

Tension within the Local Food Movement: How Local Food Systems Ensure the Health
of Both the Community and the Individual

by

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Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Bari A. Scott has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Anthropology.

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Abstract

As the local food movement (LFM) continues to gain public appeal, locavores repeatedly claim that local food systems ensure the health of the environment, community and individual. The LFM benefits the environment in that it often advocates for environmentally sustainable and organic growing practices. Local food systems benefit communities not only because they provide economic support to local businesses and farmers but also because they can facilitate social interactions.

Additionally, the LFM benefits the health of the individual by encouraging fruit and vegetable consumption and by providing the consumer with locally-produced food items that are not laden with toxic chemicals. While the environmental implications of the LFM are important to consider, this thesis is largely concerned with the implicit tension between the individual and the community. Specifically, this thesis will explore the ways in which the LFM cultivates community while also privileging the individual. I will ultimately argue that local food systems construct community through symbols and structures of exchange, while also participating in rhetoric that prioritizes individual interests.

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Introduction

This thesis project arose out of a developing curiosity in how food can mobilize collective action. Specifically, this thesis was inspired by the local food movement, in which food is understood as a means to address environmental degradation, globalized food systems, and increasing rates of diet-related diseases. My involvement in the local food movement began when I became a volunteer for Walla Walla Valley Farm to School (WWVF2S) in the fall of 2016. WWVF2S belongs to a wider network of farm to school (FTS) programs, which aim to source locally grown fruits and vegetables for school lunches and to educate students about nutrition and sustainable agriculture through the use of school gardens, cooking classes, and farm field trips. When I first volunteered, I was largely unfamiliar with the concept of local foods. Of course, I had seen restaurants and food retailers frequently promote themselves as “farm-to-table.” However, I never really knew what “local” meant. I would ask myself, “How far is local? Is local defined solely by distance? Why do consumers participate in this trend?” Therefore, my initial interest in WWVF2S did not stem from a personal commitment to support local agriculture. I first volunteered for WWVF2S because I have a deep passion for food. This passion of food not only stems from a love of cooking and eating but also from an understanding that food is deeply entwined with culture.

Anthropologists have long been fascinated by the relationship between food and culture. Claude Lévi-Strauss and Mary Douglas were some of the first scholars to explore the anthropology of food. Lévi-Strauss (2008) theorized that food can be divided into three culinary categories: the raw, the cooked, and the rotted. He further argued that the act of cooking is a cultural process that transforms raw foods into

cooked foods. Influenced by Lévi-Strauss, Douglas (1972) reasoned that food should be treated as a code, which can then inform a pattern of social relations. For example, Douglas observed that drinks are for strangers or acquaintances while meals are for family and close friends. Anthropologists have continued to explore food's place in culture and social life. In "Food, self and identity," Claude Fischler (1988) reasons that food is central to individual and collective identity. To incorporate (i.e. eat) a food, he argues, is to incorporate all of its properties, both physical and symbolic. Food can also act as a boundary marker between social groups (Hermansen 2012). During his research in post-colonial Algeria, Jansen (2001) found that the baguette became a tool which the French used to distinguish themselves from the Algerians who ate traditional flatbread. Other scholarship has examined the relationship between food and memory. For example, individuals on the Greek Island of Kalymnos frequently remember past events through food (Sutton 2001; Holtzman 2006). The anthropology of food is rich and extensive. While comprehensive overview of this discipline is beyond the scope of this thesis, the existing literature demonstrates that food and culture are intimately connected. Considering food's place within the field of anthropology, I believe an examination of the local food movement will make a relevant contribution to existing anthropological research.

The local food movement (LFM) first emerged in the United States during the 1970s when a growing number of food enthusiasts began to consider the environmental impacts of their food choices. Restaurateurs and food activists such as Alice Waters were some of the first people who popularized the local food trend. They believed that

small-scale, local food production and procurement could address the ills of industrial agriculture (e.g. environmental degradation, food contamination, etc.). The LFM was first considered a counterculture movement because it directly challenged industrial agriculture and a dominant food culture that valued convenience (Waters 2017). Today, the local food movement has become mainstream and has broad appeal to American consumers. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (2016a) reports that local food sales reached \$8.7 billion in revenue in 2015. As the demand for locally grown food continues to intensify, local food advocates or “locavores” tout the benefits of local food production. A common line of rhetoric within the LFM is the idea that local food systems ensure the health of the environment, community, and individual. For instance, the National Farm to School Network, a resource and information hub for communities that want to implement FTS programs in their own districts, claims, “The farm to school approach helps children understand where their food comes from and how their food choices affect their bodies, the environment, and communities at large” (FarmToSchool 2010). While locavores repeatedly cite the holistic benefits of local food production and procurement (e.g. nutrition, environmental sustainability, social solidarity, economic development, etc.), there is an implicit tension between the community and the individual; this tension is the main concern of this thesis project.

Much of the existing research on the LFM focuses on the ability of local food systems to strengthen community relations. One study found that “people” was among the top reasons why customers frequent farmers’ markets (Bubinas 2011). Another study found that vendors participate in farmers’ markets mainly because they enjoy visiting customers and other vendors (Lyson et al. 1995). Saldivar-Tanaka and Kransy

(2004) examined the role urban gardens play in community development through interviews with members of the Latino community in New York City. They discovered that these gardens are used to grow ethnic vegetables and herbs and are sites for hosting cultural events. They concluded that these urban gardens serve as important cultural and communal spaces in which Latino immigrants can connect to each other and to their cultural heritage. Another survey conducted in the Mid-Hudson region of New York State examined the link between participation in local agriculture and community engagement. The results demonstrate that participants in the LFM are also more likely to engage in volunteer, political, and other civic activities (Obach and Tobin 2014). In other words, the survey suggests that engagement in local food systems can encourage other forms of civic engagement within local communities. The literature just discussed analyzes the social and communal nature of local agriculture. While the LFM claims that localized agriculture can also revitalize local communities through economic development, this thesis project is primarily concerned with how local food production and procurement can cultivate social cohesion and a shared sense of community.

While some people emphasize the communal aspects of local food production, critics argue that the LFM is becoming too individualistic. Specifically, Schrank and Running (2018) posit that the growing emphasis on the taste, quality, and nutritional benefits of local food prioritize individual interests. Moreover, the very notion of a “locavore” is highly individualistic. According to DeLind (2011), the concept of the locavore prioritizes the individual because it suggests that what is wrong with the world (e.g. global warming, obesity, etc.) can be addressed through a change in

individual market behavior. Another critique is that the LFM participates in neoliberal notions of individualism by framing the locavore as a consumer (Allen and Guthman 2006). As consumers, locavores are promised a greater variety of choices within the marketplace (e.g. organic vs. nonorganic apples). By presumably giving consumers a greater ability to choose, critics claim that the LFM feeds into individually-oriented rhetoric that frames individual choice as equivalent to individual freedom (DeLind 2011). My own research confirms the significance of this rhetoric. Like DeLind (2011) and Allen and Guthman (2006), I found that the LFM participates in discourse that privileges the individual, yet also employs community-oriented rhetoric as a way to enhance social solidarity. This dichotomy led me to the central question of this thesis: *how does the LFM construct community while also privileging the individual?*

Before I address this tension between the individual and community, I will first define a few terms. In this thesis I will repeatedly refer to direct-to-consumer markets (i.e. farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture), direct-to-retail markets (i.e. grocery stores and farm-to-table restaurants), and farm-to-school (FTS) programs. These local food systems, as I will now term them, are the focus of my thesis research.

Direct-to-Consumer Markets

As the name suggest, direct-to-consumer markets are those that sell locally produced foods directly to consumers. They include farmers' markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). Farmers' markets can be defined as open-air or indoor marketplaces where customers can purchase locally grown food directly from local farmers. The most common types of food sold in farmers' markets are fresh fruits,

vegetables, and other farm products. According to Robinson and Farmer (2017), there are various types of farmers' markets including road-side stands and urban markets. While first established in 1730, American farmers' markets continue to be popular today (Neal 2013). Between 1998 and 2009, the number of farmers' markets grew to by 92% (Martinez et al. 2010).

Like farmers' markets, CSA is designed to promote direct and ongoing relationships between producers and consumers. A CSA is an organization in which members purchase a share of a farmer's anticipated harvest and make an advanced payment at an agreed upon price (Robinson and Farmer 2017). Methods of distribution differ between individual CSAs: members can either receive their shares at the farm/designated pick-up location or they can have their shares delivered directly to their homes. In either case, members typically receive their produce on a weekly basis throughout a growing season. It is unclear where the CSA model was first conceptualized. Some scholars theorize that CSAs started in Japan during the 1970s when mothers, who were concerned about the use of chemicals in mass food production, turned to local farmers in search of fresh, clean produce for their families (Robinson and Farmer 2017). Natasha Bowens (2015), however, claims that the American CSA movement is rooted in black history and can be traced to the 1960s and 1970s when Booker T. Whatley advocated for "regenerative farming," which focused on regenerating soil, maximizing biodiversity, and revitalizing black communities. Regardless of where CSAs originated, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of CSA arrangements. Between 1986 and 2005, the number of CSA operations increased from two to 1,144

(Adam 2006; Martinez 2011). And in 2015, the USDA (2017a) reported that 7,398 farms sold their products directly to consumers through a CSA arrangement.

Direct-to-Retail Markets

Direct-to-retail markets are those that establish direct relationships with local producers to then sell locally grown products to their customers. As such, these markets act as intermediaries between consumers and producers. In this thesis, I examine grocery stores and farm-to-table restaurants as popular types of direct-to-retail markets.

Specifically, I examine chain grocery stores and farm-to-table restaurants because they represent a more corporatized version of the LFM. Grocery chains such as Walmart have jumped on the local bandwagon in order to appeal to the growing demand for local products. While it is unclear how Walmart defines “local,” the company claims that 10% of all their produce is sourced locally (2018a). Many restaurants have also joined the local food impulse, labeling themselves “farm-to-table.” These restaurants also establish direct relationships with local producers to source ingredients that they use for their menus. Walla Walla Bread Company, for example, claims that they purchase their wheat directly from Seth Small, a local farmer (n.d.). In the United States, direct-to-retail food sales reached \$5 billion in 2007, while direct-to-consumer (e.g. farmers’ markets) sales only accounted for \$1.2 billion that same year (Martinez et al. 2011). Thus, direct-to-retail markets have played an important role in the popularization of local foods as they provide a more convenient channel through which customers can participate in the LFM.

Farm-to-School Programs

As stated above, farm-to-school (FTS) programs represent an effort to serve locally produced ingredients in school cafeterias while also educating students about nutrition and sustainable agriculture through school gardens, cooking classes, and farm field trips. The goal of these programs is to increase fruit and vegetable consumption among students while also supporting local farmers and rural communities (Johnson et al. 2012). In 1995, farm-to-table chef Alice Waters founded the first FTS program, the Edible Schoolyard Project. Nearly a decade later, the federal government voiced its support for FTS programs through the 2004 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act. This legislation amended the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to create a Farm to School Program (govtrack n.d.). As the FTS movement continued to gain momentum, the government passed the Health, Hunger-Free Kids Act 2010, which established mandatory funding of \$5 million annually for the Farm to School Grant Program (USDA 2018). Currently, FTS is hoping to expand the Farm to School Grant Program by increasing funding to \$15 million in order to accommodate over 1,600 applications (National Farm to School Network 2018a).

I chose to analyze these local food systems because they seem to be the most popular channels through which individuals can purchase/acquire locally grown foods.

Additionally, they each represent a different way in which individuals can participate in the LFM. Specifically, direct-to-consumer markets allow for direct and often personal relationships between producers and consumers. In contrast, direct-to-retail markets act as intermediaries, yet also offer consumers the most convenience. FTS

programs offer a unique variant of the LFM in that they are implemented through schools and aim to introduce children to the benefits of localized agriculture.

Methodology

In order to examine the ways in which these local food systems privilege the individual and the community, I first conducted an online search of farmers' markets, CSAs, chain grocers, and farm-to-table restaurants operating across the United States. For example, I Google searched, "Best farmers' markets in the United States." These searches primarily resulted in magazine articles oriented towards food and travel. From these articles, I selected specific direct-to-consumer and direct-to-retail markets to investigate further. The selection process was mostly random but I intentionally selected markets from different regions within the U.S. in order to obtain a diverse sample. From there, I browsed each market's website and focused on their "About" page or, in the case of restaurants, their "Menu" page. I then noted the language that was used to describe their products and paid specific attention to words relating to community (e.g. "social relationships", "community connection", etc.) and the individual consumer (e.g. "fresh", "nutritious", "choice", etc.)

My methodology in researching FTS programs began the same way. I browsed various program websites, focused on each program's mission statement, and noted community- and individually-oriented rhetoric. Some FTS programs posted short YouTube videos that feature their goals and accomplishments. Thinking that they would provide relevant insight from program directors, students, and volunteers, I decided to include these videos in my research. I watched, transcribed, and coded five

videos, again noting language. Considering my involvement with WWVF2S, I also felt that in-person interviews would be valuable for my research (see Appendix A for interview guide). I reached out to various volunteers in the program and ultimately conducted four interviews. Initially, I planned to conduct more interviews but due to time constraints and volunteer availability, I decided that websites and YouTube videos provided sufficient supplemental material. I then recorded and transcribed these interviews. Again, I coded this material based on themes of community and individualism.

Upon initial observation, I found that these local food systems all utilize individually- and community-oriented rhetoric. However, I also discovered that direct-to-consumer markets are more community-oriented than FTS programs and direct-to-retail markets, likely because they often involve face-to-face interactions between farmers and consumers. This discovery led me to investigate the structural differences between these local food systems, and eventually to the ways in which symbols and the act of exchange can cultivate social relationships and a greater sense of community. Therefore, much of my analysis relies on theories of exchange and imagined communities, as well as existing research that examines the social nature of localized food systems.

Scope of Thesis

In this thesis, I explore major themes within the LFM. Specifically, I discuss the ways in which the LFM constructs community while also privileging individual interests. In Chapter One, I will define the term “local,” as it pertains to the LFM. In Chapters Two

and Three, I will provide a historical overview of the LFM and examine the movement within the context of previous agrarian trends that have rejected industrialized food systems and sought to preserve small-scale agriculture. These trends have been termed back-to-the-land movements and they represent recurrent impulses among city dwellers to leave urban centers and “return” to agrarian communities. While the average locavore is not leaving the city to practice subsistence farming, the LFM is similar to back-to-the-land movements in its idealization of agrarian life. In these chapters, I will ultimately argue that the LFM constitutes a modern back-to-the-land movement and will investigate the ways in which the LFM echoes back-to-the-land rhetoric. By providing this historical context, I hope to emphasize the LFM’s cultural significance.

The remaining chapters serve as my analysis chapters. They are organized according to the types of local food systems discussed above. In these chapters, I borrow from Maussian gift exchange and Benedict Anderson’s discussion on imagined communities to analyze the ways in which local food systems construct community. I then analyze the way language is used by these systems to appeal to individual customers. I will ultimately argue that direct-to-consumer, direct-to-retail markets, and FTS programs construct community (both real and imagined) through symbols and systems of exchange while simultaneously participating in rhetoric that privileges the individual.

Part I: Definitions and Historical Context

Chapter 1: What is Local?

“Local” is a highly ambiguous term. It is typically conceptualized in terms of proximity. Even so, there is no consensus on how short a distance a food item must travel in order to earn the “local” label. The 2008 Farm, Conservation, and Energy Act defined local foods as products transported and distributed within state lines or 400 miles from their origin (Robinson and Farmer 2017). However, one volunteer for Walla Walla Valley Farm to School (WWVF2S) understood “local” as within 15-20 miles or, more generally, within county lines (Smith 2018). Despite these conflicting definitions, most local food advocates agree that food production and distribution should minimize the distance between the farmer and the eater. While spatiality is important to consider, “local” can also be defined in terms of temporal and social relationships, nutrition, environmental stewardship, and modes of production.

In order to further elucidate the multidimensional nature of “local,” I will borrow Jennifer Robinson and Robert Farmer’s definition. In *Selling Local: Why Local Food Movements Matter*, Robinson and Farmer (2017) outline seven notable facets of “local.” They first define “local” as temporal. In other words, the term represents a sense of time. After speaking with local growers and local food enthusiasts (i.e. locavores), the authors found that people often conceive of local foods as fresh. Local food production and distribution aim to minimize the distance and thus, time that foods must travel to the consumer. Local foods are frequently thought of as “fresh” because customers assume that foods lose quality over time. In my own research, I found that

local food outlets capitalize on this association between fresh and local. For example, the poultry company, Foster Farms, is dedicated to “raising poultry that is truly fresh and truly local” (2018).

This idea of “freshness” brings Robinson and Farmer to their next definition; “local” is healthful. Data collected by Cascade Harvest Coalition reveals that 88% of consumers believe that fresh is healthful and thus, local is healthful (as cited in Robinson and Farmer 2017). As stated above, locavores believe that foods lose quality over time. If this is true, then foods must also lose nutrients over time. A study conducted by Howard et al. (1999) measured nutrient retention in vegetables over time. The researchers found that green beans lost more than 90 percent of their ascorbic acid content over a 16-day storage period. However, some foods actually gain nutrients over time. As Robinson and Farmer (2017) point out, sauerkraut and blue cheese actually become more nutritious as they age. Nevertheless, locavores often cite the nutritional benefits of freshly picked, local foods. As the WWVF2S website states, “We envision a school garden program where students feed their bodies and minds growing and tasting fresh healthy foods” (n.d.).

Robinson and Farmer argue that “local” also implicates scale. The authors remark that local food products are increasingly labeled “artisanal” and “small batch.” They further observe that local farmers work on farms that are small enough to tend and harvest by themselves. During my research, I found that CSAs are often idealized as the “small, local family farm” (Abundant Fields Farm n.d.). Of course, Robinson and Farmer acknowledge that scale by definition is relative. I would further point out that not all local food systems are small in scale. I doubt that Walmart, a multinational

corporation that supposedly supports local agriculture, sources its apples from a small, family orchard in Yakima. Nevertheless, Johnson et al. (2012) claim that a major motivator for participating in the LFM is to support small- and medium-sized farms. Therefore, the scale of production is important to consider when defining “local.”

In addition to scale, “local” also implies accountability (Robinson and Farmer 2017). Local food systems often allow for personal communication and face-to-face interactions between farmers and consumers. At farmers’ markets, for example, customers can ask vendors questions about the produce being sold (e.g. “How were these carrots grown?”). These intimate interactions not only strengthen social relationships but may also incite within local food vendors a certain sense of responsibility towards their customers. To explain this notion of accountability, the Robinson and Farmer provide the following example:

When Goodell discovered one summer that her farm was included in a regional boil-water order, issued by health departments when drinking water becomes, or is suspected to be, contaminated by pathogens, she immediately discarded all the produce she had already picked and washed that week for the farmers’ market. Although the contamination was not visible to the naked eye, she had no doubt that her responsibility to her customers was to protect their health... (as quoted in Robinson and Farmer 2017: 15-16)

Here, Goodell feels a sense of obligation to her customers. Because the farmers’ market allows for relationships that exist beyond basic market transactions between vendors and customers (a topic that will be explored later in this thesis), “local” implies a degree of transparency that cannot be found in traditional supermarkets.

“Local” can also be characterized in terms of social relationships. Direct-to-consumer outlets such as CSAs and farmers’ markets are commonly characterized as “social hubs” that strengthen the relationship between local food producers and food

consumers (Easton Farmers Market n.d.; Boulder County Farmers Markets n.d.). According to Robinson and Farmer, “local” fosters systems thinking. Because local agriculture is designed to embed food production within the community, systems thinking can be defined as a community-based approach to food production and distribution (Lyson 2004). Such an approach prioritizes social relationships and a collective drive to improve the health and vibrancy of the environment and community (Robinson and Farmer 2017).

Robinson and Farmer also define “local” in terms of environmental stewardship. The authors found that local farmers often view themselves as responsible caretakers of the earth. Accordingly, these farmers practice sustainable agriculture as a means of protecting the environment. Modes of local, sustainable production include fair farm labor practices, animal welfare, and a rejection of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides (Martinez et al. 2010). The use of sustainable production methods gives further legitimacy to idea that “local” is healthful. Sustainable agriculture is not only framed as healthful for the environment, but also as healthful for the eater. When customers purchase locally and sustainably grown food, they are purchasing foods that are not laden with toxic chemicals that may pose serious health consequences.

Finally, Robinson and Farmer characterize “local” as oppositional. Today, many fruits and vegetables sold at the grocery store are products of industrial agriculture, which some argue is fueled by a desire to maximize production and profit (Lyson 2004). Industrial agriculture has been criticized for distancing the relationship between producer and consumer and for its negative environmental impacts. In response, some local food advocates propose a type of agriculture that privileges the small, slow,

nonstandard, and intensive (Robinson and Farmer 2017). Lyson speculates that “corporate interests are likely to continue to influence the food system in the direction of increased economic globalization” (2004: 103). Yet, he is also confident that local food production can stand in opposition to industrial agriculture by establishing community-based food systems that encourage more social and sustainable modes of production and consumption.

I would like to add to Robinson and Farmer’s definition of “local” the notions of seasonality and provenance. During an interview, one WWVF2S volunteer reasoned:

We can get apples here locally, easily cause this is a region of our country that grows more apples than most places in the world...but oranges don’t grow here because of our climate and I still like to consider buying oranges in season as a form of purchasing local (Brown 2018)

Here, the volunteer conceptualizes “local” as purchasing produce that is grown in season or, in other words, during a specific time of the year. It must also be noted that the volunteer understands purchasing in season as purchasing foods that are native to a particular region due to environmental factors such as climate. Purchasing in season, then, evokes this idea of “provenance,” which describes the method of production that is attributed to local influences, such as a region’s climate or local culture (Martinez et al. 2010). Therefore, purchasing local, in terms of seasonality, can be conceptualized as buying food items that are indigenous to and representative of a particular place.

In sum, the definition of “local” is layered and complex. As discussed above, “local” is temporal, healthful, seasonal and oppositional. Furthermore, the term implies a certain degree of scale, transparency, and environmental stewardship. The abstract nature of “local” likely contributes to the LFM’s success. The fact that “local” can be

understood through varying, yet often overlapping definitions allows consumers to participate according to their own beliefs and lifestyles.

Chapter 2: Back-to-the-Land Movements and Their Cultural Significance

In the Introduction, I argued that the LFM is a contemporary back-to-the-land movement. Back-to-the-land (BTL) movements can be defined as recurrent impulses to leave urban centers and to live a life of self-sufficiency through small-scale farming. While BTL participants almost always return to the city, back-to-the-land ideas have persisted since the late 1800s. Unlike traditional BTL movements, the LFM does not advocate for the average American to leave cities and practice subsistence farming. In fact, LFM advances the idea that the “farm” can be brought to the city through farmers’ markets, food cooperatives, FTS programs, etc. Nevertheless, the local ideal echoes previous back-to-the-land themes in that the current LFM rejects industrial food systems and celebrates small-scale, sustainable agriculture. In this chapter, I will examine the history of BTL movements and the central values of these movements. In the subsequent chapter, I will discuss how the LFM is a reiteration of back-to-the-land ideas.

In the United States, back-to-the-land ideas first gained popularity during the mid-late 1800s. While it is difficult to determine if and how many people actually returned to the land, it is obvious that back-to-the-land rhetoric has captured the public’s fascination for over a hundred years. Back-to-the-land ideas were most popular in the years leading up to World War I and again in the 1970s. Why these ideas gained popularity during these specific times will be explored later. Nevertheless, evidence of BTL movements can be found in popular literature. During the early 1900s, back-to-the-land literature took form in magazines and do-it-yourself farming manuals. For

example, *Country Life in America* was first published in 1901 and was an illustrated magazine whose focus was on country living (Brown 2011). A cursory glance of the magazine's illustrations reveals that the magazine and its readership held a romantic view of rural life. As Figure 1 demonstrates, nature was the ultimate vacation getaway and escape from the city.

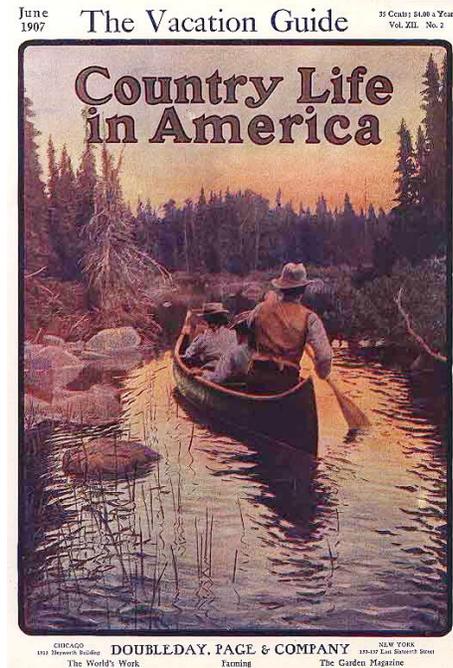


Figure 1. "The Vacation Guide."
Country Life in America (1907)

In 1910, the same magazine printed a permanent series called "Cutting Loose from the City." In one article, back-to-the-lander, William B. Hunter reflects on his exodus from the city and adjustment to life in the country:

We were New York office men, drawing better than average salaries perhaps, but still of a common type, when the scheme of our Georgia orchard came into being in 1906...one of us broke the ties which, for twenty years, had bound him to the city, and since has lived the life of an enthusiast. The other three have

remained at their city posts to produce capital for orchard development...What we have done through cooperation seems to point a way through most of the objections confronting the average city being who longs for independence and a life in the open (1911: p. 396)

Here, Hunter claims that he broke ties with the city and suggests that others can do the same if they long for a life of independence. He recognizes that returning to the land would not have been possible without some degree of mutual cooperation. Most noteworthy, however, is that he acknowledges other city dwellers who wish to move to the country, which suggests that back-to-the-land ideas were common at the time.

Other writers such as Bolton Hall also embraced the rural lifestyle and encouraged others to practice subsistence farming (Brown 2011). Hall was such a strong proponent of early back-to-the-land ideas because he believed Americans were enslaved by wage labor. In the foreword of *Three Acres and Liberty*, Hall likens the American worker to a horse that “was hobbled every night to keep him from wandering” (1907: p. 2). In order to break free from an industrialized economy, Hall suggests that Americans return to the land. In the following chapters, Hall offers guidance on how to start and maintain a family homestead. In Chapter 3, “How to Buy the Farm,” he suggests that families should buy land near other people and will “make the biggest wages by buying rough or neglected land, and hewing it into shape” (p. 26). Hall also describes farming tools, sowing methods, and other land uses (e.g. bee-keeping, raising poultry/rabbits). Like Hunter, Hall outlines the ways in which a city dweller can successfully live off the land. Thus, a common theme emerges from these two sources. Central to the back-to-the-land movement of the early 20th century was the image of a self-sufficient farmer who could care for himself and his family. Back-to-the-land advocates believed

that farming was the ultimate form of self-sufficiency. While back-to-the-landers such as Hunter relied on a secondary source of income (i.e. city friends) in order successfully live off the land, their ultimate goal was to be independent from industry and markets.

So why do we see proliferation of back-to-the-land literature during the early 20th century? During 1800s, the American economy went through an immense transformation; an economy that was once dependent on agriculture gradually transformed into one that was dependent on technology and industry. After 1880, industry grew exponentially because machines (e.g. the assembly line) accelerated manufacturing and production (Rees 2016). At the same time, cities such as New York and Chicago quickly developed to accommodate those who depended on the factories for work. In 1850, only 15.3% of Americans lived in cities and by 1900, that number more than doubled to 39.7% (Rees 2016). City centers were often thrown into “social disequilibrium” as rapid urbanization and industrialization generated slums, labor struggles, and pollution (Brown 2011). Despite great technological advances, several financial panics, crashes, and depressions starting in 1893 tested the public’s trust in the American economy. According to Brown, back-to-the-landers were attracted to an agrarian lifestyle because they believed that the self-sufficient farmer was solvent in times of financial crises. Therefore, the first BTL movement can be viewed as a pragmatic response to the economic consequences of an industrial society.

I would further argue that the explosion of back-to-the-land literature at the turn of the 20th century can be seen as a romanticizing and mourning of America’s agriculture past. Agriculture has played an integral role in the formation of early American identity

and culture (Hofstadter 1956). As stated above, the American economy was primarily dependent on agriculture leading up to 1880. Dating even further back, the colonization of the United States would not have been possible without the establishment of permanent agrarian communities. Moreover, it was agrarian farmers who fought the British in America's quest for sovereignty (Hofstadter 1956). In this manner, agriculture is intertwined with America's sense of independence. Agriculture also played an integral role in the expansion of the United States. In the 1840s, territorial expansion was often justified by the Manifest Destiny. According to this doctrine, Americans considered Westward expansion as an endowment from God with which they could spread democratic republicanism across North America (Dobson 2013: p. 41). Much like how God gave Adam the responsibility to steward the Garden of Eden, Americans believed that God gave them the divine right to settle the West through the establishment of agrarian communities. Thus, agriculture is intimately connected with America's distinctive pioneer spirit.

Prominent figures, such as Thomas Jefferson, were also enthusiastic admirers of agrarian life and would romanticize the landowning, family farmer. The American public, especially the literate and elite classes, were attracted to the idea of a self-sufficient and noncommercial way of life. During the early 19th century, the farmer was often idealized for "his independence, his frank spirit of equality, his ability to produce and enjoy a simple abundance" (Hofstadter 1956). Most importantly, the farmer was praised for his strong work ethic. In a culture that has been shaped by capitalism since the commercial production of tobacco, hard agrarian work in the United States is perceived as noble and virtuous (Weinburg 2003; Kalberg 2009). Figures such as

Jefferson were enthusiastic admirers of the farmer because the farmer was a moral symbol that embodied American values of hard work. Therefore, it is unsurprising that many people yearned to return to agrarian life when American society was undergoing rapid transformations. Industrialization and urbanization of the late 1800s not only transformed the American economy but it also disrupted America's sense of identity.

The 1970s Back-to-the-Land Movement

Back-to-the-land ideas that were popular at the turn of the 20th century faded in the years following World War I. There was a slight back-to-the-land revival during the Great Depression when the New Deal programs sought to revitalize rural America through federally funded projects (*The United States News* 1935; Brown 2011), but it was not until the 1970s that there was a notable resurgence in the back-to-the-land impulse. According to *U.S. News & World Report* (1979), the population of nonmetropolitan areas increased by 14.3% between 1970 and 1979. Like the first BTL movement, the 1970s movement materialized during a time of social, political, and economic turmoil. Brown (2011) characterizes back-to-the-landers of the 1970s as “children of prosperity” who were faced with newfound concerns such as increased energy shortages, rising food prices, and crippling inflation. Like the early back-to-the-landers, these “children of prosperity” became increasingly estranged from mainstream consumer culture and seized upon the vision of self-sufficiency as a way to preserve their own independence (Agnew 2004; Brown 2011). As Roy Reed (1975) notes in his *New York Times* article, “Back-to-Land Movement Seeks Self-Sufficiency,” back-to-the-landers of the 1970s were deeply antagonistic of the American economic system

and sought to free themselves from uncontrolled corporate power. While this new crop of back-to-the-landers was enchanted by the notion of self-sufficiency during a time of economic and social unrest, an added element of environmental consciousness seemed to permeate back-to-the-land ideas. Jeffery Jacob suggests that the 1970s BTL movement emerged alongside the modern environmental movement as the American public faced “a collective crisis of character in regard to the environmental damage inflicted on the earth” (1997: p. 11).

The modern environmental movement first emerged in 1969 when Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring* (Kline 2011). Up until then, many Americans were unaware of how an unregulated industrial economy could harm the environment. Carson’s book revealed that industrial agriculture was poisoning the environment through the use of pesticides. A series of environmental disasters (e.g. the 1969 oil spill on the Cuyahoga River) also awakened public concern. As the environmental movement garnered legitimacy, back-to-the-landers also oriented their attention towards sustainable agricultural practices. In the aforementioned *New York Times* article, Reed further states:

One of [the movement’s] long-term aims is to use more wind and solar power and less of the finite resources such as oil. Thousands of new rural families heat and cook with wood. ‘Labor-saving’ devices like tractors are examined skeptically and used sparingly. Mule-drawn equipment is reappearing. Toilets that convert wastes into compost and methane gas are being widely discussed (1975: p. 63)

Here, Reed highlights the ways in which back-to-the-landers sought to address increased environmental degradation. Brown (2011) argues that the added element of environmentalism was a natural companion to the search for self-sufficiency. To clarify

this idea further, Brown examines John and Sally Seymour's *Farming for Self-Sufficiency*. Specifically, Brown notes the apocalyptic language that the authors use to describe the environmental crises of the time. The Seymours claim, "It's all going to collapse...the oil will run out, or the grub, or the uranium-235" (as quoted in Brown 2011: p. 214). According to Brown, this apocalyptic language legitimized the pursuit for self-sufficiency as back-to-the-landers searched for ways in which to escape the social, political, and environmental crises of the time.

Chapter 3: The Contemporary Back-to-the-Land Movement

Like the first BTL movement, the 1970s movement faded. However, a new type of back-to-the-lander also emerged during this time. While traditional back-to-the-landers wanted to escape conventional life in the city, there were others who were bringing “the land” into mainstream culture. In 1971, Alice Waters opened Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California. Her goal was to open a restaurant that sourced ingredients from local farms and that supported sustainable agriculture. Even today, the restaurant’s website states:

Alice and Chez Panisse are convinced that the best tasting food is organically and locally grown, and harvested in ways that are ecologically sound by people who are taking care of the land for future generations. For over 45 years, Chez Panisse has invited diners to partake of the immediacy and excitement of vegetables just out of the garden, fruit right off the branch, and fish straight from the sea. In doing so, Chez Panisse has established a close network of suppliers who, like the restaurant, strive for both environmental harmony and delicious flavor (2018)

Similar to back-to-the-landers of the time, Waters was influenced by the modern environmental movement and aimed to address problems of environmental degradation by connecting her customers to locally sourced ingredients. Thus, the opening of Chez Panisse marks the moment when the LFM first began.

When Chez Panisse first opened, people were increasingly concerned with where their food was sourced. Specifically, the modern environmental movement encouraged people to consider the environmental impacts of industrial agriculture and their food choices. In addition, people were troubled by the increasing rates of foodborne illness. Beginning in the 1970s, foodborne pathogens were spreading rapidly and globally. At this time, the globalization of food production dramatically altered the production and

distribution of food (Lyson 2004). Globalization not only increased the distance between producers and consumers but also opened up new points for food contamination (Tauxe 1997). As global supply chains became increasingly complex, food contamination scares (e.g. 1982 *E. coli* outbreak linked to hamburger meat) drew attention to the health hazards associated with industrial, globalized agriculture.

In Italy, the Slow Food movement drew even greater attention to the ills of globalized food systems. Founded in 1986 by Carlo Petrini, the Slow Food movement represented a growing distrust of global food systems and the rising influence of fast-food restaurants. Its mission was (and still is) to “defend regional traditions, good food, gastronomic pleasure and slow pace of life” (Slow Food 2015). While Slow Food first started in Italy, it became an international phenomenon by 1989 and was introduced to the United States in 2000. Similar to its Italian counterpart, Slow Food USA challenges fast-paced life and profit-driven, industrial food systems by seeking to “cultivate joyful connections to community and place” and “protect natural resources for future generations” (Slow Food USA 2018). Most noteworthy, is the organization’s promise to “promote food that is local, seasonal, and sustainably grown.” The establishment of Slow Food USA gave greater legitimacy to Alice Waters’ food philosophy and represented a growing public desire to support localized food systems.

The concept of local foods became increasingly popular during the early 2000s when local food systems garnered greater public and governmental support. In the years between 1998 and 2009, the number of American farmers’ markets increased from 2,756 to 5,274 (Martinez et al. 2010). Additionally, the number of CSAs programs increased from two to over 1,000 between 1986 and 2006 (Adam 2006). And

in 2008, the federal government offered monetary support for local food systems through loan programs established by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act (Martinez et al. 2010). That same year, Barack Obama recognized farming as a vanishing occupation and pledged to implement policies that supported local, regional food systems (*BarackObama.com* 2008).

Since then, it is clear that local foods have maintained their appeal. As one title from a 2017 Huffington Post article reads, “The Local Food Movement Is Flourishing and Shows No Signs of Stopping” (Erbenraut). Since 2009, the USDA has invested more than \$1 billion in over 40,000 local food businesses (USDA 2016b). In 2014, local foods generated \$11.7 billion in sales, a number that is expected to climb to \$20.2 billion by 2019 (Tarkan 2015). As the demand for local foods intensifies, Noll (2014) projects that the local food movement will increasingly become part of the modern American landscape.

As previously stated, the LFM can be considered as a modern BTL movement. Unlike previous back-to-the-landers, locavores do not seek to pursue a life on the farm. Instead, locavores are attracted to this idea of “farm-to-table,” which suggests that the essence of the “farm” can be enjoyed without ever visiting one. Nevertheless, I argue that the LFM is a reiteration of previous BTL movements because it aims to connect consumers to their food and to the land from which their food was grown. As City Grown, a CSA in Seattle, states, “It is our primary goal to bring people closer to the source of their food” (n.d.). Furthermore, the LFM echoes BTL rhetoric of self-sufficiency. While locavores rely on local farmers for their food, one goal of the LFM is to create resilient communities and self-reliant food economies (Edible Schoolyard

Project 2018; DeLind 2011). In the face of a globalized world, locavores feel helplessly dependent on global corporations that have control over basic resources such as food, clothing, and shelter (Brown 2011). Local food production can cultivate self-reliant communities by supporting local businesses and directing dollars back into local economies. Another way in which the LFM participants seek self-sufficiency is through the individual act of choice. As DeLind (2011) notes, locavores are attracted by a greater ability to choose within the marketplace. This idea of choice reaffirms back-to-the-land ideas of self-sufficiency because it is through the ability to choose that consumers can exercise their individual freedom. Thus, the LFM can be seen as a reiteration of BTL movements because it seeks to preserve self-sufficiency, both on a communal level and an individual level.

As stated in the Introduction, the purpose of these first few chapters was to define “local” and to examine the cultural significance of the LFM. By contextualizing the LFM within BTL movements, I demonstrated that the LFM is not an isolated event. Instead, the local food impulse mirrors previous cultural trends that aim to preserve self-sufficiency and America’s agricultural identity. In the following chapters, I will attempt to answer my overarching research questions by analyzing the LFM in terms of direct-to-consumer and direct-to-retail markets, and FTS programs. I will first borrow Tripp Rebrovick’s characterization of “eco-dietetics” to further differentiate these three types of local food systems. I will then explore the ways in which these local food systems each construct community while also privileging the individual.

Part II: The Three Faces of the Local Food Movement

In “The Politics of Diet: ‘Eco-dietetics,’ Neoliberalism, and the History of Dietetic Discourses,” Tripp Rebrovick (2015) contextualizes the current push towards fresh, local, and organic foods within historical discourses concerning diet: the humoral and nutritionist regimes. In ancient Greece, humoral dietetics concerned itself with food and the humors of the human body (i.e. blood, yellow bile or choler, black bile, and phlegm). Humoral discourse presented the idea that a strictly regimented diet was essential to maintaining proper balance of these humors and thus, health. By the 19th century, dietetic discourse was dominated by the nutritionist regime. According to nutritionist dietetics, food can be understood as a collection of proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, and minerals, which all provide a specific amount of energy, measured in calories. Food and the body, Rebrovick argues, were thus reduced to a set of measurable, chemical components as the healthy diet was conceptualized as a quantitative formula.

As sustainable agriculture, organic farming, and local food systems have become more popular, Rebrovick observes that a new dietetic discourse has emerged: “eco-dietetics.” Since the 1960s, a growing number of consumers are concerned with how eating affects the environment. Eco-dietetics, then, prioritizes fresh, organically and sustainably-grown, local food. As Rebrovick states:

“In the eco-dietetic version of incorporation, it is perhaps more accurate to say that you are *how*, rather than *what*, you eat. Eaters incorporate the values and methods that governed the cultivation of the particular food...Within this regime, the healthiest and best food is freshest or most ‘in season’ and produced as close as possible to the eater. Eating healthily remains equated with eating ethically” (p.284)

Unlike humoral and nutritionist dietetics, which emphasize the effects of eating on the individual, eco-dietetics understands the body and the act of eating as inter-connected to the external environment and natural ecosystems.

Rebrovick recognizes that eco-dietetic discourse is not unified among its adherents. In fact, he divides eco-dietetics into two variants: *agrarian* and *corporate*. He defines eco-dietetics as agrarian when the distance between production and consumption is minimized and when the eater participates in the growing and preparing of food; in contrast, eco-dietetics are corporate when profit becomes the primary motivation of production and intermediaries come between the farmer and the consumer. Rebrovick argues that food activists, such as Alice Waters belong in agrarian eco-dietetics, while large corporations (e.g. Whole Foods), which use “organic” and “all-natural” labels as marketing ploys, belong in corporate eco-dietetics.

While Rebrovick uses “eco-dietetics” to describe the popularization of the Slow Food movement, organic farming, farmers’ markets, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), I will use my own term “local-dietetics” hereinafter to reference the growing trend towards organically, sustainably, and locally grown food. The term “eco-dietetics” can aptly characterize the local food movement (LFM) as it also prioritizes fresh, local, sustainable food. However, I want to stress the notion of “local” in discussing the emergence of this new dietetic discourse.

As I conducted research on local food systems, I also noticed an agrarian/corporate divide. As stated in the Introduction, the LFM is fueled by a proliferation of direct-to-consumer and direct-to-retail markets that participate in local-dietetic discourse. While these markets advertise their products as “local,” they differ in how they facilitate

exchange of these products between the farmer and the consumer. CSAs and farmers' markets, for example, create spaces in which farmers and consumers can directly interact with one another. Furthermore, these spaces create opportunities in which consumers are involved in the farming process (e.g. CSA members are often encouraged to volunteer on the CSA farm) and preparation process (e.g. farmers' market customers have to cook the produce they buy). According to Rebrovick's logic, then, direct-to-consumer markets belong on the agrarian side of the LFM because they minimize the distance between production and consumption, while also encouraging the eater to participate in the growing and preparing of food. Unlike CSAs and farmers' markets, direct-to-retail markets are limited in their ability to facilitate face-to-face interactions between farmers and consumers, or involve the eater in the food production process. Therefore, these local food outlets belong on the corporate side of the LFM, as their primary motivation for participating in local-dietetic discourse is likely driven by a desire to appeal to customers who value the "local" label.

Borrowing from Rebrovick's discussion on contemporary dietetic discourses, I have divided local-dietetics into two spheres of consumption (agrarian and corporate). However, I found that local-dietetics can be furthered characterized by a third: *institutional*. Local foods have been so widely publicized that the United States government has also voiced its support for local food systems through federally funded loan programs. One such program is the Farm to School Grant program, which provides federal grants and other resources to the FTS initiative. Like CSAs and farmers' markets, FTS programs directly involve students in the growing and preparation of food. For instance, Walla Walla Valley Farm to School gives students

the opportunity to work in school gardens and to gain hands-on culinary skills through extra-curricular cooking classes. Furthermore, FTS programs are not motivated by profit. Many of these programs are run by non-profit organizations that receive outside funding from donations and federal grants. By this logic, FTS programs belong on the agrarian side of local-dietetics. However, FTS programs also fall in line with the corporate side because they often rely on intermediaries to procure local ingredients that are to be used in school cafeterias. In California, for example, FTS programs “employ a wide variety of procurement practices, from establishing direct contacts with farms (including a CSA-box model), to arranging gleaning and delivery by a third party...to the use of traditional distributors” (Allen and Guthman 2005: p. 408). In short, FTS shares characteristics with both agrarian and corporate sides of the LFM. Unlike direct-to-consumer and direct-to-retail markets, however, FTS programs operate through schools. Therefore, these programs represent the *institutional* side of local-dietetics not only because they receive institutional support from the government but because they are also implemented through educational institutions.

Thus far, I have outlined the definitions of “local,” provided a historical overview of the LFM, as well as examined the ways in which the movement echoes popular back-to-the-land themes. Moreover, I have found that local-dietetics can be divided into three spheres of consumption: agrarian, corporate, and institutional. While they differ in their structure and approach to local food procurement and distribution, all three sides of the LFM manage to cultivate a sense of community while also participating rhetoric that privileges the individual customer.

Chapter 4: Community in Agrarian Local Food Systems

As I have just argued, direct-to-consumer markets (i.e. CSAs and farmers' markets) represent the agrarian side of local-dietetics because they minimize the distance between production and consumption while often involving the eater in the production process. During my research, I found that these outlets are more community-oriented in comparison to their corporate and institutional counterparts likely because they allow for face-to-face interactions between farmers and eaters. In this section, I will discuss how the structures of farmers' markets and CSAs facilitate social interactions. Specifically, I will analyze these food systems through a Maussian lens to better elucidate how the act of exchange cultivates social solidarity and community.

Scholars have researched and observed the social impacts of CSAs and farmers' markets. In an ethnographic study of a farmers' market in Georgia, Nana Gagné noted that some customers of Farmers' Basket really did become close to the farmers. For instance, Victor, a customer sometimes invited Stephan, a vendor, for dinner and cooked for him (Gagné 2011: 287). As mentioned in the Introduction, Obach and Tobin conducted a study to investigate the relationship between involvement in CSAs and community engagement (e.g. local volunteerism and engagement in other political/civic activities), and found a significant correlation between these two variables. Those who participated in local food systems reported higher rates of community engagement compared with the general population (Obach and Tobin 2014).

If the work of these scholars suggests that CSAs and farmers' markets do promote a greater sense of community (at least among those who participate), how do the nature

of the CSAs and farmers' markets lend themselves toward a more social, community-focused orientation of the LFM? Many scholars have pointed to the intimate act of exchange as evidence of the socially embedded character of CSAs and farmers' markets. Within these local food systems, producers and consumers participate in a constant relationship of exchange through face-to-face interactions (Migliore et al. 2014). Of course, most economic transactions within the U.S. market are based on exchange. However, exchange within the mainstream economy is strictly monetary and is disembedded from social relations and other non-economic institutions. Exchange within CSAs and farmers' markets is also primarily monetary—producers sell their products in exchange for dollars—yet the act of exchange between producers and consumers is not mediated by intermediaries and is instead, direct and highly social.

Gift Exchange Theory

In *The Gift*, Marcel Mauss proposed that societal relations are built upon acts of exchange. Among native tribes that inhabit the North-West American coast, Mauss observed that exchange is based upon the obligation to give, receive, and repay. To reciprocate a gift given is probably the most important obligation within gift exchange. In the case of North-West American tribes, one is obliged to reciprocate a gift because failure to do so results in slavery for debt and/or loss of social status (Mauss 1990). Therefore, exchange among North-West tribes reveals that the obligation to repay a gift is closely linked to personal honor. Another Maussian point is that exchange can occur along a continuum that is defined by two opposite poles. The first pole is commodity relations, in which individuals are driven by self-interest and are not bonded by

enduring social relationships (Carrier 1993). At the other pole are gift relations, in which individuals are bound to each other through personal and intimate relationships. Within gift relations, individuals exchange objects, or “possessions,” that innately bear the spirit of the giver (Carrier 1993). In describing Maori law, Mauss states:

...the thing received is not inactive. Even when it has been abandoned by the giver, it still possesses something of him. Through it the giver has a hold over the beneficiary just as, being its owner, though he has a hold over the thief. This is because the *taonga* is animated by the *hau* of its forest, its native health and soil. It is truly ‘native’: the *hau* follows after anyone possessing the thing (1990: p.12)

Based on his observations of Maori law, Mauss ultimately argues that gifts can possess the personality of the giver. He further claims that it is the exchange of gifts that establishes a bond between the giver and the receiver. This bond is a spiritual one because to accept a gift from someone is to accept a part of their personality or a part of their soul. It is the personality of the giver that also compels one to reciprocate a gift. The gift possesses an individuality or essence that seeks to return to “its ‘place of origin’ or to produce, on behalf of the clan and the native soil from which it sprang, an equivalent to replace it (Mauss 1990: p.13). The obligation to return a gift to its “place of origin” is another way in which gift exchange establishes a bond between giver and receiver; both actors are spiritually bound until a reciprocal gift is made. Even so, when a reciprocal gift is given, that item also possesses a spirit that seeks to return to its “place of origin.” Therefore, the exchange of gifts does not conclude when a reciprocal gift is made. Instead, gift exchange is a continual act that binds individuals together in an enduring relationship of reciprocity. Mauss’s discussion on gifts can be useful in understanding the social nature of exchange within farmers’ markets and CSAs.

Exchange within Farmer's Markets

Farmers' markets advertise themselves as socially and community-oriented alternatives to brand-name grocery stores. In Charleston, the farmers' market is the "community connection," bringing people together from all over the region (2018). Similarly, the County Farmers' Markets in Boulder "serve as community gathering events...reinforcing our community spirit and connecting us on a grassroots level to the people who grow the food we feed our families" ("Our Nonprofit" n.d.). These spaces are inherently social because they allow for two types of exchange. The first type is the exchange of language and information. For instance, customers can talk directly with vendors about how food is grown (e.g. "Are these apples organic?") or with other customers about how a particular item should be prepared (e.g. "Do you know any spinach recipes?"). Moreover, customers and farmers can share (i.e. exchange) "aspects of their personal lives, such as leisure activities, birthday parties, or foreign countries and restaurants they visited" (Gagné 2011: 287). Therefore, farmers' markets are inherently social spaces because the act of communication is a form of exchange, which, as Mauss would argue, solidifies social relationships.

The second type of exchange is a monetary one that exists along the continuum of commodity and gift relations. While customers pay vendors for food in dollars, the food items found in farmers' markets are more than just commodities. In fact, I would argue that these food items are more like gifts. To explain further, I must point to the fact that the vendors who sell these food items at the farmers' market are also the farmers who are responsible for cultivating, harvesting, and producing them. These vendors sell products that are more than just inactive, lifeless commodities. Instead,

they sell products that they tended to themselves. Accordingly, these products are more like gifts that can imbue the personality of the giver. To restate Mauss, the personality of the gift fosters a spiritual bond between the giver and receiver. Moreover, the personality of the gift is what compels the receiver to reciprocate. In the case of farmers' markets, customers obviously reciprocate monetarily. However, money is often seen as impersonal. As Carrier (1993) explains, money is anonymous and has no social history (p.59). Unlike the fruits and vegetables sold at farmers' markets, money is not thoughtfully made by the customer who makes the transaction. Due to the impersonal nature of money, I would reason the fruits and vegetables that imbue the spirit of the farmer cannot be appropriately valued in terms of dollars. Nevertheless, a monetary price is placed on farmers' market items. Consequently, customers may feel obligated to reciprocate beyond the payment of money as spirit of the farmer exerts a spiritual hold over them. In order to fulfill this obligation, customers can reciprocate by becoming a frequent customer or, as Gagné observed, by bringing other "items to exchange with vendors to express appreciation or to confirm a mutual recognition that goes beyond simple 'economic' terms" (2011: 287). As discussed before, customers can even invite farmers over for dinner.

Because I did not speak directly with farmers' market customers, I cannot claim that these customers do in fact sense the spirit of the giver. However, Carrier (1993) notes that food certainly has the potential to imbue the spirit of the giver. In his discussion on Christmas gifts, Carrier observes that food items such as homemade jams need not be wrapped. The act of wrapping, Carrier argues, is reserved for commodities to help obscure their commodity identity; in other words, the act of wrapping personalizes the

commodity gift. In contrast, homemade foodstuffs do not need to be personalized through the act of wrapping because they are made by the giver and thus, already imbue an inherent personality. According to Carrier's logic then, food items sold at farmers' markets must also imbue a personality because they are made/cultivated by the vendors who sell them.

Thus, farmers' markets can create a space in which food is not just valued based on its biochemical, physical qualities. Instead, food is also valued based on the spirit of the farmer and the time and care that was dedicated towards growing it. The added value of the food exchanged is what fosters social relationships between producers and consumers. With each transaction, the producers and consumers participate in a continual relationship of reciprocity that can exist outside the space of the farmers' market.

Exchange within Community Supported Agriculture

The CSA arrangement is also designed to be a community-oriented alternative to chain grocery stores and industrial agriculture. In Massachusetts, Indian Line Farm (ILF) claims that the CSA model is the "perfect symbiotic arrangement" in which the farmers have the security of an advance payment and the customer has the satisfaction of knowing how and where their food is grown (n.d.). ILF dedicates itself to bringing community members together "in a relationship of mutual support based on an annual commitment to one another." Similarly, Welcome Table Farm (WTF) in Walla Walla places an emphasis on "we," the combined preference of the farmers and shoppers (2018). Food grown at WTF is selected based on shared decision making between the

growers and the eaters. In Seattle, City Grown also utilizes community-oriented rhetoric; it is their primary goal to “grow food for our neighbors right here in our neighborhood (n.d.).

Like farmers’ markets, CSAs are structured to promote direct and ongoing relationships between producers and consumers. In most CSA arrangements, the customers receive their shares of produce at the farm or designated pick-up locations. Within these spaces, the farmers and customers can interact with one another through face-to-face communication. Similar to vendors at a farmers’ market, the CSA farmer might discuss how the food is grown and may even share information about their personal life. Some CSAs might attempt to further personalize their products by sending newsletters or featuring a “meet the farmer” page on their websites. For example, Abundant Fields Farm in Portland features a “Farmer Rick” page. It states:

When Rick was 8, he and his family moved to a small 14 acre farm on the outskirts of West Linn, OR. They raised a variety of livestock...They would occasionally have a seasonal garden for their own use, and Rick was always intrigued by how well it all worked...Fast forward a few (well, quite a few) years and Rick was ready for a change. After working behind a desk...he realized he wasn’t really satisfied...While he and his wife frequently shopped at local farmers markets...their discussions would always lead to living on the farm...The topic kept coming up and the decided that they had to do it sooner than later (n.d.)

Here, the “Farmer Rick” page echoes back-to-the-land rhetoric of city dwellers wishing to free themselves from urban life and live on a farm. More importantly, however, this page provides intimate information about Rick, which adds a personal dimension to the CSA arrangement. Customers of Abundant Fields Farm are provided details about Rick’s life, which in turn personalizes the produce that is exchanged. The produce is more than just fruits and vegetables; the produce also embodies Rick’s independent

spirit and desire to escape from the city. Therefore, when customers receive Rick's produce, they also receive the spirit of Rick. According to Maussian theory, it is the force of this spirit that can bind individuals together and therefore, solidify relations within a community.

While the notion that a food or gift can acquire the spirit of the giver still applies, it is also important to examine the way in which time introduces itself in the CSA arrangement. Mauss theorized that in systems of gift exchange, time must pass before a counter-gift can be made (Mauss as cited by McGee and Warms 2012: 87). For gift exchange to be the basis of social relationships, a gift cannot be reciprocated immediately. To reciprocate immediately would demonstrate that one does not want to be indebted to someone else; to do so would also imply that one does not want to engage in a social relationship of reciprocity. This concept of time is especially relevant in CSA arrangements. In order to join a CSA, members must pay an advance, lump-sum fee. As repayment, CSA farmers provide members with a weekly share of produce for an entire harvest season; members only receive complete repayment (i.e. in form of produce) at the end of the harvest season. During this time, farmers are in debt to their members, and the farmer and consumer enter a creditor/debtor relationship.

According to Gustav Peebles (2010), credit and debt are key to building group solidarity. In the "Anthropology of Credit and Debt," Peebles argues that the debtor is an individual who borrows speculative resources from his/her own future and transforms them into concrete resources that can be used in the present. In contrast, Peebles understand the creditor to be one who denies him-/herself the use of concrete resources in the present in exchange for speculative gains in the future. Thus, the

creditor/debtor relationship again takes on a temporal quality as it represents a “material link between the past, the present, and the future” (Peebles 2010: p.227). During this time, the creditor and debtor are socially bound. In the case of CSAs, the farmer, or debtor, is bound to their customers out of an obligation to reciprocate the customers’ advanced payment. The customer, or creditor, is bound to the farmer out of an inherent trust that the farmer will repay their debts. Accordingly, CSAs can solidify community by facilitating this creditor/debtor relationship.

Chapter 5: Community in Corporate Local Food Systems

To reiterate, the corporate side of local-dietetics can be characterized by direct-to-retail markets. These markets represent the corporate side because they act as intermediaries between the producer and consumer. Moreover, the direct-to-retail markets I chose to analyze are corporate in the traditional sense that they are managed by large companies or restaurant groups. Similar to agrarian local-dietetics, corporate dietetics also attempts to cultivate community. The Los Angeles-based restaurant chain Mendocino Farms prides itself on being “neighborhood gathering places where friends, families, and coworkers can come together over a good meal” (“Core Values” n.d.). Similarly, the grocery chain, Winn-Dixie sources produce from local farms to give customers an opportunity to “support other members of the local community” (2018). While they claim to reinforce community, these outlets are limited in their ability to facilitate direct relationships between farmers and eaters. Therefore, farm-to-table restaurants and large grocery retailers are more likely to cultivate community by constructing what Benedict Anderson terms, “imagined communities.”

Imagined Communities

In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Anderson examines the global phenomenon of nationalism as it grew in prominence during the 19th century. He defines a nation as an imagined political community. A nation is imagined “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 2006: p.6). Imagined

communities are thus socially constructed. In the chapter “Cultural Roots,” Anderson explores how imagined communities are constructed. Before the 16th century, for example, visual representations (e.g. stained-glass windows of mediaeval churches) and aural traditions were essential elements in the structuring of the Christian imagination. While Latin-reading clerisy was also essential in constructing Christian communities, many followers were illiterate (Anderson 2006). Therefore, the Christian imagined reality was primarily visual and aural. These images and aural traditions acted as symbolic unifiers with which the masses could conceptualize to the Christian religion. The masses came to incorporate the Christian religion and by extension, the Christian community into their own identities by interacting with and connecting to these symbols. Thus, an imagined community is socially constructed because it is “not only embodied within physical locales, but is likewise replete with symbolic meanings, emotional attachments, and feelings that individuals hold about a given setting” (Sampson and Goodrich 2009: p.902).

In the chapter “The Origins of National Consciousness,” Anderson (2006) argues that a new form of imagining came to prominence 16th century Europe: print-capitalism. During the early 1500s, the earliest form of capitalism was book publishing as book-sellers primarily sought to make a profit. At first, the market base was a small population of literate Latin-readers. However, the coalition of Protestantism and print-capitalism during the second half of the 16th century led to the exploitation of “cheap popular editions, quickly creat[ing] large new reading publics...and simultaneously mobiliz[ing] them for politico-religious purposes” (p.40). Anderson theorizes that

print-capitalism was foundational for the formation of national consciousnesses in three ways. He states:

First and foremost, [print-capitalism] created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars...Speakers...who might find it difficult or even impossible to understand one another in conversation, became capable of comprehending one another...Second, print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation... (p. 44-45).

In sum, print-capitalism was able to establish national consciousnesses across Europe because it unified and solidified national discourses that could be reproduced across space and time.

Imagined Community and Corporate Local-Dietetics

In terms of the LFM, corporate local food systems cultivate imagined realities in order to appear community minded. While they are limited in their ability to mediate social relationships between food producers and consumers, corporations employ symbolic language and imagery in order to create a greater sense of community within the minds of their individual customers. For example, Sweetgreen, a fast-casual restaurant chain that specializes in salads, designs their restaurants as a reflection of the community it is a part of. The company website states:

“In the spirit of keeping it real, we seek to preserve and honor the natural structure of a building, and we actively seek distinctive spaces with interesting history...And our walls bear the beautiful work of local artists, who produce photography, oil paintings, mixed media, watercolors and neons for our stores that are inspired by the seasons, our food ethos or the neighborhood” (2016).

Here, Sweetgreen uses specific architectural designs and artwork of local artists to honor the local culture of the communities that each restaurant is a part of. Customers can come into these spaces and interact with these visual representations of the local community. Much like the stained-glass windows of mediaeval churches, the design and artwork of each restaurant serve as symbols with which customers can understand and identify with the local culture. Thus, restaurant chains such as Sweetgreen can create an imagined sense of community, despite the fact that most of their customers will never know other customers.

Another way in which these corporations create imagined communities is by revealing the specific region/state/farm where each ingredient is from. For instance, the Los Angeles restaurant chain, Mendocino Farms credits the various local farms from where the company sources its ingredients. Pitman Family Farms grows their chickens naturally right in “sunny California,” while Coldwater Canyon Provisions “handcrafts jams, jellies, pickles, relishes, and chutneys” in the heart of North Hollywood (“Meet Our Partners” n.d.). Consequently, these specific ingredients, which are featured on the Mendocino Farms menu, become symbolic of the places in which they were grown and of the people who grew them. This notion of place evokes the previously discussed concept of provenance, which again describes the method of production as it is related to local influences, such as a region’s climate or local culture (Martinez et al. 2010). Therefore, when the customers eat these foods, they not only consume the foods’ innate, biochemical properties, but they also incorporate the places, people, and culture associated with these foods into their own identities.

It must be noted that this notion of “imagined community” is not limited to the corporate side of local-dietetic discourse. CSAs and farmers’ markets often construct imagined communities while also facilitating direct relationships between community members. For instance, Melea Press and Eric J. Arnould (2011) observe that formal conduits such as CSA newsletters attempt to fulfill the communitarian goals of the CSA model. They argue that these newsletters act as conduits through which members can connect with farmers and other members, regardless of whether they have actually visited the farm. Additionally, one of their informants referred to recipes featured within these newsletters as a way to help members prepare the food that they can then eat together. Of course, this act of “eating together” is figurative in the sense that members are not physically eating; instead, they are preparing and eating the same recipe. Nevertheless, Press and Arnould demonstrate that these recipes cultivate a greater sense of belonging despite the fact that members may never meet one another.

In these last two chapters, I explored how local food systems cultivate community. In the case of direct-to-consumer markets, individuals primarily interact through the exchange of food. Through this act of exchange, individuals participate in a social relationship of reciprocity that can exist beyond the physical spaces of CSAs and farmers’ markets. These agrarian markets can also foster an imagined sense of community in which individuals relate to one another through formal conduits such as newsletters and recipes. Likewise, corporate markets construct imagined communities through symbols that evoke a sense of place and cultural identity. Even though corporate markets are limited in their ability to facilitate direct relationships between

producers and consumers, the notion of an imagined community should not be discredited. Even though members may never meet their fellow-members, Anderson demonstrates that imagined communities are no less unifying. In sum, local food systems, both agrarian and corporate, cultivate community through a variety of social and symbolic exchanges.

Chapter 6: Individualism in Agrarian and Corporate Markets

In Chapters Four and Five, I discussed the ways in which agrarian and corporate markets cultivate community. In this chapter, I will analyze how these markets also preserve the idea of the individual. While agrarian and corporate markets are different in structure, they employ similar rhetoric in order to appeal to the individual customer. I will first argue that the notion of an imagined community is somewhat individualistic. Then, I will examine how marketing language such as “quality”, “freshness”, “health”, and “sustainable” aims to appeal to the self-interests of consumers.

As discussed in the previous chapter, both agrarian and corporate markets attempt to cultivate imagined communities. For example, the use of community-oriented language, such as “farm family” and “neighborhood gathering place,” sounds appealing, yet does little to actually cultivate social relationships (Flying Coyote Farm n.d.; Mendocino Farms n.d.). While the use of symbols and imagery can be incredibly unifying, the very notion of an imagined community is based on the idea that members may never meet one another. Accordingly, these markets must symbolically construct realities within the minds of individual customers in order to create an imagined sense of community. While people may feel a sense of communal belonging, the very notion of an imagined community suggests that members exist as isolated individuals.

Agrarian and corporate markets also appeal to the individual consumer by employing rhetoric that advertises the “quality”, “freshness”, and “health” of local food products. Paul Martin’s American Grill, for example, claims that their ingredients come from suppliers that share their focus on quality. The California-based chain

states, “Whether it’s a perfectly seasoned ribeye seared on our mesquite grill or the produce that fills our salad bowls, you’ll savor the quality that our thoughtfully sourced foods bring to every dish” (2018). Walmart also commits itself to sourcing and selling local produce. The company recognizes that Americans are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of eating local. Therefore, Walmart states, “As the world’s largest grocer, we see it as our responsibility to provide our customers with the freshest produce possible” (2018b). Similarly, Abundant Fields Farm claims they can bring vegetables and pasture raised poultry “fresh” from their fields directly to the customer (“Home” n.d.). From these examples it is clear that agrarian and corporate markets associate local foods with higher-quality foods, likely because local foods are commonly deemed fresh and more nutritious. Furthermore, direct-to-retail markets such as Walmart make an expressed commitment to serving the individual customer with the best quality produce. Therefore, the “local” food label ultimately becomes a marketing technique used by both agrarian and corporate markets; this marketing ploy is designed to appeal to the individual customer because it is the individual who presumably benefits from the quality, taste, and freshness of local foods.

Another way in which these corporate and agrarian markets appeal to individual consumers is by advertising their products as sustainable and ethically grown. For example, Chipotle, a restaurant chain that sources locally grown products, states:

Every choice we make—about who we work with, what we serve, and what we stand for—affects the bigger picture: the health of the planet. Nutrient-rich soil reduces the need for pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, buying locally reduces vehicle emissions from transportation, and humane animal husbandry means diminished reliance on antibiotics. As we strive each day to be better, we keep in mind that everything is connected (2018)

In this statement, Chipotle outlines the ways in which their products are grown sustainably. Similarly, Indian Line Farm in Massachusetts commits itself to “farmland affordability, watershed and wildlife habitat conservation, and community involvement in sustainable food production” (n.d.). Dirt Rich Farm in Portland grows “nutritious food by growing healthy soils naturally without the use of synthetic fertilizers or herbicides” (n.d.). While sustainable growing practices certainly benefit the environment, CSAs and farmers’ markets often frame sustainable agriculture as benefiting the individual. For example, Abundant Fields Farm claims, “We utilize sustainable and natural farming practices...Our poultry is raised in a healthy, natural and respectful manner in order to provide you with a product you can feel comfortable about” (“Home” n.d.). The use of “comfortable” is targeted towards customer interest in two ways. First, the individual is comforted in knowing that their food was grown healthfully and naturally. Second, the individual is also comforted by the fact that their food was grown respectfully. This notion of respect evokes questions of morality pertaining to the humane treatment of animals and the protection of the environment. As the public becomes increasingly aware of human impact on the earth, eating locally and sustainably now equates to eating ethically because doing so is necessary to reverse the effects of environmental degradation (Rebrovick 2015). Thus, the “sustainable” label becomes another marketing technique designed to appeal to individual interests by drawing upon wider public discourses surrounding the ethical treatment of the environment.

To restate my central research question, how does the LFM both construct community while privileging the individual? Through an examination of agrarian and corporate markets, I have demonstrated that local food systems can construct community by facilitating direct exchange between producers and consumers. Additionally, they can employ symbols that evoke a sense of place, cultural identity, and social solidarity. However, these markets also privilege the individual by participating in a market discourse that legitimizes consumer self-interest.

Chapter 7: Institutional Local Food Systems

I previously argued that FTS programs are institutionalized forms of local food systems because they have been implemented through schools. Similar to my previous analyses of agrarian and corporate markets, this section will analyze the ways in which FTS programs both cultivate community while also participating in individually-oriented rhetoric. Specifically, I will analyze FTS programs as sites of volunteer engagement through the lens of primordial debt theory. Then I will examine the way in which these programs participate in individually-oriented health discourses.

Community within Farm-to-School

Like agrarian and corporate markets, FTS programs claim to benefit the community in various ways. FTS websites frequently cite that these programs support local economies by allowing schools to purchase directly from food purveyors within the local communities. The National Farm to School Network states, “Farm to school empowers children and their families to make informed food choices while strengthening the local economy” (2018b). Moreover, those involved with FTS understand “healthy communities” as made up of healthy individuals. Upon being asked how Walla Walla Valley Farm to School benefits the community, one volunteer stated:

You get kids that are snacking on carrots instead of potato chips. They learn more about nutrition and stuff. You get healthier kids if they're out in the garden, they're not sitting playing computer games or electronic things. It also gets the parents involved when...uh...bring something home that they've made, they've cooked...kids can show the parents who to...make applesauce or how to make different things, so I think there's a lot of value there (Jones 2018).

According to this volunteer's rationale, FTS benefits the community by building family togetherness through parent involvement and by introducing community members to healthier food options.

While FTS programs can benefit local communities in terms of economics and nutrition, I am also interested in how these programs cultivate a greater sense of community. The Edible Schoolyard Project has designed a curriculum that seeks to educate students about how their food choices can "cultivate relationships that make our families and communities resilient" (2018). According to this claim, FTS can establish greater social relationships within the community by inspiring students to engage with and purchase foods from local farmers outside of the classroom. As discussed in the previous section, the act of exchange through face-to-face interactions can certainly create new or reinforce existing social bonds.

In examining how FTS programs cultivate a greater sense of community, I believe it is also important to recognize that many of these programs are opportunities for community and volunteer engagement. FTS programs primarily rely on non-profit organizations (NGOs) for funding, lesson planning, and food procurement (Allen and Guthman 2005: p.407). In turn, these NGOs depend on parent and community volunteers for labor. Anita Manatschal and Markus Freitag (2014) understand volunteerism as an activity in which the volunteer's time and labor is freely given in order to benefit another person, group, or organization (208). In other words, volunteerism is a form of exchange in which the giving of time and labor does not necessitate reciprocity. According to anthropological theories of exchange and gifting, however, there is no such thing as a free gift because all gifts must be returned in some

way (Maus 1990; Douglas 1990: vii, viii). If there is no such thing as a free gift, do individuals gain anything through the act of volunteering? And if so, what do they receive in return?

In “Reciprocity and volunteering,” Manatschal and Freitag seek to explain the motivations behind volunteering. Based on data collected from Clary et al. (1996), the authors found that individuals volunteered for the following reasons: 1) They felt it is important to help people, 2) Volunteering gives them hands-on experience, 3) Volunteering makes them feel better about themselves, and 4) Volunteering can lead to other job opportunities (Manatschal and Freitag 2014: p.214). According to three out of four of these motivations, the individual volunteer expects to acquire something (i.e. hands-on experience, self enhancement, and a career) in return for their service.

Accordingly, volunteerism is not necessarily a gift without compensation.

Volunteerism does not necessitate a reciprocal gift in the traditional sense, yet the individual is motivated to volunteer because they believe they will gain something in return for their time and labor.

In “The Anthropology of Giving: Toward a Cultural Logic of Charity,” John H. Hanson also explores individual motivations for charity. Hanson (2015) acknowledges that charity is a means of social pacification and brings inner peace to donors. He further argues that charity is a “boundary-setting” activity that ensures the status of the elite class. In other words, the ritualized act of charity reestablishes social boundaries by affirming the belief of the populace that the elite classes are solely responsible for the distribution of resources (Kendall 2006 as cited by Hanson 2015). In the case of charity, gift giving does not necessitate reciprocity because the act of giving serves to

reproduce social hierarchies. David Graeber (2014) would also contend that whenever lines of superiority and inferiority are explicitly drawn, exchange does not operate by reciprocity at all. Within relations of explicit inequality, a gift that is given to a superior by an inferior or vice versa usually becomes a habit or custom that regulates hierarchical relations. Graeber illustrates this point by offering the following example:

...the problem of giving gifts to kings, or to any superior: there is always the danger that it will be treated as a precedent, added to the web of custom, and therefore considered obligatory, thereafter. Xenophon claims that in the early days of the Persian Empire, each province vied to send the Great King gifts of its most unique and valuable products. This became the basis of the tribute system: each province was eventually expected to provide the same “gifts” every year (2014: p.110)

Like Hanson, Graeber demonstrates that gift giving is a means by which to maintain boundaries between social classes. Like volunteering, charity does not impose an obligation to reciprocate according to traditional modes of exchange. However, Graeber and Hanson would argue that donors do receive something in exchange for their charity; donors receive an affirmation that existing social structures will be maintained.

The literature just discussed demonstrates that volunteerism and charity are not “self-less” acts of giving. Instead, volunteerism and charity serve to pacify the self-interests of the “self-less” individual and to reaffirm social structures. However, the literature does not address the fact that volunteering is repeatedly referred to as “giving back to the community.” A volunteer for a FTS program in Lane County, Oregon states:

I’ve been a volunteer at School Garden Project since 2015 and I can honestly say it’s the most rewarding way to give back to the community and next generation. I wish they had this amazing program when I was

an elementary school student. I certainly wouldn't have taken so long to start eating healthy (and consumed a lot less ramen in college)! (School Garden Project of Lane County 2016b).

This notion of “giving back” implies that the volunteer does not expect something in return for their services. Instead, the volunteer believes that they have already gained something from society and feel obliged to reciprocate. While not all volunteers frame their services in this manner, I am curious why some feel this sense of indebtedness to the community in which they live.

Primordial Debt Theory and FTS Programs

According to primordial debt theorists, “we all owe to society for having created us” (Graeber 2014: p.59). Primordial debt theory was first developed in France by economists, anthropologists, historians, and classicists around the time the euro was first created. Primordial debt theorists seek to explain the “social contract” between governments and the people. Graeber (2014) explains that everyone pays taxes to the government, which in turn provides the people with specific services. Consequently, governments have become “the guardians of debt that all citizens have to one another” (p.56). Yet, no one really knows how or why this “social contract” was first agreed upon. Primordial debt theory supposes that this sense of debt was first expressed through religion. According to Graeber’s understanding of classical Hindu thought:

...we are born as a debt not just to the gods, to be repaid in sacrifice, but also to the Sages who created the Vedic learning to begin with, which we must repay through study; to our ancestors (“the Fathers”), who we must repay by having children; and finally, “to men”—apparently meaning humanity as a whole, to be repaid by offering hospitality to strangers. Anyone, then, who lives a proper life is constantly paying back existential debts of some sort or another (p.57)

This notion of existential debts is not limited to Vedic texts. In fact, French economist Bruno Théret theorized that birth was the “original debt incurred by all men” (quoted in Graeber 2014: p.57-58). In sum, we all owe something to the cosmos from which we were born. Moreover, our debt to the cosmos eventually evolved into a debt to society with the emergence from sovereign powers (e.g. kings, governments, etc.), which ultimately began to “assume guardianship of that primordial debt we all owe to society for having created us” (p.58-59).

Primordial debt theorists would claim that the FTS volunteer “gives back” to the community because they feel indebted to society. While I cannot speak for the volunteer, they may sense this indebtedness because, according to primordial debt theory, we all owe something to society; we are in debt to the existential powers that created us, we are in debt to our parents for giving us life, and we are in debt to state and local governments for providing us with civic services. Because we have all received “gifts” from society, Mauss would argue that we are all obligated to reciprocate in some way. Therefore, the act of volunteering can fulfill this obligation to repay our debts to society.

It is important to note that when volunteers “give back” to society, they are participating in a form of exchange. Mauss stressed the idea that in systems of gift exchange, time must pass before a counter-gift can be made (Mauss as cited by McGee and Warms 2012). While Mauss likely understood time as hours, days, weeks, months, and maybe even years, what if this concept of time was expanded to include exchange that occurs across generations? Primordial debt theorists maintain that individuals feel obliged to repay their debts not only to society and cosmos but to the ancestors who

existed before them. While individuals can never repay their ancestors for giving them life, they can repay their debts by giving to future generations. As Graeber (2014) states, “After all, once one has oneself fathered children, one is just as much a debtor as a creditor” (p.57). In the case of FTS, the aforementioned volunteer believes that it is their role to help the “next generation.” By volunteering for FTS, the volunteers repay their primordial debt to society; moreover, they participate in an act of exchange that spans across generations. According to Douglas (1990), it is this act of exchange that enhances social solidarity (vii). While traditional modes of exchange usually occur between people or social groups, volunteering can be viewed as a form of exchange that occurs between an individual volunteer and the community in which they live. Volunteerism, and thus FTS programs, can help cultivate a greater sense of belonging because they allow individuals to engage with their local communities through the act of exchange.

Individualism in Farm-to-School

As discussed in the previous section, FTS programs claim to support local economies, inspire healthy communities, and ensure social solidarity. Furthermore, primordial debt theory can explain the ways in which FTS programs facilitate unique modes of exchange between volunteers and their communities. While FTS programs highlight the communal benefits of local food production and procurement, they also participate in individualizing rhetoric that echoes back-to-the-land themes of self-sufficiency.

The notion of self-sufficiency is especially profuse in FTS discourse likely because FTS programs often make use of school gardens and cooking classes in order to teach

students important food literacy skills. Food literacy is an understanding of how food choices impact individual health, the environment, and the economy (Food Literacy Center 2015). Food literacy campaigns aim to help individuals make more nutritious food choices and learn the basics of food preparation (Truman et al. 2017). In Oregon, the Lane County School Garden Project utilizes “onsite vegetable gardens where [they] teach children standards-based science and the basics of growing food” (2016b). Similarly, the Walla Walla Valley Farm to School program has implemented cooking classes, which “utilize the school gardens for ingredients and introduce students to healthy, inexpensive recipes which they can easily reproduce at home” (“Cooking Classes” n.d.). A spokesman for Colorado Farm to School Movement states, “There’s nothing more important to somebody when you know how to feed yourself, then you don’t have to be dependent on someone else” (TEDx Talks 2014). FTS programs teach gardening basics and food preparation/cooking skills in order to socialize children into self-sufficient, independent adults who are responsible for their own health. The very idea of a self-sufficiency is highly individualistic as it suggests an ability to care for one’s self and to be independent from others. By emphasizing food literacy, FTS programs not only encourage self-sufficiency but also contribute to a dominant American ideology in which individualism is highly valued.

Another way in which FTS programs promote individualism is by framing choice as the means to achieve improved nutritional health. Wenatchee’s FTS Movement claims, “We’re teaching kids life-long habits that will hopefully help them make wise choices as they become adults.” Patricia Allen and Julie Guthman argue that it is this notion of “choice” that prioritizes the individual. In “From ‘old-school’ to ‘farm-to-school’:

Neoliberalization from the ground up,” Allen and Guthman (2006) critique FTS programs for reproducing neoliberal governmentality and rhetoric, including personal responsibility, consumerism, and choice. One specific criticism of theirs is that FTS programs socialize children into consumers. Echoing DeLind (2011), the authors further argue that FTS programs embrace the belief that consumer choice, which is often viewed as an exercise of individual freedom in the U.S. market economy, is a primary form of governance and means of achieving social change. These programs claim that the FTS curriculum provides students the knowledge with which to make informed food choices. FTS advocates commonly allege that this freedom of choice can help reverse some of our society’s health problems (e.g. obesity, diabetes, etc.). Allen and Guthman therefore conclude, “This elision thus reinforces the idea that social change is simply a matter of individual will rather than something that must be organized and struggled over in collectivities” (p. 412). In order to better understand individualism within the context of FTS, it is important to investigate why these programs were first established.

FTS programs are the result of two converging discourses, the first being the LFM. As the LFM rose in popularity, educators and parents became increasingly concerned with where and how ingredients used in school cafeterias were sourced. The LFM movement brought attention to the consequences of industrial agriculture, such as environmental degradation, food contamination, and the distancing between production and consumption. FTS programs responded to locavore concerns and worked to “develop purchasing relations with local farmers to incorporate fresh, regionally-

sourced foods, particularly fruits and vegetables, into school menus” (Bagdonis, Hinrichs, and Schafft 2009: p.107).

FTS programs can also be seen as a response to growing obesity rates within the United States. As Bagdonis, Hinrichs, and Schaff (2009) theorize, developing enthusiasm for FTS arises from the threat posed by the worsening “epidemic” of obesity. Considering that the National Farm to School Program was established through the 2004 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act, a bill aimed at improving nutrition through the National School Lunch Program, I would also contend that FTS programs are a response to the obesity epidemic.

Medicalization of Obesity, Biopower and FTS Programs

According to the Center for Disease Control (2018), the percentage of children and adolescents who are affected by obesity has more than tripled since the 1970s. The increase in diet and weight related diseases, as seen among children, has led to a medicalization of obesity in which the medical field has brought weight and diet under intense scrutiny. Medicalization is the “process by which nonmedical problems become defined and treated as medical problems, usually in terms of illness or disorders” (Conrad 1992: p.209). In the United States, the medical field is primarily influenced by the biomedical approach, which is a form of medicine that privileges biological, scientific research as the basis for diagnosing and curing disease. Biomedicine views disease as having specific biological causes (e.g. a microorganism that causes infection), considers the body as the only relevant “environment” for understanding

disease causation, and posits the individual as solely responsible for their health (Wiley and Allen 2009: p.7).

In Western culture, the biomedical field and more generally, medicine, is granted a great deal of authority, so much so that Michel Foucault has referred to medicine as a form of biopower. Foucault is famous for his theorizations of power and knowledge. According to Foucault, power is exercised through networks, dispersed throughout society, and is embedded in social relationships, institutions, and technologies (Cisney and Morar 2016; Pylpa 1998). More importantly, power derives its force through the production of knowledge, which results in a normalization of discourse that individuals seek to conform to (Pylpa 1998). Biopower, then, is a type of power that operates on the body. Foucault argues that the surveillance of bodies works to “discipline the body, optimize its capabilities, extort its forces, increase its usefulness and docility, integrate into systems of efficient and economic controls” (as quoted in Pylpa 1998: p.22). In *Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault describes how medicine became the new biopower during the late 18th century. By employing scientific knowledge, the medical profession gained considerable prestige and power in defining reality (Pylpa 1998). Medicine then had the authority to create normalizing statistical measures with which all individuals could be judged. These measures compelled (and continue to compel) individuals to conform to a normalized image of the body through discipline and self-surveillance.

The medicalization of obesity is an apt of example of how biomedicine has employed scientific and statistical knowledge as means to normalize health discourse and define obesity as pathological. For example, correlative reports dating back to 1901 have established a link between excess weight and higher rates of mortality (Pool

2001). Today, physicians use this knowledge to normalize discourse around nutrition, weight, and health and to prescribe regimented diets with which individuals can practice self-discipline and surveillance. Furthermore, statistical measures of control such as Body Mass Index (BMI) serve to define healthy and pathological weight levels. Medical interventions such as bariatric surgery act as medical technologies that further normalize body weight. As biomedicine further normalizes the image of the human body and the discourse around health, it creates a pressure to conform to these norms (Pylpa 1998). Consequently, individuals become responsible for their own health and are labeled “deviant” if they do not practice self-disciplinary behaviors such as dieting.

However, epidemiological studies have suggested that obesity is more than just a personal failing and instead, is a social pathology that “has a disproportionate effect on populations with fewer socioeconomic resources” (Aranceta, 2008 as cited by Gracia-Arnaiz 2010: 221). Today, researchers recognize that weight is not solely dependent on the amount of food eaten. Instead, factors such as genetics, environment, culture, socioeconomic factors, and biology all influence weight (Eknoyan 2006; Wood 2006). While medical professionals have also recognized these factors, biomedicine continues to individualize health and weight. For example, websites for bariatric surgery acknowledge that obesity can be a result of “extra-individual agents such as genetics or social environment” (Salant and Santry 2006: 2449). At the same time however, these websites appear to blame the individual if the surgery is not successful. They claim that the success of bariatric surgery is dependent on the individual’s “life-long commitment to better health” and adherence to proper diet (www.homanmd.com as quoted in Salant and Santry 2006: 2451). This example demonstrates that the biomedical approach does

not necessarily blame the individual for being obese, but at the same time, it does place responsibility solely on the individual to improve their own health.

FTS programs also participate in this individualizing discourse. Specifically, these programs recognize that racial, economic and ethnic disparities exist within the American food system, yet place responsibility in the students to make informed food choices. For example, the National Farm to School Network states, “Access to healthy food is a challenge, most pronounced in low-income communities of color, and disparities exist in the quality, variety, quantity and price of food available...These outcomes span both urban and rural settings and are a result of structural and institutional racism” (2018c). Here, the Network recognizes the “extra-individual agents” that contribute to the country’s obesity problem. FTS programs try to address this problem by procuring fresh fruits and vegetables to use in school cafeterias. However, the Network also claims that FTS “empowers children and their families to make informed food choices” (2018a). As Allen and Guthman (2006) argue, the notion of choice is highly individualistic because it privileges individual behavior. In sum, FTS programs cultivate community in the sense that they provide opportunities community members to “give back” to their communities. At the same time however, FTS programs socialize students to conform to biomedical discourses that prioritize the individual as responsible for their own health.

Conclusion

The topic for this thesis arose out of a passion for food. Our relationship with food, as Claude Fischler (1988) argues, is a complex one. To incorporate a food is powerful because the act of incorporation transgresses the boundaries of the human body. It represents a moment when the frontier between the world and the self is crossed, a liminal moment when the body is exposed to external pollution and that is saturated with symbolic meaning (Rozin and Fallon 1981). The act of incorporation not only incorporates the properties of food into the eater but it also incorporates the eater into a culinary system (Fischler 1988). Food, then, is central to our sense of identity. It is a means to control our own bodies as well as a symbol with which we assert both oneness and otherness (Fischler 1988). As seen in the LFM, food has become a way to incite collective action. Moreover, it is a channel through which consumers are incorporated into a system that prioritizes environmental sustainability, health, and community-based agriculture.

In this thesis, I first defined the term “local.” According to the definition laid out by Robinson and Farmer (2017), “local” is both complex and ambiguous. It lacks a concreteness, thus allowing local foods to become “a full-fledged discourse” (Rebrovick 2015: p.685). I then contextualized the LFM within back-to-the-land ideas that represent a persistent desire for self-sufficiency. This search for self-sufficiency also permeates the modern LFM. As local communities seek self-reliance in the face of globalization, individuals seek greater autonomy over their food choices.

In Chapters Four and Five, I outlined the ways in which agrarian and corporate markets cultivate community. By facilitating the intimate act of exchange, agrarian

markets foster social relationships that are based on reciprocity. In addition, both agrarian and corporate food systems employ language and symbolic imagery to evoke a sense of place, cultural identity, and social solidarity. While agrarian and corporate markets foster a sense of community through symbols and relationships of reciprocity, they also participate in individualizing rhetoric that privileges the locavore as a consumer. By placing emphasis on the “quality”, “taste”, and “nutrition” of local foods, agrarian and corporate markets prioritize consumer interest and contribute to a prevailing culture in which individualism is highly valued.

Institutionalized local food systems, as represented by FTS programs, also reproduce this individual/community dichotomy. Borrowing from primordial debt theorists, I argued that FTS programs cultivate community by creating a means through which volunteers and community members can participate in a form of exchange that spans generations. At the same time however, FTS programs participate in a form of biomedical discourse that places the individual as responsible for their own health. By framing nutrition as a form of “choice,” FTS programs propagate individually-oriented perceptions of health-management.

In these concluding remarks, I would like to echo DeLind (2011) and Allen and Guthman (2005) in their concerns that the LFM is becoming too individualistic. Specifically, I would like to critique this notion of choice. Two goals of the LFM are to both educate consumers about the benefits of local foods and make local foods more available to consumers. Accordingly, the LFM congratulates itself for providing a wider variety of food options while also giving consumers a greater ability to make informed food choices. To be clear, I think it is important to give individuals the skills

and knowledge necessary to better the environment, their communities, and their own health. By repeatedly citing choice as a way to address environmental degradation, worsening obesity rates, and globalized food systems, however, the LFM fails to address the fact that local foods are primarily a luxury of the upper-middle class. As one WWVF2S volunteer stated in their interview, “We don’t use the farmers’ market much because their prices are fairly high” (Jones 2018). In order to truly revolutionize America’s food system, the LFM must first recognize the societal barriers that make fresh, healthy, local foods inaccessible to a large portion of the American population.

Appendix A

Interview Questions:

1. Are you familiar with the local food movement? If so, how would you define the term, “local”? What are some examples of local food systems?
2. Do you participate in the local food movement? If so, in what ways? Why do you participate?
3. What do you see as the core values of the local food movement?
4. How does the local food movement reflect American concerns surrounding the way we eat in the United States?
5. Do you think local food systems are important? Why or why not?
6. Do you think farm-to-school programs fit into the local food movement? Why or why not?
7. Why do you think these programs were first established?
8. In your view, what are the core values of the farm-to-school movement? How do these values present themselves in Walla Walla Valley Farm to School?
9. What are the goals of Walla Walla Valley Farm to School? Why was it first established? Why should students participate?
10. In what ways do you think WWVF2S instills its values in its students?
11. Is the local food movement just a trend? Or, do you think locally-oriented food programs such as farm-to-school represent a permanent in shift in the way Americans interact with their food?

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