equitable and inclusive civic engagement can build capacity, trust, and empowerment in marginalized communities, creating an environment where communities can enact transformative local food system change using their own resources. Transformative change is change that occurs at the very core of ourselves as individuals and in our communities. Such change requires us to reexamine our long-standing customs, assumptions, beliefs, and institutional

---

<sup>a</sup> \* Glennon Sweeney (*Corresponding author*), Christy Rogers, and Kip Holley: Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at the Ohio State University; 33 West 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue; Columbus, Ohio 43201 USA; [sweeney.270@osu.edu](mailto:sweeney.270@osu.edu); [christyrogers441@gmail.com](mailto:christyrogers441@gmail.com); [kipholley.kirwaninstitute@gmail.com](mailto:kipholley.kirwaninstitute@gmail.com)

<sup>b</sup> Casey Hoy, Professor of Entomology, College of Food, Agriculture, and Environmental Sciences, The Ohio State University, Wooster Campus; 1680 Madison Avenue; Wooster, Ohio 44691 USA; [hoy.1@osu.edu](mailto:hoy.1@osu.edu)

<sup>c</sup> Jill K. Clark, Assistant Professor of Public Affairs, John Glenn College of Public Affairs, The Ohio State University; 1810 College Road; Columbus, Ohio 43210 USA; [clark.1099@osu.edu](mailto:clark.1099@osu.edu)

---

<sup>d</sup> Kareem Usher, Post Doctoral Researcher, City and Regional Planning, Knowlton School of Architecture, Ohio State University; and Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, The Ohio State University; 275 West Woodruff Avenue; Columbus, Ohio 43210 USA; [usher.21@osu.edu](mailto:usher.21@osu.edu)

<sup>e</sup> Colleen Spees, Assistant Professor, Medical Dietetics, The Ohio State University College of Medicine; 453 West 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue; Columbus, Ohio 43210 USA; [colleen.spees@osumc.edu](mailto:colleen.spees@osumc.edu)

*Authors' note:* With special thanks and acknowledgement to Michelle Kaiser, Assistant Professor of Social Work, Ohio State University College of Social Work.

practices, moving community conversations towards those that build relationships, foster mutual accountability, and strive for respectful understanding among neighbors and neighborhoods. Transformative change doesn't come easily. However, practicing equitable engagement can help build capacity for sustaining change. Alternative food movement scholars and activists can lift up and build on community assets, but to do so requires historical understanding, recognition of individual and community strengths, and work to build long-term relationships of trust.

### Keywords

alternative agrifood movement, civic engagement, race, farming

**I**ndustrialization and globalization of the food system have wrought profound changes in local food environments with respect to cost, availability, and variety. And while one result is that food is a small percentage of household expense in the U.S. (making up 9.8% of the average budget in 2013) (USDA ERS, n.d.), the cost of a balanced and health-promoting diet depends on where one lives (Hilbert, Evans-Cowley, Reece, Rogers, Ake, & Hoy, 2014). Thus the percentage of income needed to maintain a balanced diet might vary widely. Many urban neighborhoods with little internal wealth or external investment lack full-service grocery stores, and many of the residents of such neighborhoods lack adequate transportation to access affordable, healthy food (McClintock, 2011; Odoms-Young, Zenk, Karpyn, Ayala, & Gittelsohn, 2012).<sup>1</sup> Often families living in these communities must travel longer distances than those in other neighborhoods to access full-service grocery stores, or are limited to shopping nearby at

smaller stores. These smaller local stores may improve selection in neighborhoods which lack full-service grocery stores, but often have higher prices and/or reduced quality (Raja, Ma, & Yadav, 2008). At the same time, rates of preventable diseases, infant mortality, and other public health concerns are much higher in neighborhoods with inequitable healthy food access (Heynen, Kurtz, & Trauger, 2012; Odoms-Young et al., 2012).

The alternative agrifood movement (AAM) has broadly positioned itself as an alternative to the global, industrial food system (Friedland, 2008). Some AAM members promote local, organic and identity-preserved foods as important components of personal, public, and environmental health (Harper, 2011). While this movement is directed at all food consumers (regardless of income), accessing healthier food is often a matter of consumer choice for affluent consumers. But within many economically distressed urban neighborhoods, accessing healthy food can be very challenging. AAM initiatives aiming to bring healthy food to low-income communities have been met, on occasion, with indifference or even open hostility. Some scholars attribute this phenomenon to a lack of understanding of, and sensitivity to, the historical relationship between Whites, African Americans, the land, and food (Green, Green, & Kleiner, 2011) as well as the perceived "elite" status of the AAM (Cadieux & Slocum, 2015; Guthman, 2007, 2011; Harper, 2011).

In this commentary, we very briefly highlight farming- and land-related historical injustices impacting African Americans and outline useful ways for racially diverse organizations, activists, and academics to collaborate with urban communities of color in an equitable and inclusive way. Equitable and inclusive civic engagement can build capacity, trust, and empowerment in marginalized communities, creating an environment where communities can enact transformative local food system change using their own resources.

The historical legacy of farming in America, and in particular in the American South, is formidable. Indeed, agricultural structures and systems, beginning with slavery and extending to tenancy, sharecropping, and the crop-lien system, underpinned land-owning Whites' subjugation and

---

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this short commentary, the authors have chosen to focus on urban food environments and African American history. We recognize that rural food environments and the exploitation and marginalization of other racial and ethnic populations are equally significant, and that they share some of the social and political drivers of inequality that can characterize African American neighborhoods lacking full access to healthy foods. We look forward to collaborating on a longer article that delves more deeply into the fuller story of racialized land loss, inequality, and food injustice.

control over African American (and poor White) people and farmers in the South throughout our early history (Green et al., 2011; Massey & Denton, 1993). The corresponding legacy of these structures and systems are reflected in both African American cultural attitudes toward farming, and the underrepresentation of African Americans in the American agricultural sector (Green et al., 2011; Guthman, 2011).

African Americans remain underrepresented in farm ownership today. Particularly during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, smaller farms struggled to keep up with the cost of mechanization, more complex inputs (e.g., fertilizers, pesticides, new cultivars), and the need to purchase additional acreage to capture ever-greater economies of scale. This struggle to compete at increasing scales was systematically greater for African American farmers than for White farmers (Hinson & Robinson, 2008). Over the last century, the country experienced an estimated 98 percent loss in African American farm operations and a 66 percent loss in White farm operations, all while the largest (and typically White-owned) farming operations grew even larger (Green et al., 2011). Although African American farms tended to be smaller than White farms in terms of acres and sales, Wood and Gilbert (2000) found that when controlling for scale of operation based on gross sales, African American farmers were still disproportionately reflected in these farm loss trends.

Institutional racism at various levels of government disproportionately created barriers to land ownership and farm growth for African American farmers. In particular, African American farmers were not fairly awarded USDA loans. In 1982, a U.S. Civil Rights Commission found that in 1980 and 1981 local offices of the USDA loaned less than two percent of all farm ownership loan amounts and less than three percent of all farm operating loan amounts to African American farmers (Hinson & Robinson, 2008). As a result, the largest class action lawsuit in U.S. history, known as the *Pigford* case, was filed against the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the late 1990s and was settled in 2000, resulting in ongoing claims processing for African American, Hispanic, Native

American, and women ranchers and farmers (Hinson & Robinson, 2008).<sup>2</sup>

The loss of farm land ownership pushed many African Americans into urban spaces, migrations reflected in many central cities that are now home to large African American populations (Green et al., 2011; Massey & Denton, 1993). Unjust practices of urban housing and neighborhood exclusion such as redlining, block-busting, restrictive covenants, and steering segregated neighborhoods by both race and class. This was followed by consistently inequitable and reduced investment in minority neighborhoods by city governments and private interests throughout the U.S. (Gotham, 1998; Highsmith, 2009; Logan & Molotch, 2007; Massey & Denton, 1993; Schildt, 2011). Racism, exclusion, and disinvestment led to a downward spiral in opportunity that is reflected in high unemployment rates, high vacancy rates, high rates of preventable health problems, and failing local economies (Dreier, Mollenkopf, & Swanstrom, 2004; Massey & Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1996). As local economies failed and access to necessary resources like credit and insurance declined, many businesses (not just food-related businesses) left these neighborhoods (Massey & Denton, 1993). The combined effects of these practices made the acquisition of land for any use—residential, commercial, farming—challenging for the African American community (Gotham, 1998; Highsmith, 2009; Logan & Molotch, 2007; Massey & Denton, 1993; Schildt, 2011). Thus the U.S. food system remains inequitable, long after overt racism has subsided (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011).

Reconnecting people with food and farming is often seen as a means of addressing the vast, often racialized economic and health-related disparities in the food system. The AAM often recognizes and critiques the inequities and injudicious policies inherent in the modern food system (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Cadieux & Slocum, 2015; Guthman, 2007, 2008, 2011; Harper, 2011). Yet prescriptions for small-scale urban agriculture and diet-related behavior do not examine the root causes of the injustices they are meant to address (Guthman, 2007, 2011). And because of the rich

---

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.outreach.usda.gov/settlements.htm>

history of farming in African and African American culture (despite the multiple barriers to land ownership and repeated attempts to exploit African American labor in the U.S.), many African Americans find it offensive when Whites travel to urban neighborhoods and offer to “teach” them how to garden (Guthman, 2008). Though well-intentioned, AAM proponents may be offering a short-term solution when they could contribute powerfully to a sustainable, long-term one by investing in community engagement for collective empowerment and transformative change.

The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity (Kirwan) has worked with low-income communities of color to build capacity for transformative change for over a decade, and has recently summarized a set of principles for equitable and inclusive civic engagement as a result of this work (Holley, in press).<sup>3</sup> The following abridged summary of principles for equitable engagement and transformative change is taken from this work in the hopes that it can be helpful to the important food justice activism and scholarship across the country.

Transformative change is *change that occurs at the very core of ourselves as individuals and our communities*. Such change requires us to reexamine our long-standing customs, assumptions, beliefs, and institutional practices, moving community conversations toward those that build relationships, foster mutual accountability, and strive for respectful understanding among neighbors and neighborhoods. Transformative change requires a shift in how we measure engagement outcomes (changes achieved), and

perhaps even more importantly, a change in how we work within communities (changes in how engagement occurs).

The principles that can serve communities well in the context of the AAM include facing the effects of race, history, and power inequities as a community, embracing the gifts of diverse communities, and building trust and commitment in the community engagement environment. Additional principles include honoring dissent and protests as expressions of civic voice, practicing radical community hospitality, and adapting to community changes.

The historical legacy of the relationship of African Americans and food production in America is a particularly painful one. It is a history rife with profound injustice and inequity. The cumulative impacts of rural and urban disempowerment, displacement, and exclusion has resulted in long-standing urban and rural inequities. Yet this history and its consequences should be acknowledged and understood—not ignored—today. All of our communities, however well or poorly they have been treated, are important places in people’s lives. Our communities are places where our personal histories unfold. Embedded in each place is its own history, which is a part of each community member’s personal narrative as well. Too often the people who make up the neighborhoods, and their stories, are ignored or forgotten. Transformative change in the food system can begin by creating empathy and opportunities for people within communities to explore their histories together, leading to a greater understanding of how history shapes our personal and community narratives as well as the inequities we experience.

Embracing the gifts of diverse communities is also essential. Every community has assets, and many can be found in the skills and talents of the individuals living in the community. These gifts can manifest themselves through the abilities, competencies, and unique experiences of each member of the community. For example, some community members may possess artistic skills that can be put to use promoting community events. Others may possess leadership skills, language skills, a gift for working with children, or have connections to

---

<sup>3</sup> Much of what we have learned over the last 10 years has been in conversation and co-learning with our community partners. This learning, grounded in the writings of Peter Block’s *Civic Engagement and the Restoration of Community* and *The Abundant Community*, and Eric Uslaner’s *Civic Engagement in America*, is detailed in “Growing Together for a Sustainable Future: Strategies and Best Practices for Engaging with Disadvantaged Communities on Issues of Sustainable Development and Regional Planning,” “Expanding Democracy: A Framework for Bolstering Civic Power and Rebuilding Communities,” and “Shining the Light: A Practical Guide to Co-Creating Healthy Communities,” all available at <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/>

other organizations that wish to partner. Flora and Flora (1996) describe such skills and talents as *human capital* and such relational connections as *social capital*, both forms of community capitals that also include the *natural* (in the land), *built* (grocery stores, for example) and *financial* forms of capital. When a community is aware of and embraces all of its capitals, it can draw from these collective assets when confronting challenges. It is also through realizing and celebrating the gifts inherent in its people that further social capital is built, and it is through such relationships that the bedrock of our communities are formed.

Transformative change cannot occur without empowerment. Building trust and commitment is a necessary step toward empowering communities to create transformative change. A culture of distrust often exists in impoverished communities as a result of years of disinvestment, broken promises, and structurally segregative policies (Gotham, 1998; Highsmith, 2009; Logan & Molotch, 2007; Massey & Denton, 1993; Schildt, 2011). Suspicion of new public and private initiatives is a common result of this sad experience, frequently culminating in civic disengagement. But trust can be built by forging relationships based on mutual support. Trust can also be fostered by making and keeping promises. Building trust in communities where high levels of doubt, suspicion, and disengagement are present requires consistency and long-term commitment by organizations and individuals. Further, building trust means building empowerment; that is, it means promoting and supporting leadership in community members and recognizing that local community leaders are essential to achieving transformative change. Finally, mutual accountability is vital to community engagement; not only can it create more complete and honest communication between community stakeholders, but also encourages shared responsibility and shared learning, which are essential aspects of building trust. Through mutual accountability, communities can ensure that the agreements and plans created to strengthen the community today will be able to withstand political and social changes tomorrow.

Examples of the principles of equitable and

inclusive civic engagement in action can be found in Kirwan's work in its home community of Columbus, Ohio. "More Than My Brother's Keeper" (MTMBK) is a program run in partnership with key community anchor institutions, including the local children's hospital and a neighborhood community-development collaborative. The program supports at-risk African American male youth (ages 10 to 14) and their families residing on the south side of the city. MTMBK incorporates both experiential learning and intensive mentoring to help kids discover their own assets and build relationships of mutual trust with each other and with the Kirwan (and other partner) staff and community members. While Kirwan leads conversations among community stakeholders to address issues of affordable and safe housing, food access, and healthy and diverse "third places,"<sup>4</sup> the needs and strengths of the boys and their families are the key drivers of the program's adaptive design. This collaborative process has resulted in the creation of a neighborhood leadership academy, a plan for addressing housing needs in the neighborhood, a community focus on supporting vibrant third places, and a plan to address issues of food access and insecurity, particularly with the community's children.

Place-based strategies to address inequity in the food system must begin with an equitable and inclusive environment, within which the people can engage in developing solutions. Change doesn't come easily. However, practicing equitable and inclusive civic engagement that recognizes our collective, and often painful, historical legacy can help equip community members and collaborators with the tools required to build capacity for sustaining change. Alternative food movement scholars and activists can lift up and build on community assets, but to do so requires historical understanding, recognition of individual and community strengths, and working to build long-term relationships of trust.



---

<sup>4</sup> Third spaces are community meeting places that are neither work nor home. See Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*, 1999.



## References

- Alkon, A. H., & Agyeman, J. (2011). *Cultivating food justice: Race, class, and sustainability*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Cadieux, K. V., & Slocum, R. (2015). What does it mean to *do* food justice? *Journal of Political Ecology*, 22, 1–26. <http://ipe.library.arizona.edu/Volume22/Volume22.html>
- Dreier, P., Mollenkopf, J., & Swanstrom, T. (2004). *Place matters: Metropolitics for the twenty-first century* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Kansas: University Press of Kansas.
- Flora, C. B., & Flora, J. L. (1996). Creating social capital. In W. Vitek & W. Jackson (Eds.), *Rooted in the land: Essays on community and place* (pp. 217–225). New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.
- Friedland, W. H. (2008). “Chasms” in agrifood systems: Rethinking how we can contribute. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 25(2), 197–201. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10460-008-9116-2>
- Gotham, K. F. (1998). Blind faith in the free market: Urban poverty, residential segregation, and federal housing retrenchment, 1970–1995. *Sociological Inquiry*, 68(1), 1–31. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-682X.1998.tb00452.x>
- Green, J. J., Green, E. M., & Kleiner, A. M. (2011). From the past to the present: Agricultural development and black farmers in the American South. In A. H. Alkon & J. Agyeman (Eds.), *Cultivating food justice: Race, class, and sustainability* (pp. 47–64). Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Guthman, J. (2007). Can’t stomach it: How Michael Pollan et al. made me want to eat Cheetos. *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, 7(3), 75–79. <http://www.gastronomica.org/summer-2007/>
- Guthman, J. (2008). Bringing good food to others: Investigating the subjects of alternative food practice. *Cultural Geographies*, 15(4), 431–447. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1474474008094315>
- Guthman, J. (2011). “If they only knew”: The unbearable whiteness of alternative food. In A. H. Alkon & J. Agyeman (Eds.), *Cultivating food justice: Race, class, and sustainability* (pp. 263–282). Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Harper, A. B. (2011). Vegans of color, racialized embodiment, and problematics of the “exotic.” In A. H. Alkon & J. Agyeman (Eds.), *Cultivating food justice: Race, class, and sustainability* (pp. 221–238). Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Heynen, N., Kurtz, H. E., & Trauger, A. (2012). Food justice, hunger and the city. *Geography Compass*, 6(5), 304–311. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2012.00486.x>
- Highsmith, A. R. (2009). Demolition means progress: Urban renewal, local politics, and state-sanctioned ghetto formation in Flint, Michigan. *Journal of Urban History*, 35(3), 348–368. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0096144208330403>
- Hilbert, N., Evans-Cowley, J., Reece, J., Rogers, C., Ake, W., & Hoy, C. (2014). Mapping the cost of a balanced diet, as a function of travel time and food price. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(1), 105–127. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2014.051.010>
- Hinson, W. R., & Robinson, E. (2008). “We didn’t get nothing”: The plight of black farmers. *Journal of African American Studies* 12(3), 283–302. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12111-008-9046-5>
- Holley, D. (in press). *Principles for equitable and inclusive civic engagement*. Columbus, Ohio: Kirwan Institute
- Logan, J. R., & Molotch, H. L. (2007). *Urban fortunes: The political economy of place* (20<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed.). Berkeley, California: University of California Press.
- Massey, D. S., & Denton, N. A. (1993). *American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- McClintock, N. (2011). From industrial garden to food desert: Demarcated devaluation in the Flatlands of Oakland, California. In A. H. Alkon & J. Agyeman (Eds.), *Cultivating food justice: Race, class, and sustainability* (pp. 89–120). Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Odoms-Young, A. M., Zenk, S. N., Karpyn, A., Ayala, G. X., & Gittelsohn, J. (2012). Obesity and the food environment among minority groups. *Economy and Environment*, 1(3), 141–151. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s13679-012-0023-x>
- Raja, S., Ma, C., & Yadav, P. (2008). Beyond food deserts: Measuring and mapping racial disparities in neighborhood food environments. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 27(4), 469–482. <http://ipe.sagepub.com/content/27/4/469.full.pdf>
- Schildt, C. (2011). The struggle of memory against forgetting: Insurgent histories and the development of a new suburban praxis. *Berkeley Planning Journal*, 24(1), 141–149. [https://escholarship.org/uc/ucb\\_crp\\_bjp?volume=24:issue=1](https://escholarship.org/uc/ucb_crp_bjp?volume=24:issue=1)



U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service [USDA, ERS]. (n.d.). Food expenditures [Data sets]. Retrieved June 15, 2015, from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-expenditures.aspx#26634>

Wilson, W. J. (1996). *When work disappears: The world of the new urban poor*. New York: Knopf.

Wood, S. D., & Gilbert, J. (2000). Returning African American farmers to the land: Recent trends and a policy rationale. *The Review of Black Political Economy*, 27(4), 43–64.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF02717262>



## Race, food, and borders: Situating migrant struggle in the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS WORK

Elise Hjalmarson<sup>a</sup>

The University of British Columbia

Robyn Bunn<sup>b</sup>

The University of British Columbia

Amy Cohen<sup>c</sup>

Okanagan College

Edna Terbasket<sup>d</sup>

Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society

Levi Gahman<sup>e\*</sup>

The University of the West Indies

Submitted June 15, 2015 / Published online July 30, 2015

Citation: Hjalmarson, E., Bunn, R., Cohen, A., Terbasket, E., & Gahman, L. (2015). Race, food, and borders: Situating migrant struggle in the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 77–82. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.007>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

Over the past century, the Okanagan Valley's social, economic, and physical landscape has been largely shaped by the region's agricultural industry. Within this landscape migrant farmworkers have an essential role, yet are rendered invisible and remain marginalized. This commentary explores migrants' struggle by looking at the intersections of

colonialism, race, borders, and the local food economy. We begin with a historical examination of the racialized nature of the region's agricultural labor force, and also provide an overview of the local food economy. Following this, we outline Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) and discuss how the SAWP places migrant

*Note:* In the spirit of collective work, lead authorship is both interchangeable and equally shared.

<sup>a</sup> Elise Hjalmarson, Master's Candidate, Political Studies, The University of British Columbia, Okanagan; Co-founder, Radical Action with Migrants in Agriculture; [elisehjalmarson@gmail.com](mailto:elisehjalmarson@gmail.com)

<sup>b</sup> Robyn Bunn, PhD Student, Interdisciplinary Studies, The University of British Columbia, Okanagan; Organizer, Radical Action with Migrants in Agriculture; [robbynunn129@gmail.com](mailto:robbynunn129@gmail.com)

<sup>c</sup> Amy Cohen, Professor of Anthropology, Okanagan College, British Columbia; Co-founder, Radical Action with Migrants in Agriculture; [amicohen@yahoo.ca](mailto:amicohen@yahoo.ca)

<sup>d</sup> Edna Terbasket, Executive Director, Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society, Kelowna, British Columbia; [executivedirector@kfs.bc.ca](mailto:executivedirector@kfs.bc.ca)

<sup>e\*</sup> *Corresponding author:* Levi Gahman, PhD, Lecturer, Institute for Gender and Development Studies, Department of Geography, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus; Republic of Trinidad and Tobago; [levi.gahman@sta.uwi.edu](mailto:levi.gahman@sta.uwi.edu)

laborers in positions of precarity, often resulting in worker isolation and superexploitation. We then turn to the social conditions migrant workers encounter upon arriving in the Okanagan Valley by describing the institutional discrimination they face, as well as the everyday prejudices and aggressions they endure due to their status of being labeled both “foreign” and “temporary.” Next we provide a brief explanation of settler colonialism, the imposition of borders, and the common struggles shared by migrant workers and Aboriginal people. Finally, we offer some recommendations for change that would ameliorate some of the challenges migrant workers experience upon arriving in the Okanagan.

### **Keywords**

Temporary Foreign Worker Program, Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, migrant labor, racism, settler colonialism, food systems, Okanagan Valley

### **The Okanagan Valley, British Columbia: Unceded Syilx Territories**

Within the Okanagan Valley there is an ongoing, yet largely hidden, migrant struggle. This struggle is broadly defined by what is “seen” and what remains “unseen.” More specifically, the hyper-visibility of mostly white residents and tourists enjoying locally produced food and wine lies in stark contrast to the largely invisible plight of both racialized migrant workers and Aboriginal people. This juxtaposition highlights the diverse yet contradictory cultural landscape of the region, where the politics of food, race, and colonialism are intertwined.

In this commentary, we explore how these complexities have come to be. We do so by providing an intersectional overview of settler colonialism, Canada’s Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), and the experiences of racialized migrant workers living in a culture of white privilege. Our discussion is informed primarily by empirical data gathered from formal and informal interviews with Mexican and Caribbean SAWP workers, ethnographic fieldwork undertaken by the authors, and over two years of grassroots community organizing.

In Canada the connection between food and race manifests itself most vividly when looking at settler colonialism’s imposition of borders. Considering the lasting effects of settlement on Aboriginal communities, it becomes clear that the Canadian state imposed its borders to eliminate Indigenous people, to accumulate land, and as a way to enable corporations to amass profits (Coulthard, 2014; Hunt, 2014; Razack, 2002). The practice of asserting colonial borders led to forced dislocations of Indigenous inhabitants and the commodification of the Indigenous territories into private properties, some of which are now settler-owned, for-profit orchards, vineyards, and farms. Dispossession, whether it applies to Aboriginal people in Canada who have had their territories expropriated or farmers from different countries who have been displaced and become migrant workers, thus serves as the prime example of the links between colonialism, race, and the current food system (Andrée, Ayres, Bosia, Mássicotte, 2014; Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). Accordingly, as this commentary unfolds we (the authors) recognize that the colonial geography we discuss throughout the piece is the unceded Syilx territories of the Okanagan Nation. It is with the acknowledgment of the Syilx people as rightful overseers of the land since time immemorial that we proceed in our overview of food and race in the Okanagan Valley.

### **A Brief History of Race and Agricultural Labor in the Okanagan Valley**

The Okanagan Valley is well known for its striking landscape, sunny weather, and pleasant temperatures. Located in the south-central interior of British Columbia, it is considered one of BC’s most fertile regions. It sits upon a mountainous, pine-forested topography scattered with pristine lakes, sandy beaches, vibrant orchards, and manicured vineyards. Due to the region’s status as a premier wine producer, it is often referred to as “Napa of the North” and proudly brands itself as a tourist attraction and retirement destination. The region is also heavily marketed as having a trendy food culture, luxurious resort and golf scene, relaxing environment, and bustling overall economy. Today the Okanagan’s agricultural sector alone is a billion dollar industry. Despite this, migrant farmworkers

in the valley, who are at the heart of the agricultural economy, remain invisible.

Over the past century, the Okanagan's agricultural economic base has transitioned from ranches, farms, and orchards to a postsubsistence food economy revolving around wineries and agritourism, as well as food production for both local and global markets (Hessing, 2010). This ongoing historical process has thereby transformed the area into a predominantly "white space" (Aguiar, Tomic, & Trumper, 2005). Orchardling in particular shaped the pattern of settlement and the ethnic makeup of growing communities. Since the early 1900s, the development of irrigation systems and the accompanying parceling off of lands were conscious efforts made by land-development companies to attract wealthier British (white) immigrants. Orchardling was advertised as a "gentleman's pursuit" in order to entice this class and/or race of immigrants to the "British Garden of Eden" (Demeritt, 1995).

Farmworkers, however, were typically not members of the same demographic of immigrants who were drawn to the Okanagan as farm owners. Early laborers were often from Aboriginal communities or were Japanese or Chinese immigrants (Wong, 1989). Farmworkers were then positioned as necessary but unwanted community members. In 1917 a wartime labor shortage prompted members of the BC Fruit Growers Association (BCFGA) to call for the federal government to allow for the import of indentured Chinese laborers (BCFGA, n.d.). At the time, migration from China was restricted and Chinese immigrants were prohibited from owning land, further marginalizing farmworkers and ensuring that they would not become permanent members of predominantly white communities (Wong, 1989).

Currently, the Okanagan has a thriving agricultural industry for both local and export-oriented products. The tree fruit industry reports revenues of CA\$130 million each year (BC Tree Fruits, n.d.) and is reliant on migrant farm labor, primarily workers in the SAWP, to continue to be profitable. The local food industry is also central to the billion-dollar tourism sector of the economy, as visitors come to experience the food and wine for which the region is renowned. The social landscape

and perceptions of the Okanagan as a "Garden of Eden" is produced through agritourism, the growing wine industry, and an affluent locavore culture, yet the farmworkers (predominantly racialized) who cultivate and harvest the food served to privileged locals and tourists (disproportionately white) are erased from local restaurant and winery scenes. This dependency on migrant labor goes widely unrecognized, as it is undervalued and remains largely unseen by those outside the industry. Thus, despite their invisibility, it is undeniably clear that racialized migrant workers drive the local food economy.

### **Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP)**

Of the nearly 40,000 migrant agricultural workers legally employed across Canada in 2012, some 30,000 were contracted from Mexico and Caribbean countries through Canada's federal SAWP (Employment and Social Development Canada [ESDC], 2014). The oldest and longest-standing of Canada's temporary migrant worker programs, the SAWP was first conceived in response to grower lobbying in 1966 as a pilot program to meet the labor demands of Ontario's expanding agricultural sector. Since its introduction, the SAWP has grown steadily and attracted global attention for its bilateral approach to the management of circular labor migration, in addition to its collaborative administration in involving industry, government bodies, and the ministries of migrant-sending states. Since British Columbia joined the SAWP in 2004, the number of SAWP workers destined for BC has grown fivefold, from 855 the first year to nearly 5,000 in 2012 (ESDC, 2014), with approximately half being sent to farms in the Okanagan Valley. Today the SAWP is the most commonly utilized of four agricultural streams of the federal Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) and is a mainstay of Canada's agricultural economy. The program has a reputation as a "model" for the world (Parliament of Canada, 2010).

Despite its popularity with growers and policy-makers, as well as migrant workers for whom the program is an essential source of income, the SAWP has been criticized for rendering migrant workers "unfree" (Trumper & Wong, 2010; Walia,

2010). This occurs through several specific aspects of the program. First, the SAWP ties workers' visas to a single employer, preventing them from seeking jobs on other farms or outside of agriculture. This results in the segregation of labor by separating "foreign" workers who cannot leave their job from "local" (citizen) workers who can exercise labor mobility. Second, under the SAWP growers are mandated to provide housing for migrant workers, which is typically on-farm. Requiring employers to oversee housing for their labor force is problematic not only because it facilitates increased surveillance of workers, but also because it simultaneously positions growers as migrants' landlords. Third, the SAWP precludes workers from paths to permanent residency, excluding them from legal and political rights and making them vulnerable to deportation if they complain about working or living conditions, or even if they become unable to work due to injury.

This "permanently temporary" status demonstrates that SAWP workers are only valued as laborers and not as citizens, as were other racialized groups throughout the 20th century. All in all, while rejecting the SAWP as a global model for the management of agricultural labor migration, numerous voices have exposed the program's flaws and demonstrated the ways that the SAWP renders "foreign" migrant workers highly precarious, isolated, and superexploitable (Paz Ramirez, 2013; Preibisch, 2012). We now turn to some examples of the conditions that arise for migrant workers in the SAWP.

### **Racism and Everyday Life: Experiences of SAWP Workers in the Okanagan Valley**

A combination of legal and extralegal mechanisms result in migrant workers' virtual exclusion from the wider communities. Despite the fact that many spend more time in Canada than their "home" countries, they cannot bring their families and are heavily discouraged from forming intimate relationships while in Canada, so that they have nothing to "distract" them from work. SAWP workers' presence in their wider communities is highly regulated and kept to an absolute minimum as they live under the watchful gaze of their employers, conform with extralegal "house rules" (such as curfews

and no visitor policies) imposed by many farm owner/landlords, and lack access to transportation. Whether these rules are framed in terms of maintaining productive work forces, protecting permanent jobs for "citizens," or minimizing employers' liability, in practice they combine to create a de facto system of racial segregation.

In addition to being excluded from Canadian society through both legal and extralegal mechanisms, SAWP workers are often targets of everyday acts of racism on farms and in the wider communities. Many cite being assigned less desirable, "dirtier and harder" tasks, or being paid at lower rates, as ways employers treat them differently than Canadian workers. Farm housing is often segregated by country of origin, with the worst accommodations assigned to black workers. Numerous migrant workers from the Caribbean and Mexico recount being followed, or repeatedly questioned, by law enforcement officials both in situations where they are on farm, as well as when they are off the premises simply moving in and about the community.

It is also not uncommon for Mexican men walking along busy roads to be the daily target of racial epithets, or get yelled at by passersby in vehicles to: "Go back to Mexico!" An especially troubling incident occurred one evening when a group of Mexican migrants were at a local pub and a man picked a fight with them, yelling, "go back to the cherry orchard where you belong!" (A. Lopez, personal communication, October 2014). These examples illustrate the aggressions SAWP workers endure in the Okanagan, and demonstrate how being a racialized farmworker, labeled as "foreign," and told "you do not belong here" are integral parts of racist discourse and practice.

### **Common Struggle and Decolonizing Solidarity: On Becoming "Unsettled"**

Echoing the opening lines of this commentary, we again contend that links between colonial borders, race, and food do exist. As the Okanagan Valley's agricultural economy is operating upon a foundation of land dispossessed from Indigenous people, as well as the superexploitation of migrant workers, we believe any conversation about the region's food system should include the topics of colonialism, capitalism, and racism. We also realize that

discussions of such systems can often prove to be sensitive and uncomfortable. Despite this, we consider listening to these conversations and becoming “unsettled” by such topics to be necessary parts of decolonizing solidarity (Hunt & Holmes, 2015).

Engaging in these dialogues will also require an honest admission about what has been (disproportionally) the result of these issues for Aboriginal people and migrant workers; for many it has been isolation, segregation, and, more succinctly, a denial of their dignity. In noting that Aboriginal people and migrant workers experience oppression as a result of racism and ongoing colonialism, we are not contending both groups are homogenous, nor are we suggesting they are affected in exactly the same ways. Rather we are stating that both have been targeted and compromised by colonial borders yet remain resilient in the face of them, and therefore a common struggle exists. In this way, this commentary serves as a reminder to humbly listen to, and committedly struggle with, the Aboriginal people and migrant workers in our local communities, despite the complexities we know will arise in doing so.

As residents of the Okanagan Valley who are troubled by these issues, we would also like to propose a few short- and long-term remedies to the problems touched upon in this piece—specifically the injustice inherent in current Canadian food systems. Ultimately, the racial segregation of our communities, the forced separation of families, and the existence of a two-tier labor force (with one having less access to social, legal, and political rights) are rooted in the policies of illegitimate colonial governments. The only long-term solution to these problems, in our view, is a dismantling of the imposed borders and immigration laws used to adjudicate and enforce belonging and exclusion.

We recognize that decolonization is a long-term project and process, and from some perspectives may even seem impractical; therefore we would also like to suggest some “in the meantime” solutions for some of the most grievous issues. Firstly, SAWP workers’ visas should not be tied to a single employer, but like any citizen or permanent resident of Canada, they should be free to change

employers for any reason. This would alleviate to some extent the extreme power imbalances currently existing between SAWP workers and farm owners. Secondly, farm owners should not be landlords for their employees. Workers should be paid a fair living wage, one that allows them to freely choose where to reside and not be obligated to live under the housing conditions, surveillance, and arbitrary rules of their employers. Finally, SAWP workers should not have to choose between employment and their families. While many argue that the decision to become a migrant worker and move away from one’s family is a personal choice, we also realize the unjust circumstances creating the conditions to do so are inherently societal. Individual decisions to migrate cannot be judged in isolation, nor can they be critiqued outside of the socio-economic situation in which they are made. Thus we believe that the current family-fracturing policy faced by migrant workers is inhumane and must be changed. Spouses and children of SAWP workers should be automatically eligible to come to Canada as visitors, students, or workers.

In sum, when the SAWP was established in 1966 it was conceived as a temporary solution to a short-term labor shortage. Nearly 50 years on, it is clear that the shortage was not temporary and the program has in no way been a “quick fix.” While the SAWP serves as an economic lifeline to tens of thousands of migrant farmworkers, it also capitalizes on their precarious circumstances by legislating the inequalities they face and perpetuating the racial discrimination they experience within our food system. In this way, justice for migrant farm labor, as well as Aboriginal people, requires that we cultivate a socially just food system, one not built upon colonial borders rendering certain people (and races) temporary and disposable, but rather one founded upon affording dignity and belonging to all.

## References

- Aguiar, L. L. M., Tomic, P., & Trumper, R. (2005). Work hard, play hard: Selling Kelowna, BC, as year-round playground. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien*, 49(2), 123–139.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.0008-3658.2005.00084.x>



- Andrée, P., Ayres, J., Bosia, M. J., & Mássicotte, M.-J. (Eds.). (2014). *Globalization and food sovereignty: Global and local change in the new politics of food*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- British Columbia Fruit Growers Association [BCFGA]. (n.d.) *A fruitful century: Wartime conditions, 1914–1918*. Retrieved June 2015 from <http://www.bcfga.com/239/Wartime+Conditions%2C+1914-1918>
- British Columbia Tree Fruits. (n.d.). *Our industry*. Retrieved June 2015 from <http://www.bctree.com/about/our-industry>
- Coulthard, G. S. (2014). *Red skin, white masks: Rejecting the colonial politics of recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Demeritt, D. (1995). Visions of agriculture in British Columbia. *BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly*, 108, 29–59. <http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/bcstudies/>
- Employment and Social Development Canada [ESDC]. (2014). Labour market opinions — Annual statistics. Retrieved from [http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/foreign\\_workers/lmo\\_statistics/annual-agriculture.shtml](http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/foreign_workers/lmo_statistics/annual-agriculture.shtml)
- Hessing, M. (2010). After the harvest: Towards a sustainable Okanagan? [Commentary]. *BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly*, 168, 81–94. <http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/bcstudies/>
- Holt-Giménez, E., & Shattuck, A. (2011). Food crises, food regimes and food movements: Rumblings of reform or tides of transformation? *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(1), 109–144. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2010.538578>
- Hunt, S. E. (2014). *Witnessing the colonialscape: Lighting the intimate fires of Indigenous legal pluralism* (Doctoral dissertation). Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia.
- Hunt, S., & Holmes, C. (2015). Everyday decolonization: Living a decolonizing queer politics. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 19(2), 154–172. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2015.970975>
- Parliament of Canada. (2010, May 27). House of Parliament, House of Commons Debates, 40th Parliament, 3rd Session. Retrieved from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=4559699&Language=E>
- Paz Ramirez, A. G. (2013). *Embodying and resisting labour apartheid: Racism and Mexican farm workers in Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program* (Master's thesis). University of British Columbia, Vancouver.
- Preibisch, K. (2012). Migrant workers and changing work-place regimes in contemporary agricultural production in Canada. *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food*, 19(1), 62–82. <http://ijsaf.org/>
- Razack, S. (Ed.). (2002). *Race, space, and the law: Unmapping a white settler society*. Toronto: Between the Lines.
- Trumper, R., & Wong, L. L. (2010). Temporary workers in Canada: A national perspective. *Canadian Issues*, Spring, 83–89.
- Walia, H. (2010). Transient servitude: Migrant labour in Canada and the apartheid of citizenship. *Race and Class*, 52(1), 71–84. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0306396810371766>
- Wong, L. L. (1989). Chinese capitalist migration to Canada: A sociological interpretation and its effect on Canada. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 4(4), 465–492. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/011719689500400401>

## Race, ethnicity, and the promise of “Good Food” for Michigan: A three-voice commentary

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS WORK

Rich Pirog<sup>a \*</sup>  
Michigan State University

Kaitlin Koch<sup>b</sup>  
Michigan State University Extension

Anel Guel<sup>c</sup>  
Michigan State University

Submitted June 6, 2015 / Published online August 11, 2015 / Updated with new bibliography link on August 25, 2015

Citation: Pirog, R., Koch, K., & Guel, A. (2015). Race, ethnicity, and the promise of “Good Food” for Michigan: A three-voice commentary. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 83–86. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.011>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

This set of three interconnected commentaries begins by tracing the evolving narrative of the local food movement to embrace racial equity as a critical part of a sustainable food system in Michigan, using the Michigan Good Food Charter as a potential framework. Researchers, educators,

and advocates of local food must first have a clear understanding of the structural racism that is present in the American food system before they can work effectively toward the vision of sustainable and equitable food for all. The commentary then calls out the need for new tools and resources for local food students and professionals (including

<sup>a \*</sup> *Corresponding author:* Rich Pirog is senior associate director for the Michigan State University (MSU) Center for Regional Food Systems and former associate director for the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University. A native of New Jersey, he is a contributing author of *An Annotated Bibliography of Structural Racism Present in the U.S. Food System*, mentioned in this commentary. He can be reached at 480 Wilson Road, Room 302; East Lansing, Michigan 48842 USA; +1-517-353-0694; [rspirog@msu.edu](mailto:rspirog@msu.edu)

<sup>b</sup> Kaitlin Koch is currently a community food systems educator for MSU Extension and a native of northern Michigan.

Her previous work in urban agriculture in Detroit catalyzed her interest in ensuring that equity is an important part of her food systems work.

<sup>c</sup> Anel Guel is a recent graduate in the Department of Community Sustainability at MSU. Her work ranges from mapmaking and community food systems in Michigan to gender empowerment and ecotourism in Peru. Raised in Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico, and Grand Rapids, Michigan, she is the lead author of *An Annotated Bibliography of Structural Racism Present in the U.S. Food System*, mentioned in this commentary.

Cooperative Extension staff) to better understand the role structural racism plays in the U.S. food system. One new resource identified and developed by two of the commentary authors is an annotated bibliography of structural racism present in the U.S. food system.

### **Keywords**

racial equity, structural racism, good food, local food systems, Michigan Good Food Charter

### **Changing the White Narrative in the Local Food Movement: The Promise of the Michigan Good Food Charter**

*by Rich Pirog*

Many white local food systems advocates like myself who were active starting in the 1990s in states with limited racial and ethnic diversity developed a local food narrative focused on economic justice for the mostly white farmer audience we worked with. This well-intentioned approach was myopic in its lack of inclusion for the farmworkers, food processor workers, and foodservice workers (often people of color), as well as for the farmers of color in that same food system. We also overlooked the inequitable policies and history of discrimination that often limited the healthy food choices of people of color in the neighborhoods where they raised their families. We aspired to help build a food systems infrastructure we thought would be sustainable for all. Unintentionally, this particular food system narrative may have contributed to white privilege rather than helped dismantle it.

The local food movement across the U.S. has changed and matured in recent years, with local food becoming an important socioeconomic thread joining an interdependent fabric of movements in health, equity, food justice and sovereignty, and the environment. These movements have the opportunity to expose and reduce racial injustice. We can thank our nonprofits, foundations, new generations of leaders of color, and many others for this convergence. The maturation of local food as part of an interdependent fabric of other movements, combined with recent events exposing racial injustice, has made it paradoxically more difficult, yet inherently more critical than ever, to have

meaningful dialogues about the future of our food system across lines of race and ethnicity.

Although an agriculturally and racially diverse state, Michigan has significant disparities across race and ethnicity in regard to quality of life and economic well-being. In both the Detroit and Flint metropolitan areas the median wage for all jobs for workers of color is US\$4 less than white workers (PolicyLink, 2015). In Grand Rapids, Michigan, the white worker median wage is US\$6 higher per hour than workers of color (PolicyLink, 2015). Obesity rates in Michigan are significantly higher for blacks and Hispanics than for whites (State of Obesity, 2013).

Although equity is likely the most powerful economic development vision we have, there are significant challenges in making that dream a reality. Michigan is fortunate to have developed its local food system plan with equity as an important lens. Michigan's Good Food Charter (<http://michiganfood.org>), developed in 2010, envisions a thriving economy, equity, and sustainability for all Michiganders through a community-based good food system, where "good food" means food that is healthy, green, fair, and affordable for all. Currently more than 150 Michigan nonprofit organizations and food-related businesses have signed on to the charter; a significant number of these are working toward one or more of its six goals.

The Michigan Good Food Charter provides all Michiganders working in and across food-related movements a pathway to build a new narrative that answers the question as to why local, healthy, green, fair, and affordable food is so important for our collective future. The equity lens of the charter, in particular, needs more emphasis in this new narrative to identify ways that farmers, farmworkers, food processing workers, and foodservice workers will be treated fairly and be free from exploitation.

The change in narrative for white researchers, educators, and advocates working to promote a "good food" system is essential, and it starts with examining and understanding structural racism in the institutions we work in and the food system as a whole. This is hard, often uncomfortable work and needs introspection, an open heart and mind, and dedicated financial resources in order to

happen. It means changing the composition of our food systems undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff at our public and private institutions to reflect the people of the state. It means re-examining whether programs, initiatives and hiring practices at our institutions are equitable and accessible for all.

### **Cooperative Extension's Challenge To Integrate Racial Equity into the Legacy of Present and Future Local Food Professionals**

*by Kaitlin Koch*

Michigan State University (MSU) Extension is fortunate to have a Community Food Systems work group with educators working statewide toward the goal of developing local and regional food systems within their communities. As an Extension educator and member of this group, my perspective is that my work group receives a minimal amount of racial equity training. We also have limited opportunities to discuss how racial and ethnic inequities manifest in our work. In Michigan, each MSU Extension employee is required to attend a diversity and inclusion workshop where difference is discussed in depth, and power, inequity, and structural racism are introduced. Unfortunately, that is currently the only required training and space to discuss these issues. There are other resources available, but MSU Extension employees must seek out these limited opportunities.

Additionally, our community food systems work group is mostly white, while a significant number of the communities in which we work are predominately people of color or First Nations people. Without a space for our work group members to examine issues of power, racism, privilege, and how structural racism manifests in the food system, it is quite possible that our work group may be advancing food systems initiatives that disadvantage people of color and ultimately work against our goals of providing equitable opportunities for all people. This outcome is not because our group is intentionally working to advance white privilege and opportunity, but because the system within which we are working is a complex, layered ecosystem of policies and

power structures historically built on racial inequity.

To mindfully incorporate racial equity into our work, white Extension professionals need targeted training on undoing racism, power structures, and building authentic relationships with people of color to work in partnership towards the goal of equity. To be most effective, these topics need to be explored within Extension's historical context of inequity. Extension staff members also need a space where we can honestly reflect on how our work and actions are affecting the communities in which we work and identify and name when we, as white educators, have upheld a system of oppression. This work is deep and personal, and requires a lifelong effort of identifying and dissecting our actions. Without these spaces, chances are that the system will push us toward the easiest option or path, which is a path that may disadvantage people of color.

The MSU Center for Regional Food Systems has recently released the publication *An Annotated Bibliography on Structural Racism Present in the U.S. Food System* (Guel & Pirog, 2015) that can be found on the center's website and at the link provided below. The bibliography was introduced in May 2015 and citations were added in June 2015 in response to comments received from across the U.S.. This bibliography is an example of a tool that can assist Extension professionals with their personal and professional journey of undoing racism and inequity. I believe that other trainings that focus specifically on undoing racism should be required of all Extension professionals. Such new tools and resources will allow Extension professionals to develop a language and awareness around racism and inequity, which must be used in our conversations with all community partners (and especially in communities of color) to work toward shared goals. These tools will assist the current Extension staff to co-develop educational programs that truly meet the needs of the community in which we work by considering historical context, content, and the cultural appropriateness of messaging. We will become more mindful about who is teaching and who is learning, and how all aspects of each program either work toward equity or reinforce disparity.


## Race, Ethnicity, the Food System, and Academia

by Anel Guel

From the standpoint of a woman of color at a graduate-level academic institution in the Midwest, I have observed and experienced that racial inequities are omnipresent throughout all sectors of U.S. society. As much as this may be a concern, “race” continues to be a difficult conversation to have. Even in the academic setting one may witness one side feeling guilty or attacked, while the other is left feeling misunderstood or even patronized. Both parties feel sensitive about the issue. Although it may be easy to avoid the issue of race, it is both critical and necessary to have these uncomfortable conversations. This dialogue may become particularly challenging when the work of developing an equitable food system comes from a well-intentioned place. Nonprofits, university institutions, and government organizations are also seeking to “bring good food to others” (Guthman, 2008, p. 431). However, this outreach work bringing good food to communities of color often lacks a fundamental cultural understanding of the communities served. In other words, project development—from assessing community needs to evaluating a project—are often done with little to no involvement from the actual communities served. Work from this standpoint is ineffective, unsustainable, and could even have the potential of causing more harm than good.

Some argue that the groups best able to serve the needs of underserved communities are leaders from those specific communities. Following this train of thought, some even argue that it is white researchers’, educators’, and advocates’ job to “sometimes even stay away” (Guthman, 2008, p. 444) from work focusing on “serving” communities where larger issues are not truly understood. My opinion is that it would be very difficult to reach either of these outcomes and it is questionable whether either truly would be effective. So what can we do now—together? Critically

analyzing one’s privilege is a step in the right direction, as well as realizing that one does not—and probably never will—truly understand the “other’s” situation. This goes for white people and people of color alike. I believe the largest leap forward can be made when both parties realize that work is most effective when development projects are collaborative in nature.

Our hope is that *An Annotated Bibliography on Structural Racism Present in the U.S. Food System* (Guel & Pirog, 2015) can help open the dialogue for all future college and university students of what role race plays in developing equitable food systems—not just those who study local food. The intention is that this bibliography, while taking into account the history of structural racism in the U.S. food system, will bring to light larger questions that shape the reality of today’s food system and steps we can create together for the future. 

*An Annotated Bibliography on Structural Racism Present in the U.S. Food System* is available at [http://foodsystems.msu.edu/resources/structural\\_racism\\_in\\_us\\_food\\_system](http://foodsystems.msu.edu/resources/structural_racism_in_us_food_system)

## References

- Guel, A., & Pirog, R. (2015). *An annotated bibliography on structural racism present in the U.S. food system*. East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems. Retrieved from [http://foodsystems.msu.edu/resources/structural\\_racism\\_in\\_us\\_food\\_system](http://foodsystems.msu.edu/resources/structural_racism_in_us_food_system)
- Guthman, J. (2008). Bringing good food to others: Investigating the subjects of alternative food practice. *Cultural Geographies*, 15(4), 431–447. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1474474008094315>
- PolicyLink. (n.d.). National Equity Atlas. Retrieved June 2015 from <http://nationalequityatlas.org/>
- State of Obesity. (2013). The State of Obesity in Michigan. Retrieved from <http://stateofobesity.org/states/mi/>

## Lost in translation: Delivering culturally and linguistically appropriate interventions to Hispanic populations

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS WORK

Ivette Valenzuela \*

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Submitted June 15, 2015 / Published online August 12, 2015

Citation: Valenzuela, I. (2015). Lost in translation: Delivering culturally and linguistically appropriate interventions to Hispanic populations. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 87–89. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.010>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

Hispanics became the United States' largest minority in 2012. Lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate interventions in the Hispanic population at the health-care and community levels increases the risk of negative health outcomes, such as obesity and type 2 diabetes. Delivering nutrition education can modify cultural traditions associated with food and decrease diseases associated with food habits. Barriers faced by many Hispanics include, but are not limited to, limited English proficiency and/or immigration status. Developing interventions to improve Hispanics' health outcomes requires understanding of Hispanics' cultural values and diversity. Active recruitment and training of

Hispanics into food system fields is crucial to developing and implementing culturally sensitive and language-oriented intervention.

### Keywords

Hispanics, social determinants of health, culture, linguistics, food systems, education, food habits, obesity, diabetes, health outcomes

In the U.S., minorities have been dealing with a greater burden of diabetes and obesity when compared with non-Hispanic whites (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2014). While we are beginning to see a shift from individual-level to system-level approaches, it is important to learn the ability of public health programs to alter lifestyle factors (e.g., nutritional intake and physical activity levels) following nutrition education. Hispanics' health outcomes can be improved by delivering culturally and linguistically appropriate system-level education on

---

\* Ivette Valenzuela, PhD candidate, Department of Population Health Sciences (0395), Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University; 205 Duck Pond Drive; Blacksburg, Virginia 24061 USA; +1-781-330-6734; [ivettev@vt.edu](mailto:ivettev@vt.edu)

healthy lifestyles. Cultural traditions associated with food can be modified easily based on knowledge alone. Public health and medical providers can learn from food systems work, taking into consideration social determinants of health as especially significant factors for Hispanic populations.

### **Impact of Social Determinants of Health on Health Outcomes**

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines social determinants of health as “the conditions in which people are born, live, grow, work, and age” (WHO, 2014, para. 1). Social determinants of health, shaped by financial resources, distribution of power, and allocation of resources at the personal, community, state, national, and global levels (Stevens, 2004) are part of the underlying causes of lifestyle-related diseases. As Hispanics recently became the largest minority in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), the negative impact of social determinants of health on Hispanics health outcomes has become more notable (Peek, Cargill, & Huang, 2007). Some of the barriers faced by many Hispanics are limited English proficiency, low educational attainment, low income, and/or being undocumented. Trying to develop and deliver a public health or medical program for Hispanics might mean first overcoming those barriers. How can we help Hispanics improve their health if their primary concern is income or immigration status? This will require nontraditional partnerships with organizations outside of the public health and food systems sectors before we can begin to develop culturally sensitive and language oriented interventions.

### **Delivering Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Interventions**

In my work, I often see public health and food systems materials merely translated to Spanish from English. This does not deliver the culturally appropriate services that are needed. Ineffective communication can lead to negative health outcomes due to misunderstanding of participants’ concerns, inappropriate follow-up, and poor participant compliance and satisfaction (Wilson,

2013). As a Hispanic woman and mother, I personally have faced these frustrating barriers in a medical setting myself, where health-care providers did not value my knowledge of my own health and medical history. We need Hispanic populations to know that we not only value, but require, their input and buy-in for programming to be successful.

Participants in my diabetes-prevention program expressed the need for public health and health-care providers who truly understand Hispanic cultures. Despite speaking the language, some translators cannot effectively communicate the issues, medical problems, and realities faced by Hispanic populations. The urgency and severity of medical problems faced by Hispanic populations can be lost in translation. Having some materials translated into Spanish is not sufficient when personal interaction is needed to deliver and understand specific, individualized messages. The importance of culturally responsive programs cannot be understated when delivering medical services and interventions to decrease the burden of diseases linked with lifestyle factors disproportionately faced by Hispanics.

Researchers and practitioners involved with public health and food systems initiatives must understand that in Hispanic cultures, food is synonymous with celebration and love. Family recipes go beyond a tradition that is passed from generation to generation; they represent the love of a family member through cooking. Public health researchers and practitioners must respect this aspect of Hispanic cultures. As a health behavior scientist I understood to some degree the difficulty of changing health behavior habits. My perception changed when I started to work with communities. When I worked on pre-diabetes and type 2 diabetes prevention interventions with Hispanic communities in southwest Virginia, I realized that food habits could be modified with this group as long as we worked with participants in a respectful, culturally responsive manner. I learned that people need to feel understood and free to express themselves. I also learned that willingness to help was not enough if we did not also explain why we were offering help. Education and demonstration are key when teaching and trying to motivate people to



change. In order to develop and increase the capacity to address health issues, a community needs to be not just engaged, but also invited to become a partner in the change process. In order to motivate change in food habits, people need to be approached and heard in a respectful way while showing how a habit might be affecting their health.

One final point needs clarification. There is currently a focus on developing educational programs for Hispanics, but that is a diverse group of people. Being Hispanic, I have a deep understanding of Hispanic cultures, but non-Hispanic public health and food systems researchers and practitioners need to understand first that every Latin country has a different set of traditions. In order to develop any educational intervention, we need to understand that every community has its own traditions; even more importantly, every community member has a specific set of traditions based on his or her country of origin, religion, educational attainment, and socio-economic status. Developing culturally and linguistically appropriate services calls for recruitment and training of people of color into food systems fields.



## References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC]. (2014). *National diabetes statistics report: Estimates of diabetes and its burden in the United States, 2014*. Atlanta, Georgia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/data/statistics/2014statisticsreport.html>
- Peek, M. E., Cargill, A., & Huang, E. S. (2007). Diabetes health disparities: A systematic review of health care interventions. *Medical Care Research and Review*, 64(5 suppl.), 101S–156S. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17881626>
- Stevens, P. (2004). *Diseases of poverty and the 10/90 gap*. London: International Policy Network. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/intellectualproperty/submissions/InternationalPolicyNetwork.pdf>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2012, August 6). *Profile America: Facts for features: Hispanic Heritage Month 2012: Sept. 15–Oct. 15* [Press release no. CB12-FF.19]. Retrieved from [http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts\\_for\\_features\\_special\\_editions/cb12-ff19.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb12-ff19.html)
- Wilson, C. C. (2013). Patient safety and healthcare quality: The case for language access. *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*, 1(4), 251–253. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15171/ijhpm.2013.53>
- World Health Organization [WHO]. (2014). *Social determinants of health*. Retrieved from [http://www.who.int/social\\_determinants/en/](http://www.who.int/social_determinants/en/)



## Organizing the new food labor movement: From neoliberal alternatives to worker- based justice

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS

Billy Hall \*  
Florida International University

Submitted June 16, 2015 / Published online August 14, 2015

Citation: Hall, B. (2015). Organizing the new food labor movement: From neoliberal alternatives to worker-based justice. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 91–94.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.012>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

Scholars and activists have launched numerous critiques against the alternative food movement, deriding its neoliberal politics and privileging of white notions and imaginaries of “good food.” This commentary examines the recent formation of a U.S.-based food labor movement that is actively responding to the pitfalls of the alternative food movement and developing strategies for building coalitions across class, race, ethnicity, gender, and occupation. It also highlights some of the key ways the movement organizes around issues of discrimination, wage exploitation, and abuse throughout various sectors of the industrial food system, and challenges corporations to assume accountability in the ways workers are treated.

### Keywords

food labor, food movements, race, social justice

The twenty-first century has seen an explosion of concern and activism around food. Much of this engagement has cohered, albeit loosely, around what many have called the “alternative food movement.” Vocal largely around food issues related to pesticide and chemical use, carbon footprints, genetic modification, overprocessing, and factory farming, the alternative food movement has championed a politics of personal responsibility for effecting change in the food system, typically by promoting the buying and eating of local and organic food. Indeed, the alternative food movement’s signature approach to responding to the environmentally destructive, industrial production of nutrient-deficient foods is fundamentally neoliberal, privileging individual “choices” of “voting with your dollar” and

---

\* Billy Hall, Department of Global & Sociocultural Studies, Florida International University; 11200 SW 8<sup>th</sup> Street; Miami, Florida 33199 USA; +1-305-807-9908; [whall002@fiu.edu](mailto:whall002@fiu.edu)

supporting alternative food producers and lifestyles (Guthman, 2008).

Of course, not everyone has access to and can afford to participate in this kind of movement. Many have derided the food movement for being too expensive and racially exclusive, highlighting the pervasive middle-class whiteness that occupies and colors the spaces and imaginaries of alternative food. Poor communities of color are often discursively portrayed as trapped and obese consumers in food deserts, uninformed shoppers who make poor decisions, or celebrity examples who help others “overcome” the plight of “unhealthy” diets through their popular food initiatives (e.g., Will Allen, First Lady Michelle Obama), while white, liberal consumers, gardeners, and nutrition educators are given privileged roles as movement leaders. Moreover, as some have noted, the movement has inherited a white farm imaginary, a set of values that orient the hard work in fields around an imagined white farmer, making invisible today’s predominantly Latino farmworkers and marginalizing the historical struggles of black farmers and Latino-led groups like the United Farm Workers of America (Alkon & McCullen, 2011; McCutcheon, 2013; Ramírez, 2015; Slocum, 2007). This argument can easily be extended to assert that the work of people of color throughout the food system has also been grossly overlooked and underappreciated.

In more recent years, however, a new food labor movement has begun to form across the U.S., bringing awareness to and addressing the unjust rules and practices within the food system that abuse and mistreat not just food but also the people who make it. Composed mainly of labor organizations, social justice groups, and food workers, this movement combats the many forms of exploitation that have become normalized in food labor: low wages or unpaid labor, unsafe or cruel working conditions, racial and gender discrimination, and sexual abuse. Groups like the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and the Restaurant Opportunities Center United (ROC United) have filed litigation to redress cases of modern-day slavery and wage theft, respectively. These efforts confront the lax regulation around exploitation and the discriminatory policies and practices that

disproportionally affect women, people of color, and immigrants—the three groups that form the backbone of food system labor. The food labor movement thus advocates for “good jobs” as well as “good food” (Myers & Sbicca, 2015).

In addition, the food labor movement conscientiously aims to avoid many of the mistakes made by the alternative food movement by intentionally building an inclusionary coalition that confronts multiple axes of inequality, places workers in leadership roles, and represents a diversity of worker interests in the food system. Spaces are also created for food workers to communicate their grievances, understand them as part of a wider phenomenon, and strategize measures for enacting more just relationships with food corporations and employers.

For several years, as a researcher and food justice ally, I have had the opportunity to observe and take part in a slice of this movement from the geographic corner of South Florida, a node of growing importance in regional and global networks of radical food justice organizing. I have attended several local organizational meetings for strategizing low-wage worker campaigns and actively participated in public demonstrations led by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the Organization United for Respect at Walmart (OURWalmart), and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW). As a participant observer and scholar-activist in these settings, I have become more attuned to the ways in which workers, unions, and labor groups expose injustices within the corporate food system and advocate for policy changes.

For instance, the SEIU-led “Fight for \$15” campaign mobilizes planned nationwide strikes, worker testimonies, and various forms of media to draw attention to the nation’s widest pay gap between corporate chief executive officers (CEOs) and low-level fast food workers and to the effects of low-wage work on the quality of life of ordinary Americans. Demanding higher wages and the right to unionize for fast food workers, the “Fight for \$15” campaign aims to secure significantly improved working conditions for workers in an industry that pays the minimum wage to the largest portion of its employees and is notoriously anti-union (Schlosser, 2001). The CIW also stages rallies, pressuring major growers and corporate

buyers to enter into the Fair Food Program, a legally binding agreement that ensures that workers earn better wages, receive education about their rights, and have their protection standards regularly monitored and upheld. Contrary to the alternative food movement's neoliberal politics of consumer choice, both of these examples identify corporations as primary agents for enacting food system change. As corporations continue to distance and absolve themselves from any responsibility in the treatment and compensation of rank-and-file workers (while profiting from their exploitation), food labor campaigns aim to radically alter the terrain of corporate food business practice by reinscribing CEOs and corporate headquarters within an ethical relationship of accountability.

In May 2014 I was graciously welcomed to attend the Food Chain Workers Alliance (FCWA) annual retreat, which provided me with an inside look into the most intentional U.S.-based effort to link workers' struggles across the food system's many sectors. The FCWA officially formed in 2009 following a meeting between several organizations at the Labor Notes conference in 2008 in Dearborn, Michigan. As one FCWA leader explained at the retreat, "Michael Pollan was publishing book after book after book, and there was a lot of exciting conversation about food, but we were all saying, 'Who brings the food to the table?'" In just a few years the FCWA has successfully formed a broad coalition of worker-based organizations, including the CIW and ROC United, representing agricultural, processing, warehousing, retail, and restaurant and hospitality industries. Their work brings to light a number of worker-related issues that have historically been siloed and muted within their respective sectors, and builds a network that fosters communication, support, and strategizing across the food chain (Lo, 2014; Lo & Jacobson, 2011). To bridge the geographic and perceived occupational distances, one FCWA leader stated, "We're not actually in different industries. The product is food, and we in this room are the ones making the food." During my two-day participation, I listened to dozens of workers and leaders share their stories of mistreatment and discrimination. Each story was unique yet resonated with the experiences of other workers facing similar

conditions. The main message was perhaps most succinctly verbalized by a meatpacker from Arkansas: "We want to take the ingredient of abuse out of our food."

Throughout the retreat, nearly every word that was uttered was translated from English to Spanish or vice versa by a translator well familiar with social justice concepts and terminology. Participants also learned each other's protest chants, from "Qué queremos? ¡Justicia! Cuándo? ¡Ahora!" ("What do we want? Justice! When do we want it? Now!") to "El pueblo, unido, jamás será vencido!" ("The people, united, will never be defeated!"). This speaks to the active steps taken by the FCWA and other groups to build a more inclusive movement. One segment of the retreat featured a workshop on issues related to class, immigration, race, gender, and LGBTQ identity. Participants were encouraged to list topics of concern on a whiteboard that then prompted discussion and the sharing of thoughts and experiences. The "Immigration" heading elicited the most fodder for understanding, as several members of the CIW and other predominantly Latino laboring industries described story after story about encounters with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and immigration police, or "La Migra," human trafficking, and threats of deportation from farm crew leaders. A trained facilitator then skillfully situated these narratives within the history of policies that shape labor in agriculture and food processing.

In Miami, I have also seen a concerted effort among food labor activists to form relationships with prominent members of the clergy, some of whom have taken key leadership roles recently in the newly reinvigorated labor movement. I have witnessed the growing of a coalition predicated on becoming multilingual, intersectional, interfaith, and intercultural in a very real way. Far from espousing the vapid rhetoric of multiculturalism (and the cultural exoticism embraced by many "foodies"), the food labor movement incorporates a range of voices in its work toward dismantling the systemic forms of injustice that beset workers inhabiting various axes of difference.

Over 50 years ago the 1960 CBS documentary *Harvest of Shame* featured a quotation from a farmer that still exemplifies labor relations within the

entirety of the corporate food system today: “We used to buy our slaves; now we just rent them.” The quotation calls attention to the roots of the modern industrial food system, a system built atop a foundation of chattel slavery and racial subjugation. For major producers, profit has always depended on an available supply of cheap labor, and race and gender have been the primary determinants for ordering bodies in the fields, in the market, in the factory, and in the restaurant. Today’s farmworkers and food workers are living a legacy of conditions that may not be identical to formal slavery but are nonetheless dehumanizing. These conditions are often hidden within remote agricultural landscapes or even inside our favorite dining spaces, “behind the kitchen door” (Jayaraman, 2013).

As the industrial food system continues to produce rising patterns of inequality, precarious low-wage work, hunger, corporate consolidation, and climatic threats to life-giving systems, there appears to be little way out but through collectives unified in the struggle to ensure that food is not only healthy and abundant but is made by people who can enjoy a dignified quality of life. In a recent interview, Eric Holt-Giménez, executive director of the Institute for Food and Development Policy, argued for a “triangulation for change...between the farm worker, the consumer and the food worker” (Al Jazeera America, 2015, para. 27). This would require a radical change beyond the neoliberal consumerist fetishization of food commodities towards an ethics of care and solidarity between people living and working in far-flung places and under sometimes vastly different contexts. Building an effective movement to address contemporary food issues will only be as successful as it is inclusive and beneficial for those most marginalized by the food system. As food activism moves forward in working to bridge the many real and discursive gaps that socio-spatially separate our communities, I am reminded of and humbled by a quotation from an Aboriginal activists group in Queensland, Australia: “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together” (Mz.Many Names, 2008, para. 1).



## References

- Al Jazeera America. (2015, June 18). Policy expert: Walmart has “immense power” over food system. Retrieved from <http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/fault-lines/articles/2015/6/18/food-policy-expert-walmart-has-immense-power-over-food-system.html>
- Alkon, A. H., & McCullen, C. G. (2011). Whiteness and farmers markets: Performances, perpetuations... contestations? *Antipode*, 43(4), 937–959. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2010.00818.x>
- Guthman, J. (2008). Neoliberalism and the making of food politics in California. *Geoforum*, 39(3), 1171–1183. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2006.09.002>
- Jayaraman, S. (2013). *Behind the kitchen door*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Lo, J. (2014). Racism, gender discrimination, and food chain workers in the United States. In W. D. Schanbacher (Ed.), *The global food system: Issues and solutions* (pp. 59–82). Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO.
- Lo, J., & Jacobson, A. (2011). Human rights from field to fork: Improving labor conditions for food-sector workers by organizing across boundaries. *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts*, 5(1), 61–82. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2979/racethmulglocon.5.1.61>
- McCutcheon, P. (2013). “Returning home to our rightful place”: The Nation of Islam and Muhammad Farms. *Geoforum*, 49, 61–70. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2013.05.001>
- Myers, J. S., & Sbicca, J. (2015). Bridging good food and good jobs: From secession to confrontation within alternative food movement politics. *Geoforum*, 61, 17–26. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.02.003>
- Mz.Many Names. (2008, November 3). Attributing words [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://unnecessaryevils.blogspot.com/2008/11/attributing-words.html>
- Ramírez, M. M. (2015). The elusive inclusive: Black food geographies and racialized food spaces. *Antipode*, 47(3), 748–769. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/anti.12131>
- Schlosser, E. (2001). *Fast food nation: The dark side of the all-American meal*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Slocum, R. (2007). Whiteness, space and alternative food practice. *Geoforum*, 38(3), 520–533. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2006.10.006>

## A community engagement case study of The Somerville Mobile Farmers' Market

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS

Erica Satin-Hernandez<sup>a\*</sup> and Lisa Robinson<sup>b</sup>  
Shape Up Somerville, Health and Human Services Department,  
City of Somerville

Submitted June 15, 2015 / Published online August 21, 2015

Citation: Satin-Hernandez, E., & Robinson, L. (2015). A community engagement case study of The Somerville Mobile Farmers' Market. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 95–98. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.015>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

The Somerville Mobile Farmers' Market, a food access initiative in Somerville, Massachusetts, is an example of community-municipality collaboration and a testament to the importance of community engagement, justice, and respect in the creation of a culturally relevant program. Traditional farmers' markets have been exclusive spaces catering to the white and elite, but through a community engagement process, The Somerville Mobile Farmers' Market has come to represent the immigrant-rich community in Somerville and increase food access in a culturally appropriate way.

<sup>a\*</sup> *Corresponding author:* Erica Satin-Hernandez, Coordinator, Shape Up Somerville, Health and Human Services Department, City of Somerville; 50 Evergreen Avenue; Somerville, Massachusetts 02145 USA; +1-617-625-6600 x4321; [eshernandez@somervillema.gov](mailto:eshernandez@somervillema.gov)

<sup>b</sup> Lisa Robinson, Director, Shape Up Somerville, Health and Human Services Department, City of Somerville; +1-617-625-6600 x4312; [robinson@somervillema.gov](mailto:robinson@somervillema.gov)

### Keywords

food access, food security, food system, farmers' market, mobile farmers' market, equity, community engagement, justice, health

Shape Up Somerville (SUS) is a 15-year-old strategy in the Health and Human Services Department of the city of Somerville, Massachusetts which aims to build and sustain a healthier, more equitable community through policy, systems, and environmental change. Improving access to fresh food for low-income communities in Somerville is part of SUS's mission. In 2008, a supermarket in the immigrant-rich, lower-income neighborhood of Winter Hill closed, leaving residents with limited options for food access. In 2011, SUS and partner organizations Groundwork Somerville (a youth development and environmental justice organization) and The Welcome Project (an immigrant empowerment and service provision organization) facilitated a relationship



with a local farm, Enterprise Farm, to create The Somerville Mobile Farmers' Market. While work takes place on other policy-based systemic approaches to the issue, this market provides a short- to midterm solution to food accessibility by selling fresh, local produce at low prices. Now in its fifth season, the evolution and success of this market is the product of a community-driven, culturally appropriate program supported by the unique collaboration between community and municipal entities. In our immigrant-rich community, this market defies the notion of farmers' markets as solely white and elite spaces. This commentary will reflect on how The Somerville Mobile Farmers' Market came into being and how we put the principles of community engagement, justice, and respect into action at the market.

The first step in preparation for any community collaboration is an awareness of skills and knowledge. Creating robust partnerships requires each player to understand the unique skills they bring to the table and respect the different skills of others. As actors in an institution—the municipality—SUS provides capacity in terms of infrastructural, financial, and staffing support, and must be aware of the community's expertise, crucial knowledge, and assets. To contribute to a robust partnership, we as a municipality must actively work against a siloed process that has historically excluded community groups, use a justice lens, and value sources of community knowledge, including those that are nontraditional. We can leverage our capacity to equitably collaborate with the community for deep change. To us, this requires long-term community engagement and respect for the community at all stages, from planning to implementation and evaluation, a value evident in our mobile farmers' market.

During the planning phase to address food access in Winter Hill, SUS worked with our nonprofit partners to host forums and discussions with community stakeholders about what type of food access initiative would be most helpful for their community. Some initial discussions at the SUS office had included a short-term solution of shuttle buses running from the city's easternmost housing development in Winter Hill (a half-mile and a six-lane highway away from the nearest grocery store)

to other existing grocery stores. At one community forum, a youth community member taking part in a leadership development and language interpretation program from The Welcome Project suggested we follow the model common in her home country: carts with fresh produce for sale which visit multiple neighborhoods each day. Evidence from surveys done in Winter Hill that same year by the nonprofit Institute for Community Health also showed that residents desired a farmers' market for access to fresh, affordable produce. The idea of a traveling farmers' market—one borne of the community and less common in the U.S. currently—led to The Somerville Mobile Farmers' Market as an empowering, culturally relevant space. As SUS helps carry out the community's vision, it is important to properly recognize its origin. Whenever the history of the market is discussed, we believe it important to credit the community for the inception of the market model to give respect to the community that birthed this idea from their experience and knowledge.

Now that the market is established, community engagement, both directly and indirectly through our staff, helps increase our awareness of community assets and needs. Our primary employee, who started off as a cashier during the first year of the market and has moved up to market manager, is a resident of one of the city's housing developments (our primary locations) and is well connected in the community. The trust our customers have in her as a fellow community member is a crucial asset influencing the market's success as a community-serving and -building effort challenging the dominant narrative of farmers' markets as white, elite spaces. She receives candid feedback about the market that otherwise might not get relayed. For example, in the first year of the market her interactions with customers influenced our unique match program where we provide a 50 percent discount not only to people using SNAP, WIC, or Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program coupons but also to those who live in the housing developments but do not qualify for food assistance programs. Many farmers' markets offer a small matching program, but our market is unique in that roughly 75 percent of our customers use the match program, especially with our addition of

housing development residents to the match program. In order to sustain our work, we now aggregate produce from multiple Massachusetts farms, buying wholesale up-front and then selling to our customers at lower-than-average retail prices (see Figures 1 and 2). With our low prices and match program, we must fundraise each year to support the produce cost and allow our farmers to receive the full cost of their produce but keep our prices low. A portion of all full-priced purchases goes to support the match program as well, bringing in a “social good” aspect for full-price shoppers and contributing to market sustainability. This setup allows us to offer affordable produce to all who want it, and we gather community input into our operations, from the guidelines of the match program to the types of produce we order each week. Awareness of our community’s composition, issues, and strengths positively influences our

abilities to build policies that increase equity in the local food system.

We also use this valuable feedback and awareness to change our produce offerings. The market has steadily expanded over the years, but the main critique we heard last year was that we do not carry enough fruit and culturally relevant produce. Through consistent program evaluation and attention to customer input, we expanded the market from the original model of working with just one farm to working with four. While logistically difficult, especially as a municipality, this process was necessary to truly meet our customers’ needs, which differ from customers of many traditional white upper-class farmers’ markets. Farmers’ markets continue to grow and contribute to the fabric of their communities but cost, market schedules, and locations often isolate low-income communities, communities of color, and immigrant

**Figure 1. The Somerville Mobile Farmers’ Market van was provided by Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources grant and Herb Chambers Car Dealership sponsorship.**



communities from participating, contributing to the perception of markets as an elite luxury. By diversifying our produce to reflect the preferences of the community, keeping the produce affordable, and making the market mobile, The Somerville Mobile Farmers’ Market has contributed to food justice in our community. Changing our stocking practices also helps us limit the paternalistic practice of only providing produce available in our dominant food supply—the produce that mainstream America has determined is healthy rather than valuing diverse community knowledge about healthy foods and stocking the produce the community requests.

Additionally, a common refrain at farmers’ markets serving low-income communities, communities of color, and immigrant populations across the country is that “we have to educate our shoppers about healthy food and how to cook it.” On the contrary,

**Figure 2. Rolling racks let us set up in any space and move quickly.**



we at The Somerville Mobile Farmers' Market have found that community members have a wealth of knowledge on cooking healthy food; it's just not always the food with which we white, middle-class, American-born people are familiar. Our customers come together at the market and take part in both structured and organically occurring recipe swaps, sharing everything from Trinidadian callaloo stew recipes to Armenian eggplant techniques and Latin sancocho variations, a process valuing community knowledge and cohesion as well as cultural preservation and celebration. Those of us setting up the market could never have facilitated these values if

we had based the market on the traditional deficit-model approach, assuming that our customers do not know how to cook or eat healthfully. The reality, rather, is that there are systemic barriers to culturally relevant opportunities for healthful eating that are related to price and supply-chain availability. We are bridging that gap and bringing healthy and culturally appropriate produce to our communities who are asking for it. We who set up the market learn about cultural produce that is new to us alongside our customers learning about other types of produce that are new to them. It is this collaborative learning and valuing of

community knowledge that we aim for in our programming.

The Somerville Mobile Farmers' Market continues to evolve, with our ultimate goal to develop a more sustainable, systemic approach to increasing access to healthy food for all in our city. We are looking into facilitating changes in supply chains to bodegas and corner stores to increase affordability and cultural relevance of their produce year-round and other opportunities. No matter which direction we take, community engagement, a justice lens, and community respect must be the foundation of our work.

## Beyond inclusion: Toward an anti-colonial food justice praxis

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS WORK

Lauren Kepkiewicz,<sup>a</sup> Michael Chrobok,<sup>b\*</sup> Madeline Whetung,<sup>c</sup>  
Madelaine Cahuas,<sup>d</sup> Jina Gill,<sup>e</sup> Sam Walker,<sup>f</sup> and Sarah Wakefield<sup>g</sup>  
University of Toronto

Submitted June 15, 2015 / Published online August 21, 2015

Citation: Kepkiewicz, L., Chrobok, M., Whetung, M., Cahuas, M., Gill, J., Walker, S., & Wakefield, S. (2015). Beyond inclusion: Toward an anti-colonial food justice praxis. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 99–104. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.014>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

Activists and academics have increasingly drawn on the concept of “food justice” in recent years. While this trend is encouraging, we argue that a focus on “inclusion” by these actors may actually work to *reproduce* inequitable relationships. Food justice

research and practice should thus move beyond inclusion to connect food system inequities to interlocking structures of oppression, such as capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and colonialism. In Canada, placing food justice in the context of ongoing processes of colonialism—and recognizing that no justice can happen on stolen land—is particularly important. While we make these suggestions, we do not claim to have all the

<sup>a</sup> PhD Candidate, Department of Geography & Planning, University of Toronto, [lauren.kepkiewicz@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:lauren.kepkiewicz@mail.utoronto.ca)

<sup>b\*</sup> *Corresponding author:* Michael Chrobok, PhD Student, Department of Geography & Planning, University of Toronto; 100 St. George Street; Toronto, Ontario M5S 3G3 Canada; [michael.chrobok@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:michael.chrobok@mail.utoronto.ca)

<sup>c</sup> MA Student, Department of Geography & Planning, University of Toronto, [m.whetung@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:m.whetung@mail.utoronto.ca)

<sup>d</sup> PhD Candidate, Department of Geography & Planning, University of Toronto, [madelaine.cahuas@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:madelaine.cahuas@mail.utoronto.ca)

<sup>e</sup> MA Student, Department of Geography & Planning, University of Toronto, [manjot.gill@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:manjot.gill@mail.utoronto.ca)

<sup>f</sup> PhD Candidate, Department of Geography & Planning, University of Toronto, [samuel.walker@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:samuel.walker@mail.utoronto.ca)

<sup>g</sup> Associate Professor of Geography, Department of Geography & Planning, University of Toronto, [sarah.wakefield@utoronto.ca](mailto:sarah.wakefield@utoronto.ca)

Departmental mailing address (for all authors): 100 St. George Street, Toronto, Ontario M5S 3G3 Canada

### About the authors

The Food, Equity, and Activism Study Team (FEAST) is an emerging research group based at the University of Toronto, Canada. Our research interests include anti-colonialism and Indigenous self-determination, environmental governance, immigrant women’s environmental justice activism, Indigenous food sovereignty, and urban food accessibility. Our overarching goal is to develop practices—in collaboration with activists—that substantively promote equity, justice, and solidarity, both within food activism and across different kinds of justice organizing.

answers; we struggle through the same tensions we raise here in our own work. Nonetheless, we feel that encouraging those interested in food activism to consider intersecting systems of domination, to challenge such structures and their complicity in them, and to build solidarity with other activists, perhaps using land as the basis for new conversations and alliances, may be key steps toward cultivating an anti-colonial food justice praxis.

### **Keywords**

food justice, equity, activism, inclusion, intersectionality, indigeneity, settler colonialism, anti-colonialism, land, praxis

### **Growing Food Justice in Canada**

Over the past five years, the language of “food justice” has been increasingly embraced in both activist and academic spaces. As members of the Food, Equity, and Activism Study Team (FEAST) based in Toronto, Canada, we are surrounded by initiatives—the Afri-Can Food Basket, the Black Creek Community Farm, FoodShare, and The Stop, to name a few—that aim to strengthen food access for underserved and equity-seeking groups. Foodie academic circles have also embraced food justice, as was reflected at the 2015 meeting of the Canadian Association for Food Studies (CAFS), with a keynote titled “Critiquing Hegemony, Creating Food, Creating Justice: Cultivating an Activist Food Studies” and multiple sessions focused on injustices within the food system based on gender, class, or race.

We are encouraged by these trends and the well-timed release of this special issue. Drawing attention to inequities, stressing the value of listening to and including marginalized voices, and highlighting various forms of resistance all make important contributions to food justice. However, this can only be a starting point. We believe that to build a more equitable food system we need to move beyond inclusion and think more carefully about the structures that create privilege and disadvantage in our society, and that damage our relationships with the land and each other.

### **Food Justice and the Perils of Inclusion**

We make this argument out of a concern that

focusing on *inclusion* may re-inscribe privilege rather than redress the inequities that characterize the contemporary food system. When activists (and, in particular, *white, middle-class, settler* activists) talk about including diverse groups, they can reinforce preconceived notions of who “needs help” and who are the helpers. As Julie Guthman eloquently describes, food justice initiatives can be problematically rooted in “white desire to enroll black people in a particular set of food practices” (2008, p. 433). In our own work, we have seen the ways in which “helping” discourse is employed with “missionary zeal” (Guthman 2008, p. 436) in both academic and activist communities, particularly—although not exclusively—among the young and enthusiastic students in our courses and among interns working in food programs and on farms. Whether concerned with environmental sustainability, nutrition, or food access, a common focus in their work is to help those with seemingly less knowledge or fewer resources—for example, newcomers, the poor, or the obese.

Our purpose here is not to mock the enthusiasm that activists bring to their food justice work, but rather to highlight how important it is to confront one’s own *complicity* in hierarchical relations of power. Positioning subordinated groups in relation to an unnamed but assumed norm—described by Lorde as “white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure” (Lorde, 2007, p. 116)—naturalizes the oppression of nondominant groups, first by seeing the elements of this assumed norm as superior and desirable, second by positioning difference as somehow deficient or even degenerate, and third by assuming that the solution can be found by changing the nondominant group rather than through systemic transformation (see Cahuas, Malik, & Wakefield, in press). Elsewhere, Guthman (2011) notes that when food justice involves “improving” and “providing charity” it “rarely address[es] the source of inequality... bringing individual improvement rather than allowing for (or supporting) collective action” (p. 157). In this context, our point is not to encourage people to “confess their privilege” and achieve absolution (see Smith, 2013), but rather to use this new awareness to work toward structural change.



## Challenging Interconnected Structures of Oppression

Turning the focus instead to the “interlocking systems of domination” (Collins, 2002; Fellows & Razack, 1998) that shape food systems would position food activists to contribute more effectively to food justice. Connecting inequities within the food system (e.g., food insecurity) to larger structures of oppression—capitalism, patriarchy, colonialism, and white supremacy—and understanding how these structures operate (as well as overlap and intersect) to shape food injustice needs to be a focus of our work.

Attention is not always paid to these underlying structures within the food movement, and even where structural concerns are top-of-mind, the *intersections* of these systems have proven hard to tackle. This means that activists with different concerns sometimes fail to see how their work is all related to the broader project of social transformation.

In the Canadian context, we would suggest that taking these intersections seriously means that settler colonialism must be engaged with as an ongoing structure (Wolfe, 2006) that continues to shape the lives of everyone who dwells here.

## Taking Colonialism Seriously in Food Justice

In our own work, we have repeatedly come across a tendency to position colonialism as something that happened in the past or far away, and to conflate ongoing processes of colonization with institutional racism. This is evident in recent academic work as well: for example, in an edited collection about food justice, settler colonialism is framed as a “racial project” (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011, p. 5; Norgaard, Reed, & Van Horn, 2011, p. 25) without attention to the ways that colonialism is different. We echo Lawrence and Dua’s (2005) call to avoid conflating colonialism with race-based oppression (see also Byrd, 2011); maintaining this distinction is important because thinking about Indigenous peoples as one racial minority among many can function to erase their calls for sovereignty and self-determination as nations (Lawrence & Dua, 2005). While settler colonialism cannot be understood without considering racism, we think it

is necessary to see colonialism as a distinct but interlocking system of oppression with its own goals and logics, an approach that remains under-articulated by those who work within food justice frameworks.

Some recent work in Canada demonstrates a growing commitment to documenting the ways in which settler colonialism has violently impacted Indigenous food systems, self-determination, and sovereignty. For example, Food Secure Canada’s “People’s Food Policy Project” calls for a “return to the original nation-to-nation agreements” (2011, p. 11) and a greater focus on Indigenous rights as central to food sovereignty.

However, settler food activists and academics have yet to unpack what this means in practice and, in particular, how this might alter our understanding of *land* in the food system. Food justice scholars have done well to emphasize the importance of addressing capitalist systems of land ownership as a key part of transitioning to a more just and sustainable food system; to connect disproportionate access to land with institutional racism; and to highlight the ways that land policies in North America bar racialized groups from accessing agricultural land (Akram-Lodhi, 2013; Goodman, DuPuis, & Goodman, 2011; Guthman, 2004; Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011; Minkoff-Zern, Peluso, Sowerwine, & Getz, 2011; Norgaard et al., 2011; Wittman, 2009). Nonetheless, a lack of attention to settler control of land (e.g., for food production) and to the ongoing violence against Indigenous lands and food systems persists today.

For example, within conversations around access to land for food production (especially for new farmers), little thought is given to how land redistribution has the potential to reproduce settler claims to Indigenous land and its resources. Similarly, with the exception of pieces by authors like Kamal and Thompson (2013), Daschuk (2013), and Carter (1990), agriculture is commonly framed as beginning with white settler food production (e.g., Hinrichs, 2003), a perspective that omits the long history of Indigenous land cultivation. This omission is important because it erases Indigenous peoples’ claims to sovereignty by removing them from the conversation and the landscape.

Wolfe notes that “territoriality is settler

colonialism's specific irreducible element" (2006, p. 388). Indigenous peoples have been, and continue to be, dispossessed from their lands through "tools" of colonialism (Harris, 2004). In particular, refracting Indigenous modes of production worked to establish settler control of Indigenous lands and to functionally erase Indigenous presences (Harris, 2004, p. 172). Because erasing Indigenous peoples is central to the settler colonial project, so are settler attempts to legitimate and justify, or simply to take for granted, their continued occupation of native lands. Without attention, this process continues through the food movement.

### **Walking the Talk**

Moreover, while discussions of the ways that settler colonialism and other structures of oppression within food systems are on the rise, work that actively challenges this ongoing process has not kept pace. For example, settler solidarity-building with Indigenous movements has been limited. At the aforementioned CAFS meeting, which took place in Ottawa and had a clear focus on food justice as well as the ways that colonization affects food systems in Canada, multiple attendees brought up the failure of the conference to support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was holding its closing events a few blocks away. "Where were we during the solidarity march?" one CAFS participant asked. If we literally cannot walk in solidarity in a march down the street, and take time from the conference to do so, are we not guilty of simply "talking the talk"?

In order to walk the talk, food activists need to engage more meaningfully with the work of other justice activists, supporting them in their efforts without attempting to control the dialogue or to enroll other justice activists in their own food-related initiatives. This would widen the scope of learning about others' experiences, build an understanding of what meaningful social transformation could look like, and demonstrate what could happen if we fail to make such changes. As Sherene Razack said in a recent interview, "We have to learn that the colonial project that is Canada is not viable, because it is not structured on the principle of a common humanity....We need to say to white people, 'I don't want you to help me. I want you to

understand that your life will be really bad if things continue as they are'" (cited in Pinnington, 2014). As our society continues to dehumanize people and despoil the land, the stakes are very high indeed.

### **Moving Toward an Anti-colonial Food Justice Praxis**

We are posing these questions and challenges here because we know that activists are often ahead of scholars in their understandings of these critiques. In voicing our concerns at conferences, in front of our graduate committees and classes, and in activist spaces, we have consistently learned that activists are already having these conversations because they experience these tensions in their everyday work.

In presenting this commentary, we are not suggesting that we have all the answers. As graduate students, course instructors, and faculty, we continue to struggle through these tensions in our own research, teaching, and praxis. Still, we feel that encouraging those interested in food activism to consider how what they do is implicated in interlocking systems of domination and to be mindful of these connections, rather than privileging one perspective at the expense of others, is an important first step. In the Canadian context, this means paying serious attention to how the colonial project continues to shape our society and, in particular, how we view land, sovereignty, and our relationships to each other.

The production of dominance is not inevitable (McKittrick, 2006). One way to challenge it, as critical race and anti-colonial scholars have pointed out (e.g., McKittrick, 2006; Razack, 1998), is to make space for counterstories (see also Dixon, 2015). This approach has made its way into some parts of food justice work, particularly activism and research undertaken by marginalized and racialized communities or individuals. Counternarratives are clear in the activities of Toronto-based activist groups such as Justicia for Migrant Workers, the Toronto Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective, and FoodShare; they also surface in initiatives across the country, such as Feeding My Family (based in Nunavut) and the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (based in British Columbia).



This work contests dominant perspectives about who “speaks” and who “knows,” as systematically oppressed communities are often the best positioned to identify and address food challenges and work toward more equitable systems. We would suggest, therefore, that less time be spent intervening in the lives of marginalized communities; the focus should shift to challenging the activities and structures of oppression that we are all implicated within in different ways.

Contesting structures of oppression also requires working in solidarity with others who seek to enhance equity beyond the issue of food. If justice is the goal, a consideration of food’s intimate relationship to land may be necessary for respectful engagement with other activists. As there can be “no justice on stolen land,” engaging with how we each come to this land can build solidarity and challenge assumptions that may help to develop meaningful alternatives that can lead to food justice.

## References

- Akram-Lodhi, A. H. (2013). *Hungry for change: Farmers, food justice and the agrarian question*. Halifax, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing.
- Alkon, A. H., & Agyeman, J. (2011). Introduction. In A. H. Alkon & J. Agyeman (Eds.), *Cultivating food justice: Race, class, and sustainability* (pp. 1–20). Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.
- Byrd, J. A. (2011). *The transit of empire: Indigenous critiques of colonialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Cahuas, M. C., Malik, M., & Wakefield, S. (In press). When is helping hurting? Understanding and challenging the (re)production of dominance in narratives of health, place, and difference in Hamilton, Ontario. In M. D. Giesbrecht & V. A. Crooks (Eds.), *Place, health, and diversity: Learning from the Canadian experience*. London: Ashgate.
- Carter, S. (1990). *Lost harvests: Prairie Indian reserve farmers and government policy*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press.
- Collins, P. H. (2002). Defining black feminist thought. In P. Essed & D. T. Goldberg (Eds.), *Race critical theories: Text and context* (pp. 152–175). Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell.
- Daschuk, J. (2013). *Clearing the plains: Disease, politics of starvation, and the loss of Aboriginal life*. Regina, Saskatchewan: University of Regina Press.
- Dixon, B. A. (2015). Rewriting the call to charity: From food shelf volunteer to food justice advocate. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(2), 71–79.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.052.010>
- Fellows, M. L., & Razack, S. (1998). The race to innocence: Confronting hierarchical relations among women. *Journal of Gender, Race and Justice*, 1, 335–352.
- Food Secure Canada. (2011). *Resetting the table: A people’s food policy for Canada*. Montreal: Author. Retrieved from <http://foodsecurecanada.org/sites/default/files/fsc-resetting2012-8half11-lowres-en.pdf>
- Goodman, D., DuPuis, E. M., & Goodman, M. K. (2011). *Alternative food networks: Knowledge, practice, and politics*. New York: Routledge.
- Guthman, J. (2004). *Agrarian dreams: The paradox of organic farming in California*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Guthman, J. (2008). Bringing good food to others: Investigating the subjects of alternative food practice. *Cultural Geographies*, 15(4), 431–447.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1474474008094315>
- Guthman, J. (2011). *Weighing in: Obesity, food justice, and the limits of capitalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Harris, C. (2004). How did colonialism dispossess? Comments from an edge of empire. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 94(1), 165–182.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.2004.09401009.x>
- Hinrichs, C. C. (2003). The practice and politics of food system localization. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19(1), 33–45. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0743-0167\(02\)00040-2](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0743-0167(02)00040-2)
- Holt-Giménez, E., & Shattuck, A. (2011). Food crises, food regimes and food movements: Rumblings of reform or tides of transformation? *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(1), 109–144.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2010.538578>
- Kamal, A. G., & Thompson, S. (2013, September). *Recipe for decolonization and resurgence: Story of O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation’s indigenous food sovereignty movement*. Paper presented at the Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialog Conference, Yale University. Retrieved from <http://elsinore.cis.yale.edu/agrarianstudies/foodsovereignty/abstracts.html>

- Lawrence, B., & Dua, E. (2005). Decolonizing anti-racism. *Social Justice*, 32(4), 120–143.  
<http://www.socialjusticejournal.org/>
- Lorde, A. (2007). Age, race, class, and sex: Women redefining difference. In A. Lorde, *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches* (pp. 114–123). New York: Crossing Press.
- McKittrick, K. (2006). *Demonic grounds: Black women and the cartographies of struggle*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Minkoff-Zern, L.-A., Peluso, N., Sowerwine, J., & Getz, C. (2011). Race and regulation: Asian immigrants in California agriculture. In A. H. Alkon & J. Agyeman (Eds.), *Cultivating food justice: Race, class, and sustainability* (pp. 65–85). Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.
- Norgaard, K. M., Reed, R., & Van Horn, C. (2011). A continuing legacy: Institutional racism, hunger, and nutritional justice on the Klamath. In A. H. Alkon & J. Agyeman (Eds.), *Cultivating food justice: Race, class, and sustainability* (pp. 23–46). Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.
- Pinnington, E. (2014, November 28). Sherene Razack on lessons learned: “No one is born white.” *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from  
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/sherene-razack-on-lessons-learned-no-one-is-born-white/article21810297/>
- Razack, S. H. (1998). *Looking white people in the eye: Gender, race, and culture in courtrooms and classrooms*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Smith, A. (2013). Unsettling the privilege of self-reflexivity. In F. Winddance Twine & B. Gardener (Eds.), *Geographies of privilege* (pp. 263–280). New York: Routledge.
- Wittman, H. (2009). Reworking the metabolic rift: La Via Campesina, agrarian citizenship, and food sovereignty. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(4), 805–826.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/030666150903353991>
- Wolfe, P. (2006) Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8(4), 387–409.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>

# The food system should unite us, not divide us

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS

Lindsey Haynes-Maslow<sup>a\*</sup> and Ricardo Salvador<sup>b</sup>  
Union of Concerned Scientists

Submitted June 15, 2015 / Published online August 24, 2015

Citation: Haynes-Maslow, L., & Salvador, R. (2015). The food system should unite us, not divide us. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 105–108.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.019>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

## Abstract

The U.S. agrifood system was built upon land redistribution, enslavement, and labor exploitation. This system encompasses economic, social, and biophysical components deployed under a set of policies that negatively affect Native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanics. Researchers have studied the problematic issues affecting

marginalized groups and published their analyses, while leaving intact the issues they document and research. Researchers have the responsibility to redress the exploitative premise of the agrifood system for communities whose circumstances have helped advance academic careers. Marginalized communities can be essential partners in practical and intellectual innovation and improvement of the agrifood system. The most effective way to redirect our system is to redefine the purpose of that system. Nations that invest their public resources equitably produce greater overall well-being for people of all incomes. The purpose of public investment in our food system should be to nourish and maximize overall health and well-being. We should establish an overarching national policy to create norms leading to equitable outcomes.

## Keywords

equity, food, health disparities, policy

<sup>a\*</sup> *Corresponding author:* Lindsey Haynes-Maslow, PhD, MHA, Union of Concerned Scientists, Food & Environment Program; 1825 K Street NW, Suite 800; Washington, D.C. 20006 USA; +1-202-331-5432; [lhaynes-maslow@ucsusa.org](mailto:lhaynes-maslow@ucsusa.org)

<sup>b</sup> Ricardo Salvador, PhD, Union of Concerned Scientists, Food & Environment Program; 1825 K Street NW, Suite 800; Washington, D.C. 20006 USA; +1-202-331-6956; [rsalvador@ucsusa.org](mailto:rsalvador@ucsusa.org)

*Disclosure:* Ricardo Salvador currently serves as an advisory board member for the *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*. He receives no financial compensation in this role.

## **The Food System Divides Us**

The United States' agrifood system was built upon appropriation of the means of production by European colonists, involving land-grabbing, enslavement, and labor exploitation. Securing our nation's land base required a genocidal program and displacement of tens of thousands of Native Americans (Chalk & Jonassohn, 1990). Making that land base agriculturally productive then required relegating millions of African Americans and Hispanics to the role of base laborers whose costs were to be minimized. Because of that, we have been left with an agrifood system that divides us, with skin color and ethnicity as a clear marker for that division. This system encompasses economic, social, and biophysical components that have been deployed under a set of policies that benefit many, but also harm many. These policies have produced an inequitable outcome. This is manifested in a number of ways, primarily in disproportionately high hunger and poverty rates among Native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanics—more than twice that of whites (Coleman-Jensen, Gregory, & Singh, 2014).

While much social progress was achieved between the Civil War and the civil rights era, much more is needed to secure social equity in opportunity, employment, income, and food security for marginalized generations now and in the future. Currently, the probability that a child born to parents in the bottom fifth of income distribution reaches the top fifth is only 7.5 percent (Chetty, Hendren, Kline & Saez, 2014). If that child were born in Canada, his or her social mobility would be twice as high (Chetty et al., 2014). In the past 50 years, African American median household income in comparison to White household income has barely improved, from 55 to 59 percent (Pew Research Center, 2013). African Americans without a high school diploma are twice as likely to be unemployed than Whites without a high school diploma (Lee, 2008). In 2013, African Americans were nearly three times more likely than whites to live in poverty (27.3 percent compared to 9.7 percent) and Hispanics were two and half times more likely (23.7 percent) (Kaiser Family Foundation, n.d.). Food insecurity rates track poverty rates; in 2013 approximately 11 percent of Whites were

food insecure, compared to 26 percent of African Americans and 24 percent of Hispanics (Coleman-Jensen, 2014).

## **How Can the Food System Unite Us?**

The interests of communities of color have often been repressed in the policy-making process, resulting in policies that clearly (and often intentionally) affect those communities' transportation, housing, jobs, and schools, reinforcing the nation's discriminatory history along lines of ethnicity and color. With the 2013 repeal of the 1965 Voting Rights Act the political franchise of African Americans has been further undermined (Dinan, 2013). In the academic world, researchers have often studied the problematic issues affecting marginalized groups and published their analyses, while leaving intact the very issues they document and research.

The futility of such a cycle in addressing the practical interests of communities of color can lead understandably to those communities dismissing collaborations with researchers. While not all researchers are guilty of this system of benefitting professionally and personally while their "subjects" experience no shift in their circumstances, it is the responsibility of researchers who have relevant knowledge and the social standing to intervene to do so. This is all the more so because the scientific community has served as de facto intelligentsia for the industrializing power structure that has implemented the present agrifood system. Researchers have the responsibility to redress the exploitative premise of the agrifood system, and to relate equitably with communities whose circumstances have helped advance their academic careers.

In this task, marginalized communities can be essential partners in practical and intellectual innovation and improvement of the agrifood system. Action-based research bolstered by appropriate methodologies for capturing complex community knowledge and worldviews can provide a vehicle for academics and community members to collaborate for effective and equitable food system improvement (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001; Patton, 1990). Our current agrifood system serves some of us well, but greater and


more equitable collaboration among all sectors of society can make it work well for everyone.

### A Systemic Approach to the Food System

Reshaping the structure of the agrifood system away from exploitation of people and the environment requires a systemic approach. Researchers, policymakers, community members, and advocates must recognize that many complex interactions are embedded in the structure of our agrifood system. These interactions have socioeconomic and biophysical components. Several analytical frameworks exist to guide the work of researchers collaborating with communities in such complex milieus. Examples are soft systems analysis (Checkland & Poulter, 2006) and the business sector's "wicked problem" approach (Nelson & Stroink, 2014). Public health's socio-ecological framework (SEF) suggests that health and health behaviors are affected by different levels of influence: individual, interpersonal, community, and societal (public policies and systems) (Sallis, Owen, & Fisher, 2008). The SEF highlights that individuals both shape and are shaped by their environment, and are also influenced by public policies and systems affecting the distribution of power and resources.

To shape local, state, and federal policies that redistribute power and resources equitably it would be helpful to follow Meadows' (1999) observation that the most effective way to redirect a system is to redefine the purpose of that system. Our nation is a complex system. It was established on the aspirational premise that all its citizens are equal and "endowed with certain unalienable rights," according to the preamble of the Declaration of Independence (although at the time of its inception these rights were extended to White land-owning males only). Therefore we advocate nothing radical, but simply the actual fulfillment of this nation's founding vision: the right of everyone to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Comprehensive socioeconomic research demonstrates that communities and nations that invest their public resources equitably produce greater overall well-being for people of all incomes (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2011). The purpose of our food system should not be exclusively to maximize output and

profit, but to nourish and maximize overall health and well-being.

Our food system is an amalgam of public and private investment. Because it is intertwined with so many sectors of our economy—labor, transportation, education, health care—the aim of public investment should be a system that benefits us all. We should establish overarching national policies and principles that create norms leading to equitable outcomes (Bittman, Pollan, Salvador, & De Schutter, 2015). Policy-makers at the local, state, and federal levels should lay the foundation for a better agrifood system by implementing democratic, science-based policies to protect the environment with sustainable farming practices, support the research and marketing needs of all farmers, build the economic standing of food system workers through fair wages, and build a healthy food environment where good food is accessible and affordable for everyone. Our food system should unite us, not divide us. 

### References

- Bittman, M., Pollan, M., Salvador, R., & De Schutter, O. (2014, November 7). How a national policy could save millions of American lives. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-a-national-food-policy-could-save-millions-of-american-lives/2014/11/07/89c55e16-637f-11e4-836c-83bc4f26eb67\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-a-national-food-policy-could-save-millions-of-american-lives/2014/11/07/89c55e16-637f-11e4-836c-83bc4f26eb67_story.html)
- Bloor, M., Frankland, J., Thomas, M., & Robson, K. (2001). *Focus groups in social research*. London: SAGE.
- Chalk, F., & Johassohn, K. (1990). *The history and sociology of genocide: Analyses and case studies*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.
- Checkland, P., & Poulter, J. (2006). *Learning for action: A short definitive account of Soft Systems Methodology and its use for practitioners, teachers and students*. Chichester, England: John Wiley & Sons.
- Chetty, R., Hendren, N., Kline, P., & Saez, E. (2014). Where is the land of opportunity: The geography of intergenerational mobility in the United States. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 129(4), 1553–1623. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/qje/qju022>
- Coleman-Jensen, A., Gregory, C., & Singh, A. (2014). *Household food security in the United States in 2013* (Report No. ERR-173). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research

- Service. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err173.aspx>
- Dinan, S. (2013, June 25). Supreme Court says Voting Rights Act of 1965 is no longer relevant. *The Washington Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/jun/25/court-past-voting-discrimination-no-longer-held/?page=all>
- Kaiser Family Foundation. (n.d.). *Poverty rate by race/ethnicity*. Retrieved June 10, 2015, from <http://kff.org/other/state-indicator/poverty-rate-by-raceethnicity>
- Lee, M. A., & Mather, M. (2008). U.S. labor force trends. *Population Bulletin*, 63(2), 1–18.
- Meadows, D. (1999). *Leverage points: Places to intervene in a system*. Hartland, Vermont: Sustainability Institute.
- Nelson, C. H., & Stroink, M. L. (2014). Accesibility and viability: A complex adaptive systems approach to a wicked program for the local food movement. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 4(4), 191–206.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2014.044.016>
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, California: SAGE.
- Pew Research Center. (2013). King’s dream remains an elusive goal; Many Americans see racial disparities. Washington, D.C.: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/08/22/kings-dream-remains-an-elusive-goal-many-americans-see-racial-disparities/>
- Sallis, J. F., Owen, N., & Fisher, E. B (2008). Ecological models of heath behavior. In: K. Glanz, B. K. Rimer, & K. Viswanath, (Eds.), *Health behavior and health education: Theory, research, and practice* (4th ed.) (pp. 465–485). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2011). *The spirit level: Why greater equality makes societies stronger*. New York: Bloomsbury Press.

## Valuing all knowledges through an expanded definition of access

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS

Kareem M. Usher\*  
The Ohio State University

Submitted June 15, 2015 / Published online August 24, 2015

Citation: Usher, K. M. (2015). Valuing all knowledges through an expanded definition of access. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 109–114.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.018>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

Historical racial injustices as well as more recent public and economic policies have culminated in the displacement of supermarkets from some central city neighborhoods. With this displacement, many low-income and minority neighborhoods not only have been deprived of affordable healthful food, but also have experienced prolonged exposure to energy-dense and highly processed snack foods. Partly as a consequence of this loss of supermarkets, diet-related diseases have become prevalent. Our current policies to improve this health issue address only objective measures of access, with little input from community residents, and they are having limited results. In response, I have reconceptualized access as a construct with

five dimensions: acceptability, accessibility, accommodation, affordability, and availability. This new expanded view supports both objective and perceived aspects of access and values the knowledge of residents through community-based participatory research, thereby providing a more complete understanding of access.

### Keywords

food access, race, five dimensions of access, grocery gap, health disparity, community-based participatory research, social determinants of health, food desert

The increase in youth obesity rates and diet-related diseases across age groups in low-income and predominantly minority neighborhoods relative to middle-class White neighborhoods has received national attention of late (Bodor, Rice, Farley, Swalm, & Rose, 2010; Zenk, Schulz, Israel, James, Bao, & Wilson, 2005). Our attempts at reducing this disparity and improving

---

\* Kareem M. Usher, PhD, Assistant Professor, City and Regional Planning, The Ohio State University; Austin E. Knowlton School of Architecture—City and Regional Planning Section; 275 West Woodruff Avenue; Columbus, Ohio 43210 USA; [usher.21@osu.edu](mailto:usher.21@osu.edu)



health outcomes by increasing access to healthy foods have had limited and uneven success (Guthman, 2008a, 2008b; Slocum, 2007). In this commentary, I suggest that we reconceptualize and broaden our definition of “access” to go beyond objective measures of location, affordability, and availability to include emotive components such as acceptability, accommodation, and residents’ perceptions of their food environment and foodways (Usher, 2015). This expanded notion of access supports community-based participatory research that values the knowledge of and includes residents as research partners, and provides for a more complete understanding of food insecurity, food sovereignty, and deprived areas or “food deserts.”

Many studies, although not all, have suggested that having access to full-service supermarkets influences families’ selection and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, and thus affect their long-term health outcomes (Grigsby-Toussaint, Zenk, Odoms-Young, Ruggiero, & Moise, 2010; Pothukuchi, 2005; Raja, Yin, Roemmich, Ma, Epstein, Yadav, & Ticoalu, 2010). This is based on research that has found that supermarkets are the best sources of a variety of high-quality, healthful food at affordable prices throughout the year (Caspi, Kawachi, Subramanian, Adamkiewicz, & Sorensen, 2012; Laraia, Siega-Riz, Kaufman, & Jones, 2004). Not only do low-income minority neighborhoods suffer by having fewer supermarkets than upper-class White neighborhoods, but also there is a statistically significant link between the racial composition of a neighborhood and the density of fast-food restaurants (Block, Scribner, & DeSalvo, 2004). Kwate’s (2008) work in New York City showed that the dominant factor in determining fast-food density in majority Black neighborhoods is race-based residential segregation. Block and colleagues (2004) found that predominantly Black (80 percent or higher) neighborhoods were geographically associated with fast-food restaurants even after controlling for commercial activity, the presence of highways, and median home values. They also found that there were 2.4 fast food restaurants per square mile in majority Black neighborhoods compared to 1.5 restaurants per square mile in majority White neighborhoods. Race is also a significant factor in

the presence of large chain supermarkets. Black neighborhoods tend to have half the availability of supermarkets of White neighborhoods, and low-income African Americans on average live 1.1 miles (1.8 kilometers) further from the nearest supermarket than low-income White families (Block et al., 2004; Odoms-Young, Zenk, & Mason, 2009; Powell, Slater, Mirtcheva, Bao, & Chaloupka, 2007).

As our selection and consumption of food are largely based on the choices we have in our neighborhood of residence, it follows that low-income minority residential areas that tend to have fewer health-promoting resources such as supermarkets that offer high-fiber foods, and have prolonged exposure to highly processed, energy-dense foods, also display higher rates of cardiovascular diseases (Diez Roux, 2001; Ver Ploeg, 2010; Walker, Block, & Kawachi, 2012). In addition, a 2012 U.S. Department of Agriculture study found that 16.4 percent of the population, or 50.1 million people, lived in food-insecure neighborhoods, and 37.6 percent of these were low-income residents (Coleman-Jensen, Nord, Andrews, & Carlson, 2012). African Americans, Hispanics, and other minority groups have higher rates of morbidity and mortality rates, and suffer disproportionately from “diseases of life-style” namely coronary heart disease and Type II Diabetes, than Whites (Eisenhauer, 2001; Short, Guthman, & Raskin, 2007). Obesity, for example, is 50 percent more prevalent in low-income households, which tend to be in areas that lack other amenities such as parks and full-service supermarkets (Laska, Hearst, Forsyth, Pasch, & Lytle, 2010; Morland, Diez Roux, & Wing, 2006).

In addressing this disparity in health outcomes, some municipalities have recognized that they are less the result of genetics, individual behavior, or access to health care, and more a consequence of historical, social, physical, and economic factors that shape opportunities for neighborhoods—or social determinants of health. These observed realities are often predicated on systemic inequities that marginalize groups based on racial and ethnic identity, religion, gender, age, socioeconomic status, mental health, sexual orientation, and geographic location (Food in Neighborhoods Committee, 2010; L. M. Smith, 2008; P. Smith,

Pennington, Crabtree, & Illback, 2011). However, our extant notion of access does not reflect this insight. Current policies attempt to fill the “grocery gap” and to make healthful food more affordable through subsidies (Bell, Mora, Hagan, Rubin, & Karpyn, 2013; Bitler & Haider, 2011; Song, Gittelsohn, Kim, Suratkar, Sharma, & Anliker, 2009). While these are useful and necessary, they are not sufficient. More scholars are calling for studies and policies that consider perceived as well as objective access and value self-reporting as reasonable measures of access (Alkon, Block, Moore, Gillis, DiNuccio, & Chavez, 2013; DeLind, 2006; Moore, Diez Roux, & Franco, 2012). For example, at present access does not consider residents’ perception of food quality or neighborhood crime rates. Winkler, Turrell, and Patterson (2006) found no differences in price and availability of healthy food based on the socioeconomic characteristics of their study area. And Coveney and O’Dwyer (2009) concluded that living in a “food desert,” by itself, did not hinder access to healthy food. Residents were able to mitigate this obstacle through social networks that provided access through private transportation to food outside their neighborhoods.

Access incorporates objective as well as

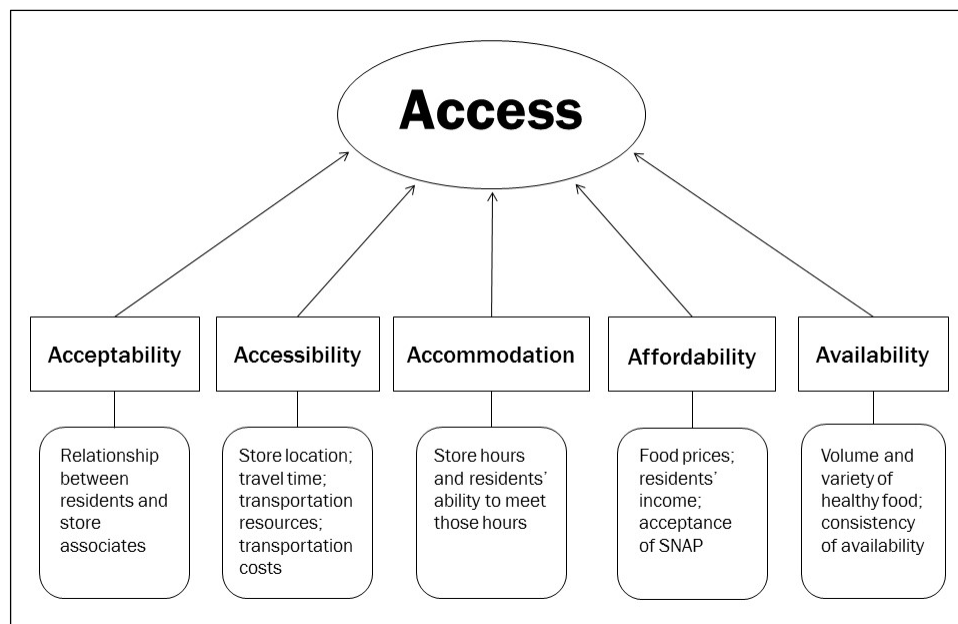
perceived elements, and it is a dynamic, not static, condition; that is, it is not realistic to expect that attracting a new supermarket will solve all food access issues in perpetuity. Given these constraints, I have reconceptualized “access” to reflect a construct that is an aggregation of factors (or “strands”) that influences residents’ ability to acquire and benefit from healthy food (Penchansky & Thomas, 1981; Ribot & Peluso, 2003). This conceptualization highlights the social interactions, cultural norms, socio-political, and economic factors that influence access to resources across the landscape. As these factors interact with each other and residents orient themselves geographically in relation to resources over time, the strands affect residents’ power or self-efficacy and level of access to resources (Penchansky & Thomas, 1981; Ribot & Peluso, 2003; Usher, 2015). In this way access is understood as the level of “fit” between residents and the local food system and residents’ ability to meet their nutritional needs.

I illustrate this conceptualization of the Five Dimensions of Access in Figure 1. The five dimensions are *Acceptability*, *Accessibility*, *Accommodation*, *Affordability*, and *Availability*. Acceptability is defined as the relationship between customers and store associates, including owners. It considers

residents’ attitudes toward the quality and cultural appropriateness of the food being sold. Accessibility queries residents’ perceptions of the relationship between the location of the food sources and the location of residents, taking account of residents’ transportation resources, travel time, distance, and transportation costs.

The third dimension is Accommodation, which I define as the

**Figure 1. The Five Dimensions of Access**



residents' perceptions of the manner in which healthy food is organized to meet residents' needs. This refers to residents' perception of store hours of operation, food displays, the physical condition of the venue, and perception of area crime. Affordability refers to residents' perception of their ability to purchase the food, including consideration of their income and their knowledge of food prices outside their neighborhoods for comparison shopping. This dimension also includes the food sources' ability to make healthy food more attractive to residents through subsidies and discounts. Finally, the fifth dimension is Availability, which investigates the relationship between the volume and variety of healthy food and the needs of residents, as well as the availability of food throughout the year (Usher, 2015).

Each of these five dimensions is dynamic and not easily separated. For instance, a family might move to another neighborhood, affecting their accessibility to healthy food, or a family member might secure a better-paying job, which may affect perceptions of affordability and accessibility. However, the model remains stable. It is also important that this model creates both the intellectual and scientific space for us to conduct community-based participatory research (CBPR) and for us to value self-reporting as a valid source of knowledge by incorporating both objective and perceived measures of food access. In this way we—social scientists, policy analysts, and community stakeholders—involve local residents as true partners (Arnstein, 1969), empower residents in problem-solving, build social capital, and gain a more complete view of families' food environments and an understanding of food choices in order to develop more effective local food policies to improve the health of all.

## References

- Alkon, A. H., Block, D., Moore, K., Gillis, C., DiNuccio, N., & Chavez, N. (2013). Foodways of the urban poor. *Geoforum*, 48, 126–135.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2013.04.021>
- Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), 216–224.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225>
- Bell, J., Mora, G., Hagan, E., Rubin, V., & Karpyn, A. (2013). *Access to healthy food and why it matters: A review of the research*. Oakland, California: PolicyLink and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Food Trust. Retrieved from the PolicyLink website: [https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/GROCERYGAP\\_FINAL\\_NOV2013.pdf](https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/GROCERYGAP_FINAL_NOV2013.pdf)
- Bitler, M., & Haider, S. J. (2011). An economic view of food deserts in the United States. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 30(1), 153–176.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/pam.20550>
- Block, J. P., Scribner, R. A., & DeSalvo, K. B. (2004). Fast food, race/ethnicity, and income: A geographic analysis. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 27(3), 211–217.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2004.06.007>
- Bodor, J. N., Rice, J. C., Farley, T. A., Swalm, C. M., & Rose, D. (2010). Disparities in food access: Does aggregate availability of key foods from other stores offset the relative lack of supermarkets in African-American neighborhoods? *Preventive Medicine*, 51(1), 63–67.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2010.04.009>
- Caspi, C. E., Kawachi, I., Subramanian, S. V., Adamkiewicz, G., & Sorensen, G. (2012). The relationship between diet and perceived and objective access to supermarkets among low-income housing residents. *Social Science & Medicine*, 75(7), 1254–1262.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2012.05.014>
- Food in Neighborhoods Committee. (2010). *The state of food: A snapshot of food access in Louisville*. Louisville, Kentucky: Mayor's Healthy Hometown Movement. Retrieved from the Congressional Hunger Center website: <http://www.hungercenter.org/publications/the-state-of-food-a-snapshot-of-food-access-in-louisville/>
- Coleman-Jensen, Alisha, Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson. 2012. "Household Food Security in the United States in 2011: Statistical Supplement."
- Coveney, J., & O'Dwyer, L. A. (2009). Effects of mobility and location on food access. *Health & Place*, 15(1), 45–55. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2008.01.010>
- DeLind, L. B. (2006). Of bodies, place, and culture: Re-situating local food. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 19(2), 121–146.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10806-005-1803-z>

- Diez Roux, A. V. (2001). Investigating neighborhood and area effects on health. *American Journal of Public Health*, 91(11), 1783–1789. Retrieved from <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1446876>
- Eisenhauer, E. (2001). In poor health: Supermarket redlining and urban nutrition. *GeoJournal*, 53(2), 125–133. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/A:1015772503007>
- Grigsby-Toussaint, D. S., Zenk, S. N., Odoms-Young, A., Ruggiero, L., & Moise, I. (2010). Availability of commonly consumed and culturally specific fruits and vegetables in African-American and Latino neighborhoods. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 110(5), 746–752. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jada.2010.02.008>
- Guthman, J. (2008a). Bringing good food to others: Investigating the subjects of alternative food practice. *Cultural Geographies*, 15(4), 431–447. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1474474008094315>
- Guthman, J. (2008b). “If they only knew”: Color blindness and universalism in California alternative food institutions. *The Professional Geographer*, 60(3), 387–397. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00330120802013679>
- Kwate, N. O. A. (2008). Fried chicken and fresh apples: Racial segregation as a fundamental cause of fast food density in black neighborhoods. *Health & Place*, 14(1), 32–44. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2007.04.001>
- Laraia, B. A., Siega-Riz, A. M., Kaufman, J. S., & Jones, S. J. (2004). Proximity of supermarkets is positively associated with diet quality index for pregnancy. *Preventive Medicine*, 39(5), 869–875. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2004.03.018>
- Laska, M. N., Hearst, M. O., Forsyth, A., Pasch, K. E., & Lytle, L. (2010). Neighbourhood food environments: Are they associated with adolescent dietary intake, food purchases and weight status? *Public Health Nutrition*, 13(11), 1757–1763. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1368980010001564>
- Moore, L. V., Diez Roux, A. V., & Franco, M. (2012). Measuring availability of healthy foods: Agreement between directly measured and self-reported data. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 175(10), 1037–1044. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwr445>
- Morland, K. B., Diez Roux, A. V., & Wing, S. (2006). Supermarkets, other food stores, and obesity: The Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities Study. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 30(4), 333–339. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2005.11.003>
- Odoms-Young, A. M., Zenk, S., & Mason, M. (2009). Measuring food availability and access in African-American communities: Implications for intervention and policy. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 36(4 Suppl.), S145–S150. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2009.01.001>
- Penchansky, R., & Thomas, J. W. (1981). The concept of access: Definition and relationship to consumer satisfaction. *Medical Care*, 19(2), 127–140. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1097/00005650-198102000-00001>
- Pothukuchi, K. (2005). Attracting supermarkets to inner-city neighborhoods: Economic development outside the box. *Economic Development Quarterly*, 19(3), 232–244. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0891242404273517>
- Powell, L. M., Slater, S., Mirtcheva, D., Bao, Y., & Chaloupka, F. J. (2007). Food store availability and neighborhood characteristics in the United States. *Preventive Medicine*, 44(3), 189–195. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2006.08.008>
- Raja, S., Yin, L., Roemmich, J., Ma, C., Epstein, L., Yadav, P., & Ticoalu, A. B. (2010). Food environment, built environment, and women’s BMI: Evidence from Erie County, New York. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 29(4), 444–460. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0739456X10367804>
- Ribot, J. C., & Peluso, N. L. (2003). A theory of access. *Rural Sociology*, 68(2), 153–181. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1549-0831.2003.tb00133.x>
- Short, A., Guthman, J., & Raskin, S. (2007). Food deserts, oases, or mirages? Small markets and community food security in the San Francisco Bay Area. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 26(3), 352–364. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0739456X06297795>
- Slocum, R. (2007). Whiteness, space and alternative food practice. *Geoforum*, 38(3), 520–533. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2006.10.006>
- Smith, L. M. (Director). (2008). In sickness and in wealth [Television series episode transcript]. In L. Adelman (Executive Producer), *Unnatural causes: Is inequality making us sick?* San Francisco: California Newsreel and Boston: Vital Pictures.

- Smith, P., Pennington, M., Crabtree, L., & Illback, R. (2011). *Louisville Metro Health Equity Report: The social determinants of health in Louisville Metro neighborhoods*. Louisville, Kentucky: Louisville Metro Department of Public Health and Wellness Center for Health Equity.
- Song, H.-J., Gittelsohn, J., Kim, M., Suratkar, S., Sharma, S., & Anliker, J. (2009). A corner store intervention in a low-income urban community is associated with increased availability and sales of some healthy foods. *Public Health Nutrition*, 12(11), 2060–2067. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1368980009005242>
- Usher, K. M. (2015). *Access to healthy food re-conceptualized: Exploring the five dimensions of access*. Manuscript in preparation.
- Ver Ploeg, M. (2010, March 1). Access to affordable, nutritious food is limited in “food deserts.” *Amber Waves*. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2010-march/access-to-affordable,-nutritious-food-is-limited-in-%E2%80%9Cfood-deserts%E2%80%9D.aspx#.Vds6HZchNnA>
- Walker, R. E., Block, J., & Kawachi, I. (2012). Do residents of food deserts express different food buying preferences compared to residents of food oases? A mixed-methods analysis. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 9, 41. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/1479-5868-9-41>
- Winkler, E., Turrell, G., & Patterson, C. (2006). Does living in a disadvantaged area entail limited opportunities to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables in terms of price, availability, and variety? Findings from the Brisbane Food Study. *Health & Place*, 12(4), 741–748. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2005.09.006>
- Zenk, S. N., Schulz, A. J., Israel, B. A., James, S. A., Bao, S., & Wilson, M. L. (2005). Neighborhood racial composition, neighborhood poverty, and the spatial accessibility of supermarkets in metropolitan Detroit. *American Journal of Public Health*, 95(4), 660–667. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2004.042150>

# The food movement: Growing white privilege, diversity, or empowerment?

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS WORK

Kelly Moore <sup>a \*</sup> and Marilyn E. Swisher <sup>b</sup>  
University of Florida

Submitted June 15, 2015 / Published online August 26, 2015

Citation: Moore, K., & Swisher, M. E. (2015). The food movement: Growing white privilege, diversity, or empowerment? *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 115–119. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.013>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

## Abstract

Food systems work is both a stimulus to the growth of the food movement and a response to the concerns of the activists who lead and participate in that movement. In the United States and many other nations, the development of a vocal, articulate, and passionate group of people who are critical of food systems work has led to many changes. However, the food movement lacks diversity representative of the communities in which food systems work takes place. People of color, the poor, and many ethnic and religious minorities remain almost invisible in the food

movement. A diversity model approach to food systems work would suggest that the food movement should include people of diverse backgrounds and characteristics, reflect the needs and interests of a diverse society, and respect everyone's food choices and values in determining solutions and creating alternatives to the current food system. Instead, the food movement most often reflects white, middle class interests, and ignores or even rejects the interests and cultural histories of diverse populations when establishing what constitutes "good food." We call for an empowerment model that instead embraces diversity and respects the variability in food choices and values within our society. We argue this model will liberate both the underrepresented and underserved *and* the elite and that the result will be more equitable and lasting solutions to complex social problems in the food system.

## Keywords

diversity model, empowerment model, food movement, white privilege, ladder of participation

<sup>a \*</sup> *Corresponding author.* Kelly Moore, School of Natural Resources and Environment, University of Florida; P.O. Box 110310; Gainesville, Florida 32611-0310 USA; +1-352-273-3508; [kmon913@ufl.edu](mailto:kmon913@ufl.edu)

<sup>b</sup> Marilyn E. Swisher, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, University of Florida; P.O. Box 110310; Gainesville, Florida 32611-0310 USA; +1-352-273-3538; [mesw@ufl.edu](mailto:mesw@ufl.edu)

Food systems work is both a stimulus to the growth of the food movement and a response to the concerns of the activists who lead and participate in that movement. The increased effort to understand and improve the food system both globally and in the United States is valuable to consumers, farmers, and other actors in the food system. It has spurred an ongoing discussion of the strengths and weaknesses and also the successes and failures of the large-scale, global systems of production and marketing that developed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the United States and many other nations, the development of a vocal, articulate and passionate group of people who are critical of food systems work has led to many changes. The growth of farmers' markets, increased research on sustainable and organic production techniques, and growing demand for fresh fruits and vegetables are just a few of the noticeable changes that have resulted. However, we argue that the work on food systems, with few exceptions, has not been able to incorporate a diversity model.

### What Would a Diversity Model Look Like?

At the most basic level, implementing a diversity model would require that the food movement and those of us engaged in food systems work include actors who represent the full diversity of the societies of which we are a part. One important indicator of the degree to which diverse actors are engaged fully is their participation not just as "beneficiaries" or "advocates" but as leaders of the food movement. People of color, the poor, and many ethnic and religious minorities remain almost invisible in the food movement. The membership of the food movement, those who advocate and work on food systems, and certainly the high-visibility leaders of the movement in the U.S. remain largely white, of "Anglo" heritage, and middle class. Nor is the diversity of the nation reflected in the land-grant colleges and universities that receive the lion's share of federal funds for food systems research and extension. The National Research Council (2009) issued an assessment of agricultural education in the U.S. that specifically called for greater diversity in the faculty and student body at these institutions. The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) (2009)

echoed the NRC recommendations.

A diversity model also requires that food systems work address the needs of the diverse groups of people in our societies. We have greatly increased the attention we pay to alternative modes of production, distribution, and marketing of foods. For example, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) now funds research and outreach on organic food production and has programs designed to provide training and assistance for new or beginning farmers and ranchers. However, organic foods are neither affordable nor accessible by the poor. Food systems workers have recognized these limitations, but much of the work to increase the quality of foods available to food insecure people has focused on gardening. In essence, this involves telling the poor to "raise your own food," ignoring the cost in time and money and the high risk of crop loss inherent in gardening, especially for the inexperienced. Attention to the "whiteness" of the food movement and food systems work has grown in recent years (Alkon, 2012; Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Billings & Cabbil, 2011; Bowens, 2015; Etmanski, 2012; Freeman, 2013; Guthman, 2008; Slocum, 2006). The APLU also issued a report (2010) that called for greater diversity in Cooperative Extension as an organization and in regard to the diverse needs of the American public.

To improve food systems work, it is useful to think about the implications that a diversity model would have for the food movement and food systems work that supports it. A diversity model would respect *everyone's food*. Intentionally or not, the food movement has defined for many people what constitutes good food. Some aspects of the definition are science-based and hard to challenge. Foods loaded with fat, sugar, and salt are not nutritionally good foods. However, for many in the food movement good food also includes intangible attributes; typical examples are organic, local, GMO-free, from a small farm, heritage cultivars, and free range. In and of themselves, these attributes represent food choices that certainly reflect values. However, this "labeling" extends beyond differences in values expressed in open discourse. The white privilege reflected in the composition of the food movement membership, and especially its



leadership, extends to what constitutes “good food” in many cases. One example is the “collards versus kale war.” Collards and kale are essentially equivalent nutritionally. Collard greens are a typical Southern food, a food choice shared by both black and white southerners. Yet kale has become the poster child for “really good food,” while collards are virtually absent from the food discourse. A negative image of collard greens as “overcooked with too much salt and lard” reflects a judgment of Southern, and more specifically traditionally African American, foods and indirectly of the people who prepare and eat them.

A more inclusive approach to food systems work could be based on Arnstein’s model of the “ladder of participation.” Arnstein (1969) divides “participation” into eight categories. At the bottom of the ladder are manipulation and therapy, where participants are essentially “subjects.” The middle levels of participation include informing, consultation, and placation. The highest levels are partnership, delegated power, and citizen control. If we apply her model to food systems work today, we can see that progress has occurred. The discussion of the need to include people of color, to meet the needs of the food insecure, and the increasing interest in foods not traditional to the U.S. and Western European diet all point to opportunities for a broader participation in food systems work. However, a critical self-examination may lead to the conclusion that the food movement has not yet moved beyond placation, a form of tokenism in Arnstein’s hierarchy.

### **The Need for an Empowerment Model**

As food system workers and food movement advocates and representatives, we have become more sensitive to the *need to embrace diversity*, but most of us probably remain trapped by the dominance of our white, middle-class experience *as a group* that prevents us from fully understanding the meaning of “embracing diversity.” Nonetheless, our work takes place in a system that is itself a product of white privilege, both historically and today. We can move from “therapy,” solving the problem “our way,” to consultation and even placation. For example, most of us will intellectually reject the idea that race has anything to do with

how “good” and “not good” foods are defined. We welcome and seek out the participation of people of color, the poor, and ethnic and religious minorities in our work. However, we are deeply challenged when we try to move beyond “welcoming others to the movement” to “welcoming and participating in multiple movements,” some of which are quite different in content, approach and form from our own. Ultimately, diversity is critical to the sustainability of the global food system because no single set of solutions, created under a single cultural and social system, is likely to produce the range of ideas and approaches needed to create lasting and evolving solutions to the challenges of feeding 9 billion people good food.

Diversity is not a nicety or “simply” a social desirable condition. Diversity is essential to creativity and the ability to engage in critical self-examination. An empowerment model may well be a more appropriate one to create diverse and transformative food systems work. Empowerment moves beyond an emphasis on diversity for its own sake to focus on the necessity of learning from and incorporating the full range of human experiences to develop equitable and lasting solutions to complex social problems. Empowerment is both an individual and a group process. Like our efforts to incorporate diversity, it does give voice to the underrepresented and underserved. Ultimately, however, a successful empowerment model for food systems work opens resources, authority, and power to those who have been denied opportunities to control their own lives (Burdick, 2014; Kojolo, 2013; Naylor, 2012; Rodriguez, 2011). It provides an environment in which diverse groups create a mosaic of solutions that they share and respect, even when the solutions reflect different values, cultures, and traditions (Fagan & Stevenson, 2002; Gollub, Cyrus-Cameron, Armstrong, Boney, & Chhatre, 2013; Leerlooijer, Bos, Ruiter, van Renswoude, Rijsdijk, Nshakira, & Kok, 2013).

The role of traditional power elites in a food movement and in food systems work built on an empowerment model undergoes transformation. It changes from one of arbiter of norms, agenda setting, and leadership to one of supporter and advocate of solutions that may differ greatly from one’s own. One of the most important aspects of an

empowerment model for development work of all types is that it liberates both the underrepresented and underserved and the elite. The ability to share fully in creating solutions that are not “of one’s own experience” is transformational (Kriner, Coffman, Adkisson, Putman, & Monaghan, 2015).

## References

- Alkon, A. H. (2012). *Black, white, and green: Farmers markets, race, and the green economy*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Alkon, A. H., & Agyeman, J. (Eds.). (2011). *Cultivating food justice: Race, class, and sustainability*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.
- Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), 216–224.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225>
- Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities. (2009). *Human capacity development: The road to global competitiveness and leadership in food, agriculture, natural resources, and related sciences (FANRRS)*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities. Retrieved from [http://www.aplu.org/members/commissions/food-environment-and-renewable-resources/CFERR\\_Library/human-capacity-development-the-road-to-global-competitiveness-and-leadership-in-food-agriculture-natural-resources-and-related-sciences/file](http://www.aplu.org/members/commissions/food-environment-and-renewable-resources/CFERR_Library/human-capacity-development-the-road-to-global-competitiveness-and-leadership-in-food-agriculture-natural-resources-and-related-sciences/file)
- Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities. (2010). *2010 strategic opportunities for Cooperative Extension*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities. Retrieved from the ERIC website:  
<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED517310.pdf>
- Billings, D., & Cabbil, L. (2011). Food justice: What’s race got to do with it? *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts*, 5(1), 103–112. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2979/racethmulglocon.5.1.103>
- Bowens, N. (2015). *The color of food: Stories of race, resilience and farming*. Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers.
- Burdick, J. M. (2014). “Good for you and good to you”: The importance of emphasizing race when radicalizing students around the food movement. *Radical Teacher*, 98, 22–30.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5195/rt.2014.72>
- Etmanski, C. (2012). A critical race and class analysis of learning in the organic farming movement. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 52(3), 484–506.  
<https://www.ajal.net.au/>
- Fagan, J., & Stevenson, H. C. (2002). An experimental study of an empowerment-based intervention for African American Head Start fathers. *Family Relations*, 51(3), 191–198. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2002.00191.x>
- Freeman, A. (2013). The unbearable whiteness of milk: Food oppression and the USDA. *UC Irvine Law Review*, 3(4), 1251–1279.  
<http://www.law.uci.edu/lawreview>
- Gollub, E. L., Cyrus-Cameron, E., Armstrong, K., Boney, T., & Chhatre, S. (2013). Basic body knowledge in street-recruited, active drug-using women enrolled in a “body empowerment” intervention trial. *AIDS Care*, 25(6), 732–737.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09540121.2012.748167>
- Guthman, J. (2008). Bringing good food to others: Investigating the subjects of alternative food practice. *Cultural Geographies*, 15(4), 431–447.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1474474008094315>
- Kojolo, E. (2013). Serving food justice: A union campaign for fresh food, health and sustainability. *Journal of Workplace Rights*, 17(2), 175–190.
- Kriner, B. A., Coffman, K. A., Adkisson, A. C., Putman, P. G., & Monaghan, C. H. (2015). From students to scholars: The transformative power of communities of practice. *Adult Learning*, 26(2), 73–80.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1045159515573021>
- Leerlooijer, J. N., Bos, A. E. R., Ruiter, R. A. C., van Reeuwijk, M. A. J., Rijsdijk, L. E., Nshakira, N., & Kok, G. (2013). Qualitative evaluation of the Teenage Mothers Project in Uganda: A community-based empowerment intervention for unmarried teenage mothers. *BMC Public Health*, 13, 816.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-13-816>
- National Research Council of the National Academies. (2009). *Transforming agricultural education for a changing world*. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press. Retrieved from <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/12602/transforming-agricultural-education-for-a-changing-world>
- Naylor, L. (2012). Hired gardens and the question of transgression: Lawns, food gardens and the business of “alternative” food practice. *Cultural Geographies*, 19(4), 483–504.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1474474012451543>

Rodriguez, D. (2011). Silent rage and the politics of resistance: Countering seductions of whiteness and the road to politicization and empowerment. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(7), 589–598.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1077800411413994>

Slocum, R. (2006). Anti-racist practice and the work of community food organizations. *Antipode*, 38(2), 327–349. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2006.00582.x>



## Diversity education at land-grant universities from the perspective of a female student of color

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS

Olivia A. Peña\*  
University of Vermont

Submitted June 17, 2015 / Published online August 28, 2015

Citation: Peña, O. A. (2015). Diversity education at land-grant universities from the perspective of a female student of color. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 121–124. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.020>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

As a land-grant university student, in order to graduate I must fulfill the requirement of a two-part diversity course. In reflecting on my own experience and growth from taking these classes as a female student of color, I examined my involvement within the agrifood system. I assert the need for diversity education and training in land-grant universities. Finally, I state the necessity for increased practices and strategies for land grants and extension departments to recruit and retain more diverse students, staff, and faculty.

### Keywords

barriers, diversity, education, extension, land-grant universities, people of color, race, requirements, students

### Introduction

When I tell individuals, friends, and family from my small suburban hometown about my interest in sustainable food systems and my studies in agricultural sciences and development, I frequently receive astonished responses due to my nonfarming background. “Why agriculture?” I am often asked, to which I respond by explaining our shared connection to food and the ways in which production, distribution, and consumption methods affect our entire society. Finally, I explain that, despite my not-so-agrarian background, I am able to study sustainable agriculture due to the Morrill Acts’ creation of land-grant institutions, and to the Smith-Lever Act (1914), which allocates federal support and funding annually to each state to enhance the study and research of agriculture and other applied fields, and also created and funds extension services to share the advancements and resources with American citizens.

Attending a land-grant university in the

---

\* Olivia A. Peña, Department of Animal and Veterinary Sciences; Terrill Hall; University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont 05405 USA; +1-802-656-2070; [opena@uvm.edu](mailto:opena@uvm.edu)

Northeast has given me the opportunity to connect with other students who have similar interests yet hail from different locations and backgrounds. My involvement with agriculture began as a young equestrian in my suburban neighborhood. Wishing to further pursue my interest in large animals and livestock, I applied and enrolled in a land-grant university as an animal science major. As my education progressed, I learned more about our modern food system and its impacts on our health, society, economy, and environment. By declaring double minors in nutrition and food science, and food systems, I have been able to supplement my major with transdisciplinary subjects.

As a female student of color in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at an institution where more than 83 percent of students identify as primarily white, I often reflect on *my* current and future involvement in the agrifood system as compared to that of my peers and classmates. While some of my peers are eager to get their hands dirty working on local organic farms during the summer or picking up a part-time job at a nearby dairy after classes, I am hesitant to get involved in the production aspect because of my perceptions of the past and present relationships of minorities and farm labor.

In this commentary, I will examine my own personal barriers in agricultural education and within the agrifood system. Through this lens, I will explain the need and purpose for diversity education and training at land-grant universities. Finally, I will assert the necessity for increased practices and strategies for land grants and extension departments in the recruitment and retention of a more diverse faculty, staff, and student body.

### **Diversity Training and Education**

Of the U.S.'s 70 land-grant universities, 43 have instituted diversity requirements for their undergraduate core curriculum (Association of Public and Land-grant Universities [APLU], 2012). In many cases, diversity course requirements are embedded in the curriculum in order for students to, as Cornell University typifies, "enhance their abilities to communicate with people of different cultural perspectives; to listen carefully and respectfully to the views of others, especially views with

which they disagree; and to employ ethical reasoning in judging ideas, actions, and their implications" (Cornell University, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, n.d., para. 1). To meet the growing diverse population of our nation and more specifically the increase of students of color enrolling in colleges and universities, more institutions are instating this requirement into their general education core curriculum.

However, these requirements may vary in their specificity. For example, some universities, such as Clemson and Washington State, have a rather broad three-credit course requirement with the goal for students to "demonstrate the ability to critically compare and contrast world cultures in historical and/or contemporary contexts" (Clemson University, 2014, p. 37) or "understand, respect and interact constructively with others of similar and diverse cultures, values, and perspectives" (Washington State University, 2014, p. 41). These requirements can be met through certain classes that may cover domestic *or* global cultures. Allowing for overly flexible diversity coursework may mask the initial purpose and mission of the requirement. While focusing on global diversity allows for broader perspectives of the world beyond our country, this can lead to obliviousness to the perspectives and issues that exist between white and minority identities in the U.S.

Some land-grant universities and institutions established by the acts of 1862 and 1890 have more specific requirements that address the issue of race and racism within the United States. North Carolina State University has a three-credit diversity requirement, with the reasoning that "the study of diversity in the United States provides students the opportunity to consider questions of difference and culture, identity and community, privilege and oppression, and power and responsibility in our nation, and to gain an understanding of how these issues affect both individuals and communities" (North Carolina State University, 2014, p. 150). General diversity courses that meet the requirement, such as an English course that explores African American literature, can be used to portray an African American perspective. However, in a land-grant setting offering more diversity courses in agriculture could have a

powerful effect in following the mission of land grants: to be able to successfully offer agricultural and technical advancements to a diverse range of American citizens.

At my university, the diversity requirement is comparably particular, with required classes that critically assess race and racism in the U.S. context. The diversity class in which I was enrolled was a societal and developmental analysis of our modern food system and the historical background that led to its current structure. In my research on domestic diversity courses across the country, few land-grant universities offered courses in relation to agriculture.

By viewing the food system in the context of its social component, my entire outlook on agriculture and my intentions for using my education were altered. Previously I had been very focused on the environmental and economic effects of conventional and mainstream agriculture. Understanding that the causes and origins of socially constructed racism stemmed from agriculture was shocking to me. The creation of the constructs of race and racism to justify the involvement of subordinate identities—more specifically ethnic minorities—in early U.S. agricultural production systems has led to the overpowering effects of systemic race and racism in a society that is certainly not post-racial. These concepts were very groundbreaking and empowering for me.

### **Implications of Diversity Education on Students of Color**

Despite learning about minority groups in the U.S. from a young age—from the original populations that inhabited this country, to plantation agriculture and slavery, to the Civil Rights Movement—it was not until this diversity course in my sophomore year of college that I learned about the systemic causes and modern day effects of racism, despite the strides that minorities have made in regards to civil rights. As an underrepresented agricultural student reflecting on my previous views of minorities and farming, my personal interpretation has been shaped by historically traditional tropes—subjugated Native Americans, enslaved Africans, liberated African Americans who still experienced trouble accessing land and resources,

or exploited Latinos (Grant, Wood, & Wright, 2012). The thought of following in these exact, or emblematically similar, footsteps had always deterred me from experiencing the joy and nobility of farm work that white peers and classmates often share. For example, a white peer asserts the privilege of jumping head-first into a position as a farmhand, working in the field with little hesitation, while I have found it challenging to take on a role that was and often still is passively held by other minorities. This led me to question how many other underrepresented students feel similar personal or systemic barriers to an agricultural education at a land-grant university, or a farming occupation, despite their strong interest.

In the required diversity courses offered at many land-grant institutions, a study in and reflection on a variety of contexts about diverse cultures and their perspectives and views are carried out. When students of color do not have access or even see individuals who are outwardly similar to them involved in an industry of interest such as agriculture, they often look to previous views and roles in agriculture that their predecessors may have taken. Students of color may, or may not, notice the privilege that whites assert within the food system—the ability and privilege to embrace any role, from a laborer to a farm operator, or even as a CEO of a multimillion-dollar food corporation—with comparably less personal barriers. While reflecting on the history and even present systemic tribulations and subsequent oppressions that exist for individuals of color, students may feel the presence of a personal barrier simply due to the knowledge of such an existing element. However, these courses also have the opportunity to promote the empowerment of social and racial justice.

### **Moving Forward and Steps for Extension and Outreach**

In reflecting on my personal barriers, I wonder about barriers that other individuals of color face when considering involvement in the agricultural field. Carolyn Finney (2006) discusses such barriers in “Black Faces, White Spaces: African Americans and the Great Outdoors,” highlighting that some may feel that they are faced with “exclusionary practices.” The second Morrill Act of 1890 was



enacted 125 years ago. Since this time many strides have been made in advancing higher agricultural education. Moving forward, I see even more potential for individuals of color to access education at land grants across the country. However, their inclusionary practices have room for improvement as well.

The reasoning behind diversity requirements at land-grant universities vary by the institution; however, each generally strives to educate and engage students in a reflection on the causes and effects of racism and race relations in our society. In my experience of learning about diversity in the domestic and global food systems contexts, my views of and barriers to agricultural production have changed. The academic agricultural community would benefit greatly by adding or increasing training and education on diversity within the food system.

In my reflection of my diversity coursework, I was curious about the structure and organization of diversity requirements at other land-grant universities. Although there is little detailed information and data on land-grant diversity requirements available, this little-explored area has great potential. I foresee great outcomes deriving from further examination and research on diversity training, education, and courses that relate directly to our domestic food systems. We must look inward at our own domestic issues and potential before we step outward to make change in global food systems. After my study and in-depth reflection on diversity within food systems, I have considered my barriers and realized that a better alternative is empowerment for action. After getting my bachelor of science degree, I hope to further my career in food systems in a graduate program. In pursuing higher education, I will get involved in extension programs to be able to serve underrepresented communities in rural settings. Eventually, I hope to have a career in public health and to contribute to a food system that is more sustainable—economically, socially, and environmentally.

Throughout my diversity courses, I was engaged in the class as an empowered learner. With the knowledge gained subsequently, I see myself taking the next steps as an empowered doer. In diversity courses offered by land-grant

universities, an emphasis on empowerment and change will encourage white and minority students to examine both their own and others' personal barriers. Additionally, students of all races and identities can bring about change by understanding the gender and racial barriers that exist, and consequently contributing to a more diverse food system by getting involved, listening, and learning about diverse identities, and empowering themselves and others.



### Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my endless appreciation for the help of Dr. Shoshannah Inwood and Dr. Jason Parker for their generous assistance and reviews in completing this commentary. A special thank you to Kelly and Alex Peña for their continued inspiration and endless support.

### References

- Association of Public and Land-grant Universities [APLU]. (2012). *The land-grant tradition*. Washington, D.C.: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.aplu.org/library/the-land-grant-tradition/file>
- Clemson University. (2014). *2014–2015 undergraduate announcements* [Course catalog]. Retrieved from <http://www.registrar.clemson.edu/publicat/catalog/2014/2014completeCatalog.pdf>
- Cornell University, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences [CALS]. (n.d.). The CALS Human Diversity (D) requirement. Retrieved from <https://cals.cornell.edu/academics/registrar/degree-requirements/human-diversity>
- Finney, C. (2006). *Black faces, white spaces: African-Americans and the great outdoors: Final report*. Retrieved from <http://nature.berkeley.edu/community/forestry/People/Final%20Reports/Finney%20Final%20Report.pdf>
- Grant, G. R., Wood, S. D., & Wright, W. J. (2012). Black farmers united: The struggle against powers and principalities. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 5(1), 3–22. Retrieved from <http://www.ipan african.com/docs/vol5no1/5.1BlackFarmers.pdf>
- North Carolina State University. (2014). *NC State University undergraduate catalog 2014–2015*. Retrieved from <http://catalog.ncsu.edu/pdf/2014-2015.pdf>
- Washington State University. (2014). *Washington State University 2014 catalog*. Retrieved from [http://www.catalog.wsu.edu/Catalog/PDF\\_Catalogs/Complete\\_Catalog\\_2014-15.pdf](http://www.catalog.wsu.edu/Catalog/PDF_Catalogs/Complete_Catalog_2014-15.pdf)

## To the American food justice movements: A critique that is also an offering

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS

Marcelo Felipe Garzo Montalvo \*  
Oakland, California

Submitted June 16, 2015 / Published online August 30, 2015

Citation: Garzo Montalvo, M. F. (2015). To the American food justice movements:  
A critique that is also an offering. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community  
Development*, 5(4), 125–129. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.017>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

a love letter,  
that is also a Dear John letter  
an invitation,  
that is also a plea  
a vision,  
that is also a grievance  
that is also a call to action

### Keywords

cultural work, critique, food justice, movement  
strategy, movement building, organizational  
development, personal reflection, *la cultura cura*,  
visionary activism, transformative justice

## To the American Food Justice Movements:

Thank you for your work. Thank you for the  
time, energy, and love you are all offering to

protect our dear Mother Earth. Thank you for  
defending our seeds, for growing dark and healthy  
soil, for fighting to defend our waters, for working  
in the interest of Life and all our relations. Thank  
you for caring about the young people in our  
communities, providing meaningful jobs, ways to  
find training and work (paid or not) that support  
the health and wellness of our communities. Thank  
you for honoring our elders, for respecting our  
ancestors' wisdom and ways of knowing across  
generations. Thank you for farmers' markets, com-  
munity gardens, healthier corner stores, educational  
kitchens, grassroots restaurants, and food trucks.  
Thank you for seed banks and seed bombs, time  
banks and radical skill shares. For worker-owned  
cooperatives, land trusts, and community sup-  
ported food systems. Thank you for the songs,  
poems, performances, books, novels, and docu-  
mentary films. Thank you for permaculture,  
agroecology, and for supporting the struggles of  
food and farm workers. Thank you for cultivating,  
nurturing, planting, watering, waiting, protecting,

---

\* Marcelo Felipe Garzo Montalvo, Oakland, California USA;  
[marcelo.garzo@gmail.com](mailto:marcelo.garzo@gmail.com)

pruning, thinning, harvesting, cooking, eating, composting, and turning under. Thank you for tending to these cycles of life and death that make our existence possible. Thank you for your thoughts, your energy, for walking these prayers.

Thank you for caring about the suffering of others. Thank you for taking care of yourself. Thank you for wanting to do something to respond to the injustices you see in our food system.

My gratitude for you all is overflowing, not just for how much I have personally benefited from being a part of this movement, but also for how much “impact” I have already seen us have. Our movements have already begun to transform our food systems. I give thanks for how this work has supported my own family, my relatives, my communities, the children, my peers, students, co-workers, etc.

Rooted in this love and gratitude, I want to offer a space to “check-in”—an invitation to slow down and consider some ways that I have also felt upset by this movement. Nobody is forcing you to read this, but I am asking, for a bit of time and space and energy, for my feelings to be heard and considered as a part of y/our community, y/our struggle.

Why should you care?

Because I am no better, nor worse, than any of you, than any of us.

And who am I to offer these comments?

I am a “person of color” who has been directly involved in “food systems work” since 2007. I am someone who felt moved to respond to this call for commentaries... and I fit the description. Also, I am your brother, your relative.

Speaking, and thinking from my own personal realities, my lived experiences and shifting identities, I offer these thoughts, for us to consider, in a conversation on “race and ethnicity in food systems work.”

When I received this call for commentaries through various listservs (food\_justice [GFJI],

CRT\_FOOD, URBANAG, etc.), I immediately opened a word .doc and began writing. At first all that came out were my grievances, which I will also share here, but after careful reflection, I could not offer my grievances without rooting them in my hopes, my visions, as well as my gratitude. I honor Grace Lee Boggs here for this reminder, for her teachings and guidance on how this work takes time, effort, and the energy to honor and witness our reactionary energy, as it slowly transforms into visionary and (r)evolutionary critique (Boggs, 2011).

As I kept writing, my grievances were many, but as I sat and observed them over time my visions and hopes showed through, and became more abundant—not only more numerous, but also more powerful. In sitting with and writing down my woundings, I opened to vulnerability, making possible the spirit of connection, as I pray for the possibility of healing.

The heart of my grievances, and also my visions, is our collective mis/understandings of “power, privilege, and oppression,” and therefore how we strategize their undoing and/or transformation through food systems work. I have often felt frustrated and stuck when it comes to how we understand and define the “political,” and what that means for food justice movements. I have felt limited, even blocked, by bourgeois understandings of “politics,” asking me to operate within the narrow and limited confines of “policy work” and other top-down strategies for change: organizing campaigns, appeals to elected officials, ballot measures, and/or nonprofit bureaucracy. There is often an unspoken, or sometimes explicitly stated, preference for this type of work, a privileging of the most concrete and tangible “victories” for us to celebrate. Organizational and community capacities are focused on strategizing, measuring, and evaluating our “impact” through this discourse, this lens.

Power, privilege, and oppression are “structural,” in the sociological/anthropological sense of the term, and also in the ways that countless anti-oppression and antiracist trainings make clear. However, what can be lost or overshadowed in a perspective, and “training,” that is solely focused on structural change and “policy work” (or on

nonprofit organizations driving and defining community change) is the opportunity to transform our everyday shared practices that re-perform and reproduce these structures of power. It is this space of the everyday that I would like to refer to as “culture,” and its accompanying activism: “cultural work.” To be sure, here my critique is not of “policy work” itself, because it is obviously and urgently important work to be done. Instead, what I am asking for is a shift, an expansion, an integration of our understandings of power itself, and therefore a turn in some of our activist energy as we also consider another point of focus—that is, the *cultural*. This is not to suggest that food justice workers are not already doing *any* cultural work; in fact, much of my own understandings of cultural work that I am sharing here have been developed through my own experiences *within* many food justice organizations. But what I’d like to reflect on, and bring into question, are my repeated experiences over time and place of fellow food justice organizers and workers marginalizing, postponing, silencing, ignoring, or not knowing how to practice and engage cultural work.

Cultural work does not refer *only* to the practice of art-making—poetry, music, film, photography, murals, etc.—though this work is necessary to any sustainable social movement. Instead, my theorizing of cultural work asks us to focus on our *everyday shared practices*, on our collective actions, our common doings, or in Spanish, our *vida cotidiana*. In this way the everyday is a space, a location from which we can “strategize, measure, and evaluate” our work. By everyday shared practice I refer to the *things we do, every day*. This means language, clothing, shelter, transportation, ethics, mathematics, and where and how we consume food and water (of course, we’re food activists!), just to name a few examples. In verbs it means: eating, sleeping, going to the bathroom, walking, driving, sitting, breathing, talking, listening, cooking, sharing, caring, calling, working, thinking, storytelling, planning, designing, reading, writing, drawing, singing, etc. These are sites of *culture*, and thus cultural work refers to the forms of activism that seek to transform these spaces that are numerous, vast, and yet intimate. Cultural work is, in short, a lot of work!

Before this understanding of cultural work becomes too abstract, let us situate it within the context of this conversation on the culture of food justice movements, and our related organizational practices. Already I need to point out how much of our movement culture is based on being affiliated with an organization (nonprofit, nongovernmental organization [NGO], for-profit, limited liability corporation [LLC], etc.), and how this itself is a cultural move. Normalizing this approach—that is, professionalizing activism—ends up making this work inaccessible to many people in our communities. (I prefer to discuss *access* rather than exclusion/inclusion.) Building a movement that is based on having the privileges that are necessary to access nonprofit organizations and/or NGOs is precarious and not sustainable in that it creates a culture in our movement that doesn’t recognize that social movements must be, first and foremost, *social*. In other movements and parts of the world (outside the United States in particular) activists including those in the food movement understand themselves *in relation* to NGOs, but not as *being* NGOs themselves. In fact, many social movements that are rooted in the Global South (Via Campesina in particular) are deeply critical of how NGOs become proxies for multinational corporations and other imperial projects. This then becomes a site of cultural work. How are we going to do the “work” of undoing the nonprofit industrial complex and its influence on our social movement (INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, 2007)? It is the role of cultural work itself that would allow us to have this conversation and take the time and energy needed to look at how middle-class, bourgeois, corporate culture is being re-articulated and re-inscribed in many of our food justice projects precisely because we are looking elsewhere for the “work to be done.”

It is in the context of these movement spaces that I have been asked, or called in as a “consultant,” to discuss “anti-oppression,” “anti-racism,” or other ways to engage the perennial (and very frustrating) question of “why are there no people of color here?” Or more often than not, “why is there a *lack of diversity* in our organization?” or “how can we be more *inclusive*?” It must be noted that “lack of diversity” and “inclusive” are often

neoliberal code words for a space being already white-dominated. When I see a call for papers asking for a list of “how tos” for working with people and communities of color in food systems, I am reminded of the dozens of times I have been asked these sorts of questions, and the dozens of times I have been unable to offer the prescriptive answers these folks may be seeking. Many times when I hear these code words, I fear it is already too late. A space and culture has already been created and established that is so thoroughly white (corporate [we don’t need to be a corporation to *be* corporate] and heteropatriarchal [dominated by the norms of heterosexual males]), that it contains within it one of the hallmarks of whiteness itself: white guilt and its accompanying savior complex.


Looking through the lens of culture, the American food justice movement often resembles a performance of middle-class, corporate cultural norms themselves. Part of this culture has also been a confusing overemphasis on race and anti-racism and an almost complete erasure of other systems of domination that make white supremacy even more durable, not the least of which are analyses of class (neoliberal capitalism) and gender (heteropatriarchy), and how deeply these systems affect our cultural practices as movement organizers. I share this as a middle-class, raised upper-middle class man of color who is the son of two physicians. In other words, I have felt comfortable participating (or even have been able to participate) in the food justice movement precisely because of my class and educational privilege, and I am taken more seriously with fewer qualifications because of male privilege and (at times) straight-passing privilege. How are we ever going to dismantle food injustice, whose very roots are situated in neoliberal capitalism and heteropatriarchy (in other words, the dominant culture) if we are re-performing these systems in our everyday shared practices? Many of my visions for our movement include strategies that challenge the cultural practices that have been borrowed from the academic, nonprofit, and other industrial complexes that disrupt our ability to collectively transform ourselves and the food system, and that instead re-embed us in the status quo.

This critical cultural work can and will make us uncomfortable. It forces us to “grow our souls” (Boggs, 2011, p. 28), to engage in “spiritual activism” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2009, pp. 292, 323). This all sounds grandiose, but it is actually very humbling and unglamorous work to do. When I am asked how to engage in dismantling racism with an organization, I often suggest organizing an all-staff and community meeting where we project everyone’s salary on the wall and see what happens. No place that I have worked has taken me up on this idea (yet!). Doing this will make them uncomfortable. It will make me uncomfortable. But not knowing each other’s salary, and it being taboo to even ask or share this information, is part and parcel of neoliberal capitalist culture. Normalizing these sorts of silences is precisely how they are perpetuated and made invisible.

When we commit ourselves to moving together and collectively through the discomfort of breaking these silences and seeing where it takes us, that is cultural work. This is the inner, personal, and interpersonal growth and working through fear (and other feelings we don’t like) that is necessary to shifting culture. Building relationships and trust is not only a part of cultural work, it is cultural work itself.

In Spanish there is a cross-cultural *dicho* (saying), *la cultura cura*, that translates to English as “culture cures” or “culture is healing.” Here *la cultura* is referring explicitly to our indigenous-centered and ancestrally oriented ways of knowing that have helped us survive, and continue to thrive, in a dominant culture that is based on our erasure, a culture that normalizes violence and genocide, a culture that silences its survivors (MarTínez, 2013). Survival is an everyday shared practice in many communities of color. In this way, cultural work, like healing work, emphasizes *process* rather than an end product, making it much more difficult to measure and apply for grants to fund. But imagine how deeply we could transform our food systems if we committed to ending a culture of genocide, slavery, sexual violence, and the like. What would our work look like if we shifted from asking how to “attract diversity” to our organizations, and instead asked how to dismantle the cultures that oppress communities of color on a daily basis?

Everyone can and needs to participate in this level of cultural work, of transformation, if we wish to overcome age-old tropes like tokenizing (turning people of color into a gimmick to sell our work) or other forms of retraumatizing and rewounding.

With this I will end as I began, with a prayer of gratitude. To all my relations, for everyone who is present in this piece and in our work, whether I know your name or not, I honor you. My visions, my grievances, I present to you as an offering, an invitation, to be in movement together, to honor our “precious knowledge,” shedding the autumn leaves of a dying neoliberalism, to feed the roots of our Mother Earth, the land, that is our home in the cosmos, that is our source. 

## References

- Anzaldúa, G. (Author), & Keating, A. (Ed.). (2009). *The Gloria Anzaldúa reader*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Boggs, G. L. (2011). *The next American revolution: Sustainable activism for the twenty-first century*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence. (2007). *The revolution will not be funded: Beyond the non-profit industrial complex*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press,.
- MarTínez, S. (2013). *AmeriCaCa: Don't step in it! Don't bring it in the house!: The sounds of silenced survivors: Breaking the silence*. Bloomington, Indiana: AuthorHouse.





## Critical food systems education and the question of race

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS

David Meek <sup>a\*</sup>  
University of Alabama

Rebecca Tarlau <sup>b</sup>  
Stanford University

Submitted June 16, 2015 / Published online September 1, 2015

Citation: Meek, D., & Tarlau, R. (2015). Critical food systems education and the question of race. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 131–135. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.021>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

Studies of food systems education have largely avoided questions concerning race. In this commentary, we interrogate the racial assumptions behind certain food systems education projects. Food systems educators are often motivated by a whitened cultural desire to “bring good food to others” and see garden-based learning projects, which seek to instill healthy nutritional behaviors, as the solution to the problem of purported food

deserts. We argue that food systems education is in need of a critical intervention. In this commentary, we propose critical food systems education (CFSE) as a theoretical framework, set of pedagogies, and vision for policy that moves beyond teaching students about the food system, and helps them realize their potential to structurally transform it through collective action. The CFSE perspective is theoretically grounded in food justice, food sovereignty, political agroecology, and critical

---

<sup>a \*</sup> *Corresponding author:* Dr. David Meek, Department of Anthropology, University of Alabama; 25a ten Hoor Hall; Mars Spring Road; Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487 USA; [ddmeek@ua.edu](mailto:ddmeek@ua.edu)

<sup>b</sup> Dr. Rebecca Tarlau, Postdoctoral Fellow, Stanford University.

### Author notes

Dr. David Meek is a faculty member in the Department of Anthropology, University of Alabama, where he teaches courses surrounding food systems. He theoretically grounds his research in a synthesis of political ecology, critical

---

pedagogy, and food sovereignty. Dr. Meek’s research has been funded by the National Science Foundation, Social Science Research Council, and Fulbright Foundation.

Dr. Rebecca Tarlau is a postdoctoral scholar in education at Stanford University, affiliated with the Lemann Center for Educational Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Brazil. She received an M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of California–Berkeley. Her research focuses on the relationship between states, social movements, and educational reform. Her most recent project was a subnational comparative ethnography of the Brazilian Landless Workers’ Movement’s (MST).

pedagogy. The CFSE approach is not merely theoretical, but arises from the examples of grassroots social movements throughout the world that have developed radical forms of food systems education. We highlight this approach using the example of the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement (MST). The MST opposes a racialized discourse of the "peasantry" as backwards and ignorant. The movement's leaders reject a vision of education that reproduces white modernity, and instead support a vision that advances radical agroecological education programs that train students to be political subjects capable of creating a socially and environmentally equitable food system. The example of the MST underscores the potential of CFSE as a corrective for the food systems education's racialized assumptions.

### **Keywords**

race, garden-based learning, food systems education, critical food systems education, Landless Workers' Movement, MST, food sovereignty, food justice, agroecology, critical pedagogy

### **Questioning Race in Food Systems Education: Towards a Transformative Alternative**

A troubling racial narrative increasingly characterizes certain forms of food systems education. The images are ubiquitous. They hang in the hallways of universities, on the doors of local farm-to-table restaurants, and in the promotional materials for numerous nutrition intervention programs, such as First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move. African American elementary-school children kneel down beside raised-bed gardens staring with amazement at the succulent vegetables they are growing. These images are frequently paired with statements lamenting the lack of school funding, the number of children receiving free meals, and the paucity of access to fresh produce for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The nongovernmental organizations and government officials promulgating these projects, like many in the alternative food movement, are motivated by an honest desire to "bring good food to others" (Guthman, 2008).

As critical food scholars point out, the

alternative food movement is characterized by an "unbearable whiteness" where its agrarian ideals, such as the importance of "getting your hands dirty" (Guthman, 2008, p. 435), reflects whitened cultural histories and ultimately produces racialized spaces of social exclusion (Slocum, 2007). In spite of the best of intentions, many food education projects falter because they are based in these whitened cultural ideals and agrarian imaginaries. Researchers contribute to this problematic racialized intervention by showing that the environmental attitudes of African American students who participate in garden-based learning increase less than their White counterparts (Waliczek & Zajicek, 1999). Rather than asking why food education projects do not achieve their purported goals among students of color, we follow Guthman's (2008) lead and question the ideological intentions and racial assumptions of these programs and their proponents.

Food systems projects often serve as a form of problem enclosure, in which a specific definition of a problem determines the understanding of the causes, consequences, and appropriate solutions (Guthman, 2012). In the case of food systems education, the "problem" is frequently defined as food deserts where socio-economically depressed communities presumably have low access to fresh produce. Yet a growing scholarship is challenging the food desert narrative (Boone-Heinonen, Gordon-Larsen, Kiefe, Shikany, Lewis, & Popkin, 2011). Lee's (2012) study, for example, shows that in comparison with wealthier neighborhoods, low-income communities have twice as many fast food restaurants and three times as many convenience stores, but—here's the kicker—surprisingly, almost twice as many large supermarkets per square mile. Focusing on schools, An and Sturm (2012) find no relationship between the types of food that students report eating, their weight, and the types of food available in close proximity to their homes. By framing food deserts as a problem of low access, rather than one of historical and social processes of red-lining, state disinvestment, or racist lending practices, for example, the problem definition produces the conditions for its own intervention: creating school gardens to help instill good

values and nutritional choices in “at-risk” populations. While its proponents see these programs as redressing socioeconomic inequalities, food systems education is insufficient for helping youth understand the racialized injustices inherent to the current food system, and their capacity to transform them through collective action.

Part of the problem is that despite the burgeoning critical scholarship on race in the alternative food movement (e.g., Alkon & McCullen 2011; Ramírez, 2015), surprisingly little has focused on education—a strange absence given education’s role in maintaining racial and class privilege (Anyon, 1997; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Lipman, 2011; Willis, 1977). A notable exception is the work of Allen and Guthman (2006), who explore the increasing neoliberalization of farm-to-school programs. Etmanski’s (2012) work also provides a welcome departure, exploring how adult educators in the organic farming movement can engage in anti-racist pedagogy, becoming allies with indigenous movements, and connecting their practice to the rapidly growing food sovereignty movement. The purpose of our commentary is to build on these emerging works in order to transform the dominant discussion about food system education and offer a concrete alternative.

Education, we believe, is both a natural site to explore racially problematic interventions related to food, as well as an arena to develop transformative alternatives. There is a long history in the field of education of blaming communities of color for their so-called underachievement in schools. This line of argument can be traced back to the 1965 Moynihan report, *The Negro Family*, which argued that “for the vast numbers of the unskilled, poorly educated [Black] city working class the fabric of conventional social relationships has all but disintegrated” (U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, 1965, p. ii). This line of reasoning that identifies family structure as the reason for racial disparities in education became solidified as the “culture of poverty” argument over the next several decades; see the writings of Oscar Lewis for the origins of these ideas. The irony of the argument is clear: just as communities of color gained the right to equal educational opportunities, overcoming de jure segregation, white flight


became legitimized as de facto segregation and communities of color in these newly segregated areas are now blamed for their educational inadequacies. This culture-of-poverty argument, along with a persistent belief in a color-blind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) in schools, masks the real reasons for educational disparities, namely, structural racism.

We argue that certain contemporary forms of food systems education fall into this same racist logic, assuming that school gardens and courses on nutrition are the key to improving the health and well-being of students of color. Nonetheless, we agree that more discussion about food systems in schools is a critical component of integrating youth into a collective struggle for more equitable food systems. Drawing on over six years of research with the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST), we propose critical food systems education (CFSE) as an alternative to the “unbearable whiteness” of food systems education. The MST is one of the largest social movements in Latin America, with over 350,000 families that have addressed food insecurity and poverty through occupations of unproductive land estates that force the government to redistribute this land to these landless farmers (Branford & Rocha 2002; Welford, 2010). An alternative educational model is a central component of this struggle, as MST leaders have developed a series of organizational, curricular, and pedagogical initiatives that encourage youth to stay in the countryside and become peasant-intellectuals, helping to contribute to the sustainability of these new rural communities (Meek, 2015; Tarlau, in press). This educational struggle is in direct opposition to a racialized discourse of the “peasantry” as backwards, ignorant, and a soon-to-disappear segment of the population. The leaders of the MST reject the goal of education as producing “urban (white) modernity,” and instead implement alternative educational programs that posit the peasantry as a political subject who can produce a more equitable food system, based in agroecological farming methods, in the twenty-first century Brazilian countryside.

Inspired by the MST’s struggle in Brazil, we suggest the concept of critical food systems education (CFSE) as a theoretical framework, a set of

pedagogies and pedagogical methods, and a vision for policy that can address the racialized narrative in U.S. and international food systems education. As a theoretical framework, CFSE incorporates insights from diverse theoretical traditions, such as critical pedagogy, food justice, agroecology, and food sovereignty. Critical pedagogy, grounded in the educational ideas of Paulo Freire (2002), defines education as a political project that is either actively maintaining or transforming the status quo. This suggests that the role of food systems education should be a dialectical process of analyzing the reality of the local food system, linking this local reality to national and international structures that have coproduced this local reality, and helping students come up with creative solutions to transform these realities: Freire's famous concept of praxis. The CFSE framework also draws on the lessons from food justice, a grassroots movement that is predicated upon a critique of the racial and class-based inequalities in the food system (Mares & Alkon 2012). Food justice's attention to the structural racial and class-based inequality in the food system should be directed at transforming the neoliberal school food system, which increasingly consists of contingent labor, private-sector funding, and the delegation of responsibility to the local (Allen & Guthman, 2006). Agroecology also plays an important role in critical forms of food systems education. CFSE engages with agroecology from a political perspective (de Molina, 2013); it focuses attention on the politics of agroecological knowledge, asking who is producing what knowledge and for what purposes? It also departs from the uncritical valorization of agroecological practices, asking students to consider how particular practices arose among particular marginalized communities, and the politics of appropriating them. Finally, food sovereignty, closely aligned with the political nature of agroecology, provides another major foundation for CFSE (Wittman, 2011). Food sovereignty is itself a global movement. Social movements fighting for food sovereignty, such as the MST and Via Campesina, have created their own educational institutions to train the next generation of movement leaders in political organizing and agroecological techniques (Rosset & Martínez-Torres, 2012). Thus, as a

component of CFSE, food sovereignty insists that food systems education be linked to these larger collective struggles.

In summary, critical food systems education (CFSE) is a tripartite perspective consisting of a theoretical framework, set of pedagogies, and vision for policy that posits food systems education as an inherently political and economic process that is mediated by racial and ethnic histories and identities, while also maintaining that these educational processes can be transformed to be a form of education for liberation. CFSE is directly relevant to questions concerning the intersection of race and the alternative food movement because it brings into question the larger project of food systems education and the motivations of its proponents. It calls us to explore how garden-based learning educators conceive of the subjects of their intervention and the subjectivities they seek to mold. As a transformative alternative, it also asks how educators in these programs can develop the critical consciousness to recognize and question their own racial assumptions, and engage with their students as cocreators of a transformative future. CFSE is not a new perspective, but rather builds on a long history of social movements incorporating education into their larger struggle against classism, racism, and sexism. Along with these social movements, we believe that "education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (Freire, 2002, p. 34). 

## References

- Alkon, A. H., & McCullen, C. G. (2011). Whiteness and farmers markets: Performances, perpetuations... contestations? *Antipode*, 43(4), 937–959.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2010.00818.x>
- Allen, P., & Guthman, J. (2006). From "old school" to "farm-to-school": Neoliberalization from the ground up. *Agriculture and Human Values* 23(4), 401–415. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10460-006-9019-z>

- An, R., & Sturm, R. (2012). School and residential neighborhood food environment and diet among California youth. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 42(2), 129–135.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2011.10.012>
- Anyon, J. (1997). *Ghetto schooling: A political economy of urban educational reform*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Boone-Heinonen, J., Gordon-Larsen, P., Kiefe, C. I., Shikany, J. M., Lewis, C. E., & Popkin, B. M. (2011). Fast food restaurants and food stores: Longitudinal associations with diet in young to middle-aged adults: The CARDIA Study. *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 171(13), 1162–1170.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1001/archinternmed.2011.283>
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). *Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reform and the contradictions of economic life*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Branford, S., & Rocha, J. (2002). *Cutting the wire: The story of the landless movement in Brazil*. London: Latin America Bureau.
- de Molina, M. G. (2013). Agroecology and politics. How to get sustainability? About the necessity for a political agroecology. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems*, 37(1), 45–59.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10440046.2012.705810>
- Etmanski, C. (2012). A critical race and class analysis of learning in the organic farming movement. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 52(3), 484–506.
- Freire, P. (2002). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum International Publishing.
- Guthman, J. (2008). Bringing good food to others: Investigating the subjects of alternative food practice. *Cultural Geographies*, 15(4), 431–447.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1474474008094315>
- Guthman, J. (2012). Opening up the black box of the body in geographical obesity research: Toward a critical political ecology of fat. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 102(5), 951–957.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00045608.2012.659635>
- Lee, H. (2012). The role of local food availability in explaining obesity risk among young school-aged children. *Social Science and Medicine*, 74(8), 1193–1203.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.12.036>
- Lipman, P. (2011). *The new political economy of urban education: Neoliberalism, race and the right to the city*. New York: Routledge.
- Mares, T. M., & Alkon, A. H. (2012). Mapping the food movement: Inequality and neoliberalism. *Environment and Society*, 2, 68–86.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3167/ares.2011.020105>
- Meek, D. (2015). Learning as territoriality: The political ecology of education in the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement. *Journal of Peasant Studies*. Advance online publication.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2014.978299>
- Ramírez, M. M. (2015). The elusive inclusive: Black food geographies and racialized food spaces. *Antipode*, 47(3), 748–769.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/anti.12131>
- Rosset, P. M., & Martínez-Torres, M. E. (2012). Rural social movements and agroecology: Context, theory, and process. *Ecology and Society*, 17(3), Art. 17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5751/ES-05000-170317>
- Slocum, R. (2007). Whiteness, space and alternative food practice. *Geoforum*, 38(3), 520–533.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2006.10.006>
- Tarlau, R. (in press). How do new critical pedagogies develop? Educational innovation, social change, and landless workers in Brazil. *Teachers College Record*.
- U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research. (1965). *The Negro family: The case for national action*. Washington, D.C.: Author.
- Waliczek, T. M., & Zajicek, J. M. (1999). School gardening: Improving environmental attitudes of children through hands-on learning. *Journal of Environmental Horticulture*, 17(4), 180–184.  
<http://hrresearch.theknowledgecenter.com/Publications/index.cfm>
- Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to labor: How working class kids get working class jobs*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Wittman, H. (2011). Food sovereignty: A new rights framework for food and nature? *Environment and Society: Advances in Research*, 2(1), 87–105.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3167/ares.2011.020106>
- Wolford, W. (2010). *This land is ours now: Social mobilization and the meanings of land in Brazil*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/9780822391074>



## A Native perspective: Food is more than consumption

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS

Rachel V. Vernon \*

Cooperative Food Empowerment Directive (CoFED)

Submitted June 19, 2015 / Published online September 9, 2015

Citation: Vernon, R. V. (2015). A Native perspective: Food is more than consumption. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 137–142. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.024>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

Effectively engaging in food work with and among Native American people toward food sovereignty requires cultural competency, historical knowledge, and a more complex understanding of how food informs community well-being. Drawing on both personal and academic experience, this paper argues that Native Americans' food consumption is tied to land, place, relationships, community, and health. Native American relationships to food stand in contrast to American individualism and function as an intricate part of communities to maintain relationships, build cultural knowledge,

and satisfy emotional and physical health. Food problems among Native people have developed over centuries of forced change, a history that provides insight into the way food has been utilized to colonize. As a result, many tribes and individuals have become food dependent on the U.S. government. Food systems research and outreach that focuses narrowly on consumption and access risk oversimplifying Native communities' relationship to food as well as their movement toward food sovereignty. Solutions that do not account for the cultural and historical realities of Native people are not real solutions to the problems confronting them. We must make room, therefore, in the food justice movement to envision alternative solutions that better reflect Native realities, cultures, and lives.

---

\* Rachel V. Vernon, CoFED, the Cooperative Food Empowerment Directive; 2323 Broadway, Suite 223; Oakland, California 94612 USA; [rachel@cofed.org](mailto:rachel@cofed.org)

### Disclosures

Parts of this commentary were drawn from the author's master's thesis, *Food systems among Native American peoples in Oakland, California: An examination of connection and health*, as cited in the reference. Some of this commentary was written during paid staff time at CoFED.

### Keywords

Native American, food justice, food movement, culture, food sovereignty



As a person of Yaqui and Mescalero Apache descent, I have a long history of personal engagement with Native people within the context of community as well as working for Native organizations that work on Native issues. My educational journey has also focused on Native people and their relationship to food within the context of food justice. I currently work at the Cooperative Food Empowerment Directive, where we hope to encourage a world where food cooperatives build community wealth. My experiences working on food issues with Native people have led me to the question: How do we build resilient Native communities that are empowering *and* powerful? In attempting to answer this question I have discovered that the relationship to food for Native communities has been ruptured, making food central to the question of empowerment and power. For many Native people a ruptured relationship to food resulting from colonization has had profound effects beyond nutrition and health. These effects must be examined in more detail to develop a better understanding of food's power in community building given historical realities that have informed current relationships to food for all Native communities in this country.

According to the 2010 census there are over 566 federally recognized tribes, 2.9 million people who identify as Native only, and 5.2 million who claim Native identity in combination with another race (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], n.d.). As one works with Native people it is important to acknowledge that we are *not* one people. Although our experiences with U.S. society have helped to create a pan-Native identity, we are not one. Each tribe has its own language, customs, beliefs, and histories. However, there are many commonalities found among these diverse populations, commonalities such as Native philosophies of interconnectedness, obligations, and responsibilities between people, animals, land, water, and air.

The current perspective, drawn from research for my master's thesis at Colorado State University (Vernon, 2014), uses a qualitative PhotoVoice project with participants from the Intertribal Friendship House (IFH) in Oakland, California. The goal of the project was to further the under-

standing of contemporary relationships to food for Native people, while also highlighting some of the tremendous work of Native organizations and people within their communities. Among the 11 tribal identities represented, some individuals had a history of occupation of their ancestral/reservation homelands and others did not have much connection to their homelands.<sup>1</sup> The majority of participants were women ranging in age from their late 20s to 60s. This project illuminated the ways that Native people challenged the myths of individual choices and consumption around food. To expand the narrative around health and food, I have chosen one story to share that I believe informs us about how we can work in solidarity to solve the food issues that Native people encounter.

What my research found was that food cannot be disentangled from people and relationships; consuming, producing, and foraging for food all have meaning because they facilitate the strengthening of community bonds. Some participants believed that eating "well" is not always about the nutrition of the food, that it has more meaning. Photo 1 highlights this idea. A quick or cursory look would suggest that this food means the person is not eating well, due to both the quality of the food and its potential effects on health and well-being.

This photo could be treated as evidence of the "problems" with food consumption among Native people, and this food—the McDonald's coffee and a sweet pastry—could easily be transformed into a warning poster of what not to do. It confirms the dilemma nutritionists have identified with the diet of marginalized people, a diet that includes too much sugar and fast food and illuminates the unhealthy choices of an entire community. Too easily this image could be used to fuel a narrative of what is wrong with the food choices of Native people, placing the blame for health problems upon this community. However, there is an alternative reading of this image, one that tells a story of nourishment, relationships, and safety.

The hand in the photo belongs to the 82-year-

---

<sup>1</sup> The tribes represented were Zapotec, Ohlone, Chumash, Hopi, Tewa, Navajo, Yurok, Seminole, Stockbridge Munsee-Mohican, Sioux, and Shoshone.

old aunt of Ana, a participant who shared this picture during a focus group at the Intertribal Friendship House (IFH). Ana shared at that meeting how this picture was taken after she had endured a long day of arranging for the secure and affordable parking of her car, which required both negotiating informal arrangements at IFH and dedicating precious time to traveling on public transportation. Exhausted by the process, Ana still found a sense of happiness, love, and community as her aunt presented her with some food.

I had to bring my car to IFH and leave it in the parking lot, and Carol was nice enough to let me do that because I don't have secure parking. And then, taking the BART and a bus home, and then the BART to the San Francisco Airport and then getting a red eye—it was just really exhausting and such a long journey. It felt so good to get to that airport and my aunt that I'm really close to, she's 82. So that's her there in the car and so she picked me up and she had brought me a sweet roll that another aunt had packed for me, that she had driven. So I just thought it was so sweet that my aunty making it the day before or something, and my other one [auntie] packing it and driving it about an hour to the airport and so it was already ready for me all packaged in the car. Then a senior priced coffee from McDonald's. You know she got her discount or whatever and got it for me. So, I know it's not healthy or something but it was, you know, just a meaningful moment and I really felt like I could totally relax at that moment.

This strikingly beautiful story illuminates the healing nature that food and connection have on people's lives. It illuminates deeper notions of

nourishment, situating the relationships of the producers of the food as sacred, while also demonstrating how this food, this experience, is tied to home, to being on or near her reservation. This moment also signals satisfied emotional health. In sum, what this story teaches is that the meaning of food among Native people must be discussed with more depth. Food means more than simply personal responsibilities about food choices and includes a more complex understanding of how food invokes community, well-being, and connectedness. The key point in the interaction is not the food itself, or the act of consuming the food and the resultant health factors, but instead the role the food has in community and individual well-being.

The severe disruption of Native communities and lives extends to the altering of their relationship to food, and is deeply tied to racism, colonialism, and the loss of autonomy and power. Stripping Native communities of their food sovereignty and traditional diets increased nutritional deficiencies and starvation for Native people and contribute to current health disparities in obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. (First Nations Development Institute, 2014). Destruction that began at contact became apparent when the Native population dropped from over 5 million to 250,000 in 1900 (Thornton, 1987, p. 133), a decrease resulting from

**Photo 1. Ana receives a sweet bun and coffee upon her arrival home.**



disease and war that had a dire impact on the ability of Native people to hunt, gather, grow, cure, and cook food. Many Native people were also relocated off their traditional lands onto bounded reservations. The policy to limit land access affected their hunting and gathering since they were no longer allowed to hunt in traditional places, and much of the reservation lands were not the best for planting. Some relocated tribes were also unfamiliar with the land they were relocated to, thus limiting their ability to find or produce traditional food.

Eventually, the U.S. government launched the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, which is still currently available to “low-income households, including the elderly, living on Indian reservations, and to Native American families residing in designated areas near reservations and in the State of Oklahoma” (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2015, para. 1). This program provides canned goods, powdered milk, white sugar, and commodity cheese. According to food sovereignty activist Winona LaDuke, “these highly processed, high sugar, high fat, and packaged foods” (LaDuke, 2005, p. 194) provided by the government have contributed to the high rates of diabetes rates found in Native communities and is a direct impact of the “loss of access to traditional foods” (LaDuke, 2005, p. 194). This loss affects the practice of consuming traditional foods and the teaching of food preparation and foodways across generations, between genders, and within families. This loss of traditional food practices is connected to a loss of human connection, a loss of community strength.

Both reservation and urban Natives have encountered a loss of control over the food they interact with through consumption, production, and distribution. Contrary to the common belief that Natives live on reservations, approximately 78 percent of Native peoples live off-reservation, which may further affect their ability to access traditional foods and knowledge (Norris, Vines, & Hoeffel, 2012). Urban Native communities have struggled to have access to quality food since moving to urban areas.<sup>2</sup> The Governmental

Relocation Program in the 1950s moved thousands of Native people into urban areas with the hope of assimilating them into modern American society (Fixico, 1986). These programs have generally failed since Native people have been integrated into mostly poor urban areas and have been subject to the food deserts of the already existing marginalized communities of color.

This historical context helped shape Native communities’ current relationship to food and should be central to addressing food related concerns within these communities. Too often, those involved in food justice work see the lack of consumption of healthy foods as an issue of personal choice rather than one resulting from a deeply traumatic history of food relations in Native communities. The common U.S. narrative about Native people is that we do not care about our health and subsequently make poor eating decisions. In her chapter in *Cultivating Food Justice* (2011), Guthman explores how universalism and color-blind logic inform the assumptions of white communities regarding “why” people of color do not frequent places such as farmers markets in the same numbers as white communities. Guthman’s ethnographic study on farmers markets found that many white vendors relied on evaluative statements about whites having higher education levels and exhibiting greater interest in health as factors that lead to primarily white patronage of farmers markets. Guthman’s study argued that farmers market vendors believe that low education levels lead to a disinvestment in health, participation, and education about food. Such ideologies and discourses around race, health, and food for Native and marginalized communities oversimplifies the relationship to food and deny the systemic way colonial oppression works.

There is no doubt that, given the limited scholarship, further research on food (in)security among Native people is needed. This exploration must include a cultural understanding about food and its importance for community well-being. There is a dire need to connect food to community well-being rather than just individual health. Since

---

moved due to forced removal from their tribal communities by the U.S. government.

<sup>2</sup> Some of these individuals have moved willingly, while others

some research finds that many “Native American communities experience a lack of access to high-quality and culturally appropriate foods” (Jernigan, 2012, p. 113) and these communities have “higher rates of chronic-disease-related outcomes, including obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases” (Jernigan, 2012, p. 113), more research on foodways is vital for understanding how these poor health outcomes and lack of access have affected communities’ functioning and well-being. Those interested in working with Native people must develop a deeper, historically grounded understanding of Native food consumption, including knowledge about their specific food histories and elaborate foodways.

For many Native communities, including the participants of my study, food is the sinew that holds communities together. Food helps build cultural knowledge and practice, satisfies health holistically by satisfying emotional and physical needs, and brings people together through the act of producing, consuming, and distributing foods. This was evident in my work with the IFH and its food programs.

While food brings people together, it can also be a source of great pain, shame, loss, and disconnection. This was most evident through the story of a participant who lamented that her daughter did not like salmon, a traditional and sacred food of her tribe. Those devising strategies to build food sovereignty must have a deep historical understanding of how food has been lost, how people have been moved or constrained, and how food acts as a community-bonding factor. The narrow focus on food consumption and access as they relate to physical health limits Native attempts to achieve food justice for our communities.

To address the food needs and well-being of Native peoples, we must expand the contemporary scholarship and policy efforts addressing health disparities that focus only on personal accountability and personal choice in eating and exercising. While it is important to address access, accountability, and choice, these approaches are not a holistic solution for Native well-being. Mainstream attempts to address issues involving food among Native people are singular in analysis and deny the complex effects of colonialism. These attempts

also deny the function and role that many “unhealthy” foods have in Native communities. Changing diets means creating new meaning and integrating new foods into old practices. In the case of Native people living near their homelands, it might also mean integrating old foods into current practices.

The food movement must support Native people in their work toward rebuilding tribal food systems. In Oakland, Native people have created a community garden, cooking classes, community dinners, a food pantry, and a cookbook in an effort to build their own urban food system. Several tribes are utilizing food as a means to change the economy, revitalize traditions, and provide more food security. Examples of this work can be seen among the traditional foods programs supported by the CDC among the Mohegan, Muscogee (Creek) Nation, Oneida, Laguna Pueblo, and Suquamish tribes (CDC, 2013). These projects share similar themes found in my own work (Vernon, 2014) that include strengthening cultural identity, sharing knowledge, and fostering inter-generational knowledge. Programs across the country in both urban spaces and on reservation lands are improving health and building community through engaging in food sovereignty. We must support these projects and help build leadership among Native people by providing them with resources and greater visibility for their projects. Those people interested in assisting these efforts must develop cultural competencies within the communities where projects are located that include historical and contemporary understandings of power relations that support rebuilding Native food systems in culturally relevant and meaningful ways.



## References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC]. (2013). *Traditional foods in Native America: A compendium of stories from the Indigenous food sovereignty movement in American Indian and Alaska Native communities—Part I*. Atlanta: Native Diabetes Wellness Program, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- CDC. (n.d.). *American Indian & Alaska Native population*. Retrieved June 14, 2015, from <http://www.cdc.gov/minorityhealth/populations/REMP/aian.html>



- First Nations Development Institute. (2014). *Native food and health fact sheets* (Nos. 1, 4–7). Longmont, Colorado: Author. Retrieved from <http://firstnations.org/knowledge-center/foods-health/resources/fact-sheets>
- Fixico, D. L. (1986). *Termination and relocation: Federal Indian policy, 1945–1960*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Guthman, J. (2011). “If they only knew”: The unbearable whiteness of alternative food. In A. H. Alkon & J. Agyeman (Eds.), *Cultivating food justice: Race, class, and sustainability* (pp. 263–282). Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Jernigan, V. B. B. (2012). Addressing food security and food sovereignty in Native American communities. In J. R. Joe & F. C. Gachupin (Eds.), *Health and social issues of Native American women* (pp. 113–152). Denver, Colorado: Praeger.
- LaDuke, W. (2005). *Recovering the sacred: The power of naming and claiming*. Boston: South End Press.
- Norris, T., Vines, P. L., & Hoeffel, E. M. (2012). *The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2010* (2010 Census Briefs No. C2010BR-10). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-10.pdf>
- Thornton, R. (1987). *American Indian holocaust and survival: A population history since 1492*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- United States Department of Agriculture [USDA]. (2015). *Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)*. Retrieved June 11, 2015, from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdpir/food-distribution-program-indian-reservations-fdpir>
- Vernon, R. V. (2014). *Food systems among Native American peoples in Oakland, California: An examination of connection* (Master’s thesis). Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado.

# The Rohingyas of Myanmar and the biopolitics of hunger

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS WORK

Tamara Nair \*  
Nanyang Technological University

Submitted June 19, 2015 / Published online September 10, 2015

Citation: Nair, T. (2015). The Rohingyas of Myanmar and the biopolitics of hunger. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 143–147. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.023>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

## Abstract

The Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar have faced discrimination due to their ethnicity and religion from the majority Burmese-Buddhist population and have been subjected to biased policies governing citizenship. This has resulted in prejudicial behavior on the part of the state in terms of movement, employment, education, and, consequently, access to food. Such discrimination has led to the Rohingyas being one of the most food-insecure communities in Asia. Using concepts of biopolitics and governmentality, I discuss how acute hunger in the community is a state-created construct—one of many strategies to isolate and control the Rohingyas.

## Keywords

food insecurity, citizenship, biopolitics, Rohingyas, Myanmar, development

The Rohingya Muslims of northern Rakhine State in Myanmar<sup>1</sup> are a minority group in the country. This community has faced discrimination from the majority Burmese-Buddhist population as a result of their ethnicity and religion, and have been subjected to biased policies governing citizenship. This has resulted in prejudicial behavior on the part of the state in terms of movement, employment, education, and, consequently, access to food. Years of this entrenched inimical behavior has resulted in the Rohingyas having diminished capacities in all the seven categories of human security, as defined in the Human Development Report of 1994 (U.N. Development Programme,

---

\* Tamara Nair, Research Fellow, Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University; Block S4, Level B4, 50, Nanyang Avenue; Singapore 639 798 Singapore; +65-6513 2734 (office); [istnair@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:istnair@ntu.edu.sg)

---

<sup>1</sup> Formerly known as Burma. Both names feature here and are used interchangeably.

1994, pp. 24–25). As a matter of fact, this has led to them being one of the most food-insecure communities in Asia. Theirs is a condition of systematic legal, administrative, and social discrimination that has resulted in their exclusion and prejudicial treatment.

Recent events in the South China Sea and the actions of some Southeast Asian nations have brought them to the forefront again. Abandoned ships with human cargo including Rohingya women and children and mass graves of Rohingya men who were trafficked have made headlines. *Time* magazine had a cover photo of a two-year-old Rohingya toddler, crying his eyes out while held by two social workers and being “processed” at an Indonesian camp. But as all headlines do, they will eventually fade from our collective memory while the world pursues more “current” news. The world’s silence on their plight is notable, notwithstanding the occasional release of statements or comments. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has remained very careful in commenting on the issue and has not placed enough pressure on its member states to address this refugee crisis. Myanmar itself is a member state, but very little is discussed with respect to “Myanmar’s problem” in regional meetings. Sadly, this mirrors the reaction of the international community.

Notwithstanding these biases, life does go on for the Rohingyas, albeit mostly in a state of hunger and malnourishment as a result of outright discriminatory practices.

### **The Archaeology of Systematic Food Insecurity**

The Rohingyas are an ethnic group that descend from Arakanese Buddhists, Bengalis from Chittagong, Bangladesh, and Arab sea traders (Mathieson, 2009). Under the British Raj, centuries of peaceful co-existence were compromised when the national boundaries of India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar were demarcated, with the majority of the Rohingyas ending up in then Burma, in 1948 (Mathieson, 2009). When the British took over Burma following Japanese occupation of the country, they agreed to establish a Muslim area within the Rakhine state (Yegar, 1972). This

politically motivated the Rohingyas, who then requested the merger of northern Rakhine with East Pakistan (current Bangladesh) (Cook, in press). This attempt at breaking off Burma’s territory to merge with Bangladesh is one of the key reasons for Burman Buddhist animosity toward the Rohingyas (Coursen-Neff, 2000, cited in Cook, in press).

In the 1960s a massive nationalization program saw the expelling of thousands of South Asians from Burma. Since then, every successive military government has subjected the Rohingyas to harsh treatment characterized by neglect, exclusion, and scape-goating (Human Rights Watch, 2002). In the late 1970s, an “ethnic cleansing” campaign drove more than 200,000 Rohingyas into neighboring Bangladesh, only to have them return after a year. The squalid conditions in Bangladesh saw 10,000 Rohingyas die from starvation and disease as Bangladeshi authorities withheld food aid, and survivors had no choice but to go back (Grundy-Warr & Wong, 1997).

A discredited census in the 1980s resulted in further alienation for this community when Rohingyas were not included and as a result were classified as “stateless.” The 1982 Citizenship Act further entrenched this status, creating two classifications: full citizens (including most ethnic minorities) and “associates” (those of South Asian and Chinese descent). Rohingyas could not prove their lineage as “associates” prior to 1948 and as a result were disqualified as citizens (Berlie, 2008). In the 1990s the Burmese military drove more than 250,000 Rohingyas out of Burma and into the districts of Teknaf and Cox’s Bazaar in Bangladesh; in 1995 the Bangladesh government forced most of them back across the border in a U.N.–supported repatriation exercise. These moves were marked by violence against the Rohingyas by both the Bangladeshi forces pushing them out and the Burmese troops receiving them (Human Rights Watch/Asia, 1996). Violence against the community escalated with the establishment of the NaSaKa (a border security force constituting the police, army, and customs and immigration offices), which violated the Rohingyas’ human rights by detaining and raping women, taxing marriage registration multiple times, confiscating



land, and encouraging Buddhist migration into these lands (Islam, 2007, cited in Cook, in press).

Examining the food insecurities of the Rohingya is a study in the exercise of biopolitics (or power over lives) on both individuals and the group. Increasing state surveillance on those who lack legality removes political rights from lives and creates subdued, “empty” lives that can be surveyed, detained, and used. The body is the site for the exercise of this biopolitics. Illegality works with other structural vulnerabilities, such as economic insecurity and increasing poverty, that push the individual to “disappear” from society. Such illegality also allows the individual (simply by her or his state of existence) to participate in some aspects of social life but not in others (Gonzalez & Chavez, 2012, cited in Carney, 2014, p. 3). Therefore the Rohingyas are still allowed to work for food (as long as their work is required) or are deployed by the NaSaKa as forced labor. Since 1948 or earlier the state has paid great attention to the biological life of the Rohingyas in order to power their expulsion from Myanmar. By controlling access to food (through limiting economic activities, for instance), and reproductive processes through marriage authorizations and birth registrations in family lists, the state has created norms by which the community lives. The exercise of this biopower over the Rohingyas is complete as now the state has access to their bodies through these norms, which have been internalized by the community and pervade their society. The daily struggles of the Rohingyas in trying to meet their nutritional needs are just one way that represents how the state has systematically, through decades of discriminatory practices, created an uneven form of governance that reveals a biopolitics of food insecurity and hunger. And this biopolitics of hunger is just another aspect of the state’s biopolitics of citizenship and governmentality over this community.

### **The Biopolitics of Hunger**

Earlier moral economies of hunger, which linked both personal responsibility and social obligation to ensure food security, have been replaced by a political economy of exclusion and violation of the Rohingyas’ right to food. The community’s efforts to meet nutritional needs often take place outside

of established norms and through mechanisms that are further hindered by biased policies that deny them access to economic security and the ability to produce their own food. The search for food then requires ever greater creativity or innovation. Food, for example, is often sourced by borrowing from neighbors (if there are quantities to spare) and/or by studying and working in the World Food Program’s (WFP’s) paddy schools (Arakan Project, 2012).

Needless to say, the community, and especially the women and children, suffer from chronic malnutrition. According to the Arakan Project, a human rights organization that has been monitoring the situation of Rohingyas since 1999, food insecurity is a direct marker of forms of discrimination such as forced labor, restrictions on movement, arbitrary arrests, and extortion. These technologies of governance keep Rohingyas “in their place” and allow easier control through their vulnerabilities. Food security for this community is a gossamer web of controls; reported incidences of violence and abuse are flashes of light that occasionally reveal to the world this control over their bodies. Once the media attention fades, the Rohingyas are still left to face the technologies of governance that limit their capabilities in meeting their nutritional needs. One study indicates a food insecurity situation in northern Rakhine state in need of immediate humanitarian attention (FAO & WFP, 2009). This same document reports that the Rohingya in northern Rakhine are highly vulnerable due to restricted mobility, inadequate access to land, and lack of casual labor opportunities. The forced taking of land (the landless being the most food insecure), the restrictions on travel that hinder employment and educational opportunities, especially for women and girls, and forced labor that takes children away from schools (Arakan Project, 2012) and men away from their families and work opportunities, have created a milieu of insecurity and deprivation in this community.

The exercise of biopolitics is almost necessarily racist in that such governance is broadly understood as an “indispensable condition” that grants the state the power (Taylor, 2014), in the case of the Rohingyas, to create methodical structural vulnerabilities, including food insecurity. This

justifies state actions in managing what are perceived as problematic groups. Such governance is best reflected in census-taking. Such an exercise of data collection gave the state vital information about the population that would assist in managing people. The population census of the 1980s and the subsequent dismissal of the Rohingyas' citizenship status legitimized the state's discrimination.

### Future Scenarios

The Rohingyas spend almost 70 percent of their meager incomes on food, a stark indicator of food insecurity in the community. The need for greater economic security sees them desperately searching for opportunities, including paying exorbitant rates, to move to "greener pastures" elsewhere. Such desperation makes them easy prey for human traffickers. This is exactly what recent events in the South China Sea reflect. Rohingyas' willingness to suffer the long and perilous journeys indicate the level of disenfranchisement faced at home.

Illegal movement into Bangladesh in search of family and/or work creates competition for limited resources that can expose the Rohingyas to resentment in the host country. This is already happening in Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh, where massive deforestation is threatening food security for the local Bangladeshis and Indigenous hill tribes, as well as the Rohingya refugees (IRIN, 2012). Increasing population pressure on forest resources has resulted in communities having no choice but to sell wood to feed families. There is great resentment against the Rohingyas from locals who feel that the refugees are already being fed by the U.N. and therefore should not encroach upon their source of livelihood. However the malnutrition rates in the two refugee camps and numerous makeshift camps are acute. Often locals attack the Rohingyas and forcefully take away the wood they have gathered (IRIN, 2012).

Climate change scenarios and their potential effects on food production add to increased food insecurities. Future climate variability can affect food production, which will further stress already-stressed resources and deepen vulnerabilities. This might cause mass movements of people toward resource-rich areas, something the Rohingyas will not be able to undertake easily due to their lack of

resources on top of their restrictions on travel. This could severely affect their already precarious situation *vis-à-vis* food security.

There is also the ever-present danger of radicalization. The great suffering of the Rohingyas could push them toward Islamic radicalization, aided by groups seeking to recruit disenfranchised people for their own agendas. However, despite hardships faced by this community, no mass jihadist intents have arisen from the group, which might in itself speak for their wish to live in peace. There are several other factors that explain this seeming lack of organization, but I will not attempt to explain them here. Suffice to say that it is important to understand that there are very human limits to enduring atrocities. When we are no longer able to tolerate and resist, we either perish or ultimately seek to "punish."

### References

- Arakan Project. (2012). *Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Issues to be raised concerning the situation of stateless Rohingya children in Myanmar (Burma)*. Bangkok, Thailand: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/AP-CRCMyanmar-12-01.pdf>
- Berlie, J. A. (2008). *The Burmanization of Myanmar's Muslims*. Bangkok: White Lotus Press.
- Carney, M. A. (2014). The biopolitics of food insecurity: Towards a critical political ecology of the body in studies of women's transnational migration. *Journal of Political Ecology*, 21, 1–18.  
<http://jpe.library.arizona.edu/>
- Cook, A. D. B. (in press). *The global and regional dynamics of humanitarian aid in Rakhine State*.
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO] & World Food Program [WFP]. (2009). *Special Report: FAO/WFP crop and food security assessment mission to Myanmar*. Rome: Authors. Retrieved from <http://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/special-report-faowfp-crop-and-food-security-assessment-mission-myanmar>
- Grundy-Warr, C., & Wong, E. (1997). Sanctuary under a plastic sheet: The unresolved problem of Rohingya refugees. *IBRU Boundary and Security Bulletin*, 5(3), 79–91.  
<https://www.dur.ac.uk/ibru/publications/bulletin>

- Human Rights Watch. (2002). *Crackdown on Burmese Muslims*. Washington, D.C.: Author.  
<http://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounders/asia/burma-bck.htm>
- Human Rights Watch/Asia. (1996). *The Rohingya Muslims: Ending a cycle of exodus?* New York: Author.  
<http://www.hrw.org/reports/pdfs/b/burma/burma969.pdf>
- IRIN. (2012, December 18). *Bangladesh: Deforestation threatens food security in southeast*. IRIN News. Retrieved from <http://www.irinnews.org/report/97067/bangladesh-deforestation-threatens-food-security-in-southeast>
- Mathieson, D. S. (2009). Plight of the damned: Burma's Rohingyas. *Global Asia*, 4(1), 86–91.  
<https://globalasia.org/>
- Taylor, C. (2014). Biopower. In D. Taylor (Ed.), *Michel Foucault: Key concepts* (pp. 41–54). London and New York: Routledge.
- UN Development Programme [UNDP]. (1994). *The human development report 1994*. New York: Oxford University Press. Retrieved from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-report-1994>
- Yegar, M. (1972). *Between integration and secession: The Muslim communities of Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand and Western Burma/Myanmar*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.



## Decolonizing a food system: Freedom Farmers' Market as a place for resistance and analysis

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS

Gail P. Myers \*  
Farms to Grow, Inc.

Submitted June 22, 2015 / Published online September 11, 2015

Citation: Myers, G. P. (2015). Decolonizing a food system: Freedom Farmers' Market as a place for resistance and analysis. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 149–152. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.025>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

Oakland's Freedom Farmers' Market is more than a venue for food exchange; it is a gathering place for Black cultural expression and economics. More often than not, Black farmers are shut out and even pushed out of mainstream farmers markets. However, fresh food and Black farmers are celebrated at the Freedom Farmers' Market each week. This commentary discusses the critical ways in which this market represents a social discourse about decolonizing our food system. Embedded within this place analysis is also, necessarily, a critique of the dominant places people currently

have available for food. The Freedom Farmers' Market has become a model for disenfranchised peoples to take control of their own food system.

### Keywords

Black farmers, decolonizing food, farmers markets, Black economics, Black farmers markets

*Look closely at the land. Imagine vast fields of okra, peas, turnip greens, watermelon, collards and squash weaving themselves together into a forest of bright colors and amazing shapes. Can you see those crops in vast rural fields on the Motherland where for thousands of years the ancestors toiled with bare feet and bared hands, bending backs into ground, planting not only their hopes but the dreams of their children to come? Can you see those same crops*

---

\* Dr. Gail P. Myers, Co-Founder, Farms to Grow, Inc.; P. O. Box 10504; Oakland, California 94610 USA; +1-415-374-0608; [gpmymers@farmstogrow.com](mailto:gpmymers@farmstogrow.com)

*traveling through the diaspora, those same ancestors, backs bent further, their hopes and dreams now chained, beaten, but still growing, surviving in the richness of legacies encompassed in their foods? Through all the hardships life would bring, the ancestors will continue to plant the crops that feed their children. Through it all these crops will be the salve they have to heal the wounds and nourish the future, a future they continue to grow with their own hands, a future they are determined their children will see: A free future. Our future.*

Every Saturday in Oakland, California, Black food liberation takes place in the form of the Freedom Farmers' Market (<http://www.farmstogrow.com>)—a culturally specific, historically rooted market experience that is bringing Black residents together with Black farmers in a setting reminiscent of an African marketplace. This marketplace was named to honor the work of freedom fighter Fannie Lou Hamer. In rural Mississippi, Fannie Lou Hamer started the farm cooperative called the Freedom Farms. That this freedom movement continues today in Oakland is appropriate. Oakland was home to the Black Panther Party, whose 10-point plan aimed for everybody to have enough food, housing, health, and education to meet their needs. It is the city where the Black Panthers began their Free Children's Breakfast Program, which caused FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to call the group the "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country." Grits, not guns, were what worried Hoover. By serving children breakfast, the FBI director said, the Black Panthers were "infiltrating the black community." The Freedom Farmers' Market builds on that breakfast program freedom movement and on an earlier Black farmers' market started in the late 1990s by David Roach and his organization, Mo' Better Foods.

Managed by Farms to Grow, Inc., a Black-run organization, the Freedom Farmers' Market is a place for farmers, vendors, educators, and others with resources to address the current power dynamics between the marginalized communities of people and the dominant class structure. Farms to Grow's approach is unlike the large farmers market associations. Freedom Farmers' Market's

primary goals extend beyond making money to focus on community empowerment, farmer outreach, and cultural celebration and preservation. What we have learned is that we should not seek to become a market that is interested only in profits because such an entity is not holistic in its approach and cannot serve more than a small number of individuals. The Freedom Farmers' Market strives to involve the community as a whole in order to ensure that transformation can take place on a scale greater than the individual. We remember the lessons of a past time when people had some understanding of the fact that individuals need more than the financial success that is represented in money. They also need to feed their minds and spirits, as well as their bodies. The spiritual, psychological, and cultural resiliency features that are built into the Freedom Farmers' Market are incalculable.

Cooperation and cultural celebration are two of the principles at the heart of the Freedom Farmers' Market. A farmers market like this, with a focus on the Black experience, can do more than build a local food system: it can create a cooperative environment that has the power to transform the whole community by reintroducing sustainable views of nature through recollections of our folkways and old ways that mattered. Such a farmers market can facilitate a communal perspective and cultural resiliency.

Venues for commerce where Black dollars are spent purchasing food from Black farmers and vendors can be transformative. Without such intentional venues, which themselves provide for a type of analysis of race and privilege, decolonization of a food system may not occur. The Freedom Farmers' Market represents a point of critical analysis as well as a place for the decolonization of the current supply-chain food system. In the process of organizing an all-Black farmers' market, we inadvertently began to take our power back in the local food system. We reached out to, recruited, trained, and eventually brought Black farmers, food businesses, and culturally relevant health information into a setting that necessarily is itself a social discourse about decolonizing our food systems. Embedded within this place analysis is also necessarily a critique of the dominant places people

currently seek groceries and community enrichment.

We sought to shift the discourse in order to drive change from within marginalized food communities to continue to reduce their dependence upon dominant food access points. Commerce can be mixed with cultural food access, and people can be released from the shackles of a colonized supply-chain food system. The Freedom Farmers' Market, itself claimed from the decolonized approaches of freedom fighters, situates its dominant food story within the oppressed stakeholders. The reconstruction of traditional foodways and decolonization of food systems require a liberator space for the redevelopment of traditional identities and more expansive farming narratives where land, people, and food are one.

Unfortunately, the USDA's agricultural policies have always been deeply rooted in a supply-chain philosophy, which allows for greater manipulation of the food supply and pricing by Wall Street, and also creates food gaps, food deserts, land loss, and inequalities in the various layers of the food system. The Freedom Farmers' Market took the opportunity to fill in these gaps of the broken food chain, which ignores Black farmers and slights Black food businesses. We have created a venue for our farmers to bring forth the fruits of their labors that carry the legacies of our food past. The approach brings with it much more than fresh food. When traditional people are able to reclaim their food histories, they may be more likely to overcome the decolonization wreckage pervasive in urban centers. The Freedom Farmers' Market challenges the historical assumptions that there are no Black farmers or that Black food economics do not exist. It is important that Black communities know that Black farmers are still keeping the traditions, despite a mostly hostile atmosphere where White supremacy has haphazardly dismantled Black farmer developments, Black towns, and business districts, and has removed swaths of people from their land.

Imperialism's praxis has left a remarkable trail of people disconnected from their sustainable traditions, with whole histories interrupted by the convenience of Western enlightenment and the accompanying world belief systems. The Freedom

Farmers' Market addresses these effects. It is the resiliency praxis that liberates, decolonizes food spaces, and connects people back to sacred times and spaces. Agroecological environments included sacred spaces where the elders went to pray and forage for herbs and food—food they planted by the signs of the moon, by the rotation process, with the three sisters, all in prayer. We used to know the accompanying herbs to serve with our foods to help it digest better and absorb some of the fat that was inherent in the dish. Although this knowledge lost to many individuals, it has not been lost to our culture because it survives with the farmers and herbalists who still have access to the land. Bringing these farmers and herbalists back together with our urban residents brings this knowledge back to the greater community.

We began the Freedom Farmers' Market because we needed to honor our Black farmers; we needed a safe place to reclaim our legacy around food and community; and we wanted to opt out of the dominant supply-chain food system. Through the market we have demonstrated that creating community around food in the quest for freedom is grounding and can serve as a bridge between the years of the past to the hopes of today and beyond. The Freedom Farmers' Market can and has become a model for disenfranchised peoples to take control of their own food system.

The creation of a culturally specific farmers market community as a revolutionary praxis and a place of resiliency shifts focus from the individualist notions of liberty so deeply rooted in American culture to one on the cooperative and communal characteristics of freedom. In mainstream Western spaces such as predominantly White farmers markets, Black folks can find only slight resemblances of themselves culturally. We find few if any cultural markers of significance. The Freedom Farmers' Market (re)presents an African-based perspective, while defining itself as a place of resilience reclaiming local wisdom and foodways. Nonetheless, it is also a safe and profitable place. Black people who come say it is like walking through an oasis of safety. White people who come through pay respects to Black culture and appreciate the diversity. We have created a hub of Black culture while providing critical access to healthy, fresh




food in places where this has not existed.

We need spaces that represent the resiliency to resist that which cannot be exacted. Providing people with a choice as to where they spend their food dollars is decolonizing the food system. The availability of fresh, culturally relevant produce is decolonizing people's diets. We can look at the Freedom Farmers' Market as a model and a guide. Starting with really small, concrete steps we have reconnected Black growers with Black consumers, and as a result we are reconnecting the people with the culture that is inherent in our legacy foods.

We also talk about how we can recover some of the ancestral knowledge that people hold in their immediate families. Sharing in recipe stories and other food stories provides a positive occasion for Black people to remember fondly and proudly in a safe and supportive environment. Pea-shelling contests, watermelon-eating contests, blues, gospel, and jazz music, dancing, and poetry are all cultural expressions and celebrations that connect us to historical places and honor Black culture and

community. Decolonizing our diet also means honoring our ancestors and the earth, and fostering sustainability. The African natural world view calls for us to be accountable not only to the community, but also to the forest, water, soils, and livestock. This world view has been passed down through generations of Black farmers, and their presence in the community models critical lessons for those who have lost touch with the land. The Freedom Farmers' Market in Oakland has brought various stakeholders together and is implementing food justice by practicing communal food autonomy. Reclaiming our food spaces in the way that the Freedom Farmers' Market has resists the food colonization that has left us in a desert. When we name our liberation spaces within our own community struggle for freedom, we bring back our cultural roots of self-sufficiency. Choosing to decolonize a food system is a quest to be free, truly freed. This liberating act of maintaining a farmers market around food freedom is at the heart of decolonization.



## Identity and group dynamics in urban food systems

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS

Neetu Choudhary \*

A. N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies

Submitted June 18, 2015 / Published online September 16, 2015

Citation: Choudhary, N. (2015). Identity and group dynamics in urban food systems. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 153–157. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.026>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

In this commentary I argue that access to food and nutrition systems, instead of being uniformly distributed among the urban poor, is a group phenomenon, that is, the shared situation of a group of individuals sharing similar identities, where a group may be defined horizontally in terms of gender, caste, religion, location, and so on. Drawing upon earlier field work in the city of Mumbai in India, I observe that due to identity-driven factors there are certain groups that remain disadvantaged within the food system, while there are groups that are able to attain intergenerational or intertemporal upward mobility despite having similar initial endowments. This happens due to differences between groups in the entitlement relations or due

to the relationship between a group's endowment and its exchange options, which in turn is mediated by group members' religious or locational identity. Thus the factor of group dynamics is necessarily inherent within urban food systems, and this can be analyzed through operationalization of the entitlement approach, as proposed by Amartya Sen (1981). The entitlement approach has much potential as a technique for illustrating the power dynamics underlying identity-based group differential in access to urban food systems. In fact, any policy intervention designed to expand individual capabilities, such as nutrition security, would need to be preceded by an analysis of his or her entitlements, including in relation to group affiliations.

### Keywords

group, nutrition, entitlement, food system, slum, endowment, state, agency, transfer

\* Neetu Choudhary, PhD, Assistant Professor of Economics; #16, A. N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies; Patna, Pin Code 800001, India; [choudharyneetu@gmail.com](mailto:choudharyneetu@gmail.com)

Exclusion along race, ethnicity, or any other form of identity is essentially an issue of horizontal inequality, that is, inequality across groups. While “poverty,” as the class segregation of a group of low-income individuals or households, is a known reason underlying the failure of food systems in the context of developing countries like India, there is much ambiguity about what explains inequality of this failure within the groups collectively called the “poor.” In this commentary I argue that access to food and nutrition systems, instead of being uniformly distributed among the urban poor, is a group phenomenon (i.e., the shared situation of a group of individuals with shared identities), where a group may be defined horizontally in terms of gender, caste, religion, location, and so on. Drawing upon earlier field work in the city of Mumbai, India (Choudhary, in press), I observe that due to identity-driven factors there are certain groups that remain disadvantaged within the food system, while there are groups that are able to attain intergenerational or intertemporal upward mobility despite having similar initial endowments. This happens due to differences between groups in resource endowment, on the one hand, and the options to translate those endowments into capabilities, on the other, which in turn is mediated by group members’ religious or locational identity. I found that group identity interferes with the processes of local government and public transfer, which are instrumental to (or constraining for) upward intergenerational mobility of population groups in Mumbai. Thus some sort of group dynamics is necessarily inherent within urban food systems, and this can be analyzed through operationalization of the entitlement approach, as proposed by Amartya Sen (1981). In this commentary I share key reflections from entitlement analysis of four slums of Mumbai that help to illustrate the dynamics underlying identity-based group differential in access to urban food systems.

Sen (1981) describes entitlement as the set of all possible combinations of goods and services that an individual can legally obtain using the resources from his or her endowments based on means of production, labor, trade and/or exchange (Osmani, 1993). However, Sen is cognizant of

certain “fuzziness” in the notion, likely in transitional contexts, where informal considerations based on social beliefs and attitude towards certain groups take precedence over formal provisions and thus constrain those groups’ access to legal entitlements. This is what was observed in the larger study of which this commentary is a part. An analysis of entitlement relation of a person would facilitate understanding of the combination of his or her abilities and social contexts that may result in particular capabilities and associated functioning (see Smith & Seward, 2009).

### **Operationalizing the Entitlement Framework**

For the urban poor, labor is the primary individual endowment and source of entitlement. In the four slums that serve as the premises for this commentary, most forms of labor are unskilled and informally employed except one, which has benefitted from the growth of a large formal enterprise in proximity. However, the four slums (namely, Chamunda Nagar, Rafi Nagar, Padma Nagar, and Cheekuvadi) have shared characteristics as far as their initial endowments, that is, the endowments of their first generation in Mumbai, are concerned. It is due to their differential degree of assimilation in the local environment, mediated by informal considerations, that they end up having differential access to urban food systems and as a result suffer from significantly different levels of food and nutrition insecurities. While Chamunda Nagar and Rafi Nagar are on the verge of starvation, Padma Nagar is suffering from chronic malnutrition. Only one of the four slums, Cheekuvadi, is relatively better off and suffers from only moderate levels of malnutrition.

Each of the four slums has a unique identity and social position, although they overlap in some ways. Field reflections identify three main identities that determined the status of the four slums within the urban local food and nutrition systems: migration status, religion, and gender. Further, these three group identities mediate group members’ access to overall food systems through three different interfaces.

The first interface is in the form of access to municipal transfer entitlements. Except for

Cheekuvadi, all the slums in the present study are informal settlements; that is, they are not included in the list of slums in the Greater Mumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). Of the three non-notified slums, Chamunda Nagar has been created by a cluster of migrants pushed out of their villages in North India. The other two, Rafi Nagar and Padma Nagar, are inhabited by the minority Muslim community, including one inhabited by allegedly illegal in-migrants from the neighboring nation of Bangladesh. Being non-notified, these three slums do not have access to municipal entitlements, including basic civic service supplies such as water and sanitation. This is an important issue given that even the newest of the four slums has existed for nearly 15 years, certainly long enough for social and institutional assimilation. Although it is not a legal violation to not supply municipal civic services to non-notified slums, there are several barriers informally created in the process of legal notification that have become politicized and are unjustifiable on constitutional grounds. The lack of access to drinking water, sanitation, and an overall livable environment has been a central factor also excluding the three slums from access to minimum nutrition systems.

Moreover, the varying degrees of assimilation of the four slums can be attributed to varying social, cultural, and political backdrops in Mumbai corresponding to the emergence of these slums. When Cheekuvadi—the oldest and the now notified among the four slums—emerged, urban space and resources were not a constraint in Mumbai, and therefore neither administrative nor cultural sentiments toward it were hostile. Also, this slum's dwellers are not migrants from outside the state of Maharashtra. Thus attempts were made to mainstream the slum in terms of education, food, and housing support, which proved helpful in facilitating access to urban food and nutrition systems. In the present context, migrants and minority Muslim members are a resented lot amid the identity politics of Mumbai that are driven by Maratha (the originals of Mumbai) sentiments. Growing pressure on urban infrastructure and changing demography in favor of the former have aggravated negative sentiments, and this in turn is contributing toward institutional alienation of the excluded groups.

The second interface is in the form of access to the public food and nutrition support system. The Public Distribution System (PDS) in India is countrywide scheme that entitles some groups of people below the poverty line to food and nutrition support from the state. Access to the PDS is based on beneficiaries' identity cards. Since all four slums except one, Cheekuvadi, are informal settlements of in-migrants, their residents usually fail to establish their identities and are bypassed by the PDS system. Issuance of an identity card itself is constrained partly by the widespread corruption sweeping the PDS machinery and partly by systemic bias against migrants and minority communities in Mumbai. Thus the residents of the three slums need to rely solely on the market for meeting their food needs. The inability to afford to do this has resulted in circumstances of starvation. Clearly, as Stewart (1999) notes, "democratic institutions are not sufficient to prevent such inequalities, partly because majorities can discriminate against minorities, and partly because even with 'shared' power at the top, lower level elements may involve inequalities" (p. 9).

Affiliation with the group identified as migrants from North India or as Muslims is resulting in social exclusion of access to both tangible and nontangible resources. From the perspective of the entitlement framework, all four slums have similar initial endowments; that is, at the beginning of their settlement their only asset is unskilled and illiterate labor. The difference that has arisen since then lies in the differential nature of entitlement relations faced by each of them. Sen's (1981) framework mentions four types of entitlements, namely those based on labor, production, exchange, and transfer. While all four slums share similar supplies of labor-, production- and exchange-based entitlements, it is the transfer-based entitlement that is generating differential options for them, as mediated by their respective identities.


The third form of interface emerges from the gendered nature of food and nutrition systems that influences a group's ability to translate resources into functionality. Since determinants of malnutrition include several nonfood and nontangible factors, such as health care, reproductive health,

fertility behavior, etc., access to food and cash may not solve the problem completely. The instrumental relationship between low income and low capability is variable between different communities (Sen, 1999). Like food utilization and care practices, intracommunity gender dynamics also usually manifest themselves through cultural beliefs and practices. Gendered processes are salient manifestations of cultural norms in less developed contexts, often resulting in intrahousehold discrimination in food and nutrition entitlement (Agarwal, 1996). For example, based on household surveys, I found that the extent of health-care outreach was much lower for female children as compared to males in all four slums. Further, negligence of reproductive health is also a manifestation of negligence toward women's health. This is particularly visible within the minority Muslim communities of two slums, where women are burdened by repeated child-bearing due to religious taboos. The low status of women, uncontrolled fertility, and poor reproductive health care—key factors behind mother-child transmission of malnutrition—are typical of Rafi Nagar and Padma Nagar, both of which are home primarily to Muslims.

The varying nature of entitlement relation and differential degree of entitlement failure between the four slums are lucid representations of the intersection of class, religion, migration status, and gender. Entitlement collapse of the highest degree occurs when a group is on the disadvantaged side simultaneously in respect of all four dimensions (Joe, 2013). Even if overall malnutrition rates in urban areas may be lower than in the countryside, the three slums in this commentary (excluding Cheekuvadi) show that there are pockets of extreme vulnerability. Thus a reduced rate of malnutrition may not imply a reduction in inequality related to it (Van de Poel, Hosseinpoor, Speybroeck, Van Oortia, & Vega, 2008). Among the four settlements, only Cheekuvadi experienced upward mobility over the years. Though the four slums were endowed with similarly inadequate resources at their founding, due to the ease of assimilation in the host environment supported by public transfer to its earlier generation, one of them has been able to escape extreme vulnerability.

The remaining three slums seem to be trapped in persistent vulnerability. These three slums do not display any sign of upward mobility, and the younger generation in these slums witness vulnerability transfer from their parents; this is, they inherit poverty (South African Human Rights Commission [SAHRC] & UNICEF, 2014). Given their meager labor options and disparity in access, the three slums are structurally less capable of assimilation into mainstream processes. They also are unable to defend their rights due to the high transaction costs of accessing formal juridical systems (see Birner, 2007). The kinds of deficiency they are suffering from causes long-term impairment related to nutrition and cognitive ability, and it takes a very long time to reverse the process. In such a scenario, tackling deprivation and poverty among vulnerable groups may require tackling the position of the group as well (see Stewart 2007). It is in the ability to problematize this dimension of nutritional vulnerability that the contribution of entitlement framework lies. Even though Sen's entitlement approach has received several criticisms (see De Waal, 1990; Gore, 1993), much of these criticisms are resolved once the entitlement approach is considered as a framework to explore a plurality of causes and to analyze the relationship between rights, interpersonal obligations, and individual entitlement to things (see Vizard, 2001).

To conclude, I argue that the issue of nutrition security has an indispensable and direct role for the state's agency, especially in the wake of the identity-based discriminations observed amid food system dynamics at the local level. Given the culturally diverse nature of Indian society, there is much scope for mediation of food access by identity-based issues such as race, caste, religion, or gender. While the role of civil society and community leaders becomes critical in this regard, this does not absolve the state of its obligations to guarantee constitutional rights to its people. Despite their importance in political dynamics, identity-based discriminations have failed to receive adequate attention in the processes of development intervention. Thus issues such as race, religion, caste, and migration status continue to distort groups' entitlement structures and their access to basic survival options.



## References

- Agarwal, B. (1996). *A field of one's own: Gender and land rights in South Asia*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Birner, R. (2007). *Improving governance to eradicate hunger and poverty* (IFPRI 2020 Focus Brief on World's Poor and Hungry People). Retrieved from the International Food Policy Research Institute website: <http://www.ifpri.org>
- Choudhary, N. (in press). Malnutrition in greater Mumbai slums: An entitlement analysis of group differentials in basic capabilities. *South Asia Research*.
- De Waal, A. (1990). A re-assessment of entitlement theory in the light of the recent famines in Africa. *Development and Change*, 21(3), 469–490. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.1990.tb00384.x>
- Gore, C. (1993). Entitlement relations and 'unruly' social practices: A comment on the work of Amartya Sen. *Journal of Development Studies*, 29(3), 429–460. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00220389308422283>
- Joe, W. (2013, August). *Inter-group inequalities in child undernutrition in India: Intersecting caste, gender and place of residence*. Poster presented at the meeting of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, Busan, Republic of Korea. [http://iussp.org/sites/default/files/event\\_call.../William%20310%20Paper.pdf](http://iussp.org/sites/default/files/event_call.../William%20310%20Paper.pdf)
- Osmani, S. R. (1993). *The entitlement approach to famine: An assessment* (WIDER Working Paper No. 107). Retrieved from the World Institute of Development Economics Research (WIDER) website: <http://www.wider.unu.edu>
- South African Human Rights Commission [SAHRC] & UNICEF. (2014). *Poverty traps and social exclusion among children in South Africa*. Pretoria: SAHRC. Retrieved from <http://www.sahrc.org.za/home/21/files/Poverty%20Traps%20Report.pdf>
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development and freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sen, A. (1981). *Poverty and famines: An essay on entitlement and deprivation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Smith, M. L., & Seward, C. (2009). The relational ontology of Amartya Sen's capability approach: Incorporating social and individual causes. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 10, 213–235. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19452820902940927>
- Stewart, F. (2007). Why horizontal inequalities matter. *Poverty in Focus*, June, 16–17. Retrieved from <http://www.ipc-undp.org/publication/27313>
- Stewart, F. (1999, June). *Crisis prevention: Tackling horizontal inequalities*. Paper presented at the World Bank Conference on Evaluation and Poverty Reduction, Washington, D.C.
- Van de Poel, E., Hosseinpoor, A. R., Speybroeck, N., Van Ourtia, T., & Vega, J. (2008). Socioeconomic inequality in malnutrition in developing countries. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 86(4), 241–320. <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/86/4/07-044800/en/>
- Vizard, P. (2001). *Economic theory, freedom and human rights: The work of Amartya Sen* (ODI Briefing Paper). Retrieved from the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) website: <http://www.odi.org>





# Using the interconnections and complexities of food systems to teach about human diversity and white privilege

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS

Jason S. Parker\*  
University of Vermont

Submitted June 15, 2015 / Published online September 17, 2015

Citation: Parker, J. S. (2015). Using the interconnections and complexities of food systems to teach about human diversity and white privilege. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 159–163. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.022>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

## Abstract

How can diversity courses at land-grant universities be shaped to better prepare the next generation of food systems practitioners, educators, and researchers? This is the question I approach in a discussion of the first undergraduate diversity requirement course in a college of agriculture focusing on domestic issues of race, gender, ethnicity, class, and equity in the development of U.S. food systems. I discuss the benefits I found of using food systems studies as a framework for learning about diversity by highlighting the interconnections among people through discussions of issues every student can appreciate: food and eating.

## Keywords

diversity training, food systems, sustainable agriculture, community engagement, land-grant universities, white privilege

## Introduction

As a white research-track faculty at a predominantly white land-grant university (LGU), I often contemplate the values of teaching a diversity course on U.S. food systems at LGUs. In the last decade, LGUs and liberal arts schools have been preparing many white, middle-class students to move into the food system and “do good.” Yet as many have commented on whiteness in the food system, questions arise regarding the benefit derived from these projects. For whom are these people doing “good”? Who has ownership and direction of these projects as they evolve? How are the values of participants represented in these projects? How is privilege challenged or reified in

---

\* Jason S. Parker, Research Assistant Professor, Department of Plant and Soil Science, University of Vermont; 202 Jeffords Hall; Burlington, Vermont 05401 USA; +1-802-656-2824; [jparker7@uvm.edu](mailto:jparker7@uvm.edu)

the spaces where these projects occur?

These are not questions that I seek to answer in this brief commentary. Rather my aim is to discuss the quality and value of what diversity training at universities could be and how these curricula can be designed to better prepare both minority and dominant group students for fuller, more self-aware participation in our food systems. The issues brought up through a diversity curriculum are important not only for guiding the next generation of practitioners who will graduate into development and outreach positions and will benefit from the enhanced awareness and appreciation for the diversity of people and identities they will encounter, but also for engaging and training the next generation of faculty and researchers. Diversity training at most institutions of higher learning emphasizes international contexts that have paralleled the development of Peace Corps programs, but it has lagged in preparing students to move into domestic service arenas where they are also confronted with issues of diversity. For faculty and staff, preparing the next generation of students for awareness of race, gender, ethnicity, and class perspectives is as important as incorporating these understandings into their own research. Pressing issues of food access, opportunity, and development are inter-related in these issues; anthropologist Roy Rappaport noted (1993) that if we are to affect real change in the world, we need to begin identifying and resolving major problems “at home,” as these radiate and affect places near and far. Finally, within this context I also attempt to examine how my own privilege can be directed toward shaping positive change in the food system.

### **What Does the Next Generation of Practitioners and Educators Need to Know about Diversity?**

If we as faculty at LGUs and other universities and colleges are to provide educational opportunities for students in sustainable food systems, education in all aspects of sustainability needs consideration. LGUs focus well on economic, production, and environmental issues of the food system, but focus less on nurturing an awareness and appreciation for the historical elements of our food system that are

shaped by racial, gender, ethnic, and social identities. Roles of people and groups founded on the dominance and subordination of one group over others are directly related to the development and current state of our food system. The historical relationships between minorities and food production in the U.S. are rooted in systemic racial classification that has relied on prejudice, bigotry, and discrimination to endow a dominant white group with privilege over all others. Awareness among students of the nuances of this history is uncommon, in my experience, yet in my opinion is necessary for anyone who plans to move on to work with others toward making change in our food system.

The systems perspective is an entry point for ecological systems and environmental and food justice, labor justice, environmental justice, healthy food access, and nutrition, in addition to organic and local food systems. These areas then can become learning examples for the importance and value of human diversity—life experiences and the intersectionality of individual characteristics that form our identities and yet make a greater whole, and expand our alternatives for growing, sharing, and consuming food. Moreover, they underscore the importance of tradition, new ideas, and novelty in a larger human social system that currently is running a homogenous, overrationalized model of horizontal and vertical integration. Emphasizing alternatives provides new role models beyond the conventional system of agriculture operated by older white men with large farms, and contests ideas of privilege and wholesomeness among white family farms in our food system.

### **Alternative Views of Agriculture for Students**

As Peña (2015) saliently discusses in this issue, many students are taught the traditional tropes of minorities throughout international and U.S. domestic histories (subjugated natives, enslaved and then emancipated Africans, exploited Latino/a workers, etc.). Less common is teaching the histories of people within the context of food systems, a system that is at the core of U.S. social organization and political economy, and highlights the values that a society has for the people who live

and labor toward producing and consuming food. Understanding the issues and concepts of diversity in complex state-level societies such as the United States can be challenging if taught from a generalized perspective. I find that using the concept of food systems helps contextualize and highlight the characteristics of the relationships among people in that system, which reveals the types of relationships and the effects of power and privilege. A focus on the nuances along the continuum of food production to consumption has the benefit of providing the interconnectedness of a system with the power of self-reflection exercises, such as journaling, pairing and sharing, and response pieces, where students can begin to make their own connections among their social location in the food system with the many other food system actors, the various levels of access in the food system among members of those groups, the power and privilege of each, and the tension between structure and agency in individual and group decision-making.

The lack of appreciation among many policymakers for the interconnectedness of social problems like food deserts with the histories of low-income and minority communities is problematic. Further, this interconnectedness has resulted in real and perceived barriers to participation among many minority members of society. In large part, this lack of awareness is due to the immensity of the issues stemming from complex and contested histories that are beyond the scope of most many courses. Identifying where privilege originates and how it can be challenged or subverted will prepare undergraduates to identify this privilege in themselves and offer pathways to diffusing it.

### **Shaping Student Perceptions and Expanding Awareness of Identities**

I teach an undergraduate diversity requirement on *U.S. Food Systems, Social Equity and Development*. Many have asked me what a diversity course focused on food systems would offer that students would not receive in other diversity requirement courses. At first I was not sure how to answer this. It took time and reflection, and actually teaching the course, to develop what I think is a sound response. As an anthropologist, I believe that the

need for food, sex, and belonging are drives that shape humanity and link us to our world. Food, or more specifically, eating, is the submission of the individual to the environment, and society prescribes inclusion and exclusion. Further, food inspires art, creativity, and relationships, and shapes production, economics, and interactions with our environment. Embedding a discussion of human diversity in a food systems course provides entry to the interaction between human perceptions of the self and the natural world, through a subject we each relate to, allowing us to discuss larger systems and the opportunities and constraints in those systems. In this approach, students have the opportunity to look around the system, to see the environmental, economic, and production components, and to locate where people labor in relation to ourselves and our locations.

The approach I take borrows from risk perception literature and my background as a practicing anthropologist. My work in risk perception and socio-cultural anthropology offered me insights for trying to build a learning environment that differentiates among beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and values held by students, individuals, groups in our readings, and the instructor. I think these distinctions are important as a university diversity course is unlikely to change a student's values, but it can alter perceptions by challenging beliefs and changing attitudes toward a topic, planting the seed for perceiving things differently.

In my experience, we give information and are unable to control how it is perceived or how it will be internalized to either enhance or alter existing beliefs and attitudes; that is a risk we take as educators. This evokes another important aspect of the learning process, the identification of current student knowledge and values. Rather than challenging values directly, I try to focus on challenging beliefs and attitudes that can alter perception with facts. If I begin by challenging a student's values, then all I may achieve is shutting off their learning. Pairing what is known by the students with course content that is new to them can be transformational for some and challenging for others. This long-term growth is essential.

This past semester, I learned that a critical


event was the shift in our perceptions of who we identify as a farmer. We learned there are many hidden or shadow-farmers whose labor is neither equitably compensated nor recognized and who are often exploited. Understanding the identities of these people and placing them within a system we all participate in helped shift our views away from seeing people as objects on the landscape and toward perceiving them as having goals, values, and desires similar to our own. We focused on ways to shape self-reflection in our readings and assignments to be cognizant that our desire to go into a community “to help” is supported by a social status and privilege affording us the opportunities and (very often) the social and economic freedoms to do this.

Through trial and error in class, I learned from students that emphasizing positive outcomes or positive actions are important no matter how dire the situation. Through reflection pieces, students have shared that negativity influences them to surmise that nothing can be done and leads them to the conclusion that there is little point in trying. Students have also shared their appreciation for my highlighting the importance of incremental change, and that there is value in small, local changes positively affecting people even when the larger system seems unchanged. As for the larger system, I try to impart an urgent need for policy shifts to move beyond individual action. To this end I try to highlight the historic role of information, education, technology, and subsidies (or simply IETS in the diffusion of innovation literature) that has shaped the 150-year development of the current conventional food and farming system. I trace the origin of this development to the 1862 Morrill Act and underscore the structural disadvantages shared across alternative-agriculture farmers.

This diversity requirement, I feel, is the tip of the iceberg of what food systems curriculum should provide students whose goals are “to help.” They need to be prepared to understand and partner with the people they want to help, which means being exposed to the histories of diversity and development successes and failures, the need for participatory design and engagement, and the impacts of self-directed programs grounded in the

privilege of outreach professionals versus community-based development. They also need concrete examples of the successes of others in these areas.

The big problem that I, and I assume others like me, face is knowing how and where to channel my white academic privilege, and how to coach students to channel their own, toward accomplishing meaningful assistance in partnerships with communities in need while not overstepping, reinforcing, and constructing more privilege. As most would expect, many white students found it difficult to accept the existence of white privilege as the output of systemic racism. Likewise, accepting that racism can extend a system of privilege among well-intended individuals in the food system where whites make judgments and decisions about others in the food system, exacerbating the problem of privilege, was by extension contentious. In negotiating this dilemma, I concede to my students that I have a certain privilege as a white male that my colleagues of other genders and racial categories do not. I am aware of the struggles and burdens of women in academia, and particularly women of color, and the varying degree of respect and gendered assumptions layered upon them by students, colleagues, and administration, specifically but not exclusively from white males. In contrast, I perceive an unspoken, unasked deference and respect from many students in and out of the classroom regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, and social class. Students are often surprised by this, although not all of them, and are interested in discussing it.

Acknowledging our privilege while drawing on our authority as educators can be a way to more comprehensively address diversity issues, challenge privileges in the food system, and construct a learning environment that makes these issues more accessible through interconnected contexts. White faculty and students may not be able to stop the privilege given them, but we can be more aware and better prepared for seeing how it shapes our perceptions, and how those perceptions influence expectations and solutions we may offer in addition to the outcomes we think are fair, just, responsible, and humane. This can allow us to deny this privilege over others in some domains while reflexively using it as a learning example for students. 

## References

Peña, O. (2015). Diversity education at land-grant universities from the perspective of a female student of color. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.020>

Rappaport, R. (1993). Distinguished Lecture in General Anthropology: The anthropology of trouble. *American Anthropologist*, 95(2), 295–303.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/aa.1993.95.2.02a00020>



## Food Solutions New England: Racial equity, food justice, and food system transformation

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS WORK

Joanne D. Burke <sup>a\*</sup>

University of New Hampshire

Karen A. Spiller <sup>b</sup>

KAS Consulting and University of New Hampshire

Submitted June 24, 2015 / Published online September 17, 2015

Citation: Burke, J. D., & Spiller, K. A. (2015). Food Solutions New England: Racial equity, food justice and food system transformation. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 165–171. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.027>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

When originally conceived, the efforts of Food Solutions New England (FSNE) were centered on discovering the potential and possibility of working together as a six-state entity. Our first New England summit was convened in 2011. We considered the benefits of working together regionally, explored the possibilities of promoting greater food justice, and embraced the merits of expanding food production via the concept of a

New England Food Vision. By 2012 we had adopted the collective impact model as a way to organize our work. In 2013, during this first year of breakout sessions we identified “racial equity and food justice” as non-negotiable, explicit attributes that should inform all food system work. We continue to learn and demonstrate a commitment to promoting greater racial equity and food justice through a variety of network and community strategies. Select examples from FSNE’s efforts are provided as evidence of the power of collective impact and regional collaboration. As states and regions come together to challenge the status quo, share strategies, and align policies and practices designed to address food system inequities, we are emboldened, knowing that our collective commitment and actions will have implications that extend well beyond the food system.

<sup>a\*</sup> *Corresponding author:* Joanne D. Burke, PhD, RD, LD., Thomas W. Haas Professor of Sustainable Food Systems, University of New Hampshire (UNH) Sustainability Institute; co-chair of Food Solutions New England, Racial Equity and Food Justice Working Group; and director of the UNH Dietetic Internship in the UNH Nutrition Program. She can be contacted at 129 Main Kendall Hall, Kendall Hall; Durham, New Hampshire 03824 USA; +1-603-862-1456; [joanne.burke@unh.edu](mailto:joanne.burke@unh.edu)

<sup>b</sup> Karen A. Spiller, KAS Consulting, Principal, and University of New Hampshire, Sustainability Institute, co-chair of Food Solutions New England, Racial Equity and Food Justice Working Group. She can be contacted at KAS Consulting; P.O. Box 52476; Boston, Massachusetts 02205 USA.

### Keywords

food systems, racial equity, food justice, New England Food Vision, collective impact, food insecurity, racial disparity, sustainability



This food system works for some, but fails too many of us. Yet, we have a glimpse of the possibility of a just and healthy food system. To get there, we must use a critical race lens to diagnose what's wrong with the current system, assess entry points for change, and determine ways that we can work together to build a better system for all of us. (Gaincatarino & Noor, 2014, p. 4)

### Current Realities

During the past 20 years, there has been increasing interest in understanding food system viability and sustainability. Efforts often have focused on food production and the potential economic and environmental benefits to farmers, consumers, and local and regional food enterprises. In this issue of the *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, we have the opportunity to explore efforts and commitments that explicitly focus on the role of racial equity and food justice as integral components of food system transformation. As we challenge the status quo, share strategies, and explore policies and practices designed to promote greater racial equity and food justice, we realize this is indeed a journey in which we are all learning. We know that this work is essential and its positive impact will extend well beyond the grocery cart.

With input from a regional steering committee, in 2011 the University of New Hampshire Sustainability Institute launched an inaugural “Better Together” summit, designed to learn more about each state’s food system work and to leverage commitment to building a more just, democratic, and sustainable food system. Another key theme addressed at our first conference was structural racism. Cathrine Sneed, founder of The Garden Project in San Francisco, served as a keynote speaker, and attendees viewed the FSNE *Voices from the Field* video.<sup>1</sup> Efforts at this first summit to build alignment around common goals and explore regional food production and fisheries capacity have led to the emergence of Food Solutions New England (FSNE), a highly collaborative food

system “learning action network” (FSNE, 2015a); the 2014 release of the report *A New England Food Vision* (Donahue et al., 2014); and extensive connections, relationships, alignments, and learning among numerous state and regional partners. Our regional capacity to connect, envision possibilities, build relationships, and leverage resources has been enhanced by using the collective impact model proposed by Kania and Kramer (2011). As a network of individuals, partners, and organizations, we have been able to help each other in efforts designed to advance policies and practices that transform the food and fisheries system into one that works for all (Bowell et al., 2014; FSNE, 2015b). The evolution of the regional commitment to an explicit emphasis on racial equity and food justice in food system work in 2013 is indicative of our transformation as a region, and of the larger national discourse on the need for structural changes that dismantle racial inequalities and injustice across the American social, political, and economic systems.

### Historical Context and Implications

The American food system has been defined by its exploitation of Native American lands, development of an agricultural trade system built on the backs of slave labor, and a lack of appreciation for farmers and farmworkers. Unfortunately, from farm to fork, to health and nutrition outcomes, food system inequality persists nearly 150 years after the end of the Civil War and over 50 years after passage of “landmark” civil rights legislation. Though the need for food unites us all, access to healthy food and the ability to fully participate in the food system is often divided along racial and ethnic lines. As we commit to designing a more equitable food future that supports a high quality of life for generations to come, we are compelled to address the pervasive systemic racial disparity operating at all levels of the food system. There is increased awareness by non-Hispanic Whites (and a lived experience by others) that White privilege and structural racism are actively and insidiously at play. According to Lawrence and Keleher (2004):

Structural racism in the U.S. is the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics

---

<sup>1</sup> See the *Voices from the Field* video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igb2VHAtx5M>

—historical, cultural, institutional and inter-personal—that routinely advantage Whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. It is a system of hierarchy and inequity, primarily characterized by white supremacy—the preferential treatment, privilege and power for White people at the expense of Black, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Arab and other racially oppressed people. (p. 1)

For instance, if you are Black or Hispanic in the United States you are less likely to own farmland (U.S. Census of Agriculture, 2012), to be able to procure healthy foods (Coleman-Jensen, Gregory, & Singh, 2014; Coleman-Jensen, Rabbitt, Gregory, & Singh, 2015; DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014), to have a livable wage income (Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, 2013; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014a, 2014b; U.S. Census Bureau, 2013), to have adequate access to money (Sommeiller & Price, 2015), or to have health outcomes comparable to White, non-Hispanic individuals (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2014). Table 1 displays how food insecurity, poverty, and unemployment disproportionately affect Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians, compared with non-Hispanic Whites.

Indeed, many of the food system indicators of inequity are related and virtually inseparable. Under- and unemployment leads to poverty and

food insecurity. Higher paying jobs often require a college education. Given the high cost of a college education, many students from Black and Hispanic families are not in a financial position to attend college, thus limiting earning and wealth accumulation opportunities. But even when employed in similar food system jobs, People of Color tend to earn less than Whites (Sommeiller & Price, 2015). Likewise, when one lives in poverty, defined as an annual income of US\$24,250 for a family of four (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2015), the ability to choose healthy food (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015) and to engage in preventative healthcare is severely compromised.

### Emerging Food System Strategies

Often when we think about racism, we focus on individual attitudes or behaviors, which is important. Sometimes, we look at how particular institutions treat people of different races differently, which is also important. But to truly understand the root causes of racial inequity and thereby produce solutions that work for everyone, we need to take a structural race approach. That means looking at the food system through the lens of policies, institutions and people-together. (Gaincatarino & Noor, 2014, p. 6)

**Table 1: Food Insecurity, Poverty, and Unemployment by Race and Ethnicity**

Race and Ethnicity	% Food Insecurity (a)				% of Total U.S. Population (b)	% Below Poverty (c)	% Unemployed (d and e)
	% Food Secure (a)	% Total Food Insecurity	% Low Food Security	% Very Low Food Security			
White, non-Hispanic	89.4	10.6	6.0	4.6	64	9.6	5.3
Black, non-Hispanic	73.9	26.1	15.9	10.1	14	27.2	11.3
Hispanic	76.3	23.7	17.0	6.7	17	23.5	7.4
Other (a)	88.3	11.7	6.5	5.2			
Asian (b)					5	10.5	5.0

<sup>a</sup> Coleman-Jensen et al., 2014: The USDA includes food security data for the Asian population in the “other” category

<sup>b</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2013: provides specific data for the Asian population in its demographic and poverty datasets.

<sup>c</sup> DeNavas-Walt, C. & Proctor, 2014.

<sup>d</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014a.

<sup>e</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014b.

The food system is a microcosm of larger social systems that exist nationally and globally, but is one that people interact with intimately on a daily basis. The extreme complexity of the food system, coupled with the intricacies of the social, environmental, and economic systems in which it operates, demands complex, long-term skills and strategy development to ensure that the voices and needs of all food consumers are addressed now and into the future. It is no longer sufficient to demand expansion of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), a program that now serves nearly one in seven Americans (over 46 million Americans) who exist in poverty. In addition to securing immediate food needs, we need to interrogate why there are so many Americans who must rely to SNAP in order to provide food for themselves or their household members, and why are People of Color more apt to require SNAP assistance (Gray, 2014)? As proposed by Eric Holt-Giménez (2015):

Activists across the food movement are beginning to realize that the food system cannot be changed in isolation from the larger economic system. Sure, we can tinker around the edges of the issue and do useful work in the process. However, to fully appreciate the magnitude of the challenges we face and what will be needed to bring about a new food system in harmony with people's needs and the environment, we need to understand and confront the social, economic, and political foundations that created—and maintain—the food system we seek. (p. 25)

### **FSNE's Commitment to Addressing Racial Equity and Food Justice Explicitly in Food System Work**

As we consider selected examples of FSNE's commitment to addressing racial equity and food justice explicitly as central to its efforts, we do so in the spirit of knowing full well that we are not working or learning alone. Rather, it is the collective efforts of multiple regional and national partners, organizations, and activists who are committed to using food as a driver for greater social justice and racial equity.

During the first FSNE summit in 2011, we posed the question, "Would the New England states benefit from coming together and working on food system issues in a more collective and concerted manner?" With the recent convening of Summit Five in 2015, this six-state regional network has unequivocally answered that question in the affirmative. During our first summit, Vermont shared its newly released *Farm to Plate Strategic Plan* (Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, 2011) and offered assistance to the other states working on food system planning. Presently, all New England states either have statewide food plans or are drafting statewide plans or strategies. The initial concept call to examine New England's food production and fisheries capacity was also proposed in 2011; in Spring 2014, the report *A New England Food Vision* was released (Donahue et al., 2014). During the three-year, highly iterative process of developing this aspirational document, which initially focused on New England's production capacity by land and by sea, the conversation and focus of the Vision expanded. Input by diverse partners, organizations, and summit attendees informed our collective thinking and consciousness. *A New England Food Vision* proposes that New England could produce 50 percent of New England's food needs by 2060, and nearly two-thirds of its food requirements if we needed to move towards greater regional reliance. *A New England Food Vision* calls for access to healthy food to be considered as a basic human right (Anderson, 2013; Donahue et al., 2014). As noted by Tom Kelly, in the introduction page,

This vision is bold in scope and aspiration. It reflects a point of view informed by two principles: first, food is a powerful determinant of all aspects of quality of life the world over, including New England. Second, New Englanders can and should pursue a future in which food nourishes a social, economic, and environmental landscape that supports a high quality of life for everyone, for generations to come. So this vision is all about our choices and the conversation, learning, and purposeful decision-making in which we as a region can participate. (Donahue et al., 2014, front cover)

In March of 2015, FSNE hosted a webinar to explore how *A New England Food Vision* could be put to work in communities and the region (Kelly, Donahue, Spiller, Bourns, Burke, & Beal, 2015). With the UNH Sustainability Institute functioning as the backbone organization, using collective impact as a model (Kania & Kramer, 2011), taking the time and energy to build relationships, engaging highly skilled professional facilitation staff, building collaborative and diverse teams, and having public and philanthropic support (FSNE, 2015c) has shaped us as individuals and as a regional network. FSNE now defines itself as:

A regional, collaborative network organized around a single goal: to transform the New England food system into a resilient driver of racial equity and food justice, health, sustainable farming and fishing, and thriving communities. (FSNE, 2015d)

In addition to an expanded goal statement and the release of the *A New England Food Vision* report, and in service of increased racial equity in food system transformation, we continue to seek ways to increase diverse active participation. During this past year, we have launched an Ambassador program in the three most populated and racially diverse New England states: Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. Our three ambassadors have reached out to diverse audiences, and have engaged with and brought in additional people of color and organizations committed to comprehensively addressing the role of race and food justice in the food system. When funding permits, we anticipate our pilot Ambassador program will be expanded into the remaining New England States (Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont).

As we expand the voices at the food system transformation table, our food system conversations are more rich and diverse. For instance, at summit number five in June 2015 individuals directly engaged in food service work were invited as a new delegation to the summit. Our participants were far more diverse by age and race than other summits. We remain committed to building

diversity into our work and extended networks, as do our existing network partners.

In addition to our broad-based community and regional engagement, we have made a commitment to our food system planning teams and regional team partners to provide opportunities to help build our own internal capacity to thoughtfully address the subject of racial equity and food justice. Our regional facilitator, Curtis Ogden, from the Interaction Institute for Social Change, has worked with us for over three years and has extensive expertise in food system and racial equity work (Ogden, 2015). Our planning team meetings have included training sessions with national experts as well as with members of our extended New England network. FSNE also has started to develop working groups, including the Racial Equity and Food Justice working group. A major accomplishment of the working group this year was to expand upon the work of Moore and Irving to develop guidelines and resources for our first annual 21-Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge, launched in March 2015 (Moore & Irving [adapted by Spiller, Ogden, & Burke], 2015).

As FSNE continues on this journey, we will lift up our voices and use our collective power, of all races, to increase racial equity and food justice as a model for successful replicable system change. Racism and injustice are not unique to the food system. But the daily requirements for nourishment, the enormous work force that is involved directly and indirectly in the food system, and the extensive environmental and economic implications of food system injustice combine to provide compelling multi-sector opportunities through which transformational change can be realized.

Now our struggle is for genuine equality, which means economic equality. For we know now, that it isn't enough to integrate lunch counters. What does it profit a man to be able to eat at an integrated lunch counter if he doesn't have enough money to buy a hamburger? (King, 1968)



## References

- Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. (2014). *National healthcare quality and disparities report* (Pub. No. 15-0007). Rockville, Maryland: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, AHRQ. Retrieved from <http://www.ahrq.gov/research/findings/nhqdr/nhqdr14/index.html>
- Anderson, M. D. (2013). Beyond food security to realizing food rights in the US. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 29, 113–122. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2012.09.004>
- Bowell, B., Coffin, C., Courchesne, C., Frignoca, I., Greene, M., Iarrapino, A.,...Ruhf, K. (2014). *New England food policy: Building a sustainable food system*. Washington, D.C.: American Farmland Trust, Conservation Law Foundation, Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group. Retrieved from [http://www.clf.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/1.New\\_England\\_Food\\_Policy\\_FULL.pdf](http://www.clf.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/1.New_England_Food_Policy_FULL.pdf)
- Coleman-Jensen, A., Gregory, C., & Singh A. (2014). *Household food security in the United States in 2013* (Report No. ERR-173). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1565415/err173.pdf>
- Coleman-Jensen, A., Rabbitt, M., Gregory, C., & Singh, A. (2015). *Household food security in the United States in 2014* (Report No. ERR-194). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research and Service. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err194.aspx>
- DeNavas-Walt, C., & Proctor, B. D. (2014). Income and poverty in the United States: 2013 (Current Population Reports, P60-249). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2014/demo/p60-249.pdf>
- Donahue, B., Burke, J., Anderson, M., Beal, A., Kelly, T., Lapping, M.,...Berlin, L. (2014). *A New England food vision*. Durham: University of New Hampshire, Sustainability Institute, FSNE. Retrieved from [http://www.foodsolutionsne.org/sites/default/files/LowResNEFV\\_0.pdf](http://www.foodsolutionsne.org/sites/default/files/LowResNEFV_0.pdf)
- Food Solutions New England. (2015a). *Who we are/what we believe*. Durham, New Hampshire: FSNE. Retrieved from <http://www.foodsolutionsne.org/what-we-believe>
- Food Solutions New England. (2015b). *Six states, one region*. Durham, New Hampshire: FSNE. Retrieved from <http://www.foodsolutionsne.org/six-states-one-region/regional-alignment>
- Food Solutions New England. (2015c). *Who we are/how we work*. Durham, New Hampshire: FSNE. Retrieved from <http://www.foodsolutionsne.org/who-we-are/how-we-work>
- Food Solutions New England. (2015d). *Transforming New England's food system together*. Durham, New Hampshire: FSNE. Retrieved from <http://www.foodsolutionsne.org/>
- Gaincatarino, A., & Noor, S. (2014). Building the case for racial equity in the food system. New York: Center for Social Inclusion. Retrieved from <http://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org/building-the-case-for-racial-equity-in-the-food-system/>
- Gray, F. K. (2014). Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program households: Fiscal year 2013 (Report SNAP-14-CHAR). Alexandria, Virginia: USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/Characteristics2013.pdf>
- Holt-Giménez, E. (2015). Racism and capitalism: Dual challenges for the food movement. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(2), 23–25. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.052.014>
- Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 9(1), 36–41. Retrieved from [http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective\\_impact](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective_impact)
- Kelly, T., Donahue, B., Spiller, K., Bourns, C., Burke, J., & Beal, A. (2015, March 17). *Putting a New England food vision to work* [Webinar]. Durham: University of New Hampshire, Sustainability Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLMkrnwDcdE&feature=youtu.be>
- King, M. L., Jr. (1968). Speech in Memphis, Tennessee. Retrieved from <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2013/01/21/1180824/-Martin-Luther-King-Jr-Our-struggle-is-for-genuine-equality-which-means-economic-equality>
- Lawrence, K., & Keleher, T. (2004). *Chronic disparity: Strong and pervasive evidence of racial inequalities: Poverty outcomes: Structural racism*. Race and Public Policy Conference, 2004. Retrieved from <http://www.intergroupresources.com/rc/Definitions%20of%20Racism.pdf>

- Moore, E., & Irving, D. (Adapted by Spiller, K., Ogden, C., & Burke, J.). (2015). *The 21-day racial equity habit building challenge*. Durham, New Hampshire: FSNE. Retrieved from <http://www.foodsolutionsne.org/get-involved/21-day-racial-equity-habit-building-challenge>
- Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. (2015). *U.S. federal poverty guidelines used to determine financial eligibility for certain federal programs*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/15poverty.cfm>
- Ogden, C. (2015). *Senior associate*. Boston, Massachusetts: Interaction Institute for Social Change. Retrieved from <http://interactioninstitute.org/people/curtis-ogden/>
- Restaurant Opportunities Centers United. (2013). *Realizing the dream: How the minimum wage impacts racial equity in the restaurant industry and in America*. New York: Author. Retrieved from [http://rocunited.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/report\\_realizing-the-dream.pdf](http://rocunited.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/report_realizing-the-dream.pdf)
- Sommeiller, E., & Price, M. (2015). *The increasingly unequal states of America: Income inequality by state, 1917 to 2012*. Washington, D.C.: Economic Analysis and Research Network. Retrieved from <http://s3.epi.org/files/2014/IncreasinglyUnequalStatesofAmerica1917to2012.pdf>
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2014a). *Household data annual averages. Table 5: Employment status of the civilian non-institutional population by sex, age, and race 2014*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat05.pdf>
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2014b). *Household data annual averages. Table 6: Employment status of the Hispanic or Latino population by sex, age, and detailed ethnic group*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat06.pdf>
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2015). *Consumer expenditures in 2013* (Report No. 1053). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/cex/csxann13.pdf>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2013). *USA QuickFacts*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html>
- U.S. Census of Agriculture. (2012). *Race/ethnicity/gender profile*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. Retrieved from [http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online\\_Resources/Race\\_Ethnicity\\_and\\_Gender\\_Profiles/cpd99000.pdf](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/Race_Ethnicity_and_Gender_Profiles/cpd99000.pdf)
- Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund. (2011). *Farm to plate strategic plan*. Montpelier, Vermont: Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, Vermont Farm to Plate Network. Retrieved from <http://www.vtfarmtoplate.com/plan/>





## Privilege and allyship in nonprofit food justice organizations

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS

Danny W. Tarng\*  
Rutgers University–Camden

Submitted July 7, 2015 / Published online September 17, 2015

Citation: Tarng, D. W. (2015). Privilege and allyship in nonprofit food justice organizations. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 173–177. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.029>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

Nonprofit urban agriculture organizations are a key component of the food justice movement in U.S. cities. As the movement grows, an increasing number of allies will perform community food work and take leadership roles in nonprofit food justice organizations. One key to the ongoing growth and success of the movement is how allies transform their privilege into empowerment at an organizational scale. This commentary provides insight on how certain organizational policies and practice can lead to better allyship.

### Keywords

food justice, community food, food movement,

allyship, privilege, empowerment, organization theory, shared leadership, social movement, nonprofit organizations, professionalization, urban agriculture

While many highly visible, effective nonprofit food justice organizations are led by members of underprivileged social groups, a great number of nonprofit food justice organizations are created, led, and staffed by allies. By definition, allies are individuals from dominant social groups who work “to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based on their social-group membership” (Broido, 2000, p.3; see also: Washington & Evans, 1991). When doing social justice work, allies must firmly grasp their own positionality and constantly engage in self-reflection in order to identify ways in which their biases and approaches may be leading to counter-productive efforts (K. E. Edwards, 2006). Allyship’s built-in self-reflection on one’s unearned privileges closely mirrors the practice of cultural humility, i.e., a “lifelong commitment to self-

---

\* Danny W. Tarng, Department of Public Policy and Administration, Rutgers University–Camden; 401 Cooper Street; Camden, New Jersey 08102 USA;  
[danny.tarng@rutgers.edu](mailto:danny.tarng@rutgers.edu)

### Note

This commentary is based on the author’s ongoing dissertation work.

evaluation and critique, to redressing power imbalances...and to developing mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic partnerships with communities on behalf of individuals and defined populations” (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998, p. 117). Of interest here is how ally-led or ally-heavy urban agriculture organizations in U.S. can pursue nonpaternalistic and mutually beneficial work.

Much of today’s food justice ally work in U.S. cities is encouraging, although some of it is met with skepticism from academics, activists, and others within the food justice movement, including members of the social groups whom allies seek to support. Some of this skepticism deals with the whiteness of alternative food (Alkon, 2012; Guthman, 2008, 2011; Slocum, 2006), with particular emphasis on the lack of People of Color in organizational leadership positions (Slocum, 2006). Ally-led or ally-heavy organizations will always be fighting the perception that they are outsiders imposing their ideas on a local population. Even if an organization gains the formal support of a local community group or community leaders, there will always be other local community stakeholders who remain suspicious of the ally organization’s presence. With increasing institutional support for food justice, especially in the form of new or bolstered academic programs and policy institutes focusing on critical food studies and social justice, there will be an even greater influx of individuals from privileged backgrounds seeking community food jobs. This influx of outsiders with formal credentials that designate them as “qualified” in their field of practice will lead to an increasing professionalization of community food work, which if left unchecked can lead to food justice nonprofits settling for more moderate political goals (Jenkins, 1998) and centralizing decision-making authority (B. Edwards, 1994). It is important, then, that we closely examine both the concept and practice of food justice allyship so that current and future allies can avoid causing unintentional harm and creating trajectories leading to further exclusion of the social groups they are trying to support.

To re-emphasize, *privilege or the lack of it* is what separates allies from members of social groups that allies seek to support. It is often said in the food

justice community that allies must start by first “acknowledging their privileges.” Yet there is a great disparity between allies being aware of their privileges and their nonprofit organizations operating in a manner consistent with said level of awareness. Newman and Lake (2006) explain this disparity from a systems perspective, noting that the neoliberal framework in which today’s community-based organizations function limits their potential for political militancy and also allows them to avoid accountability to the communities in which they operate. From an organizational behavior perspective, concepts such as mission drift (see Ebrahim, Battilana & Mair, 2014; Jones, 2007; Weisbrod, 2004), autocratic decision-making processes, and groupthink (Janis, 1982; Nemeth & Staw, 1989) are common explanations for why organizations might cause unintentional harm. While understanding that all of these explanations are very important, this commentary is focused on how allies can transform their privilege into empowerment through organizational policies and practice.

With respect to food justice, privilege is commonly discussed in terms of food access. For example, someone living in a middle class suburb has easier access to affordable, fresh, healthy, and culturally appropriate food than someone living in a poor urban area or remote rural town. When placed within the context of nonprofit organizations, however, privilege denotes *control over resources*. While there are several factors that determine a nonprofit’s ability to thrive, the lifeblood of formal nonprofits consists primarily of financial, human and social capital. For allies to share and eventually relinquish access to these resources in a resource-scarce environment seems like a counterintuitive strategy, for on its face it is threatening to the survival of one’s career and organization. My response to this concern is that it is important for allies to reclaim the initial spirit of community-based organizations, that is, to shift accountability and stakeholdership from external funding institutions back to the community, to grow local leaders capable of accessing the necessary resources to build community, and to collaborate more effectively with other community-based organizations that share common goals.

The two cases below document organizations<sup>1</sup> that have taken steps toward transforming their privilege into empowerment; in the first case, the transformation has been in an *intraorganizational* manner, and in the second case has been in an *interorganizational* manner.

### **Intraorganizational Empowerment: Organizational Policy and Structure**

One ally-led community food work organization distributes the power of privilege by implementing horizontal organizational governance practices. More precisely, the organization devolves key decision-making authority over program implementation from upper levels of management to the relevant program staff. In this case it is particularly important to note that some program staff are members of the disenfranchised social group that the organization supports. This organizational practice provides valuable program management and leadership experience to people who might not otherwise have opportunities to lead others and make important decisions in a formal organizational setting. This practice might also be an important stepping-stone toward increased responsibilities, allowing for the development of higher-level management skills that could transfer to other fields and enhance these individuals' social mobility and economic security. In the best-case scenario, this job experience leads to each individual's self-determination as a socially conscious, politically active, and productive member of society.

To institutionalize this empowerment strategy, boards and upper-level management together can formulate a vision and implement organizational policy that commits to the idea of homegrown succession, wherein the organization must (1) meet a quota of paid employees who come from within the community that the organization serves, and (2) train these employees to become leaders of the organization or leaders of new spin-off or partner organizations. Such a policy will both address the immediate need for living-wage jobs in a distressed community, as well as commit the organization to a future in which allies are willing to share authority

and allow homegrown leaders to more fully determine the trajectory of food and social justice work in their communities.

Critical to the success of this homegrown succession policy are some important factors. One of the most important is that an organization must have the organizational culture, structure, and capacity to accommodate shared leadership (see Pearce & Conger, 2002). In an ideal situation, directorship is shared between multiple staff. Some executive-level decisions with major ramifications are made by consensus, while the power to make less important executive decisions are distributed among co-directors. To build towards this leadership model it is vital to find resources to invest into developing the managerial competency of staff. The organization must possess the savvy to sell to their funders the importance of building the organization from within, or else seek other sources of revenue that do not restrict the organization's restructuring and political activity. In regard to actual empowerment tactics, allies must acquaint their future co-leaders with the relevant philanthropic, nonprofit, and community-development worlds. For example, allies can engage their future co-leaders in the grant-writing process and encourage them to participate in settings where greater decisions about our food systems occur (e.g., on food policy councils, at city planning meetings, and at meetings with legislators).

### **Interorganizational Empowerment: A Programmatic Approach**

The second organization acts as the city's one-stop shop for garden resources, but creates its most sustainable impact by developing the capacity of its gardeners to facilitate change in their own communities. Affiliated gardeners who demonstrate a certain level of competence in horticulture and express a serious interest in taking on greater responsibility in their communities can attend a training program that provides trainees with the necessary resources and horticultural and community-organizing skills to become community leaders. The aspects of this training program specific to community organizing include strategies on how to engage neighbors, build community support, and entrust others with leadership

---

<sup>1</sup> Identifiers were removed to protect the identity of these organizations.

responsibilities. The training program also instructs its participants on some important financial management competencies such as identifying sources of funding, grant-writing, budgeting, planning, and reporting.

Many graduates of the program have gone on to build community gardens and lead their own gardening workshops, while some have started their own nonprofit organizations. One of these nonprofits has addressed serious public safety concerns in its neighborhood by organizing community patrols and utilizing an array of urban greening efforts, including community gardens, market gardens that employ youths, and vacant-lot clearing and maintenance projects. Another training program participant went on to transform her organization from a small youth-development program into a community food hub that now runs a farm (composed of multiple affiliated market gardens), farmers market, shared commercial kitchen space, and resource center for local neighborhood gardeners.

Underpinning these transformative approaches to community-building and food justice is the philosophy that professionalized nonprofit organizations should do things “with” and not “for” their communities (Skocpol, 2003). Instead of building the community gardens or completing the urban agriculture-related projects for others, this case organization provides the necessary resources and technical support for those communities to organize and build these projects themselves.

## Discussion

The ally’s position in the community becomes more genuine and less impeachable when they are actively sharing their control over resources with members of the social group they are supporting. It also helps both the perception of the food justice movement as well as its outlook if its leadership is more diverse. Ally-led organizations doing community food work will always face issues of perception from critics and be met with suspicion by members of local disenfranchised communities. Well informed allies already understand that their presence as outsiders in disenfranchised communities represents a threat of displacement. Real or not, these perceptions are damaging to a food justice

movement that is already trending toward increased professionalization. Despite the highest levels of self-awareness and self-reflection, it will always be hard for a strong ally to recognize when he or she is becoming part of the problem.

Scholars should also to continue to critically re-examine the role of nonprofit organizations in the food justice movement altogether. The ways that nonprofit food justice organizations are being funded and hence operate are becoming more homogenous and coherent with the way nonprofit organizations in different social service arenas operate (see Hwang & Powell, 2009). While there is ample evidence to suggest that nonprofits can induce policy change through practice in the manner of policy entrepreneurship, a compelling argument can be made that some of these policy innovations are neoliberal in nature and ultimately come at the expense of building social movements and making greater systems change (DeFilippis, Fisher, & Shragge, 2010). This is not to suggest that nonprofits should pursue monumental social change completely at the expense of short-term poverty alleviation efforts. Instead, nonprofits could perhaps build more constituent mobilization efforts into their current work.

## References

- Alkon, A. H. (2012). *Black, white, and green: Farmers markets, race, and the green economy*. Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press.
- Broido, E. M. (2000). The development of social justice allies during college: A phenomenological investigation. *Journal of College Student Development*, 41(1), 3–18.
- DeFilippis, J., Fisher, R., & Shragge, E. (2010). *Contesting community: The limits and potential of local organizing*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Ebrahim, A., Battilana, J., & Mair, J. (2014). The governance of social enterprises: Mission drift and accountability challenges in hybrid organizations. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 34, 81–100. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2014.09.001>
- Edwards, B. (1994). Semiformal organizational structure among social movement organizations: An analysis of the U.S. peace movement. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 23(4), 309–333. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/089976409402300403>

- Edwards, K. E. (2006). Aspiring social justice ally identity development: A conceptual model. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 43(4), 1235–1256. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.1722>
- Guthman, J. (2008). Bringing good food to others: Investigating the subjects of alternative food practice. *Cultural Geographies*, 15(4), 431–447. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1474474008094315>
- Guthman, J. (2011). “If they only knew”: The unbearable whiteness of alternative food. In A. H. Alkon & J. Agyeman (Eds.), *Cultivating food justice: Race, class, and sustainability* (pp. 263–281). Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Hwang, H., & Powell, W. W. (2009). The rationalization of charity: The influences of professionalism in the nonprofit sector. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 54(2), 268–298. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2189/asqu.2009.54.2.268>
- Janis, I. L. (1982). *Groupthink: Psychological studies of policy decisions and fiascos* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Jenkins, J. C. (1998). Channeling social protest: Foundation patronage of contemporary social movements. In W. W. Powell and E. S. Clemens (Eds.), *Private action and the public good* (pp. 206–216). New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.
- Jones, M. B. (2007). The multiple sources of mission drift. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 36(2), 299–307. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0899764007300385>
- Nemeth, C. J., & Staw, B. M. (1989). The tradeoffs of social control and innovation in groups and organizations. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 22, 175–210. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(08\)60308-1](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60308-1)
- Newman, K., & Lake, R. W. (2006). Democracy, bureaucracy and difference in US community development politics since 1968. *Progress in Human Geography*, 30(1), 44–61. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/0309132506ph590oa>
- Pearce, C. L., & Conger, J. A. (2002). *Shared leadership: Reframing the hows and whys of leadership*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE.
- Skocpol, T. (2003). *Diminished democracy: From membership to management in American civic life*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Slocum, R. (2006). Anti-racist practice and the work of community food organizations. *Antipode*, 38(2), 327–349. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2006.00582.x>
- Tervalon, M., & Murray-Garcia, J. (1998). Cultural humility versus cultural competence: A critical distinction in defining physician training outcomes in multicultural education. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 9(2), 117–125. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/hpu.2010.0233>
- Washington, J., & Evans, N. J. (1991). Becoming an ally. In N. J. Evans & V. A. Wall (Eds.), *Beyond tolerance: Gays, lesbians and bisexuals on campus* (pp. 195–204). Washington, D.C.: American College Personnel Association.
- Weisbrod, B. A. (2004). The pitfalls of profits. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2(3), 40–47. <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1850719>



## Concerning the unbearable whiteness of urban farming

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS

Antonio Roman-Alcalá \*  
San Francisco, California

Submitted to JAFSCD August 19, 2015 / Published online September 18, 2015

This commentary was originally written in 2010 for a newsletter of the San Francisco Bay Area-based food justice organization Planting Justice (<http://www.plantingjustice.org>). It is reprinted with minor edits with permission.

Citation: Roman-Alcalá, A. (2015). Concerning the unbearable whiteness of urban farming. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 179–181. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.031>

### Abstract

Based on the author's experience in urban agriculture projects and organizations in the United States, this commentary offers some basic, initial, and practical suggestions for how activists who are white or otherwise of relative privilege can approach “food justice” activism in ways that avoid re-inscribing white supremacy, and can more likely achieve the potential of transformative and multi-racial urban agriculture movements.

### Keywords

urban agriculture, race, identity, strategy, practitioner reflection

---

\* Antonio Roman-Alcalá had no institutional affiliation at the time of writing this commentary. He can be contacted at 3027 Harrison Street; San Francisco, California 94110 USA; +1-415-571-6660; [antidogmatist@gmail.com](mailto:antidogmatist@gmail.com)

Antonio Roman-Alcalá is an urban farming educator, permaculture designer, scholar of food systems and social movements, musician, and father. He enjoys (organic) ice cream. See more at [www.antonioromanalcala.com](http://www.antonioromanalcala.com)

First off, let me start by stating who I am. I am a native of San Francisco, California, born to two U.S. citizens. My ethnic background includes Mexican Mestizo, Eastern European Jew, and (like many younger people) smaller parts from all over the world. However, from an outsiders' perspective, I could easily be considered “white.” This is the frame that I bring with me: growing up as Latino in a Latino neighborhood, but losing much of that background to the ease of being white. I have, in part, grown into my name being pronounced “Ant-oh-knee-oh” instead of “Ant-ohn-yo.”

That said, I identify strongly as an antiracist activist. Not meaning that I am not racist, or still struggling with issues of race, but that I strive within my life to question, address, and confront the ongoing oppressions we all experience in a white supremacist world.

My entry into the world of food justice organizing, through my work at Alemany Farm (in San Francisco), was unavoidably steeped in these sorts of issues. But how I go about my work, and



my perspective on the complexities of race politics, have changed much since that period. I now see a much more complicated picture, and not one that is simply rosy when it comes to being a white-identified person working for justice with or in communities of color. And it seems like an increasingly unfunny joke to note that most people working in the sustainable/fair/green/organic/local/urban food production world are white.

There is no way I could posit a solution to this joke, or make it somehow funnier, but I hope to at least offer one perspective on it.

What guides me still are words attributed to Aboriginal artist Lilla Watson:

If you have come here to help me, you are  
wasting our time.

If you have come here because your  
liberation is bound up with mine, then let us  
work together.

Black, White, Latino, whomever: we are all subject to the whims and injustices of an exploitative, inhumane, and grossly unsustainable capitalist system. While in the present moment, we must acknowledge that having certain attributes (lighter skin color, upper class status, higher education, male gender) can lead to more resources and opportunities (and that the long-touted American Dream is but a mirage for many sectors of the U.S. population), we must also see that “No one is free when others are oppressed.” This goes for the “poor” folks in West Oakland as well as the “middle class” folks attending the University of California at Berkeley. Besides a minute percentage of the population who do not have to work for a living, we are all survivors of a broken system, and it is incumbent on us to find ways to challenge this system *together*.

I prefer not to blame anyone who has started on a path towards food justice activism, simply because they are white. The important question is how they go about that activism. What are some methods and strategies for being an antiracist food justice activist, working to change the norm of a white-dominated food sustainability scene? Here are some ideas to start with:

1. *Go to where people are at, not where you want them to be.* Stay far away from “knowing what is best for people.” If people in your neighborhood don’t care about growing food, don’t force it. Maybe people feel more excited about an after-school program teaching photography to youth? If so, try to integrate your food-based ideas into programs that the community actually wants. Unite your interests with those of whom you work with; don’t patronize.
2. *At the same time, don’t accommodate people to the extent of ignoring your own needs, desires, strengths or personal mental health.* While we must acknowledge the role of people’s internalized oppression and racism, and the “problem” behaviors that come from it, giving license to someone to act anti-socially, *because of their skin color*, is just another form of racism. Likewise, do not deny that you want to address food issues, if that is your passion.
3. *Don’t operate from assumptions.* This is general life advice, of course, but goes especially for activism. For instance, the naïve notion many new food justice activists have that “if only they [read: poor, black/brown people] knew about where their food came from, they would make better choices.” *Maybe* this is true, for some people. But if your goal is to change and improve people’s lives, you must start by asking folks what that change would look like, and what it might take to accomplish it. Maybe a central concern is not for organic food, but for having more time to cook? Maybe having a better income would allow for more freedom in food spending habits? Consider the possibility that a local grocery store might be more helpful than 15 community gardens...
4. *Always be focused on leadership development.* One of the main problems for antiracist whites is that they do not like being treated as, well, white people. In many marginalized communities and communities of color there can be a lot of (justified) resentment and distrust of outsiders (those seen as “others” or part of the dominant elite). While we should work to break down these barriers over time, perhaps more importantly, we must use whatever privilege we have to support the capacity of these communities to

work *for themselves*. Youth especially love to be taught by someone who looks like them, and so, if you are interested in being of service to a community that doesn't look like you, *train the trainers*. Work toward your own position being obsolete.

5. *Within group processes, always be conscious of how privileges may be affecting group dynamics* (but once again beware of overaccommodation to the point of being patronizing). Simple strategies like effective, shared facilitation, and checking in with each participant to make sure they feel heard, do wonders for the efficacy and longevity of any project. The operative words for white, male, rich, or otherwise privileged activist: *step back*.
6. *Do not downplay, and even more, CELEBRATE non-white contributions to food justice*. Many events that I go to about urban farming tend to be homogenously white. But I know that, around the country (and of course the world!), people of color are leading the charge for socially

relevant farming. Growing Power's Will Allen is a beacon; as is Boston's Food Project, whose leadership over time came to better reflect the populations it served. Los Angeles's South Central Farmers represent the agrarian vitality of Central American migrants to the U.S., while in the Bay Area People's Grocery and the Richmond Eco-Village are both led by people of color. We can also learn something from the Asian immigrant community, some of whom (the Hmong) are among the best urban farmers in California. In many cases, Asian neighborhoods (with just as low incomes as other "food desert" areas) manage to have thriving food markets and healthy family diets. We all have something to learn from each other, and we must be careful not to downplay or denigrate any particular ethnic or racial group's ownership over the concept of universal access to food that is good, clean, fair, affordable, and delicious.





## Three strategies to foster diversity in the food movement

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS

Hilary King\*  
Emory University

Submitted July 16, 2015 / Published online September 18, 2015

Citation: King, H. (2015). Three strategies to foster diversity in the food movement. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 183–187. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.030>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

This commentary explores strategies for coalition-building and reallocating resources across racial divides within alternative food systems. Following analysis of a set of public conversations held in Atlanta, Georgia, in spring 2015, I identify three strategies that may promote greater diversity: (1) the allocation of institutional and academic resources beyond historically privileged spaces; (2) the development of a shared historical context for framing and shaping collaborative, antiracist work; and (3) the commitment of policy-makers to execute the ideas of food producers. These

strategies, pursued in conjunction, may aid in addressing regional and neighborhood discrepancies in representation in food system leadership and also foster a stronger, antiracist alternative food system.

### Keywords

alternative food systems, Atlanta, coalition, collaboration, diversity, inequity, farmers, food justice, race, racism, strategies

### Introduction

In Atlanta, Georgia, no shortage of racialized history shapes our existing food system. This same history shapes the alternative food systems through which practitioners and academics seek to address the inequity in food access, economic development, and sustainable food production that is disproportionately borne as a result of one's racial identity (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Block, Scribner, & DeSalvo, 2004; Franco, Diez Roux, Glass, Caballero, & Brancati, 2008). Evidence demonstrates that discrepancies in access to resources

---

\* Hilary King, Department of Anthropology, Emory University; 1557 Dickey Drive; Atlanta, Georgia 30307 USA; +1-541-778-4631; [hking@emory.edu](mailto:hking@emory.edu)

### Disclosure

Hilary King, primary author and applied anthropologist, works part-time with Community Farmers Markets, one of the organizations that sponsored the event with Eric Holt-Giménez and Grow Where You Are at the King Center in March 2015.

correlate with histories of injustice and racism. In the spring 2015 issues of the *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, Tanaka, Indiano, Soley, and Mooney (2015) examine regional discrepancies in the funding of USDA Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program (CFPCGP). They find that there is a large regional discrepancy in grant allocation, leaving the Southern region of the U.S. particularly under-represented in terms of funded projects.

Their findings encouraged me to examine how similar disparities in access to resources may operate on and be addressed on smaller scales, particularly on a citywide level. My analysis of a series of conversations and events held in Atlanta in spring 2015<sup>1</sup> led me to identify three major strategies to respond more comprehensively to the discrepancy highlighted by Tanaka et al. They are: (1) the purposeful allocation of institutional and academic resources beyond historically privileged arenas; (2) the development of a shared historical context in framing and shaping collaborative, antiracist work; and (3) the commitment of those of us in policy-related positions to act on and execute the ideas of food producers. Cities suffer from many of the same racial and cultural inequities that regions often do. The pursuit of these three strategies, in conjunction, may further the development of a shared system from which to address disparities like those identified by Tanaka et al. (2015).

### **1. Allocate Institutional and Academic Resources Beyond “White Space”**

To address racism in our food systems, it is necessary to bring to light the historical and contemporary inequities that exist. It is critical to undertake this project in spaces where people of color and white people can come together to explore this history and confront its ramifications. The spaces that facilitate these interactions may not be within the

institutions that support such explorations. It is critical, therefore, to use institutional and academic resources to bring events, conversation, and explorations beyond the boundaries of those institutions.

In March 2015, Emory University hosted Eric Holt-Giménez of Food First for the lecture, “Dismantling Racism in the Food System.” Rather than running a single event, activists at Emory partnered with food system organizations to do an additional version of this event at The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change (the King Center), an educational memorial and social change center honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. Though both events were widely publicized, the event at the King Center received much more media attention and a very different spectrum of attendance. The Emory event was attended primarily by students. In contrast, the King Center event drew more than 80 people from across the city. The Emory event was scheduled as a lecture followed by a question and answer period. The King Center event was a short lecture followed by a community discussion. The racial makeup of the audiences differed greatly; at Emory, attendees were primarily white. Attendees at the King Center were primarily people of color, including activists, farmers, academics, community members.

To understand the difference in attendance at these two events, it is useful to examine Anderson’s (2015) ideas of “white space” and “black space.” Anderson puts forth the idea that although racial integration has progressed since the civil rights movement, overwhelmingly white neighborhoods, schools, restaurants, and public spaces remain. Blacks, and other people of color, may perceive these to be “white spaces” informally off limits to them. To engage in racially inclusive ways, it is critical to move conversations beyond the “white space.”

---

<sup>1</sup> The identification of these three strategies followed a set of public conversations held in Atlanta in February and March 2015. These consisted of a participatory workshop, “Food System Alchemy,” facilitated by Eugene Cooke and Nicole Bluh, hosted at the 2015 Georgia Organics Conference in Athens, Georgia, and the lecture and community discussion, “Dismantling Racism in the Food System,” hosted by Eric Holt-Giménez of Food First and the activist growers of

Grow Where You Are, an agricultural social enterprise located in Atlanta. These discussions were small steps in a long history of struggle, intervention, and action by food system activists of color in Atlanta, supported in this instance by the Black Heritage Museum and Cultural Center, Community Farmers Markets, Georgia Organics, Emory University, Food Well Alliance, Grow Where You Are, and Slow Food Atlanta.

The commitment to follow-up and partnerships following the events also differed. While the Emory event seems not to have produced great further engagement, the King Center event strengthened new partnerships. One example includes a new market being piloted at a public transit station in a historically black neighborhood. This project brings together Atlanta's public transit authority, MARTA; the South West Atlanta Growers Cooperative, made up of primarily black urban farmers; the Atlanta Community Food Bank; and Community Farmers Markets, which is a farmers' market umbrella organization in Atlanta.

The event at the King Center would not have been possible without institutional support for Holt-Giménez's honorarium and travel. However, Holt-Giménez was eager to share his expertise in an alternate setting. Planning community events that take place outside of the traditionally "white spaces" that have financial resources is an important strategy for building relationships and shared knowledge bases across racial and ethnic boundaries in the food system. Such pairings build institutional support and personal collaborations that create more inclusive spaces wherein institutional privilege can and should be challenged.

## **2. Build a Shared Historical and Analytical Framework**

Within community discussions that have brought race and racism in our food system to the forefront, many people have lauded an expanded historical context. As stated before, hosting conversations and events that provide this foundation can be fundamental for building partnerships with systemic potential. Holt-Giménez's lectures in spring 2015 reported the problematic history of agricultural industrialization on a global scale. The lecture focused on the fact that current global agricultural systems have largely been built on the backs of people of color and women. Through charts and narratives connecting food riots, stock prices of agroindustry corporations, and profits, the lecture provided an historical and analytical framework that situated existing divisions based on race within the global food system. This context made space for participants in the community discussion to flesh out how such divisions are

manifest within Atlanta.

Participants in this discussion expressed empowered sentiments following the examination of this history. One participant observed that, "the majority of the food grown worldwide is grown by people who are not educated through the formal system. They often grow food for other people, on land that used to be their own." This observation was coupled with outcries related to the lack of land available particularly to black farmers in Atlanta. Another participant asked, "What of what we have seen [in the lecture] is being replicated from the global food system here in Atlanta?" This led into a tense discussion about recent grant applications, funded and unfunded. Although these questions were not resolved, the contextualization of these issues in Atlanta within a global context seemed to generate a space to discuss the disparities that underlie some disputes about the allocation of resources and funding that correspond to existing marginalizations.

Kwabena Nkromo, executive director of Atlanta Food and Farm, eloquently expressed this idea, stating,

There is a fundamental need to have an understanding of this history... If we don't have an understanding of this history, then we will always be working from different foundations. We have to work on structures, because it is the structures that oppress us. If we just throw down our hands without understanding the structure, the work that we do will feed into that system.

It is pivotal that we work from a foundation that accounts for the historical contexts in which current food system inequities manifest.

## **3. Commit Analysts to Develop and Implement Food Producer's Ideas**

Within the food movement, I am currently given a stipend to work in front of my computer, analyzing inequities in the food system and working to build programs. In Atlanta the paid work of analysis and policy creation within the food system is disproportionately white. My work, however, is also built on the work of the people in the alternative food

movement who actually grow food and run food-related businesses. It is critical in my view that my work as an analyst be grounded in the solutions developed by the people producing the food in the food movement. Many are people of color. To know their ideas, it is necessary for me as an analyst to follow the two steps above to build relationships. The next step is to follow through on using my position to advance ideas that they deem most useful and which may produce some structural change.

During the conversations that are the basis for this commentary, Eugene Cooke, activist farmer at Grow Where You Are, a social-enterprise educational farm in South West Atlanta, called for microscale structural reforms. He asked young people who are salaried and working in advocacy and policy-based organizations to develop their own microgrant programs by pooling and allocating 3 percent of their incomes to support a farmer, provide grant-writing assistance, or address another need outside of bureaucratic or competitive funding opportunities.

Cooke also advocated for expanding the HUD Good Neighbor Next Door program, which makes certain single-family homes available to law enforcement officers, public school teachers, firefighters, and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) at a substantial discount, provided they agree to live in those homes for at least 36 months. Atlanta had more than 30,000 vacant homes in 2012—homes that could be made available to farmers through an expanded Good Neighbor Next Door program. Cooke and others like him are busy farming and do not have time to do the logistical work to submit these types of ideas to the USDA's competitive funding program that was analyzed by Tanaka et al. Ideas such as these come out of the needs and work of the people building our alternative food system. Many of the best ideas come from those who are most marginalized within both conventional and alternative agricultural systems. Many of us who have salaried work come from backgrounds of privilege. It is our responsibility as people with analytical jobs aimed at building a more just food system to bring ideas such as these, offered by people whose positions are more precarious, to fruition.

A unique limitation of working with farmers is that they want to be farmers; they lack time to develop programs that may best serve them. It is the responsibility of those of us who work to systematize and develop policy to connect with and pay attention to these food producers, and to shape our analyses and programs accordingly. Many people who work in the food system, as producers or food workers, continue to be people of color and those who are historically marginalized. Those of us who are paid to think about food systems have the privilege of doing so because of their work. It is therefore critical that we know them, and work from their knowledge and observations. If we fail to do so, we cannot build the more just, inclusive food system that we hope to build.

## Conclusion

The three crucial actions above are interrelated processes that build on each other to strengthen and implement the most innovative ideas in alternative food systems. These approaches work to connect policy-makers, resources, and food producers in our cities and our regions, sharing expertise while addressing the racialized and marginalizing context in which alternative food systems must function. Such approaches may aid those of us in the U.S. South to garner the greater institutional support that Tanaka et al. identified as lacking. Such support will facilitate building on the antiracist, socially embedded, engaged work that is already being done in our region, and lead us toward a more just and sustainable food system for all.



## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank and acknowledge many of the activists, scholars, and farmers whose work indirectly and directly shaped this article, particularly Colleen Morich, Daniel Crain, Eric Holt-Giménez, Eugene Cooke, Imran Battla, Jovanna Johnson-Cooke, Katie Hayes, Kim Karris, Peter Morich, Nicole Bluh, Tamara Jones, and Sarah Franzen.

## References

- Alkon, A. H., & Agyeman, J. (2011). *Cultivating food justice: race, class, and sustainability*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.



- Anderson, E. (2015). "The White Space." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 1(1), 10–21. <http://src.sagepub.com/>
- Block, J. P., Scribner, R. A., & DeSalvo, K. B. (2004). Fast food, race/ethnicity, and income: A geographic analysis. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 27(3), 211–217. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2004.06.007>
- Franco, M., Diez Roux, A. V., Glass, T. A., Caballero, B., & Brancati, F. L. (2008). Neighborhood characteristics and availability of healthy foods in Baltimore. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 35(6), 561–567. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2008.07.003>
- Tanaka, K., Indiano, E., Soley, G., & Mooney, P. H. (2015). Building the capacity for community food work: The geographic distribution of USDA Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program grantees. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(3), 97–111. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.053.006>



## Engaged advocacy and learning to represent the self: Positioning people of color in our contemporary food movement

COMMENTARY ON RACE AND  
ETHNICITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS WORK

Regina A. Bernard-Carreño \*  
Baruch College, City University of New York

Submitted June 15, 2015 / Published online September 21, 2015

Citation: Bernard-Carreño, R. A. (2015). Engaged advocacy and learning to represent the self: Positioning people of color in our contemporary food movement. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 189–193. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.028>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

### Abstract

Issues with access to food access are not solely that people of color are not included in the happenings of the food movement; it is also problematic just how our inclusion happens. Our issues within the movement are as diverse as we are, and there is no one particular narrative that can illustrate these sets of dilemmas easily. The solutions are even more difficult to generate and institute. Within these many complexities, however, both in addressing the problem and in finding positive results, there is also the problem of the lack of involvement within the community in a critical dialogue. Without a dialogue about these diverse sets of problems, working together to solve them seems a distant possibility.

### Keywords

food access, self-help, food sovereignty, people of color, culturally appropriate foods

### My Background in the Food System

I was born in New York City of Guyanese heritage and am currently an associate professor in Black and Latino Studies at Baruch College, City University of New York. But anyone who knows me also knows that my personal narrative related to the food system usually begins with the phrase, “growing up in Hell’s Kitchen in the 1970s.” In my Hell’s Kitchen neighborhood we had access to pizza, Chinese food, Afghan kebobs, and an enclosed farmers markets operating out of a parking garage. (It was not until the early 1990s that the neighborhood had its first sidewalk open-air farmers market that are now so commonly seen in the city.) We also had the choice of two major supermarkets: the A&P supermarket (Atlantic & Pacific Tea Co.), whose building is now a Citibank branch, and Red

---

\* Regina A. Bernard-Carreño, PhD, Associate Professor, Black and Latino Studies, Baruch College, City University of New York; 55 Lexington Avenue, Suite 4274VC; New York, New York 10010 USA; [profbernard.nyc@gmail.com](mailto:profbernard.nyc@gmail.com)

Apple Grocery, now Gristedes (another supermarket chain). Even with such a reasonable amount of access and despite people knowing how to cook and what to do with fresh vegetables, food struggles were not foreign to people in our neighborhood. Each month, west of our building a food pantry was operated in a church. The “cheese line,” as it was called by the neighborhood children, was where extremely poor families acquired basic food staples. Although our family did not qualify for this food benefit, I had many schoolmates who stood on that line for hours for groceries like powdered milk, cheese, canned fruits in heavy syrup, potatoes, and other items. Receiving families would always share their food with families who did not qualify for the benefit. This provided a great opportunity to organize around the topic of food access. Families never complained about the quality of their food items, although sometimes the quantity was disputed between distributor and recipient. Accepting their free groceries without hesitation or further inquiry is an attitude toward food benefits that is also seen in recipients today.

However, in addition to the food offerings within short walking distances, I also had access to the tradition of a home-cooked meal, Guyanese style. Every day I watched my working mother come home from work and wash her hands before washing every leaf in a bunch of callaloo. She stripped potatoes of their skin with a knife, not a fancy peeler, and measured dry rice with her hands, not a measuring cup. She even soaked dry beans overnight after working a 40-hour-a-week job and attending school three nights a week. Every weekend while most children were outside playing, I and sometimes my older siblings accompanied my parents out on a food-shopping trip. Sure, there were cans of Campbell’s soup in our shopping cart, but that was considered “emergency food.” Every single day, my mother made a fresh and hot breakfast of eggs, toast, juice, and hot chocolate (on winter mornings).

### **My Foray into Changing the Food System**

About a year ago I founded a farm-share program in Corona, Queens. It began very small, with just four members and an undergraduate student of mine alongside my husband and myself delivering

the shares from Manhattan to Queens on a weekly basis. It was not long before I realized that families and other community members were not only unable to participate because of the price, but they had no real understanding of what a farm share meant as a larger community responsibility. In addition, farm shares and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs have been identified mostly in white, affluent communities and therefore are aligned with being one of “their” social programs of community rather than need. For low-income communities, CSAs and similar program models are recent attempts to change the food access problem while signaling gentrification, a change that could mean their expulsion from the community. Shopping at the low-end chain supermarkets and the “fruit guy” at the train station’s corner leads to a perception of access that seems to quell any desire for more by most residents. This version of access remains popular because many of the members in the community are not yet being given examples of how the entire neighborhood could be reignited, reawakened, revamped simply through the distribution of food by the person who actually grew it. There was and still is a gap in understanding why a pesticide-laden bunch of cilantro is different from the bunch that a 100% organic farmer offers.

In many communities that are lacking in better food choices, there is, no doubt, a lack of conversation as well. Among all their pressing and pending life issues, quality of food just is not ranking high enough on the list of important struggles. Residents of affluent communities already have access to successful schools and better opportunities for work. They have careers in place, not just jobs, and an overabundance of access to life’s basic necessities. In low-income communities, these struggles stem from economic issues that rear their heads in every decision the family has to make, including food choices and whether or not critical thought is put into that decision each and every time food is consumed. This problem cannot be remedied by sending “organizers” into communities. There must be work on the part of the community itself to create its own organizers from among them. Only then can the problem be defined accurately and authentically. Only then can

valid and unique solutions be found that address specific and diverse needs, rather just challenging global food access issues. Understanding the challenge requires an understanding of what set of information people have access to. The fight cannot be simply about making sure organic kale is in the Black neighborhood, but rather why it should be available in the Black neighborhood as well. What is the larger point behind having this access, rather than just increasing access? As we can see, simply bringing it to the community without discussion and inclusion leads to wilt, among the produce and the members of the neighborhood.

### **Food Access Re-Evolution**

It is important to understand that food access for people of color has several layers, and these can be unpacked as we begin to regain our consciousness about our access and what we are eating on a regular basis. It is a common narrative in the larger public that people of colors' relationship to food is grounded in the overconsumption of fast food. However, many chefs of color are rewriting Black food history to reshape the dishes and recipes with more healthy ingredients. For some of us, if we were to consciously consider and study our Caribbean heritage, we would see that those diets historically were very green and largely about root vegetables. Critical but simple questions might arise, such as (1) if our diets were historically inclusive of spinach and sweet potatoes, then how come we are not eating them now? (2) Why can't we access them regularly? (3) Why are the big health-food stores monopolizing these groceries and making them largely unaffordable? (4) Why is there so much bureaucratic red tape in getting a farmers market to Black and Latino neighborhoods? (5) Why are we still very accepting of these circumstances?

The first step in the re-evolution has to be rethinking how we want to identify our relationship with food. There is a reason none of the fast-food restaurants in low-income Black and Latino neighborhoods are going out of business, but the libraries are losing funding. Perhaps through the redefinition of ourselves, we can change the dialogue in other groups about what they think they know about our history. Consider that the vegan

diet, with its affluent subscribers, is the original diet of the Rastas. Yet veganism has become synonymous with Whiteness, affluence, and privilege, particularly in a big city like New York. We have become so dependent on television to teach families how to cook that we do not realize that those who are on TV mostly do not resemble us, and they use ingredients that we may have to work very hard to find. We have lost our will to ask the big and simple questions about the dishes that not only we are cooking, but that others are cooking and claiming as their own or as legitimate reinventions of the food wheel. It is really a stab in the heart to hear a beloved TV chef say, "You can find this in your local supermarket," and you know immediately that they are not saying this with you in mind. For if they did, they would know that a good portion of their viewers in low-income communities cannot access most of those basic ingredients, let alone tomato paste in a tube. What we need urgently are a new articulation of demand, a reintroduction to cooperation, and an updated model on collectively working for change. The need for valid inclusion in the food movement has to happen in steps, and has to have the very people being advocated for at the center of the table. How else can any of us know the true problems that need addressing?

As part of this first step we need to begin developing a new vocabulary that can critically define the existing problem, as opposed to using popular phrases that do not necessarily qualify a universal experience. For many of us living in a place like New York City, we are not struggling with food deserts. Actually, there is an overabundance of food in many of the neighborhoods that are identified as being "in trouble." The problem is that a lot of the food that is available should also be considered slow-kill poison; it is sold in the same aisle as pest killer at some of the neighborhood bodegas. If families make a proactive decision to skip past the burger chains, fried chicken restaurants, and, in some neighborhoods, ethnic-specific fast food, then the dependency immediately falls onto the neighborhood supermarket. The people who work at the supermarkets, both behind the register and stocking the shelves, are usually Black or Latino and are sometimes recently arrived

immigrants. They reflect the shoppers in the community as well, so there is trust behind the purchasing experience. The owners however, are usually not from the neighborhood, do not speak the language of the shopper fluently, and are a different race altogether. They are marketing what they believe Black and Brown people use, eat, and enjoy. To some degree they must be right in their assessment, as items like canned food, frozen food, alcohol, salt, generic cold cuts (bits), soda, and fruit punch fly off the shelves. Many of the owners do not consider that the sincere “enjoyment” of these products comes from overconsumption and addiction to them, enabled by the very stores that sell them in plentitude. The fruits and vegetables at these supermarkets, when available, are waxy and shiny, and have colored lighting shining above them so they look fresh, farm-delivered, and ready to eat. It is not often you see a shopper at the local C-Town supermarket in Corona, Queens, using a smartphone to track the PLU code of a vegetable. There is not a single label in the supermarket that would be encountered in the supermarket of the affluent. No “non-GMO,” “vegan-friendly,” “allergen-free,” “rBGH-free.” But the time saved in not reviewing labels lets the shopper catch the bus and save a 20-minute walk home from the supermarket with heavy bags.

If we can begin to shift our vocabulary, we might be able then to engage in a better understanding of what we are actually accessing. The community most targeted for having a lack of options does not just need the option; it needs to rehabilitate the dialogue. The simple appearance of vegetables and fruit could signify gentrification. Everyone should be able to remain in their community but have access to quality food nearby as well. Healthy foods’ appearance should not just be due to new, affluent residents.


The second step in the food access re-evolution is using critical dialogue about better access as a pedagogical tool. Simply placing a salad bar in a school cafeteria is not going to make long-term changes if the child cannot access a bunch of carrots outside of the cafeteria. The pedagogical tool that is designed must be useful for everyone in the community. Existing “community workshops” around the food issue(s) are usually introduced to

low-income Black and Latino communities in a less-than-rewarding way. The same White, non-threatening faces that are repeatedly cast as “food heroes” are the same faces that shows up to teach these communities about “eating properly” and how to consume fruits and vegetables. Adult members of families who are solely responsible for the food choices in their home do not want to be patronized, or reprimanded, and do not want to feel like they are being taught what is obviously best for their families, including their children. This is not to take away credit from programs that have the best of intentions in their outreach practices, but I have been witness to several surveyors and outreach coordinators who (1) do not understand the community they are reaching out to; (2) have no long-term investment in the community they are working in; and (3) take outreach to mean tacitly dehumanizing members of the community they are serving. People should be offered culturally appropriate tools to actively engage in the pursuit of their own change.

Aligned with the second step is the reshaping of our image as people of color and our involvement in the food system and food movement. We have become the visually illustrative example of the nation’s “hungry.” Having this label hanging over our experience with food does not invite humanizing opportunities for change. Neither does it beckon us to consider and research our cultural food history, and it certainly does not hold anyone else to a standard when invited to our communities to “advocate.” Being identified as needy, be it due to unequal food access, inadequate or racist housing practices, or employment issues, detracts from the actual problem of inequality and economic disenfranchisement. Most of us in New York City and the outer boroughs, especially Queens, are not dying of starvation, although many of us fall weakness to atrocious food and are thus dying from our actual food consumption and choices. There is a desperate need to change our involvement in the food movement.

The third and final step of the re-evolution of food access is to promote leadership from within, even if it means alienating government officials, “do-gooders,” and our neighbors. Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire has always argued that the

oppressed must wage their own war, and that their teachings to each other must also include teaching the oppressor as well. To teach the oppressor (whomever and whatever that representation) is to begin freeing the oppressed. To engage in change any other way, or to be dependent on anyone else for a glimpse of liberation, might be to engage in a struggle for a reward of which we do not really understand the value. Organizers who do not

represent the communities that they advocate for and within cannot assume that everyone in those communities knows nothing about the change they wish to see. There are heroes and staunch community fighters living among those who are silent. If we are to own the re-evolution and lead in organizing, in defining change, and in articulating a positive act of inclusion, *those* heroes and fighters have to be actively sought out from our own ranks. 

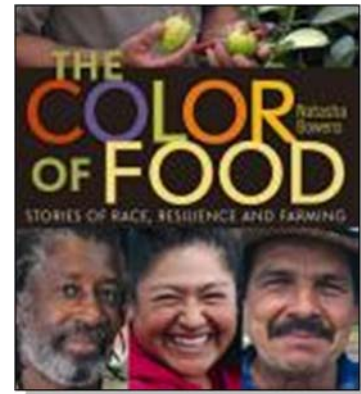




## A portrait of American farmers

Book review by Kathlee Freeman\*  
University of Missouri–Columbia

**Review of *The Color of Food: Stories of Race, Resilience and Farming*, by Natasha Bowens. (2013).** Gabriola Island, British Columbia, Canada: New Society Publishers. Available as paperback and ebook; 240 pages. Publisher's website:  
<http://www.newsociety.com/Books/C/The-Color-of-Food>



Submitted March 30, 2015 / Published online July 20, 2015

Citation: Freeman, K. (2015). A portrait of American farmers [Book review]. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 195–197. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.003>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

There is an agricultural renaissance of sorts taking place that can be seen in the rising sales of organic food, the sprouting of urban gardens throughout major cities, and the growing legion of locavores. While this surge of interest in what we eat and where it comes from is good for our health and communities, criticism that alternative food systems are elitist and inaccessible has tinged conversations around the growing good-food

movement. Indeed, all too often the story of this movement is told only through white voices.

Natasha Bowens' *The Color of Food* provides a window through which we can see a fuller picture of agriculture in the United States. The reader accompanies Bowens as she crisscrosses the country, revealing the many farmers and communities of color dedicated to their land, food sovereignty, and way of life. The book is a product of Bowens' travels across 15,000 miles (24,140 km) and 16 states to interview farmers of color and to unpack the often complicated emotions related to land ownership, farming, and the exploitation and oppression that has frequently been linked to agriculture.

Bowens introduces her subject matter by first telling her own story. Working as a political organizer and blogger in Washington, D.C., she became enamored with food and agriculture. Immersing herself in the alternative food movement, she participated in everything from attending

---

\* Kathlee Freeman, Rural Sociology Department, University of Missouri–Columbia; 121 Gentry Hall; Columbia, Missouri 65211 USA; +1-573-882-7451; [kaf4z7@mail.missouri.edu](mailto:kaf4z7@mail.missouri.edu)

Kathlee Freeman is a master's candidate at the University of Missouri–Columbia in rural sociology while also working toward a graduate certificate in geographic information science. Her research focus includes the role of technology use in market access for smallholder farmers in east Africa. She is an advisory board member to the Women, Food and Agriculture Network and a contributing writer to *Food Tank: The Food Think Tank* (<http://foodtank.com>).

conferences to volunteering at community gardens, before eventually quitting her job in order to work on an organic farm. Bowens describes herself as a woman of color, deeply connected to the earth and farming, but nevertheless conflicted. She explains in her introduction, “As I began to feel rooted in my life as someone who worked the land, I quickly realized all the cultural and historical baggage that came with that” (p. VIII). She also noticed that there was a striking lack of people of color working alongside her at the organic farm. She asks wryly, “Why am I the only brown person here?” (p. 2).

With support from her community, Bowens raised the funds to embark on an ambitious project to uncover and tell the full story that occurs at the intersection of agriculture and communities of color. The result is 25 “portraits” of individual farmers whose stories are told through both words and photographs. The photos shaped the project in a way that would not have been possible without them. Bowens took about 3,500 photographs along her travels, and places photos at the start of each “portrait” and throughout the text. The importance of these photos lies in their ability to capture a snippet of life and provide a brief glimpse into the moments shared between Bowens and the interviewees. Photos like those of Nelida Martinez, migrant worker turned landowner, tending a vined plant, or Yasin Muhaimin, schoolteacher turned farmer, preparing a chicken for slaughter, tell a larger story that words alone would not be able to capture.

I read Bowens’ book in an afternoon, but over the course of several weeks I revisited many of the stories. Common threads of experiences linked these diverse farmers, weaving together one coherent story made up of many voices. The importance of land ownership and stewardship radiated from the pages. Reading the quotations, you could imagine chests puffed with pride as each of these farmers gave a tour of their family farm or land purchased after years of saving. The theme of independence bubbles up from each story, and a sense of respect, for both the land and the farming profession, permeates the language of each farmer. For them this is not a job, but a calling.

Each interview tells a story of triumph; the word empowerment immediately comes to mind as


I recall the interviews. Black southern farmers spoke of land that had been wrestled from the vicious cycle of sharecropping. Immigrants spoke of working for someone else until they were able to purchase their own land and achieve the often elusive American Dream. Indigenous farmers spoke of recapturing aspects of their culture that had been stolen through forced resettlements and assimilation.

However, despite idyllic scenes of vegetable rows and well-tended herds of animals, Bowens and the farmers she interviews tell a second story that runs parallel to the first. This second story explains the injustices, both past and present, that have created breaks between the land, people of color, and their sovereignty, over both food and life choices. It also tells the story of protest, liberation, and overcoming adversity. The fight to return to a slower way of growing our food and support of small-scale farming operations has been fought by these farmers of color long before the terms “organic” or “permaculture” made their way into our cultural lexicon.

This is all the more important given the well documented problems brewing within the agricultural sector. Farmers in the U.S. are getting older, with the average age edging toward 60, and fewer younger people are looking to farming as a viable career path. The agricultural landscape looks much different from a few generations ago, and many small to medium-sized farmers are looking for ways to remain viable. The farmers profiled in *The Color of Food* have learned how to make their operations profitable, against all odds. Many have overcome discriminatory lending practices, the difficulty of accessing funds for startup costs, forced removal from their rightful land, language barriers, and, for those returning to the land, the loss of knowledge of how to farm. As a result, their stories are the ideal lens through which to envision a revitalization of the family farm in general.

*The Color of Food* challenges those of us who advocate for a better food system to be truly inclusive and to incorporate the full spectrum of experiences into our understanding of what a just food system looks like. For activists and policy-makers, this book provides tangible examples of the problems that small-scale farmers face. For

students and teachers, the rich history, and often untold story, of agriculture in the U.S. told by these farmers provides a deeper level of historical and cultural understanding. As Rigoberto Delgado, with the National Immigrant Farming Initiative, explains, “For those of us that care about community food security, family farmers and social

justice, we have a tremendous opportunity right now to support these farmers” (p. 56). These opportunities include linking farmers of color with business and legal resources, supporting policies and programs that will give minority farmers financial assistance, and, of course, purchasing locally grown food. 

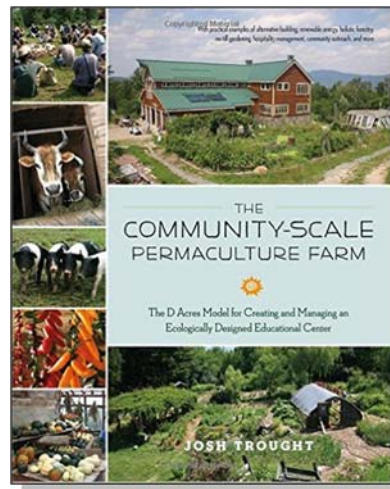


## Notes from an intentional farm community

Book review by Gregory Zimmerman \*

Lake Superior State University

**Review of *The Community-Scale Permaculture Farm: The D Acres Model for Creating and Managing an Ecologically Designed Education Center*, by Josh Trought. (2015). Published by Chelsea Green, White River Junction, Vermont. Available as paperback; 416 pages. Publisher's website: <http://www.chelseagreen.com/the-communityscale-permaculture-farm>**



Submitted June 15, 2015 / Published online August 6, 2015

Citation: Zimmerman, G. (2015). Notes from an intentional farm community [Book review]. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 199–201. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.009>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

Many of us have projects in which we build community around food. Community gardens, food hubs, farm-to-school, farmers' markets, expanding nutrition assistance, policy research and advocacy, and other such projects enhance nutrition, help build the local food system, and increase capacity of local communities. We pick a few aspects of "community" and a few aspects of "food" and tie them together. Josh

---

\* Gregory Zimmerman, Professor of Biology, Lake Superior State University; 650 West Easterday; Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan 49783 USA; [gzimmerman@LSSU.edu](mailto:gzimmerman@LSSU.edu)

Gregory Zimmerman is a professor of Biology at Lake Superior State University, where he teaches in the area of ecology, biostats and epidemiology. His research includes sustainable local communities, food systems, and environmental conservation. He and his family have a small, diverse farm on which they grow produce for the local farmer's market, CSA customers, and local restaurants.

Trought has taken many aspects of community and many aspects of food and tied them together in D Acres Farm and written about his experiences with this large project in the book *The Community Scale Permaculture Farm*.

D Acres defies easy categorization. It's a group of people living together on a farm, growing much of their own food and sharing their knowledge. Trought uses the term "intentional community" and "land-based service movement," since "collective" and "commune" bring to mind too many distracting concepts and images. He is looking to do no less than develop a new model for small farming, an alternative in the sense of ag practices but also an alternative to the family farm for those not part of a farming family. Revenue is derived from sales of farm-derived products, educational programs, and grant funds. This book summarizes the experiences of building and

operating this entity; this review is about the book, not directly about the entity it describes.

As someone who works in the local food system, both as a researcher and a participant, I read the book looking for lessons learned I could put into practice. I was also curious about such an ambitious project: how did it come together and how does it work? At 395 pages this is a long book, but Trought's conversational style of writing makes it an easy read. In the introduction he states that his purpose in writing the book is so readers "can use this model as a platform for their own innovation and creative living." So it's intended to be part inspiration and part how-to.

The first several chapters set the stage for the D Acres project, beginning with a litany of woes about the current food system. These woes include loss of farmland to urban sprawl, unsustainable farming practices, disconnection from the source of our food, devaluation of food and the labor required to produce it, loss of community connections and engagement, and the disadvantages of capitalism. Even land trusts and academia are not immune from criticism. Trought then provides some history of responses to those problems, such as the back-to-the-land movement typified by Helen and Scott Nearing, religious communities, and most recently, the permaculture approach. He presents these examples to show how the D Acres project was built on the lessons from these previous attempts to overcome the problems with the modern mainstream agricultural industry.

Getting more specific about the D Acres environs, chapter 3 describes the sense of place for the White Mountains of New Hampshire where D Acres was built from the Trought family farm. Chapter 4 lays out the history of the transition from family farm to the present D Acres farm. He explains some missteps based on the naiveté of a group of people who wanted to start an alternative farming community. It's always fun for me to read about people new to farming learning all about what it really takes to build a successful farm. In this case, the experiences went beyond learning all the pieces that go together to make a farm and included the development of an organization around the ideals of a group of people coming together to build an intentional community.

After these introductory chapters, Trought describes the daily activities of the farm in Chapter 5. One gets a picture of the hard physical work of farming, the collaboration of the members of the D Acres community and the consensus decision-making approach they use, and how D Acres engages with the broader local community. The remainder of the book describes specific parts of how this project works. Chapters about collaborative decision-making and governance provide good insight into the way the project operates, but they are a bit vague on specifics. The chapter about the farm's revenue stream illustrates the challenges of managing costs and multiple revenue streams, and highlights the nature of the D Acres farm as educational center as much as farm. Chapters about animals, buildings, and water and energy provide some good, practical, experience-based advice. Sometimes the advice is very specific, if commonly known, but one could tell the members literally learned from scratch (advice such as don't put away wet hay because it can start a fire). For example, the descriptions of their use of oxen and the challenges that presents are quite detailed. The chapter about buildings is quite lengthy but illustrates the farm's whole-systems view, from siting to materials selection to layout, construction, and maintenance, and the challenges from using non-standard building techniques such as cob (clay, sand, and straw).

The chapters about gardening and food harvesting and preserving offer additional practical how-to advice while showing how they are able to provide food for the residents and guests of the farm. These descriptions illustrate the thorough analysis they do and the very deliberate nature of all their work. That theme is especially evident in the chapters about "The Farm Ecology" and their forestry work, which also highlights their work with oxen.

Chapters about community outreach, cottage industry, and marketing and promotion round out the description of this wide-ranging venture. These chapters also present some advice others can use in their work in promoting specific aspects of building community around food.

The final chapter, "Ideas to Come," provides reflection about how D Acres can advance and



further its goal of building a lasting “eco-village” in which a community’s members can work together to provide for the community’s own needs.


Trought makes it clear that this approach is not recommended for everyone and that he does not consider it the only solution to the problems with the current industrial ag model.

While the book was an enjoyable read, there were some parts I found distracting. Many chapters start out with a lengthy philosophical treatise. These passages frame the project and provide insight into the basis of D Acres, but they could be briefer. The writing is not overwrought, but neither is it always to the point. Some word choices are a bit puzzling. Instead of simply saying that wood chips have a high carbon-to-nitrogen (C:N) ratio that slows down microbial activity, he writes about the “entropic condition” of wood chips (although later he specifically mentions ideal C:N ratios).

I found a few factual inconsistencies distracting as well. In a few places, Trought comes close to equating soil organic material and the mineral component of silt. Also in one passage he likens the process of drilling a water well to a hydrau-

lically fractured petroleum well. Although both involve a drill rig, they are quite different, to say the least!

As far as lessons learned, I would have liked to have more information about the decision-making process they use. Specific farm advice is readily available; how to get a group of people to work together in this kind of project and at this level of commitment is not.

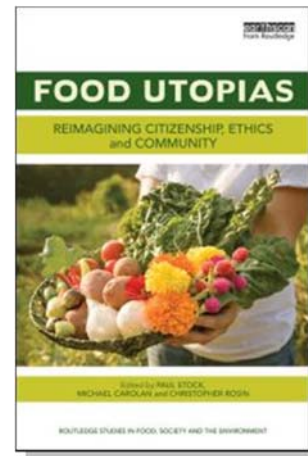
Overall, this book is a worthwhile read and provides good insight into this specific example of what I am now learning is a growing set of these types of communities. Although I promised that this review would be about the book and not about the project it describes, I can’t help making one comment on projects such as D Acres. While reading this book, I also read an article in *Smithsonian* magazine about new suburbs incorporating working farms into their built environment. All I can say is that compared to that approach, D Acres and the other eco-village/deliberate communities somehow seem to be more honest attempts to reconnect us more broadly with our sources of sustenance (although again, they are not for everyone). 



## Harnessing the power of imagination

Book review by Elizabeth Morgan \*  
Macquarie University

**Review of *Food Utopias: Reimagining Citizenship, Ethics and Community*, edited by Paul V. Stock, Michael Carolan, and Christopher Rosin.** (2015). Published by Routledge. Available as hardcover, Kindle eBook and iBook; 238 pages. Publisher's website: <http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9781138788497/>



Submitted June 21, 2015 / Published online September 22, 2015

Citation: Morgan, E. (2015). Harnessing the power of imagination [Book review]. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 203–204. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.033>

Copyright © 2015 by New Leaf Associates, Inc.

An Irishman/Frenchman/Tunisian man is sipping his favorite tippie when he is visited by a fairy, who offers to grant him three wishes. “I’d like an ever-replenishing glass of Guinness/Bordeaux/mint tea,” says he. “No problem,” she replies, and with a quick flick of her wand the man’s now-empty glass is refilled to the brim, and greedily drunk. This happens several times until the fairy interrupts the man’s reverie. “I’m sorry, but I can’t be hanging around here all day while you get stuck into more Guinness/Bordeaux/mint tea. What is your second wish?” With nary a second’s hesitation, the Irishman/Frenchman/Tunisian replies: “I’ll have another one of those.”

---

\* Elizabeth Morgan is PhD candidate in the Department of Geography and Planning at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia. Her research is on the role of local government in food security, with case studies on two local government authorities in Western Sydney. She can be contacted at [elizabeth.morgan@mq.edu.au](mailto:elizabeth.morgan@mq.edu.au)

This is a tired, old joke, but it is, nevertheless, a powerful parable about humankind’s propensity for shortsightedness, simple foolishness, and an almost willful blindness to the value and finitude of the world’s precious resources. Food is often bought, consumed, or thrown out with little consideration of its true cost—not just monetary. The pressing question is, how much longer can we be so profligate before we find ourselves in real trouble? Academics and activists have been raising the alarm about the globalized/conventional food system for quite some time, but it is probably fair to say that *Food Utopias: Reimagining Citizenship, Ethics and Community* is something of a trailblazer in its attempt to tackle the food conundrum by reimagining the food system through a utopian lens. The editors (two sociologists and a geographer) are to be commended for their vision, because this is an engaging, challenging, and optimistic volume of essays that are woven together by the common threads of sustainability

and alterity. The sustainability warp leaves us with little doubt that a business-as-usual attitude toward food in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be disastrous and that other ways of “doing food” are crucial; the alterity weft points the way to conceptualizing and practicing food systems that are more sustainable and socially just.

*Food Utopias* draws on what the editors identify as the concept’s three principal aspects—critique, experimentation and practice—and as such it will appeal to a wider audience than the average scholarly publication. The book is arranged into three main parts. The first, *Food and Utopias*, comprises two chapters: an editors’ introduction (which this reviewer thinks would be better served by incorporating the thoughts in their concluding chapter, *An Invitation to Food Utopias*), and an historical-philosophical-literary sketch of food and utopias, the purpose of which is to make the link between food and utopias but which again sits somewhat uncomfortably in the flow of the remaining sections and chapters. The second main section, *Emergent Food Utopias*, sets off with a more confident stride. It comprises six chapters that, in their various ways, explore and critique some practical alternative ways of doing food, ranging from nanotechnology to the Slow Food movement. It concludes with an accessible discussion of the theory and praxis of food utopias and the hopeful message that we could indeed “seize upon the present possibilities” to construct alternative worlds and effect social change, as David Harvey argued about cities more than 40 years ago (Harvey, 1973, p. 313).

This chapter, by one of the editors, Michael Carolan, tees up the reader nicely for the third main section, *Food, Ethics and Morality*, in which three separate authors use case studies to extrapolate what new food utopias do, and could, look like. The empirical work analyzes the work of the Land Institute (founded by Wes Jackson, who writes a foreword to the book) in developing sustainable agricultural systems; Biosphere 2, a closed ecological system in the Arizona desert; and the Catholic Worker Movement intentional communities based on faith and social justice principles. Finally, there is a thought-provoking and entertaining look at the politics of food (titled

*Spurlock’s Vomit and Visible Food Politics*), which posits how utopias can be used as tools not just to critique the dominant industrialized food system (as Morgan Spurlock did in *Super Size Me*, his documentary on McDonald’s), but to stand at a distance from it, resist and challenge it, and forge workable alternatives.

The emergence of the Slow Food movement in direct opposition to the steady march of fast-food chain McDonald’s is addressed in the chapter *Slow Food Presidia: The Nostalgic and the Utopian*. It is potentially problematic because it neglects to address the very globalization and corporatization characteristics of McDonald’s that the global Slow Food movement itself exhibits (for example, see Sheringham, 2008). However, this is a small weak point in an otherwise excellent body of work that makes a solid argument for using utopian theories and practices to get us out of the mess we are indubitably in. Overall the book is a thoughtful, critical, robust, and hopeful collection of meditations on one of life’s most essential ingredients: food.

The editors’ concluding chapter, *Food as Mediator: Opening the Dialogue Around Food*, brings the reader full circle to the book’s principal aims: to harness the power of food narratives and use utopian theories as sounding boards to stimulate new dialogues about just and sustainable food systems. It is also unashamedly a clarion call to every individual who is concerned about the future of food to use the relational tools of critique/scholarship and experimentation and, building on these two foundations, enact change by process—what the editors describe as a recognition “that new ideas and experiments coming from the margins of society need space to incubate” (p. 10). In other words, utopias.



## References

- Harvey, D. (1973). *Social justice and the city*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Sheringham, C. J. (2008). *A gastronomic meditation: On McDonald’s* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Western Sydney, Australia.  
<http://researchdirect.uws.edu.au/islandora/object/uws%3A3790/datastream/PDF/view>