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Why CSAs Matter: (re)localizing for people-based food networks

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**Why CSAs Matter:
(re)localizing for people-based food networks**

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In partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Environmental Analysis, 2018 –
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Acknowledgments

In my time at the Claremont Colleges, I have been pushed to think both critically and creatively, and it is the latter for which I am most thankful. I hope my small piece in the food justice discourse inspires others to think beyond what I've written, and push our conceptions of food and community even further. I dedicate my thesis to those who are unafraid to explore the endless possibilities of the new worlds we can create for ourselves.

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Preface

In Japanese, *teiki* means ‘to tie-up.’ It references both a partnership, and a responsibility shared between producer and consumer. Its origins stem from *teiki* groups, which were formed in the 1970’s by predominantly female farmers in Japan, and paved the way for alternative food networks between farmers and consumers worldwide.¹² It also signified the origination of the community sourced agriculture (CSA) model, in which consumers pay a fixed amount for weekly produce. This concept crossed the Pacific in the 1980s, and has gained momentum throughout the early 21st century. As of 2018, there are thousands of CSAs operating in the U.S. alone. These markets have been created as alternatives to conventional food systems. The community-sourced movement is part of a trend of localization, favoring local and community control over the production, distribution, and consumption of the food chain.

As the alternative food movement has expanded in the US since the 1980s, and in many ways bonded itself to ideas of localization and community, there needs to be further analysis of the effectiveness of these measures, and of these words. Looking at the CSA model specifically, how has the community-sourced model persisted, and struggled in the wake of large corporations looking to co-opt the rhetoric of alternative food movements? In this thesis, I will argue that the CSA model is an effective strategy to

¹ Hinrichs, “The Practice and Politics of Food System Localization.”

² Lamine, “Settling Shared Uncertainties.”

combat neo-liberal market tendencies as well as the local-washing of the alternative food movements, by prioritizing consumer-producer relationships and community engagement above all. The inability for corporations to co-opt the relationships that are created by people-based food networks make it an almost infallible anti-market model strategy. By analyzing and re-defining terms such as localization and community, we open ourselves up to exploring new ways transactional networks can not only exist, but thrive, and continue to grow.

Alternative foods have always struggled with a question of working within, or outside of the system. In an interest in avoiding choose one side over the other (because, how can we?), I'd rather consider the mechanisms we already have in place and learn how to strengthen them. Basing my arguments off the works of those who came before me and those who have shaped my own experiences creating alternative food networks, I offer a morsel of hope in how we can foster better community.

I ground my perspectives in my own work, on the ground, managing Claremont Market Shares- a CSA program at the Claremont Colleges. A program whose history has yet to be formally recorded, this thesis will outline the specifics of the program as it relates to notions of local agricultural networks. By writing a history, and analysis of the program, I hope my own experiences can be used to the benefit of other students looking to do similar work, both on college campuses and outside of academia.

In the first chapter of this paper I will delve into the history of industrial agriculture, then move into the corresponding history of alternative agriculture. I will underscore the movements and policies which have informed the current discourse on alternative foods. In Chapter Two, I will define and analyze important terms such as 'community', and

‘local’, and establish the ways in which malleable rhetoric has informed food networks. Finally, in Chapter Three, I will switch to discussing how these concepts have, and can be applied to on-the-ground work in CSAs and alternative food networks.

Chapter 1: A Historical Perspective

The 2012 federal Agriculture census indicates that there are 12,549 CSAs in the United States. From my own experience working as a farm-hand in Maine and as a manager of a CSA in California, I feel confident in saying that this is an under-estimate. At least in the agricultural-driven states that I’ve lived in (Pennsylvania, Maine, and California), almost every organic farm that is located near a suburban or urban population has some form of CSA or food-sharing cooperative program. According to localharvest.org, more than 340,000 individuals and families nationwide participate in a CSA. However, compared to other countries, even our highest estimates pale in comparison to how societies prioritize community based food networks over shopping in chain stores. In Japan, one in four families belongs to some sort of teiki group.³

In tangent with the creation of CSAs in the 1970’s, an American tradition stemmed from a European interest in biodynamic farming techniques. Indian Line Farm in Massachusetts and Temple-Wilton Community in New Hampshire are often cited as the first, starting their operations in 1988.⁴ They prioritized community involvement in creating a sustainable food system that would provide share-holders with weekly produce

³ Lamine.

⁴ “The History of Community Supported Agriculture, Part I | Rodale Institute.”

for the entirety of the New England agricultural season. As the first North American CSAs in the late 80's, their creation and growth can be attributed to multiple factors, both economic and socio-cultural, that were responses to conventional agricultural practices. In this thesis, I will delve more fully into a timeline that concerns the rise of industrial and alternative agriculture, as well as the backlash that each has generated, and how they play into the sustainability of the CSA.

In the historical or classic CSA set-up, share-holders will pay up-front for the total cost a season's share, thus taking on some of the risk that the farmer faces; in case of drought, disease, or disaster, they will be at a financial loss just like the farmer. In Iowa in the 1980s, the first markets of this variety were producer-oriented rather than consumer. This was a consequence of the dire economic issues commodity agriculture faced at that time.⁵ The farmer-oriented dynamic is essential, as it also means that there is an up-front understanding that some weeks will be better than others, and that the cost of buying local often involves more than just working around a middle-man to buy your produce. CSAs serve a larger purpose that goes beyond the transactional exchange between food and money; they offer the promise of an agrarian ideal, free of the economic market, where the farmer and the consumer occupy the same world. To understand the cultural complexities that have caused the CSA model to evolve over time, it is important to understand the history of the industrial food system and the corresponding alternative food networks in the United States.

⁵ Hinrichs, "The Practice and Politics of Food System Localization." Page 9

In 1960, the world population reached 3 billion.⁶ A global panic surrounding feeding of this swelling population helped to create the agricultural industrial complex that prioritizes mass-production and hyper-productivity, with little care for issues of environmental impact and labor. Our contemporary food system, and all its networks, came to be in waves of technological advancements and societal shifts, spurred by changing economic policies. Unpacking a few of these movements will set the stage for an understanding of the need for alternative food networks, where they came from, and why they have struggled to gain control in a system that has been anti-alternatives and pro-individual for centuries.

The first, and perhaps most important concept to understand in relation to the history of industrial agriculture, is that of the Green Revolution. The Green Revolution, also known as the Third Agricultural Revolution, references an international effort to mitigate world hunger by improving the performance and durability of key crops—corn, soy, and grains. The strategy for growth was based on a premise that given appropriate institutional mechanisms, “technology spillovers across political and agro-climatic boundaries could be captured”. It began in the 1940s, when the Rockefeller Foundation initiated a research project that would improve agricultural productivity in Mexico⁷. Norman Borlaug, who led the research in developing a wheat crop that was both pest and disease-resistant, is credited as the father of the revolution, and rightly so—by 1970, wheat yields were six times what they had been in 1950⁸. While in 1950, one farmer fed

⁶ McKenzie, “A Brief History of Agriculture and Food Production: The Rise of ‘Industrial Agriculture.’”

⁷ McKenzie.

⁸ “A Green Revolution, This Time for Africa - The New York Times.”

15.65 people, by 1970, one farmer fed 47.9 people⁹. By 1990, one farmer could supply 100.

Though originating in the 1940s, the 1960s marked the true change in agricultural production for the Global North and the Global South. In the early 1960s, South Asia was on the brink of large-scale famine, particularly India and Pakistan.¹⁰ In response to this looming crisis, the Global North turned to the expanding technologies born out of Borlaug's legacy. The agriculture industry globalized, pouring money into developing fertilizers and pesticide¹¹ Many of which contained harmful chemicals left over from WWII, such as DDT, which was used as a chemical weapon against the Vietnamese people. Crops were designed to withstand non-native climates and produce year-round. The land could now be used with rapid intensity, continually giving output with increased chemical input.

High yields necessitated high input, and as the wheels of the industrial agriculture complex continued to spin faster, this process became non-negotiable. Farmers in the United States who had previously saved and cared for specific seeds now had to purchase mono-varieties of GMO seeds from conglomerates such as Monsanto to stay afloat in the marketplace. Not only was this method more expensive for the farmer, but as monocropping became the normative way of farming, bio-diversity- and profits, have declined sharply. For farmers who have been able to last, profits have struggled. Genetically engineered seeds have risen dramatically in price since they were introduced by Monsanto in 1996; that year soybean cost less than \$20 per acre to plant. As of 2011, it

⁹ "History | National Institute of Food and Agriculture."

¹⁰ Pingali, "Green Revolution."

¹¹ "Green Revolution."

costed almost \$100.¹² Not only did input costs become unbelievably high, but the Monsanto policy that forbade farmers from saving seeds past one year meant costs went up annually.

Monsanto's PR spin is that they single-handedly help feed the world. Their supporters, and other proponents of the Green Revolution often cite the massive amounts of food produced in such a short period of time: for example, between 1960 and 2000, yields for all developing countries rose 208 percent for wheat, 109% for rice, 157% for maize, 78% for potatoes, and 36% for cassava.¹³ However, statistics are not always what they seem. Although the GR did indeed save many people from extreme famine, particularly those in South-East Asia, that does not mean it has successfully fixed hunger worldwide. Even in South Asia, the poorest areas were the slowest to benefit from the Green Revolution. The technologies proposed to "end world hunger" ended up leaving the poorest of the population behind. This is due to several factors: inequitable land distribution, lack of rights for land-owners, policies that made it difficult to be a successful small-market producer, and subsidies given to farms that only produced food for the globalized food trade.¹⁴ In the top-down race to end poverty, little effort was actually given to allow people to establish their own sustainable food networks worldwide. While these examples highlight the inequalities abroad, these same sentiments were echoed in the United States. Smaller farmers became increasingly

¹² "Is Monsanto The Enemy Of Family Farmers?"

¹³ Pingali, "Green Revolution."

¹⁴ Bacon, "Globalization and NAFTA Caused Migration from Mexico | Political Research Associates."

pushed out of the market by large conglomerates, who were heavily subsidized by the United States government.¹⁵

By 1994, the net farm income in the United States reached a record \$54.9 billion.¹⁶ However, more money meant less farms, signaling that the industry was being concentrated in fewer and fewer hands; not a new pattern, but one that was becoming direr. Land ownership was being corporatized—by 1994 this was a long-established pattern in the US, and the FDA granted its first approval for a food product produced through biotechnology (the FLAVRSAVR tomato)¹⁷. As the agriculture industry expanded rapidly across the United States, Congress approved the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to liberalize world trade of agricultural products and more generally remove trade barriers between neighboring nations. simplified idea behind NAFTA was to have trade between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, free from tariffs. As stated in the trade agreement: “the United States seeks to support higher-paying jobs in the United States and to grow the U.S economy by improving U.S. opportunities to trade with Canada and Mexico.”¹⁸ This had overall positive effects for the United States economy at large. Farmers who were already heavily subsidized by the Farm Bill could score larger profits by no longer having to pay tariffs when they exported their soybean and corn to Mexico and Canada. This meant something else entirely for Mexico. Farmers there did not benefit from government subsidies, and they did not have the same access to technology and chemical inputs compared to their American counterparts. This meant

¹⁵ Patel, *Stuffed and Starved*.

¹⁶ “Agriculture in the Classroom.”

¹⁷ “History | National Institute of Food and Agriculture.”

¹⁸ “North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) | United States Trade Representative.”

that to compete, Mexican farmers were pushed to adopt large-scale, export-oriented farming practices, which go hand in hand with fossil fuel and GMO use. The farmers that were able to survive had to relinquish learned, ancestral practices of caring for the land, and instead became complicit in the use of under-paid migrant workers and flagrant environmental violations. NAFTA created a huge amount of profit at the border, but none of it was for the land-less farmers in the south of Mexico.¹⁹ And while many economists will argue that NAFTA was not responsible for depressing the profits of Mexican farmers, many agree that the abolition of U.S. agricultural subsidies would be highly beneficial²⁰. NAFTA was presented as an act of benign international diplomacy, but it effectively existed only to supplement existing power structures, where major corporations were on top and small producers came last. By globalizing food, the presence of local no longer had meaning or value in an export economy.

Seventeen years after NAFTA, some two million farmers in Mexico have been forced off their land due to low prices and lack of government support.²¹ Instead of finding other jobs in “industry” in urban Mexican centers, as economists had predicted, most looked to the United States for a new life, and jobs in agriculture. Thus, began a mass exodus of Mexican migrants attempting to move across the border. Alejandro Ramirez, a general director of the Confederation of Mexican Pork Producers, gives numbers to these claims, stating that “we lost 20,000 farm jobs directly from imports, and counting the 5 indirect jobs dependent on each direct job, we lost over 120,000 jobs total.

¹⁹ Bacon, “Globalization and NAFTA Caused Migration from Mexico | Political Research Associates.”

²⁰ Fiess and Lederman, “Mexican Corn.”

²¹ Fiess and Lederman.

This produces migration to the U.S. or to Mexican cities”²². Migrant workers in the United States may likely find themselves working for industrial agriculture conglomerates, either as farm workers or in meat processing factories, their health being continually threatened by the chemical inputs and toxic outputs. Victims of conventional agriculture both in the United States and on a global scale, small farmers have continually endured hardships at the cost of productivity and globalization. Thus, now we are back in the United States, in 2018, struggling to understand how these various bills, movements, and revolutions, have impacted our understanding of the production and distribution of food.

The grocery store, for example, exists as an anonymous space of distribution and consumption, where the consumer moves through the aisles as disconnected from the produce they are buying as the person responsible for growing their Jersey tomatoes, their California avocados. Before World War I, “most urban grocery stores had been small, specialized, independent neighborhood markets with clerks who provided service.”²³ There was no immediate transaction of cash—the prices were simply added to a tab that would be paid later. The shop-owner and consumer were connected by community, by a knowledge of each other’s existence and space in the community they shared.

As food prices escalated in the early 20th century, it became apparent there was a disconnection between the efficiency of production and the inefficiency of distribution. This was mainly due to lack of transportation—a crate of apples would have to take a train from country to city, then get unloaded at the station, then find a way to the auction

²² Bacon, “Globalization and NAFTA Caused Migration from Mexico | Political Research Associates.”

²³ “Kitchen Literacy : How We Lost Knowledge of Where Food Comes From and Why We Need to Get It Back.” Page 160

house, and then eventually make it to the store. This became a costly affair, as all the workers in these in-between stages had to be paid. To combat this, chain stores began to buy products wholesale from singular producers, rather than weekly from the market, which eliminated upfront costs and allowed them to sell individual crates at a larger price point, a transition in economic model that took place over several decades. This meant that now, instead of one or two options for any given product, there were ten. And these products no longer pretended to be straight off the farm. Instead, aligning with industrialization and urbanization, pre-packaged foods filled with preservatives became popular. This is due in part to an “increasing understanding of germs” at the turn of the century²⁴ as well as a reaction to heavily populated cities, where fear of disease and infection was connected to increasingly close living quarters.

American consumers were at first wary of buying pre-packaged foods whose contents remained mysterious and illegible- labels listed chemical flavoring and additives whose scientific names were unfamiliar to the majority of the public. However, it became the norm to only want to purchase food that had been anonymized, filled with preservatives, and able to withstand the long distances it had to travel to reach grocery store aisles. The grocery store model ties into not only the globalized food network, but a hyper-individualized sense of consuming, where those with the buying power often think they are in control of their decision-making; that the consumer has choice. In reality, the power dynamic is flipped. Ann Vilesis calls this way of thinking about the food industry

²⁴ “Kitchen Literacy : How We Lost Knowledge of Where Food Comes From and Why We Need to Get It Back.” Page 162

a “covenant of ignorance.”²⁵

There was now an unspoken agreement between the corporations running the food industry and the consumer. The manufacturers did not want to be questioned as they continued to cut costs, deliver a wider array of products, and reach new markets. On the flip side, the consumer chose to have some cognitive dissonance about where and how their food was grown, harvested, and transported. The products being offered made life easier- they had a longer shelf life, and could be cooked or re-heated on-demand with little prep work. If they did not know the effects that the industry was having on the planet, they could choose to ignore these and other murky aspects of the industry. As Raj Patel, noted food justice scholar puts it: “Our choices are not entirely our own because, even in a supermarket, the menu is crafted not by our choices, nor by the seasons, nor where we find ourselves, nor by the full range of apples available, nor by the full spectrum of available nutrition and tastes, but by the power of food corporations.”²⁶ Patel qualifies this point by stating that our decisions are not *entirely* our own, meaning, that we as consumers still have a sense of choice and freedom in these decisions. This is important. We have the ability to make decisions that go against the grain, and we are also complicit in choosing to uphold a system as damaging as the one that exists currently. Luckily enough, there are people who are choosing to engage with the former. As scholarship by academics such as Patel has reached the mainstream, people are coming to understand that the grocery store model that is so normalized in US culture does more harm than good, not only in the overly-processed food that it offers but also in

²⁵ “Kitchen Literacy : How We Lost Knowledge of Where Food Comes From and Why We Need to Get It Back.” Page 160

²⁶ Patel, *Stuffed and Starved*. Page 20

its non-stop progression of an unfair power dynamic between the producers, the laborers, the distributor, and consumer. Nowhere in this history do we think of community or non-transactional exchanges. Those aspects are not considered necessary to productivity, and thus ignored. New food networks challenging the mainstream decided to embrace these ideas, creating the alternative food movement.

In response to the faulty dynamics of the industrial agricultural complex, the alternative food movement emerged in the 1980's. To many it appeared to be the clear solution to a time-sensitive problem. A main focus of the agriculture-specific movements is this necessity of produce being organic. Organic farming offers everything that Industrial Agriculture does not—a care for the land, a dismissal of chemical inputs, and an emphasis on quality over quantity. Permaculture and hydroponic set-ups are becoming increasingly popular ways of farming, especially in urban spaces. The positive cultural stigma that accompanies products labelled as organic has helped the movement prosper further, giving farmers incentive to change their growing practices in order to be more sustainable. The organic movement has had roots in various international communities since the 1800s, but took off in the United States both in parallel and in response to the blooming of industrial agricultural complex. If Norman Borlaug can be credited as the father of the Green Revolution, then J.I. Rodale is the other father-figure at play, commonly regarded as the brain behind the modern organic farming movement. Rodale drew inspiration from Sir Albert Howard, a British agriculture scientist who “spent years observing traditional systems in India, and advocating for agricultural systems which were reliant upon returning crop residues, green manures and wastes to soil, and using

natures processes to inform farming decisions.”²⁷ His work encouraged among farmers looking to disengage with conventional practices in the late 1960’s.

By the 1960s, there was an increase in environmental awareness due to multiple factors. Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* was published in September of 1962, revealing the dark underside of the adverse effects of the use of pesticides in domestic and agricultural settings. Focusing on the synthetic pesticide DDT, Carson argued that these chemicals had severe effects not only on the environment but on humans. Her findings revealed that human pesticide poisoning could lead to cancer and other terminal illnesses. She also proved that even if DDT and other pesticides had no real environmental effects (which they do), that they were still counterproductive because the insects would simply develop a resistance to the chemicals, thus creating a never-ending cycle of stronger breeds of insects that would need more powerful chemicals in return. The book met fierce opposition from chemical companies and the agriculture industry, but also became a rallying point for the environmental movement. If Bourlag and Rodale are fathers, then Carson reigns as corresponding mother supreme of environmental action. The creation of the Environmental Defense Fund in 1967 and the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970 both addressed issues that Carson brought up in her work; that of regulating pesticide use and considering rising concerns about the impact of industrial agriculture on air, water, and soil.

As environmentalism became mainstream, and organic food became established in the marketplace, government organizations became involved in harnessing the power of this movement. In 1972 the International Federation of Organic Agriculture

²⁷ “Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program - Grants and Education.”

Movements (IFOAM) developed as a democratic organization that would deal with the challenges of creating standards that would define “organic.” The goal was to provide a framework for organic certification that would result in a streamlined trade in organic product. In the U.S. specifically, organic is defined legally, so that the commercial use of the term is continually maintained by the government. Any farm advertising its products as such must be officially certified as organic. If not, their distribution process is illegal. The Organic Food Production Act was passed in 1990, which allowed for a national regulation of organic production. Previously, organic certifications had been regulated on a state-by-state basis. After many years of workshopping the standards that would define a product as organic, the final decision was established in December of 2000, and USDA organic labels were made public in October of 2002. The standards were fairly basic: no use of synthetic pesticide, no genetic modification, no growth hormones or antibiotics for livestock, and only organically grown feed. Many activists felt that these standards were not stringent enough, and that the cost it took to get certified as organic made it an unlikely situation for many poor farmers who had been farming this way for centuries regardless of government regulation. These regulations came from a place of environmental awareness, but effectually aided large companies looking to appeal to a wider customer base.

The mainstreaming of organics- and its abuse as a marketing tactic, has meant that there is a dissonance between the organic movement- an ideology based in breaking free of the industrial ways of producing food, and the organic industry, which preaches similar values but wants to uphold the status quo. The organic industry is what controls the market, gives farmers incentives to produce a certain way, and establishes

government control over farming practices. As multi-national food corporations have begun to invest in both buying and creating “organic” subsidiaries, there is fear by food justice advocates that capitalism has co-opted the organic food movement, and that a once radical idea for change has just become another tool of the industrial agricultural complex. One such example is Gary Hirschberg, a once small-farm owner turned CEO of Stonyfield Farm (they have 13% of the North American yogurt market), who notably said: “once you’re in organic you have to source globally.”²⁸ For the consumer looking to buy organic, many would not realize that the brand they think of as being the “greener” alternative is in fact owned by Kraft or Nestle, just because those more recognizable names do not appear on the product. Hillary Lindsay, in her essay “McOrganic?” writes, “Kellogg owns Kashi, a supplier of organic whole grain cereals. Kraft has bought out Boca, a maker of organic soy burgers. Select Walmart stores now sell a limited line of organic cotton supplies for yoga, bath and baby. Many organic seed varieties are now available only through a giant seed company called Seimines, which earlier this year was acquired by Monsanto.”²⁹ These companies bank on the consumer not knowing the food chain in which their favored organic product comes from, and in many ways, they have been successful in establishing this dissonance.

As the grassroots energy behind the organic movement has been replaced by corporate interest in marketing such ideas, there has arisen a new phase of this movement that prioritizes language such as “local” and “sustainable” over the tired “organic.” The original rhetoric that promised a new system under an organic revolution have held on

²⁸ McKibben, *Deep Economy*. Page 88

²⁹ “McOrganic?: Is Corporate Organic Changing the Organic Landscape in Canada? | The Dominion.”

over the years, it has just taken new forms in the way we think about producing, distributing, and consuming our food. Michael Pollan has made waves as an author of issues on food justice and the alternative food movement. He is the author of 2006's *Omnivores' Dilemma*, and has remarked that "I think the challenge with organic is for us to raise the bar again and figure out, well, what's next after organic? How can we do it even better?"³⁰ He is not alone in wanting a new movement to rally behind.

To answer Pollan's question, we can look to emerging frameworks that are shaping alternative foods, and how they are helping to 'raise the bar' for our expectations of food networks. I define these movements as networks, as they tie together various ideas, people, communities, and theory. The networks that emerge from alternative food movements look to be intersectional in their ideas of food politics. Two movements in particular—that of food sovereignty and food justice—broadly encompass the patterns that this movement follows. Clendening defines food sovereignty as "peoples (not corporations) rights to food and production systems," an ideology that is still evolving but at its core looks to put the power in the hands of the people at all levels of the food chain. Food sovereignty was born out of peasant struggle. In 1993, *La Via Campesina*, was created as an international peasant movement. It was the result of many years of land displacement, economic devaluation, and political organizing in Central America. It brings together "small and medium size farmers, peasants, landless people, rural women and youth, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from around the world."³¹ The organization gained traction in the Global South, and then spread to Europe, Asia, Central America, and Africa. The coalition involves 182 organizations in

³⁰ Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*.

³¹ "Via Campesina - Globalizing Hope, Globalizing the Struggle!"

81 countries. Its advocates strongly believe that access to local markets should be prioritized over access to foreign markets, and that food should not be considered an economic commodity. Production should be under the local community control, and access to land should be part of agrarian reform, not via the market. These ideologies have permeated the works of North American food scholars and activists looking to use these anti-market and alternative ideas in our communities to develop new food chain systems. This framework is a valuable lens for the alternative food movement as a whole because it centers the needs of community members on a smaller scale, pushing for personal sovereignty rather than corporate control.

Food Justice, by contrast, is more often related to the environmental justice movement, which grounds itself in the marginalization of people of color and low-income people and communities. Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi, in their book *Food Justice*, define it as a goal of “equity and fairness in relation to food system impacts”³². Race and class are key concepts in the food justice movement, whereas the food sovereignty movement the focus is on shifting the movement of capital and control of production- identity politics play less of a role. Most alternative food networks have some relation to frameworks of food justice, whether by offering subsidized food programs, doing outreach in food-insecure neighborhoods, or more generally seeking to make alternative foods more inclusive as a whole.

The emphasis of the alternative food networks that have emerged from these frameworks relies strongly on two pillars: localization and community. The reality of these tenets are farmers markets, CSAs, nutritional programs, urban garden projects, and

³² Press, “Food Justice.”

weekly/monthly delivery services.³³ These ideals are woven into the CSA model specifically: its consumers are encouraged to think locally, to learn more about the food-growing process, and to engage with the producers of their food and other consumers involved in the program. These alternative food networks are also a direct response to a market failure to provide fresh food to the majority of the population (a 2009 study by the USDA found that 23.5 million people in the U.S. lack access to a supermarket or food provider within a mile of their home)³⁴, gaps in distribution that are called “food deserts,” in which access to locally-grown produce is limited or non-existent, particularly in low-income and non-white areas. Alternative food networks have historically targeted these communities, with positive and neutral results. This aspect will be explored later in the paper, when we look at two functioning CSAs in Claremont, California and Warren, Maine. These networks define themselves by using “local” and “community” as keywords, in effect virtue signaling their positionality as progressive institutions. The definitions of these terms are rooted in modern environmentalism and social justice politics, and I hope to explore how these defining terms play into conceptions of CSAs as viable market systems.

In the CSA model, at least in the ones I am exploring in my thesis, the consumer has no choice over what or how much they receive each week—all is up to the producer and climate. There is an inherent lack of choice that comes with choosing this model of purchasing food, that is effectually the reverse of what Patel means what he says that the

³³ McKibben, *Deep Economy*. Page 88

³⁴ “Why Local Food MattersThe Rising Importance of Locally Grown Food in the U.S. Food System.Pdf.”

“inversion of the logic of mass production that seems to give priority to individual choice.”³⁵ When we have an abundance of commodity options, it is easy to think we have the most consumer freedom. In reality, our choices are dictated by a multitude of factors, and the cost of supposed freedom is large when we consider all the downsides to a market that offers us more than we need. While the CSA method of purchasing could be read as a lack of freedom or of choice, it is actually an example of a way that personal choice can look different than the normative model to which we are accustomed. The consumer still has choice, it just takes place prior to the transaction, and “the choices concern the production process and distribution more than the products themselves.”³⁶ This choice encompasses not just the distribution aspect of the food chain, but the production, the consumption, and conditions of labor that usually go ignored in the consumers purchasing process . The corporate interest in upholding this ideal of personal choice, or freedom, is one that manifests greatly in the food industry, as seen above. It holds great economic potential for suppliers knowing that they can supply more choices for more profit. However, it has both personal and community drawbacks for consumers that need to be unpacked in order to understand how freedom of choice can take on different forms.

³⁵ Patel, *Stuffed and Starved*. Page 308

³⁶ Lamine, “Settling Shared Uncertainties.” Page 12

Chapter 2: Reconceiving the Local

When Barry Schwartz, a Swarthmore professor, describes the positive aspect that accompanies having social ties, or being part of a community or religious network, he

notes that these social ties “actually decrease freedom of choice.”³⁷ His rhetoric is reminiscent of Raj Patel’s, and for a reason. Schwartz’s work, which environmental critic and activist Bill McKibben uses throughout his book *Deep Economy*, explores how our wellness is tied to social factors, particularly how involvement in a community or society has intense effects on our health and well-being. Community, like ‘local’, has always existed as a somewhat vague term, used often in progressive and conservative frameworks to understand people’s motivations, desires, and interests. The antithesis to community-based approaches of thinking is individualism, the political philosophy which favors freedom of individual action over collective control, and boils down to a desire for self-reliance and independence over dependence on others. This mind-set is the backing for conservatism, an ideology that encourages a “boot-straps” mentality towards personal growth, where all people are capable of supporting themselves and their families without help from the community, the government, or society at large. While it is mostly associated with conservative ideologies, liberalism can fall into similar fallacies, believing the individuals are responsible for creating their own change outside of community or structural frameworks. There are many problems with this thinking—the first being that structurally, not all people are able to access the same resources nor have the same capacity for labor and work. The second, being that this way of thinking has real negative effects on our emotional well-being. As human beings, we are wired for companionship, which seems obvious enough, yet does not align with the ways we think about the economy of food. According to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, middle-aged women with large social circles had a 23% lower incidence of coronary

³⁷ McKibben, *Deep Economy*. Page 109

artery disease, and people above the age of eighty with “poor social networks” had a 60% higher chance of dementia.³⁸ Yet we live in a society that prioritizes individual utility over savoring group dynamics. How is this reflected in the way we buy our food?

As we have seen in Chapter One, the way grocery stores and food networks are structured under capitalism limit our interactions with each other and those who make our food. We even have the ability to get rid of human interaction all together. Just look at the self-check-out lines in stores across the country, or the emergence of Amazon’s entirely automated grocery stores. These technocentric options offer speed and ease, thus equating the human side of transactions as slow and difficult. In response, food activists are using CSAs and farmers markets as markers for possible sites for community development. By encouraging people to linger and chat at pick-up sites, or by creating community meals and events for share-holders, there are many approaches to fostering community and integrating people into food networks.

There are many environmental scholars who have been critical of the idea that food fosters “community,” especially as it relates to alternative, anti-market networks. Julie Guthman is one of the harshest critics. Her work has explored the detriments of alternative food systems, especially as it intersects with issues of race and class. She often points out the many ways in which alternative food networks are lacking in their accessibility for marginalized communities, as well as in their definitions of what it means to foster real, productive communities through the creation of food-related networks. In her eyes, “CSAs can be impervious to uneven development, as if all

³⁸ McKibben. Page 110

communities would want to stay as they are.”³⁹ She is not wrong in many ways—CSAs that are implemented by white folks in low-income, predominantly black and brown neighborhoods often fare poorly, having low turnout for both community engagement as well as on the distribution side. Guthman’s arguments are explored more fully in Margaret Ramirez’s essay “The Elusive Inclusive”. Ramirez looks at two urban farm/CSA projects in Seattle as case studies for how community-developed programming is infinitely better than white-run projects in minority communities. Ramirez argues that community food networks will “continue to struggle if they do not shift the power structures that exist within the organization herself.”⁴⁰ She places black geographies and local expertise at the forefront of her paper, choosing not to focus on the white actors that are often acknowledged as key players in this field. She cites Patricia Allen who addresses how “place is a socio-historical process and locality a set of relations.” Defining locality as a set of relations, rather than as a set of parameters, more fully helps us understand how some community food networks have struggled to function as sustainable food networks for those in surrounding areas. Food justice activists who come into communities with a sense of entitlement and a lack of knowledge about the histories of the community, (*add stuff from Ramirez*will most likely fail, because there is no personal connection tying them to the space. This can hurt the progress of alternative food networks, and also damage the intentions of food activists looking to make a change.

The work of Guthman and Ramirez does more than just critique CSAs (and farmers markets) as being all futile. Guthman acknowledges that a driving force behind consumers’ interests in supporting local farmers comes from wanting to directly support

³⁹ Guthman, “Bringing Good Food to Others.”

⁴⁰ Ramirez, “The Elusive Inclusive.”

the people and their businesses, despite the fact that it is often logistically harder for the consumer. When talking about research a fellow food scholar did on an Oakland farmers market: “[...] her surveys have revealed that many of the customers are white and or middle-class blacks who are from out of the area and who go there specifically to support black farmers.”⁴¹ Here, the identities of the farmers play a direct role in who their customers are and why they choose to patronize these businesses. This fits within the definition of transcommunality, which is defined by John Childs as “the constructive and developmental interaction among diverse communities which through shared political action flows increase communication, mutual respect, and understanding.”⁴² Ramirez’s work highlighted the blind spots in creating alternative food networks, but also helped bring to light what is working. By centering on black geographies, Ramirez opens up the possibility that choosing to engage our work with ‘alternative geographies’ can help us foster sustainable community food projects.⁴³ An alternative geography can be a de-colonial understanding of space, as well as a re-prioritization of what makes spaces so important: the people that occupy them. Using an alternative geography that places people’s connections above existing power structures opens up a whole new world of alternative possibilities.

The word ‘community’ has been explored by many different scholars in many different contexts, some of which align themselves with geography and its importance. If we think about Benedict Anderson’s imagined communities as reference to nation states, it is hard not to draw linguistic parallels to the way in which alternative food networks

⁴¹ Guthman, “Bringing Good Food to Others.” Page 14

⁴² Guthman. Page 16

⁴³ Ramirez, “The Elusive Inclusive.”

use similar language to draw business and construct their modelling outside of the conventional food system—and a run-on sentence. Instead of imagining communities, we should instead look to engage with pre-existing ones, as well as foster a mindset that encourages transcommunality by way of establishing inter-personal connections and relationships that prioritize community development over transactional benefits. Community based movements must be based around an interest in gaining more than transactional value from the experience, i.e.: an interest in forming new relationships or solidifying old ones for the sake of both the food network and a better local system at large.

Closely tied to the idea of community is the language and rhetoric of “local” that permeates alternative food networks. I choose to place “local” in quotes to emphasize the lack of definition that this term holds in reference to how it is used to market food networks. In earlier discussions of the organic food movement, it was continually brought up how the term “organic” became played out, co-opted, and effectively meaningless by the time it had reached a mainstream understanding. The politics of localization, or re-localization, have emerged as the latest iteration of a trendy alternative food buzzword that accompanies so much of the discourse. It makes one wonder how long will it take before Hellman’s Mayonnaise™ offers not only an organic variety, but a local one? Has the omnivore’s dilemma become the locavore’s dilemma?

Localization of food is often neatly packaged as the antidote to globalization; where there are issues of transportation, bad labor conditions, dissonance between producer and consumer, localism offers up a stark contrast. It exists as the antithesis to

neoliberal economic policies and market strategies. The image of a farmer handing off a box of fresh vegetables to the consumer onsite fits well into the environmentalist idea of how food should be distributed. However, as Hinrichs points out, placing globalization and localization at opposite ends of a spectrum “can be an overdrawn and problematic dichotomy.”⁴⁴ This can be simplified to the fact that local, like community, or organic, is a vague term. When describing food networks as being local, we often gloss over the specifics of localization in an effort to package movements into the framework that has been prescribed. For example, CSAs or farmers markets located in urban city centers often advertise their produce as being “local,” even if the food and those who sell it travel hundreds of miles to reach consumers. If it is still from the same state, does it still count as local? Or, for the sake of holding higher standards for alternative food networks, how can we prescribe definitions of local that do not reflect an industry activists are trying not to replicate?

There is no consensus on what constitutes local. Definitions change as those defining them have different interests, and different needs that must be met by engaging with this rhetoric. Here I will explore the various ways it is currently being defined, and how these definitions can detract from the ways that local food can create powerful networks. As corporations have begun to incorporate ‘local’ into their marketing schemes, food activists have begun to name this pattern; localwashing, an homage to greenwashing, which is when organizations use green aesthetics/lingo in order to demonstrate that they are environmentally responsible. In the case of local-washing, large corporations and enterprises use the word “local” to denote that producers are either have

⁴⁴ Hinrichs, “The Practice and Politics of Food System Localization.” Page 33

geographical or cultural proximity to the consumer. In reality, their practices and business model is far from locally run, sourced, or financed. There are many examples of this wave that have popped up in the past few years. Starbucks has begun the process of re-naming some of their Seattle branches, replacing the signature Starbucks logo with names such as “15th Avenue Coffee and Tea.”⁴⁵ As of 2018, two other stores in Seattle are planning to follow this path, receiving a “local” name that stealthily makes them appear as small businesses, not part of a 16,000-store empire. The senior vice president at Starbucks told the *Seattle Times* that the intention was to give the stores “a community personality.”⁴⁶ Hellman’s launched an “Eat Real, Eat Local” initiative in 2009 based around promoting the consumption of their mayonnaise as a local Canadian product. The advertisement, as seen below, claims that food produced in the entire country of Canada is local, and therefore sustainable.

An article by Steve Holt took on this topic, interviewing food analysts and networkers. One such interviewee, Rebecca Thistlethwaite, who is a farm and food policy analyst with The Cornucopia Institute of Portland, Oregon, talked about the many Portland restaurants that “identify their pork offerings as ‘local’ when in fact.... the ‘local pork’ on their menus comes from a nearby large-scale slaughterhouse called Carlton farms. Most of Carlton Farms’ hogs are born and raised in Canada and only killed and butchered in Oregon.”⁴⁷ Another interviewee, Tanya Tolchin, runs a small CSA program in Maryland. In her eyes, rising technocratic food delivery services are threatening businesses like hers, especially when they appeal to consumers under the guise of selling

⁴⁵ “Stealth Starbucks.”

⁴⁶ “Stealth Starbucks.”

⁴⁷ “What Does It Mean for Food to Be ‘Local’?”

local produce.⁴⁸ In reality, most produce in these boxes is sourced from several states away. The fact that this is happening should come as no surprise to those who know the history of food culture and food industry in the US, yet this pattern is a reminder of how difficult it can be to enact significant change without losing sight of how power structures will persist regardless. With an understanding of corporate local-washing as the lens, we can see how the following mechanisms of defining local agriculture can become tied up with structural issues. It would be irresponsible to equate Starbucks using ‘local’ as a marketing tactic and the fact that a farm few miles away from your home may offer you ‘local’ produce. What I am arguing here is not to discard the latter, but understand that the intentions of the former have trickle-down consequences. The ability of big businesses to utilize grassroots marketing mechanisms to continually exploit small farmers means that there is something wrong with the way we are prescribing ethical definitions onto food vendors. We must contextualize these definitions in order to understand how they can be misused and exploited.

⁴⁸ “What Does It Mean for Food to Be ‘Local’?”



Photo from Hellmann's, (a subsidiary of London-based giant Unilever) "Eat Real, Eat Local" initiative in Canada. Locally sourced ingredients of Hellman's include: water, modified corn starch, soybean oil, vinegar, high fructose corn syrup, egg whites, salt, sugar, xanthan gum, lemon and lime peel fibers, colors added, lactic acid, phosphoric acid, natural flavors.

One such defining factor for local food is that small, local farmers are expected to use "best practices," growing their food organically and creating good labor conditions. And, this is often the case. Besides the important fact that local agriculture means less distance for the food to travel, thus less fossil fuels are consumed to move product to the consumer, there are other ways in which the ecology of local foods is better. Small, local farms are more likely to adopt environmentally friendly practices simply due to the fact that mono-cropping is not a practical or sustainable option for a farm looking to develop a strong consumer base, nor is it practical in terms of maintaining healthy soil. Nutrient cycling is maintained at a local level. Jennifer G Phillips, an assistant professor at the

Bard Center for Environmental Policy, puts this in specific terms when she explains that “phosphorous in fertilized grain grown in the Midwest is shipped to the Northeast for dairy cow feed, then the dairy cow manure is applied to fields in the Northeast, where the excess phosphorous runs off into water sources, causing eutrophication.”⁴⁹ In a localized system, this would not happen because the nutrients would be cycling locally. Not only is mono-cropping unhealthy because of its environmental impacts, but it also puts farmers at risk and creates an unhealthy market dynamic. If a farmer is dependent on one crop for their livelihood, the risks are much greater, and the level of adaptability is limited.

However, stereotyping *all* local agriculture as sustainable, or even as ecologically superior to large-scale globalized agriculture, has its flaws. There are many small local farms who do not engage with best practices. They may use fertilizers, pesticides, and pay their workers low wages in just the same manner as their larger industrialized competitors. In fact, they might even be worse, environmentally speaking. On the flip side, small, local farms may not be organic certified due to high financial costs and time commitment. Also, defining local by ecological standards runs the risk of large-scale, corporate agro-business co-opting the term in the same way it did with organic, just by knowing how to use the defining terms to its advantage. Basing a definition of local on farms’ practices becomes tricky due to all of these factors, and a general issue with trying to prescribe one method of growing to a wide variety of producers.

Because defining local by ecology and agricultural practices is difficult, many food activists and food producers instead choose to base their definition around geographical parameters. Everything is local to somewhere, and if that thing is produced

⁴⁹ “How Green Is Local Food?”

in a sustainable way, then we can come up with no faults to continuing a globalized, if organic food trade. An upside to this way of thinking would be the possibility that farmers could feel encouraged, or surveilled, by their local consumer base and choose to make changes based on these personal decisions. However, this is not reflected in a simplified ecology based definition of local, and instead underscores a need for a people and not place based approach.

A common, yet not universal, marker of “local” is that it is produced within 100 miles of where it is consumed. This comes from a 2015 consumer survey, where 96 percent of shoppers felt that this was a substantial geographical marker.⁵⁰ According to the U.S. Congress in the 2008 Food, Conservation, and Energy Act, the total distance that a product can be moved and still considered a “local” food product is less than 400 miles from its origin, or, from within the state it is produced. According to the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, local food is defined as anything sourced from within 250 miles. Whole Foods Market, now a subsidiary of Amazon, uses state lines as boundaries for defining local. With this logic, if produce is grown in Iowa, shipped to Arizona for packaging and distribution, and then shipped back to Iowa for distribution at a Whole Foods, it is local. This goes against the logic of ‘local’, thus making the argument weak and easy to corrupt.

A geographic definition is often referred to as “Place-based”; an emerging term that is replacing local in some areas of the discourse, due to an interest of activists and analysts to be more specific in their discussion of food networks. The decision to change

⁵⁰ “Why Local Food Matters: The Rising Importance of Locally Grown Food in the U.S. Food System.Pdf.”

the wording from local to place-based feels flat when the linguistic shift offers no real ideological change than the one we were presented with under the guise of ‘local’. Not all ‘local’ marketing is a disguise for conventional agriculture, but there needs to be an awareness that it can be used as such. That being said, I want to explore the reasoning behind using this rhetoric to dictate alternative food networks. There are obviously positive reasons to base local agriculture around geography. Transportation involves high fossil fuel use. These so-called “food miles” measure not only the resources needed to produce the product, but also to transport it to its final destination. The matter of wanting to eliminate fossil fuel use wherever we can should be reason enough to encourage a local food trade.

One such example of work being done around ‘place-based’ food is Clare Hinrichs research on the local food economy in Iowa. CSAs encompass a large part of her critique of the concept of local, or ‘place-based’ definitions of agriculture. Using Iowa as a case study is especially interesting, given that the state considers itself an “agricultural hotspot,” mass-producing agricultural commodities like corn, soybeans, and pork. The vast open spaces that many would consider to be a natural, historical landscape are arguably some of the most developed in the entire United States.⁵¹ The land has been radically transformed over the last 150 years, allowing Iowa the capability to “feed the world’ efficiently and cheaply,⁵²”. The state’s legacy as an industrial giant has informed subsequent waves of alternative farming practices and alternative networks.

Food localization in Iowa began similar to most places—by appealing to

⁵¹ “Why Local Food Matters: The Rising Importance of Locally Grown Food in the U.S. Food System.Pdf.”

⁵² Hinrichs. Page 34

consumers' environmental and ethical sensibilities, offering an alternative to the industrial-grade varieties of maize they see off the highway and in the aisles. Farmers markets and CSAs begun taking hold, and “the first direct markets were producer, rather than consumer-oriented.”⁵³ The market alternatives eventually evolved into an interest in changing procurement and distribution patterns. Iowa food activists looked into projects like encouraging hospitals and universities to fully source their food supply from local producers. Local activists believe that these institutions hold great potential for supporting local agriculture and creating promising, economically sustainable markets. Hinrichs, somewhat dissident of farmers market and CSA alternatives, believes in changing distribution patterns as the most promising avenue of change. However, it also shifts the definition of local from being “food raised in this county or one nearby” to a much broader “food raised in Iowa.”⁵⁴ Hinrichs claims this as a subtle shift, but it makes one wonder, how far a jump it is from “food raised in Iowa” to “food raised in the Midwest”. Even Iowa itself takes up a whopping 56,000 square miles, making in no way compatible with even the geographical standards of ‘local’ that is so often prescribed by consumers and analysts alike. It also brings up questions of what it means for the food to be raised in a state where some of the biggest agriculture corporations have long been established.

A geographical definition of local also has the possibility or the potential for a defensive localism, a pervasive sense of exclusion that can border on nationalism.⁵⁵ As Hinrichs puts it, “in the food systems arena, defensive localization imposes rigid

⁵³ Hinrichs. Page 38

⁵⁴ Hinrichs. Page 39

⁵⁵ Hinrichs. Page 42

boundaries around the spatial ‘local’”. A geographic boundary inherently designates a difference between those inside the line and those outside. An emphasis on locally supported communities should not also lead to a disregard for those who are not a part of them, and this ideology can be exacerbated by an emphasis on clear-cut lines. The creation of a spatial local- where strict borders are created that distinct ‘local’, from ‘other’, can also give off nationalistic airs, especially in a place such as Iowa, where increasing immigrant populations (who often come for work in the agro-business) face pushback against those looking to maintain a homogenous society. The “regular re-surfacing of English-only” legislative proposals” are just one example of this trend.⁵⁶ The antithesis of many food activists looking to uplift local is to produce a system that is exclusive and nativist, yet situations can arise out of even the most genteel of sentiments. Food systems are more often than not a reflection of greater cultural anxieties, and the local food movement is not innocent of this fact. Of course, Iowa’s nativism in its relation to food networks is not representative of other places, and the conservative ethos of the state plays into this situation quite a bit. It is not certain that this same pattern of defensive will be repeated in every place-based food network system. However, we must be cautious in our choice of language when discussing the rhetoric of here and there, of borders, of geographical and cultural proximities. In a climate where these issues are prescient, it is valuable to remain cognizant of how we choose to define our radical movements.

A place-based, more specifically state-based, definition of local can also be reactionary, a term used to describe a nostalgia for returning to past ways of living, or an

⁵⁶ Hinrichs. Page 39

opposition to social and political liberalization. A food movement that romanticizes the past is not all bad, but an emphasis on past ways of living, farming, and eating, can often co-exist a little too easily with xenophobic and nativist sentiments towards the ways in which the country is changing demographically and culturally. The “Iowa grown banquet dinner,” for example, provides a large-scale dining experience that invites both producers and consumers to enjoy a “taste of Iowa,” and emphasis the diversity in produce that can be grown in the state. The dinner has been a success—there have been many subsequent iterations, and like most alternative food attempts, it also has its failings. These failings mainly revolve around the demographics of those who have access to the event, given that they are “neither poor nor particularly marginalized.”⁵⁷ The issue of structural inequalities flowing from conventional to alternative food networks is nothing new, and nothing I can offer up a profound solution for. Instead, I would like to draw attention to what Hinrichs, and I, can agree on, as the most positive thing about these dinners—the personalization of the farmers, and the subsequent producer-consumer interactions that would take place at the events. While in conventional settings the two are divided--literally, in most cases, by the middleman which separates them--at these dinners social boundaries begin to disappear. The farmers stories are heard, their faces recognized, and a sense of what food networks have the potential to look like starts to become clear. Hinrichs argues that the Iowa banquet dinner is an example of these relationships pushing further; that farmers markets and CSAs alike don’t go far enough in their simple face-to-face transactions. However, using personal and outside testimony, I hope to demonstrate how CSAs can in fact fulfill this space, and establish community whose connections

⁵⁷ Hinrichs. Page 42

stretch far beyond shared meals.

Chapter 3: Making Food Personal

In the spring of 2016, my freshman year at Scripps College, I joined Claremont Market Shares as the volunteer coordinator. CMS was created by Belmont Pinger and other students in 2013 out of an interest in engaging the community with local farmers, and providing fresh produce to students and staff that they otherwise may have trouble accessing. The CSA is entirely student-run, and non-profit, though not technically registered as a 503c due to the fact that the finances are managed within the Claremont Colleges club system, and are technically registered as a club like any other at the schools. In the past, there was some contributions from the schools, but CMS currently receives no funding from the Claremont Colleges, and relies solely upon donations, grants, and a slight profit from under-purchasing to make enough money for the sliding-scale aspect of the program to work- buying 18 dollars' worth of produce rather than 20 dollars each week provides a limited weekly profit. The CSA runs for 12 weeks a

semester, costing 20 dollars a week for a total of 240 dollars for the semester. The program sources from 4-6 local farms, each providing a different array of herbs, vegetables, and fruits, and also allowing us to interact with a diverse array of produce native to both the land and the cultural histories of the producers. The weekly shares balance produce that one may be accustomed to purchasing at the store with a couple native plants and items that are specific to the region to encourage share-holders to culinarily engage with the surrounding eco-system. The core team is made up of 4-7 individuals, depending on the semester. The roles are as follows: outreach coordinator, purchasing coordinator, financial coordinator, market-day coordinator, and subsidized coordinator. A few semesters we also have had an events and farm liaison, however those positions have shifted and melded into others as interest in joining the club has varied semester by semester. Having served in the positions of volunteer, outreach, market-day, financial, and purchasing, I have ostensibly run almost all aspects of the program, giving me an understanding of the mechanics behind running an alternative food program. The various tools and techniques that go into each position vary subtly but in strong ways that have introduced me to many new types of people and given me a deeper understanding of the various players that take up space in alternative food networks.

Share-holders are mostly comprised of students, staff, and professors at the colleges, however about 10-20% are local community members who found out about the program either from association with the schools or from flyers. There is a subsidized program in place which offers shares at a rate of 5, 7, or 10 dollars a week depending on income level, as opposed to the usual \$20. These shares are primarily offered to staff at the schools who work in grounds, housekeeping, or the dining halls. In recent semesters

as we have gained more funding through fundraising, we have been also able to offer subsidized shares to students, trying to accommodate those who struggle financially. Currently, out of the 42 shareholders of the Fall 2018 semester, 13 are subsidized, making up approximately 30% of the consumer base. This number has risen dramatically from even the previous semester, where the percentage was only around 15%, even though there were 20 more shareholders total. The subsidized shares program has been one of the most important aspects of the program, and also the most challenging. Navigating not only the financial challenges of being able to afford such low rates while still maintaining a hearty supply of food each week necessitates a fine balance of reliance on other, more privileged shareholders and a dependence on the small farmers to continue offering their produce at a relatively low wholesale price. An important aspect of this financial scheme is that the sliding scale goes both ways—shareholders have the ability to apply for cheaper, subsidized shares, but can also pay more than \$20 a week if they are able, which helps in balancing out some of the subsidized shares. This type of financial scheme does not necessarily fix any structural inequalities, but it demonstrates one of the ways in which purchasing power goes beyond simple transactions, and can translate into a mechanism for people-based networks. Because everyone involved in Claremont Market Shares is related to the schools in some capacity, there is an argument to be made that the pre-existing community of the colleges and small-town encourage people to give back, given the fact that the people they are helping are those they may interact with on a daily basis. By engaging with the personal geographies already in place, there develops an avenue for deeper community connection.

Claremont Market Shares operates under a ‘market-basket’ style of CSA, where

instead of being based around a single farm, operating on that individual site, it instead sources from multiple small farms and shareholders pick up in a third location, at Pitzer College. This style of CSA has its benefits. Small-scale farms that do not produce a diverse-enough variety of crops, and who otherwise would not be able to develop a CSA on their own, get the benefits of selling their weekly goods without having to deal with the responsibilities that come with marketing the program and dealing with shareholders. By out-sourcing the logistical headaches that accompany trying to organize a functional market day, they can instead use their time working with the food and the land. In a way, this system is more similar to a wholesale distribution network than a traditional CSA or farmers market model. Manju Kumar of Sarvodaya Farms spoke with me about her experience selling to CMS for the past few years. The weekly financial support of small purchases from her farm have helped immensely- “Claremont Market Shares has helped stabilize expenses, and the size of the purchases is something our size farm can produce.”⁵⁸ She went on to speak on how the CSA has been both financially and emotionally supportive, saying that “the farmers feel [the students] love. [Claremont Market Shares] has been open-minded and experimented with a variety of unusual produce. Overall experience has been of support and upliftment of local farms.”⁵⁹ Many farms like Sarvodaya would have to rely entirely on selling wholesale to restaurants, and would not have use for leftover produce that does not have a place in the whole-sale marketplace, especially those that might not be aesthetically appealing enough to sell. The personal connection between Sarvodaya and Claremont Market Shares has meant financial stability for both parties.

⁵⁸ Kumar, Interview with Manju Kumar.

⁵⁹ Kumar.

Claremont Market Shares is not the only variety that uses this business model- they are becoming increasingly popular in major cities, where farms are generally located farther from the consumers looking to purchase produce. Local Roots NYC is another example of this model, which offers a 3-month subscription service. They source from farms within 3 hours of the city, and source from a variety of farms that match the ethical qualifications they demand out of their food providers. Similar to CMS, share-holders pick up weekly at a specific location. The website boasts a potentially increased connection to community, environment, and body. In navigating the importance of producer-consumer relationships, which I have established as being central to a comprehensive local food network, this market-basket based model has to navigate this removal of intimate interaction between producer and consumer, which has been established as an integral component of maintaining strong food networks that can resist market co-optation. Consumers are not so removed from the producer as compared to say, a nation-wide chain supermarket. The model still connects the product to its place of origin, encourages events that bring together farmer and share-holder, and often reaches out to share-holders about events or fundraisers occurring at the various farms. Claremont Market Shares offers at least one volunteer trip per semester, giving share-holders the opportunity to visit the farms and gain experience working with the land. However, the lack of face-to-face interaction results in a loss of the original ideals of a CSA, where relationships are fostered not only around the food but around shared interests, experiences, and mutual understanding. If this CSA model looks to retain the same sort of intimate focus, relationships need to be shaped not only around producer and consumer, but those who facilitate the interactions; i.e.; the coordinators who organize the pick-up

day. In this case, for a people-based system to be effective, the producer-consumer binary needs to be dissolved in favor of a personal, focused understanding of the knots that tie people together in networks that encourage alternative market systems.

In my first semester as the produce buyer for Claremont Market Shares in 2015, I was familiar with the farms we sourced from in theory but had no actual familiarity with their geographical placement in the Inland Empire. For context, the Inland Empire is located east of Los Angeles, stretching through Los Angeles and San Bernardino Counties, eventually reaching the Nevada border. The area is expansive, historically occupied by acres of citrus orchards and dairy farms. At present, in 2018, the citrus orchards are long gone, having been replaced by acres of subdivisions, commercial centers, and warehouses, stretching along highways packed with 4 and 18-wheelers for as far as the eye can see. Interspersed with these corporate giants remain a decent number of farms- as of 2012, there were 1,249 in San Bernardino County, and 1,294 in Los Angeles County.⁶⁰ These farms are both of small and industrial scale, utilizing the hot, dry climate to the best of their ability, and never taking the massive Southern California population for granted.

Claremont Market Shares is based in Claremont, California. Situated at the edge of Los Angeles County, bordering on San Bernardino County, the city exists as a majority white, upper-middle class suburb whose demographics do not necessarily reflect those of the neighboring towns. This is due largely to the Claremont Consortium, a network of five schools: Claremont McKenna College, Harvey-Mudd College, Pitzer College, Pomona College, and Scripps College. While Claremont has the appearance of

⁶⁰ “Cp06071.Pdf.”

being an overwhelmingly wealthy, approximately 9.5% of the population lives in poverty. We can see the wealth discrepancy in the food options available- Claremont has many specialty meat, bread, and cheese (read: expensive) food stores which are walkable in the village, and is surrounded by cheap, big-box stores on the outer edges; Trader Joes, Vons, and Super King to name a few. For someone looking to purchase food somewhere in the middle of the line: local, but with a reasonable price-point, a consumer may find themselves either at the weekly Sunday farmers market or at Uncommon Good's daily market (another producer who works with Claremont Market Shares). Uncommon Good, like CMS, is building a food network for consumers looking to break from big-box chains but not willing to pay high prices for artisanal items. Uncommon Good, Huerta del Valle, and Sarvodaya farms are a few places in particular, based in Ontario and Chino, who encourage sustainable agricultural practices as well as community-based political and cultural projects, helping those who purchase their produce in community efforts that go beyond food justice.

Over 3,000 miles away from Claremont's growing bubble of food networks, Reba Richardson has a clear understanding of how to foster community through a CSA practice. She has been running the Hatchet Cove Farm CSA in Warren, Maine, for 11 years. Hatchet Cove is a MOFGA (Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association)-certified organic family farm in Mid-coast Maine, started by two former union organizers. Their farm occupies around 10 acres, dispersed around the town of Warren, and their CSA has more than 350 members in the summer season. When they started the farm in 2004, they originally only sold their produce wholesale to restaurants and distributors. However, that became not only a huge time and energy investment, but

emotionally unfulfilling. Their pivot to a community based model has not sustained their business, but their well-being.

I got the chance to work for Bill Pluecker and Reba Richardson, the owners, this summer as part of a stint WOOFing (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms, a program that matches farm apprentices with small-scale organic farms). While there, I helped in the field and in preparing the multi-weekly CSA pick-ups that took place both on and off the farm. While working the CSA, I was continually amazed at how personalized the experience was for shareholders. Many of the members had been picking up shares for the most 5+ years, and their lives were fully integrated with the Pluecker family—their kids were on the same soccer team, they belonged to the same church, and so on. A key practice that Reba implements is a weekly newsletter, that offers more information than just a list of produce. In it, she details mundane aspects of farming, as well as funny stories about her kids, the chickens, the happenings of the apprentices. Tidbits from her own life interspersed with educational information about farming practices start to erase the boundary between producer and buyer, and offer a window into the life of a small-scale farmer. In the newsletter from the first week of November 2018, for example, topics include not only the frost that has permeated many of the crops but the fact that Bill is running for state representative, and spending every night knocking on the doors of his neighbors. As Reba puts it herself, when considering her own definition, “that having a farm, even if people never actually set foot on it, they like know the intimate stories of the farm, and they know something about the practices of the farm, and they have the opportunity to go set food on it if they want, for me that’s

super important and what I would consider as local.”⁶¹

I recently spoke with Reba, as I was interested in her opinions on the definition of local, and how it has shifted in her time running an alternative food network that prioritizes community relationships. In her eyes “geographic is less important...” when questioned with the importance of defining her CSA as local, she has other priorities that go beyond strict geographical parameters- “there are other features that could be more important... for me it’s just about scale, a place where the farmer is intricately involved in the day-to-day workings of the farm, and through the members relationship to the farmer and the farm... that’s what feels local to me”.⁶² Hatchet Cove distributes all along mid-coast Maine, and some of their shareholders come from up to an hour away. Her shareholders are connected not only by their similar consumer tendencies, but an enjoyment in being part of something- a community- larger than themselves. Reba relayed to me how earlier in the summer season they struggled to keep up when Bill was physically unable to work. Share-holders came in droves to provide meals for the family, help set up the CSA, and even get their hands dirty harvesting what needed to be picked for that week. She describes the experience as being powerfully emotional- those who had been on the receiving end of the transactions were now giving back in huge ways. The narrative flipped and consumer fulfilled the duties of the producer. Intimate stories and funny anecdotes relayed over weeks of pick-up days established proximity and empathy, allowing for a community to help itself prosper.

In contrast, Claremont Market Shares has only been around less than half the

⁶¹ Richardson, Reba, Interview on Defining Local.

⁶² Richardson, Reba.

amount of time as Hatchet Cove, but personal relationships have established modes of thinking and working, creating a model that is transparent in its interest in eliminating false binaries between the roles of who makes and those who buy. For volunteers who work during the pick-up day, engaging with the share-holders, and each other, brings about a sense of commitment not only to the alternative foods movement but to the Claremont community at large; market-day often fosters discussion that intersects the work with each individual's area of interest, study, or passions. There is significant volunteer turn-over because of the fact that it is a college-based program: those involved graduate every year. However, by focusing in on the community aspect of the CSA, the program continues to sustain itself due to the personal connections those who volunteer make with each other, and then spread to other (younger) students looking to be involved in something on campus. Volunteering at the CSA has also led many students to pursue more food-related work off-campus: whether that be interning at Huerta del Valle for a semester, or engaging in radical community-organizing in other aspects of campus life. In my own experience, working at Claremont Market Shares and developing the subsidized share program is what bonded me to issues facing dining hall workers on Pitzer's Campus, whom I now organize with, intersecting food-related work with labor injustices at the colleges.

The relationships that have been woven over the years of CMS's existence truly highlight the need for its survival as a mechanism of personal connection between academic theory and praxis. As acting purchasing coordinator for the program, for the most part when people, specifically share-holders, asked who I sourced from, I offered up a vague answer of, "we buy from farms within a 20-mile radius of the Claremont

Colleges!” One day when a farmer was running late, I used Google Maps to try and calculate their ETA. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that one of our main farms who we sourced from every week was not in fact under 20 miles away, but almost 100. Immediately, I was filled with guilt, think that I had broken the trust of those who were promised a local which matched a definition reflected in conventional ideas of alternative foods. Having prescribed to a geographical standard of local for many years in my work in alternative foods, this felt like a dark spot on an otherwise strong and beneficial program. The idea that we were compromising a moral standard felt very real, but it also was what inspired a critique of the set of notions that had been so ingrained. This was a farmer who I had a connection with, who was reliable, and who often offered a larger variety of produce than some of the farms closer to the schools. He was loyal to the program, and would even come all the way out to Claremont for community-based events. It is possible that because I had previously existed as a consumer, rather than a distributor of this produce, that my conception of local was tethered to a weak understanding of geographical lines. With no personal connection to the food I purchased, I never considered that one could exist, and how powerful it could be. Not understanding how I was defining my own food network created confusion both on the purchasing side but also in how I was able to communicate the goals, ethics, and hopes of Claremont Market Shares’ future as an alternative food system. From that moment forward, it became clear that re-structuring my conception of local was integral to the success of the program.

Conclusion

Resistance can take many shapes. Attempting to create stronger, healthier communities is one of these forms. Over the past decade, alternative food networks have taken on the task of creating sustainable food models that can compete with and outlast the powers of conventional agriculture. Not only the hold it has on the economy, but on the mindset of the consumer. As we have seen with various movements that have come into fashion within alternative foods, such as the emphasis on organic and local produce, alternative trends can have their flaws. The co-optation of organic set a precedent for localwashing. A lack of a strong, radical definition of ‘local’ has left room not only for capitalist absorption of grassroots movements, but also for defensive localism and nationalistic ideals to pervade.

A people-based food network model that seeks a local framework by way of personal connections avoids issues of both defensive localism and un-clear geographic divides. Food networks that prioritize following a standard of local that is clearly derived from, and benefits, conventional agriculture conglomerates inherently lack the mechanisms that give communities the ability to create their own markets. By engaging with existing community structures and systems and using them to create stronger, food based networks, we no longer have to structure these systems using antiquated ideas of what alternative food means.

Once we move past the theoretical, it is necessary to engage with how these ‘people-based’ networks would function in praxis. I am arguing that they already do- by

way of CSAs that engage with communities on a personal level and foster intimate connections that go beyond transaction. There are both barriers and facilitators in establishing people-based networks, and while I have begun to unpack some of them, there is much more work to be done. These models are not perfect, and still have ways to go, especially when it comes to accessibility for communities often left behind when alternative food networks are considered. By working with- rather than for- these communities, effective change could be created by placing importance in existing relationships and reinforcing those dynamics in order to create genuine, sustainable networks.

The arguments I make in this text correspond directly with the action Claremont Market Shares has taken in developing a comprehensive ethos for a small-scale food network. While many hurdles have been crossed, there are still barriers in place that make the CSA model a challenging project. In my conversation with Manju Kumar of Sarvodaya Farms, she was quick to express the positive aspects of the program, but also commented on the downsides: due to the nature of the academic calendar, summers and winter vacation mean lost revenue for her farm, which can mean having to close its community programming. Other farmers have expressed similar sentiments; the college year does not align perfectly with farm seasons. Similarly related to timing, the quick turn-over of volunteers and coordinators means endless re-learning of the inner-workings of the program, and insightful knowledge about the Claremont food system is often lost with each graduating student. I hope that this paper will help even marginally in the preservation of the people who have made this program possible. The radical nature of a people-based network may not even be the realization that it *can* exist, but the

understanding that it already does: we just need to acknowledge it as the foundation of alternative foods.

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