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Owning Our Food System: Urban Community Gardening and Local Food Movements

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by

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Food is a means of examining culture, including identity, autonomy and power. It creates relationships and memories between people via shared connections. Through food, I explore local food movements and urban community gardening.

We both ingest and produce garden-grown foods. This movement is often described as simple nostalgia. I suggest that it is a response against heavily processed foods within a system reliant on mass produced food. This desire for ownership pushes community gardens and other counter-hegemonic spaces forward in their goals of using social practice to challenge the established food industry and take control within their own lives.

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Paige A. Edwards

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Tilling Soil: An Introduction

I grew up on a small farm in Northern Michigan. Eating "locally" was not something we thought about but something we tended to simply do. When we wanted a turkey for Thanksgiving, my father would send my younger sister and I into the turkey coop to chase down a bird (usually, however, the birds would end up chasing us until my dad would come into the pen and thump the bird with a quick movement of his hatchet). We collected fresh eggs each day and watched as the eggs we left would be cared for by the hens. We would sit on crates by the hens watching and waiting for the babies to emerge. The day we would hear tiny peeping as the chicks would break through their shells was always exciting. The beef cattle were grass fed during the summer and we baled and stacked thousands of square bales for our own use and for our neighbors to use during the winter. One of my neighbors raised pigs so we could get bacon there if we wanted. Another had pheasants. If our garden was short on peas one year, we would trade zucchini to a neighbor that had an abundance of peas. One farmer specifically grew enough sweet corn for the entire neighborhood to share each fall. Another sold us strawberries and asparagus. Sometimes I would ride my bike the three miles to the strawberry fields in which case I was given as many strawberries as I could eat and put in my bicycle basket. We shared resources and traded labor to sustain ourselves and our family businesses. To "earn a living," however, most all of the farms turned away from the community supported foods to cash crops in order to compete with industrial agriculture.

Although we always had fresh foods from the farm, this is not to say that I never had processed foods. Kraft Mac and Cheese was a favorite quick meal. During the week my mother sometimes used Hamburger Helper boxed dinner starters as a quick solution after a long day at work and an hour commute to get back home to the farm. As a child, however, I did not know that access to the fresh foods produced in the gardens and in my back yard of a 240 acre farm was a limited view on what food is and who had access. While the other farm children and I never had to worry about if and when a meal of fresh, healthy food would be available, other parents and children, in the nearest town, were struggling to keep basic and cheap foods on the table. The county I grew up in has consistently ranked in the top ten poorest counties in Michigan in terms of annual income for at least the past twenty years. While those living rurally on farms had food access on the farm, if we wanted to go to a grocery store it was an eight mile drive from my parent's home. Walmart was even further at a 46 mile drive. To borrow a concept often associated with poor urban areas; this "food desert" helped to shape my own understanding of our food system and is deeply connected to my own identity and my reactions to our food system. We are not isolated.

People worldwide, from the Italian and French Slow food movement to food movements occurring in the U.S., have been struggling in search of answers to reevaluate what we eat and where our food comes from. The local food movement is one aspect in the United States that has slowly been popularized and politicized due to this struggle. However, the local food movement is not completely new but has been revived and popularized more recently in the United States. For example, one recent action has been the urban-community gardens launching in full force within such cities as Detroit.

Detroit has been a leading city since 2003 when the Detroit Agriculture Network, Earth Works Urban Farm/Capuchin Soup Kitchen, Greening of Detroit and Michigan State University began working in collaboration with over 185 other organizations and hundreds of individuals to support community gardening and agriculture in the Detroit area (www.detroitagriculture.org). This has pushed and enabled other urban areas in Michigan to also develop more sustainable food systems including cities in Southwest Michigan such as Kalamazoo. What changes and influences have occurred as these local food movements have become increasingly popular? How can such things as community gardens be utilized as a tool? In what ways are community gardens successful? What are the struggles within community gardening? How can urban gardens help to set the stage and continue towards a path of local and sustainable food for a majority rather than a minority of people?

Lawson argues that "urban gardening" is a more defined term than "community gardening" as it is broader and includes more types of programs (2005). Community gardening is thought as "the neighborhood garden in which individuals have their own plots yet share in the garden's overall management" (Lawson 2005:3). Although she makes a call to use this term, Lawson still uses the two terms interchangeably throughout her book as I will also do throughout this thesis.

The local food movement's broader world context is based in its premise to create an alternative to the Industrialized Food System (IFS). There are several issues which may not directly relate to community garden but are important in understanding the broader issues surrounding the IFS including the current food crisis and neoliberal dominance which have furthered the conditions of inequality, displaced blame onto

natural disasters and farmers; and has also reinforced blame placing onto individuals that cannot afford to eat "well." How do urban gardens fit into the idea of protest and power? What do they offer, if anything? Do they challenge "common sense" systems and notions or do they simply make people *feel* like they are doing something without actually challenging the issues within the hegemonic system? In what ways are community gardens offering alternatives to the food crisis?

Hegemony recognizes the totality of the process of the "dominant" groups or classes whereas non-hegemonic classes Antonio Gramsci usually referred to as the "subordinate" or subaltern" throughout his notebooks which were his resistance to the very forces that put him in prison (Gramsci 1971:145). Gramsci's writings allow us to consider resistance in the face of defeat and how to create the conditions for social change (Hall 1987). Within the hegemony are multiple alternatives working to mobilize millions globally. Many of which view the construction of a world based on human solidarity and equality as a primary mission (Harris 2007). These alternatives, are what Jerry Harris and others label "counter-hegemony;" meaning, "to develop political theory and strategy based on experiences of the new movements, encompasses the diversity of social forces and helps define the passionate commonalities in the struggle for justice" (Harris 2007:2). Community gardening volunteers are aware of hegemonic conditions to varying degrees and while the gardens are not a solution to the broad and complex issues, people are reacting to what is occurring which further gives meaning to garden participants. As such, I suggest that urban community gardens offer an alternative or counter hegemony and a way for individuals to combat the alienation that they feel.

Why Kalamazoo, Why Food?

Kalamazoo provides a unique environment because of the strong support of local food ranging from local food businesses to non-profit organizations active in making food more secure such as Fair Food Matters and Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes. There is also a strong and diverse agricultural setting in Southwest Michigan within and surrounding an urban environment. Michigan's hard hit economy provides further grounding as these local food movements have grown. While this situation is not unique to Michigan, the dominant reliance on the slipping auto industry creates a slightly more extreme case in which we can see and reflect on broader global trends occurring including the so-called free market and the dominance of neoliberal capitalism which have "produced conditions allowing for increased exploitation, resulting in increased inequalities and insecurity for working people throughout much of the globe" (Lyon-Callo 2008a:30-31; See also Lyon-Callo 2008b). This is resulting in more people becoming economically despaired while the few "living emotionally and physically separated from the majority" benefit from the situation (Lyon-Callo 2008a: 31; see also McGuire 2008; and Escobar 2004).

Food is one piece of material culture in which to study people and has been utilized as a means of looking at many aspects of culture, including identity and power. Eating is both social and a biological necessity. It can create relationships and intimacy between people and it provides a shared connection. Our foods come packaged in boxes and wrapped in plastic and are often disassociated from where they come from (see Meigs 1997). Sidney Mintz argues that "The foods eaten have histories associated with the pasts of those who eat them; the techniques employed to find, process, prepare, serve

and consume the foods are all culturally variable, with histories of their own" (1996:7). Due to this, food has intrinsic meaning within cultures and to individuals. Food is internalized as we physically ingest it or reject it. This is what makes studying culture through food unique; however, this is not all it teaches us (see Sutton 2001). One example can be found in *Sweetness and Power,* where Mintz argues for the important social meanings, identity, power and exploitation surrounding food and eating (1986).

Another example of how food can be used as a material to study the concept of power is Jon Holtzman's *Uncertain Tastes* which focuses on developing an argument utilizing Bourdieu's "habitus," ("the socially informed body") encompassing food, memory and ambivalence (Bourdieu 1977:102). In other words, as Holtzman noted, the "internalized bodily practices" such as tastes and language in which the power of memory and food memories specifically may become a part of the habitus thus making the habitus subject to the taste test (2009:40-41). Holtzman discussed food studies as often being seen as fluff or simply fun but he argued the complexities of identity and memory that can be viewed through food: "Memories are often expressed in reference to the food one was eating at particular times—an apricot or a particular meal—while long-term changes may be chronicled through changes in food" (2009:61). Nadia C. Seremetakis explains that social memories are cultural in their relationship to both material and emotional things, most especially those involving sensory: "The object invested with sensory memory speaks; it provokes re-call as a missing, detached yet antiphonic element of the perceiver" (1996:10-11). Because of the sensuous nature of food, memory associations are made. Furthermore, through gardening we can view a

deeper ownership of our food. Not only do we ingest the foods grown in gardens but we are producing them; producer and consumer become one in the same.

Methodology and Fieldwork

The U.S. local food movement has many different aspects ranging from Community Supported Agriculture to farmer's markets but this study will emphasize the urban community gardens. My goals include further exploring the U.S. local food movement through community gardens and the variety of motives as well as political actions involved in Kalamazoo.

Much of the local food movement is not just to consume the local as a trend but to truly participate and begin to be defined by as well as to create places in which cultural identification takes root. This is often driven by the larger picture of inequality and the instability of the current food system as well as on the individual level concerning health, community and wellbeing. For others, eating is about following food trends, whether the latest dietary recommendations or the pleasure of a local "cuisine" where foodstuff is defined or becomes intricately woven into what is considered local.

An important component working within the local food movement is in how to define what is "local" and what is "health." Despite the fact that there is currently widespread agreement of local food being important, there are many meanings of "local" which vary in meaning and language from group to group and place to place. Similarly, the definition of "health" varies across cultural groups. In popular media, for example, a number of authors, including Michael Pollan, Barbara Kingsolver and Michael Moss, have continued to promote and open the public's eyes with highly informative articles and books regarding different aspects of food production, nutrition and the food industry

while offering similar conclusions: that individuals must make choices to turn to local food (Pollan 2007a; Kingsolver 2007; Moss 2013).

However, this is not something we can all afford or have the ability to do. For example, Pollan calls for a change to the food system and places this change into the hands of the consumers:

> ...whenever I hear people say clean food is expensive, I tell them it's actually the cheapest food you can buy. That always gets their attention. Then I explain that with our food all the costs are figured into the price. Society is not bearing the cost of water pollution, of antibiotic resistance, of food-borne illness, of crop subsidies, of subsidized oil and water -- of all the hidden costs to the environment and the taxpayer that make cheap food seem cheap. No thinking person will tell you they don't care about all that. I tell them the choice is simple: You can buy honestly priced food or you can buy irresponsibly priced food. [Pollan 2007a:243]

This further embeds the idea that individual "choice" is a good thing, which promotes the ideal that choice somehow gives us more freedom when in reality the supposed "choice" has not helped us but has instead contributed more power and wealth towards the few at the top (Slee 2006). Furthermore, arguments such as this reinforce the popular notions that through these consumer choices somehow the system will change while at the same time increasing the guilt and anxiety people feel for not making the "right" choice.

Other examples of how "local" is defined include distance, such as the Kalamazoo People's Food Co-Op's 100 mile market. However, others might define "local" as 50 miles or produced in the state of Michigan or even some other way. "Health" and "healthiness" are equally complicated in how people use the terms. While one person may describe a "healthy" diet to be well rounded and include both meats and vegetables; another may argue that a strict vegan diet is the most "healthy." Both "local"

and "health" are culturally constructed similar to terms like "cuisine" or "global." Both are defined by a group of people trying to make sense of a particular situation. "Local" is also often a response to negative aspects of the "global" and it can even manifest the global in the sense of the global local movement that shares ideas, practices and connections. For this thesis, it is not necessarily important to come up with one specific definition of "local" or "health." Instead, I explore people's use of local and health through their food activities that they define as "local" and "healthy." I look at what ways localness in the sense of food is connected to a place and both the similarities and differences within Michigan and relating to other U.S. states. I explore how local food movements in Kalamazoo are utilizing the negative aspects of "the global" as a lens which frames and motivates participating in the food movements and on what scale. I argue that the local food movement has varied meanings for individuals but what participants seem to share is their response to a system which they do not feel is working. In this sense, the local food movement offers an alternative approach to the Industrial Food System in which those that are involved feel a greater sense of autonomy and control of where their food comes from and how it is produced. Within this general frame specific reasons for individuals vary from local activism in feeding all people equally to health aspects of staying away from chemicals and Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs).

To explore this argument, I looked at the ways in which people participate in obtaining their food; how they identify with it; the successes and challenges associated in the embracing of local foods; and finally, how this affects individuals in Michigan, specifically Kalamazoo. From farmer's markets to Kalamazoo's own Fair Food Matters

and the continual growth of community gardening, people are continuing to respond to the food industry in various ways. Active participant observation was undertaken as a part of a larger project within urban-community gardens in the Kalamazoo area. Interviews, both formal and informal, as well as observation build upon the experience and data collected. Questions were developed in the field based on participant observation and informal conversation. I further explore whether or not local food movements empower marginalized groups in the food system; or whether community gardens and the local food movement further embed elitist food niches. At the same time, I question whether alternatives like community gardening focus on broader activist elements, such as addressing lower income food supplies, or if they are simply another elitist food trend. In addition, I look at the complex relations between the movements, the food systems and the social relations to the global whole (see Agostinone-Wilson 2013; Ollman 2003). This will enable me to look at the local level but also consider the global context of placing the rights of access to healthy and sustainable food in the hands of individual producers, distributers and consumers to reform the core of our food system.

Furthermore, I take an activist approach in reflecting on the research beyond just an academic understanding of local food movements. I explore how we can intervene and renegotiate in the world to gain more freedom and then create conditions to create even more while continuing to ask such questions as: Who is in what position in society and what does this serve? How do these different people relate and interact in these processes, demands and creating need? In what ways does the society we live in constrain or build on the opportunity to build/develop potential? How do we create

potential where people have more options? How do we create a society with more of the freedom for the potential for equality? And most importantly, who benefits? Within a capitalist system there is an unfairness that continues to reproduce the inequalities and exploitation. In what ways is the local food movement, and specifically urban gardening, affected by this and responding to it?

Fieldwork took place over several periods between 2010-2014. The project will focus on urban community gardens as an important aspect of local food movements. Active participant observation was utilized within the urban-community gardens in the Kalamazoo area, most specifically the Oakwood Neighborhood garden (fall 2010, spring through fall 2011), Growing Community Garden (fall 2013- spring 2014) and the Vine Neighborhood Garden (summer 2011). Active garden participation occurred from April to October while further interviews often were reserved for the winter months. I conducted 18 formalized interviews ranging from interviews with the urban gardeners that I worked with directly in the gardens, garden coordinators, Fair Food Matters employees and local farmers. My goals included discovering reasons why people chose to eat local, what these people's concerns are and what the local food movement means to them. Through this I engaged with some of the most vital components of the "why local" and "why garden" questions. The objective was to collect a series of personal relations people develop encompassing community gardens, and in turn to see if and how their relationships are altered in new ways when they grow, produce and consume their foods I became a member of a website group, Eat Local Southwest Michigan (ELSWM), associated with FFM, an online message board where people who are concerned with the

local food system in Kalamazoo and the surrounding area can interact and post both questions and answers about local foodstuffs.

My fieldwork is heavily dependent on personal narratives and conversations in terms of how individuals incorporate cultural meaning within their own perceptions and interpretations; the understandings of the community surrounding the gardens; and finally, society as a whole. As such, conflicts often arose between people's viewpoints and how involved they actually are even when people indicate high ambitions and the importance of local foodstuffs to both themselves and their community. As Serena Nanda indicates, "a major problem in a person-centered ethnography is that of creating a balance between the authenticity that comes from an individual's perceptions expressed in his or her own words, and the need for the anthropologist to communicate the cultural meanings and norms through which individual lives can be contextualized and made accessible to those outside the culture" (1999:xx). I have tried to provide the reader with individual experiences, my own experiences and detailed descriptions in order to take an inclusive approach to the so called norms within and surrounding community gardening. Within the network and reflecting on the neighborhoods I was working in, racial and class aspects became apparent. Both of the gardens that I primarily focused my research efforts were predominantly white and middle-class. The ages of people working the gardens ranged from young children accompanying their thirty-some-year-old parents, to college students to the oldest participant I interviewed who was in his mid-fifties. As such, my observations do not represent the totality of urban gardening experiences; rather, they are one piece of a movement continuing to work towards greater diversity. As previously mentioned, through individual experiences in the everyday, a social

consciousness is made. Shared experiences and shared consciousness through group identities create collective agency. It is through dialog and collaboration within the collective identity that praxis takes shape; "when it gives subordinate groups a greater voice in the actions of dominant groups" (McGuire 2013:146).

As Holtzman argues, "it is impossible to adequately account for the power of food without understanding the complex interplay between varying and sometimes countervailing strands of causality and meaning, which run the gamut from abstract symbolism to the vulgarly material" (2009:17). How successful the movement will be is not yet fully determined as it is a continuous process, but it shows no signs of slowing yet. My goals include looking at people's personal experiences in the local food movement, reviewing the more recent history of the movement; discuss where it is potentially going and how these efforts are moving towards food sovereignty and what people can do to continue fighting for autonomy. The focus on community gardening attempts to address food access in ways that other avenues do not reach or fail to reach as well as focuses on what can be done to improve the efforts including how community gardening can be utilized as a tool.

Section Outline

In order to understand the scale and the involvement of local food in Kalamazoo I begin by discussing the local food movement and the history of the movement on a broad scope and then work my way to the more localized aspects as these all connect to community gardeners' understandings of local food movements. My fieldwork in community gardening and other local food efforts explores and considers the generation and/or encouragement of such unwelcomed effects as guilt and anxiety on gardeners' and

consumers' food choices. I question whether this propels the individual towards virtuous eating and ask if both virtue and guilt are rooted in deeper cultural or emotional processes. I further consider how this affects individuals' relationships with food and how they choose to obtain their foods.

Another aspect of community gardens is the potential for greater food awareness. My next section argues that through farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), Fair Food Matters (FFM) and other local food programs, the ideas of cooperation and interactive relationships in building community around food while holding sustainable efforts at the core are promoted. These systems work towards and offer alternative approaches that are less exploitative than the Industrial Food System in an effort to serve a wider audience by beginning locally. To explore this further, I followed one local CSA from its start in 2010 to her third year and discussed the process and development. I also visited various Farmers' Markets in the area to observe interactions between the producers and consumers and interviewed local participants. Through these interactions, stronger community bonds are formed. This communal awareness connects to what Fair Food Matters indicates to also be a goal of the community garden project. Community gardens bring about a similar idea of the CSAs except the farmer and the community member become one, possibly creating an even greater social awareness of food, of the local community and of the community's concerns. As Sharp, Imerman and Peters (2002) argue in their discussion of CSAs, people learn where their food comes from by becoming more involved with their food, by creating networks and discovering more sustainable means. Through these interactions, stronger community bonds are formed. This communal awareness connects to what Fair Food Matters indicates to also

be a goal of the community garden project. I further question what people in Kalamazoo are doing to change the ways we eat and interact with the food system as well as how we ended up where we are at and why is it so difficult to deviate from current pathways.

This leads to the questions I address in my next section. As previously stated, "local" food can encompass multiple meanings. Similarly, so does "community garden." This section, the core of my participant observation and research, attempts to address individuals' relationships with food through community gardening; why people chose to become involved in community gardening; what are the goals and struggles of community gardening; and how do gardeners push through these.

In my conclusions I consider the question: what do we do next? As well as: where do we go from here? I consider the impacts that local food movements and urban community gardening are having while considering further direction and avenues.

A Brief History of Food Movements

The purpose of this section is to discuss the context, both socially and historically, of the local food movement; the role of community gardening in terms of sustainability; the need to revamp food security; and the movement towards empowering individuals in creating a new system of equality. All of these components, while not directly a part of urban community gardens, are important in what makes people interested in local food movements. Not all of my participants have the exact same experiences or understandings but are aware on varying levels of the historic and social complexities surrounding local food movements which further engage and give meaning to their own individual experiences.

Planting Roots

In the U.S. there has been a large absence of knowledge about food, how it is grown and how it is produced. We have disassociated ourselves from where our food comes from and even *what* it is. Sugar consumption has skyrocketed, as have diet related diseases. Eating prepared foods full of unrecognizable ingredients has become normal. At the same time, more and more "health" food stores, co-op grocery stores, farmers' markets and other "alternative" food methods have steadily grown. How did we get to where we are at today in terms of our food system? More important, however, is where we need to go from our current position in order to reconnect with our food supplies and improve public health.

The domination of a global system and industrial food came about due to many events in history. Some critics place the turn towards a global system with the Industrial

Revolution and the evolution of a more "modern" capitalist economy (see Kingsolver 2007 for example). However, capitalism is not limited to the Industrial Revolution (see Roseberry 1989; see also Wolf 2010). Others argue that a more global system and agrifoods culture became dominant, even though neither is sustainable, in more recent decades and pin specific moments in history. For example, Holt-Gimenez and Patel name four components to explain the dominating systems: the Green Revolution (1960-1990) which led to a monopoly of seeds, chemicals and other monocropping needs; overproduction and food aid; Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS); and the World Trade Organization (WTO) along with regional free trade agreements (2009). Regardless of where critics point to as the origin, from the Industrial Revolution to the Green Revolution, I argue that a steady spread over time has slowly brought us to where we are today in a world of fast capitalism and, most importantly, people are beginning to question this and respond in large numbers. In both cases, a historical understanding is necessary to ground us in the question of how to proceed.

The Industrial Revolution, beginning in the late 1700s, spurred an avoidance of manual labor, including agriculture (and popular author Barbara Kingsolver suggests avoiding dirt itself), in preference to factory production. The New Deal was introduced during the Great Depression which attempted to create assistance and programs such as Social Security for people suffering as well as subsidies for farmers. This resulted in fewer farms of larger scale production. By 1960, the Green Revolution continued towards big industry and favored "a minority of economically privileged farmers" leaving the majority at a disadvantage (Holt-Gimenez and Patel 2009:31).

Kingsolver argues that the government, since undermining the Great Depression's New Deal throughout the Green Revolution and into the1970s, has safeguarded cheap supplies of corn and soybeans to continue the overproduction of processed foods, high fructose corn syrup and hydrogenated oils instead of helping those who farm multiple crops to produce fruits and vegetables in the government's attempt at creating food security (2007). Single crop farms set on rotating schedules are now able to produce twice the number of calories per U.S. citizen that we need per day. The survival of these farms depends on the overproduction of the monocrops. The food industry has taken advantage of this and has continued to push the excess calories into our bodies (Kingsolver 2007). A second Green Revolution is arguably occurring today and offers credit and agricultural extensions to adopt commercial hybrids, which we now refer to as Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), while also leading to the founding of the World bank along with such neoliberal policies as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Those agriculturalists that did not do go along with the commercial hybrids were often forced out of production and forced into labor positions in industry, construction and manufacturing. This created many industrial monopolies, including one of the seed "giants," Monsanto which "owns" many of the most popular seeds, including the rights to many GMO seeds, used for larger scale and small scale production including corn, soybean, cotton, wheat, canola, sorghum and sugar cane. Community gardening participants are aware to varying degrees of the influence of Monsanto, however the participants I worked with are not necessarily directly connected. Monsanto is, however,

and important example of a specific large scale agricultural seed company that people engaged with the local food movement are reacting against.

Kingsolver argues that because we do not have cultural foods, we continue to be overwhelmed and confused by choice with the thought in mind that "more" is always better (Kingsolver 2007). Franco La Cecla further argues that regional cuisines are "parts of systems, local or broader, that resist innovation and variation" and that these cuisines lose their regional qualities as they become a part of a national cuisine to outsiders (2007:101). For example, he argues that "Italian food" only became the Italian cuisine once it was introduced abroad, giving Italians a food identity. With the large scale IFS and the global system that have allowed us to be able to buy whatever fruits and vegetables we want any time of the year, the confusion continues, leaving us no closer to possessing a "food cuisine" as La Cecla defines. While most all of the urban garden participants are not necessarily Slow Food activists, the Slow Food Movement is another reaction worldwide to the IFM occurring.

Alison Blay-Palmer argues that Slow Food "emphasizes saving regional foods and small producers, seeking to revive and celebrate organoleptic pleasures—something seen as missing from North American cultural life" (2008:2). The Slow Food Movement was founded in Italy in 1986 by Carlo Petrini and spread internationally by 1989 with a group of men thriving to improve the wine culture of their region (See Petrini and Padovani 2006 for complete history). With over 90,000 members across 130 countries, the Slow Food movement has spanned to the U.S. and has brought with it a rise in consumers demanding to know where our foods come from proving itself capable of mass political and social development. Although limited in scope and accessibility, Slow

Food has certainly been fundamental in this growth specifically in its ideology of good, clean and tasty which uphold food appreciation and pleasure, education and skills of production of healthy food, safeguarding local and traditional cuisines and production systems along with conserving near extinct animal/plant species, sustaining a new model of agriculture that is both less intensive and cleaner and finally "defending biodiversity and the right of the people to food sovereignty" (Slow Food 2014). Slow Food has inspired chefs across the world to turn towards sustainable and local food, including the well-known Berkeley, California-based chef, author and current vice president of Slow Food Alice Waters. At the same time, Slow Food fosters a sense of guilt for those who are affluent and do not choose to be on "the right side" while also excluding those who cannot afford the luxury eating habits that Slow Food Promotes (Simonetti 2012:172; see also Petrini and Padovani 2006).

These ideas of luxury eating habits further trickle into the Industrial Food System through consumer choice. Post WWII there was a feeling of collective accomplishment and collective action expanded during this time into such programs of welfare, increased access to health care, higher education became more accessible, there were new housing programs, new unemployment programs, unions strengthened and grew, etc. By the 1970s, this growth ended: "Individualistic ideas drove out the post war communal ideals and found their own conservative political expression at the end of the decade in the elections of Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the United States…" (Slee 2006:4). Furthermore, Neo-conservative guidance came from University of Chicago with Milton Friedman as front runner. The Chicago school attacked Keynesian ideas of government spending to carry economy through recessions and pull out of

depressions. Instead, they promoted "rational choice" meaning that all decisions, including noneconomic ones, could be understood as the product of self-interested rational individual choices. Through this they concluded that the market was the "pathway to prosperity and growth" (Slee 2006:4).

Academic journals and public arenas promoted the ideal of privatization and deregulation as it was seen that this allowed for the most choice. This was the up rise of neoliberal capitalism that has continued today. Today's capitalism is also sometimes known as fast capitalism, which is defined by Randall H. McGuire as "the rapid expansion of information technologies (including computers, software, satellites, fiber optics, and the Internet) has transformed the global economic landscape, accelerating capitalism in terms of both its reach and its translations" (2013:6). Choice continues to be promoted as common sense and has even been adopted by liberal parties in "public markets" and other choice driven approaches to solve social issues (Slee 2006).

The claim behind choice, as we well know, is that customers have the power through the decisions and actions made by their choices. We chose each time we make a purchase; companies remain powerless in that they are only are able to respond to our demands. However, this is misleading. One example of this can be seen in the rise of "gourmet" coffees. As exclusive coffees became more available, large mass producing companies began rebranding coffees and placed the "choice" of buying a "gourmet" version of original brands (for example, Folgers Original versus Folgers Gourmet) into the consumers' hands to give illusions of social class through lifestyle choices (see Roseberry 1996; see also Ebert and Zavarzadeh 2008). William Roseberry shows how food preferences are shaped by what we can afford and how the mass market "gourmet"

coffees try to blur the lines between what is class and "lifestyle" (1996). A more simplified example can be found in Tom Slee's use of a fictional town, Whimsley, and the tale of what "choice" really offers. Slee begins with a story of WalMart moving into Whimsley and the character Jack who looked forward to this because he would be offered more choice. Similar to real towns, smaller stores in Whimsley began closing because they could no longer compete leaving Walmart as the only choice:

> In a free-market system the special interests with the resources to do so can encourage tangles to form, to their own benefit. Individual choice becomes a toll that can be used to maintain and extend privilege under an egalitarian and populist guise. [Slee 2006:15]

Slee exposes how choice goes wrong and exposes the mechanics, inequality and how good results tend to be for the few. Returning now to Slow Food's goal of how the world should eat; the ways in which food is enjoyed and the types of foods promoted is framed within the ideals behind "individual choice" and the need for consumers to make "better" choices. As Simonetti questions, "How could one seriously claim to feed the world with Colonnata lard, Zeri lam, Ustica lentils or Tortona strawberries…" (2012:173). Similarly, Heather Paxton's ethnography of cheese makers, ranging from those who are wealthy to farmers struggling to make ends meet, touches on the issues of class within the luxuries of consuming gourmet cheeses pricing at thirty dollars per pound or more (2012). While Paxton alludes to the issues within her discussion of more environmentally conscious agricultural methods, quite clearly thirty dollar per pound cheese is not going to feed the world. Ultimately, Slow Food looks towards the past in nostalgia and calls for a backpedal to this idealized world in which we would also very conveniently be able to feed the entire world, but this approach belies the truth of the current global situation: "As long as there are starving people in the world, the way to

help them is not to maintain culinary and agricultural traditions, but to change them" (Simonetti 2012:184). While Slow Food is flawed, it does provide alternatives (although mostly unattainable for the majority)[1] and it draws attention to and provides a critique of modern industrial agriculture and capitalism.

The local food movement has risen and includes not only rural people and farmers growing their own foods, but urban dwellers participating in community gardens, shopping at local farmers' markets and buying from CSAs. School gardens are also on the rise where our children are learning how to get their hands dirty in the soil and later how to cook with the foods they produce, and of course, having the opportunity to consume what they worked towards during the school year(s). Steven L. Hopp writes in his short essay "Oily Food," "If every U.S. citizen ate just one meal a week (any meal) composed of locally and organically raised meats and produce, we would reduce our country's oil consumption by over 1.1 million barrels of oil *every week*." (Kingsolver 2007:5). While this idealistic statement points out that this would not only help our own diets but our environment as well, the question becomes how do we enable *all* of the population to do this and not just those who can afford the monetary and time commitments necessary to produce the food in question.

One attempt at enabling people to grow their own food within our current economy has been through community gardening. Efforts towards local food production, gardening spaces included, in the U.S. and across the world began for different reasons than Slow Food. People have been creating garden spaces in American cities since the

[1] For example, the Chez Panisse Restaurant, owned by Alice Waters, has a rotating seasonal price fixe menu that averages anywhere from $65 to over $100 per person. However, in 1996 Waters celebrated 25 years of Chez Panisse by establishing The Chez Panisse Foundation (now known as The Edible Schoolyard Project) which works towards Slow Food's goal of education about the foods we eat.

1890s: “Social reformers started the trend by promoting vacant-lot cultivation associations to provide land and technical assistance to unemployed laborers in cities including Detroit, New York, and Philadelphia” (Lawson 2005:1). There have been several phases of urban gardening in the United States’ history. Laura J. Lawson addresses these phases based on themes of building morale, fighting rising food costs and improving nutrition during a “paternalistic” approach during WWI, WWII and the 70s (2005). The social agendas from the 1890s through WWI included “income generation, education, assimilation, and beautification—garden programs of this era included vacant-lot cultivation associations, the school garden movement, and civic improvement gardening” (Lawson 2005:13). Victory gardens stemming from WWI as well as relief gardens during the Depression and later during WWII sought to produce food during times of need. These gardens helped to “resolve local manifestations of crises that impacted the entire nation” (Lawson 2005:13). During WWI, backyard and community gardens were created to augment domestic food and to send more overseas. Children were called to action as the “Soldiers of the Soil” when the US School Garden Army was created to further assist in domestic food need during wartimes. Subsistence gardening during the Great Depression included over 23 million participants. During both World Wars and the Depression, gardening was seen as a way of enacting national self-help and was even a way to separate “the worthy from the unworthy among the poor,” (Lawson 2005:290). This consequence results from social divides within a capitalistic system. A rise in community gardening also occurred during WWII as Victory Gardens. Leaders were found in civic and women’s clubs, and a focus on children gardening continued. Differences emerged from the earlier gardens creating a shift from growing food to sell to

growing food to be eaten locally. Instead of being an occupation, the gardens were now serving immediate nutritional needs and were considered recreational activities. This era had a top down shaping approach with much more national and federal funding involved. Gardening was a civic duty, afterwards becoming a personal form of recreation, and few gardens remained during the 50s and 60s. Gardening remained recreational until the 1970s, which spawned a rebirth of gardens in resistance to urban abandonment, a new inspiration. While participation varied, the resistance addressed, "urban abandonment as well as to provide resources to address inflation, express a new environmental ethic, and reconnect neighbors during a time of social unrest" (Lawson 2005:2).

Tending Sustainability

Caroline B. Webber and Jamie S. Dollahite define sustainability in terms of food and agriculture to contain several themes: ecological soundness, economic viability in terms of fairness to farmers and farm workers and lastly social justice specifically in terms of availability of healthy foods that are accessible (2008). The IFS undermines the goals that sustainable food systems (or the AFS) maintain and feeds off of consumers' food fears. At the same time, the IFS makes claims to feeding the world. Food fears among consumers are what Blay-Palmer argues to be what the IFS attaches itself to and what it thrives upon (2008). The IFS is based on commodity, quantity and monocultures and within it, the origins of food tend to be unknown to consumers while quantity and short- term efficiency are being valued over taste, sustenance, quality and environmental sustainability (Blay-Palmer 2008). Tracie McMillan argues that "the American way of eating is defined not by plenty, but by the simultaneous, contradictory, relentless presence of scarce nutrition in its midst" which she says is slowly working its way across

the world (2012:10). This has caused a loss in food sovereignty as well as the growth of diseases which has further embedded fear and what Blay-Palmer, along with other theorists call the global food crisis (2008; see also Holt-Gimenez and Patel 2009).

So called "alternative foods" have sprung up in response to the food crisis, the need of food security and against the industrialization of food. "Alternative" food choices are labeled under many different terms including specialty, quality, local, fair trade, ethnic, artisan and organic which all have "their appeal to quality-seeking consumers of food" with various reasons spanning from wanting food from home to wanting pesticide free foods (Blay-Palmer 2008:1). These many labels often further confuse consumers as the labels have been taken over by marketing strategies to sell products. While terms like "organic" are regulated by the USDA creating costly barriers for small farmers to be able to utilize, large companies and agribusinesses are able to take advantage of the label and sell products produced in mass quantity, such as organic Ragu spaghetti sauce, to a consumer as a more "natural" and "healthy" product.

Sitting in opposition to the IFS and the global food crisis is the Alternative Food System (AFS) which focuses on being more local, self-sufficient and a part of the community: "nature situating humans as part of and subject to nature; diversity; and restraint of resource use with an eye on the long-term consequences of production" (Blay-Palmer 2008:3). Fear is deeply imbedded in the IFS in terms of both alarm and anxiety with the root of food fears being grounded in society, not in nature, as a result of confused consumers who feel personal failure and a need to make "smarter" and "better" choices (Blay-Palmer 2008). This fear further implants the feelings of guilt and anxiety into the "personal failures" of consumers in not making the "right" choices (whatever

those may be). This guilt extends to both those who can afford to be a part of niche groups (such as Slow Food) and those who are excluded within the AFS's movements that promote individualistic choice, often only obtainable for the elite, and further embeds ambivalent relationships with our food.

The focus of the IFS has been in placing blame onto the individual to cope with the food crisis instead of upon the resources needed to change and move the food system in a new direction creating a divide between humans and nature through food capitalism or the "global food crisis" creating a feeling of hopelessness (see Holt-Gimenez and Patel 2009 and Holt-Gimenez 2011). Blay-Palmer also points out that the status of "alternative food" is often marginalized and not viewed as a primary, direct approach to a sustainable food system. Blay-Palmer addresses the difficult question: are alternative foods simply quick fixes to address people's food fears in an increasingly insecure food system or do they have a deeper rooting?

There is no simple answer to this question. Community gardening is a way for people to work towards sustainable food systems; however, I am not suggesting that this is an end-all solution to creating sustainability nor do I suggest that urban gardeners feel that gardening is the end all solution. Community gardening, instead, is one of several steps that people are turning towards in producing a surplus in which they have control. In fact, J.K. Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron and Stephen Healy use community gardens as models towards a more sustainable economy: "As vegetables grow, some are eaten by the gardeners so they can sustain themselves and continue to work in the garden. Seeds are dried and kept for the next year's crop. Stems and leaves are composted and used to replenish nature's soil. The products of the garden flow back to the producers and the

environment to ensure the ongoing survival of the gardeners and the garden" (2013:xv). The reward is in the harvest; any surplus can be given away to families, to neighbors, and to local food banks. These acts help to build a sense of community. This example offers a simple vision in terms of sharing the commons, producing what is needed both for individuals and collectively, and investing in each other and in the garden, even to the soil itself via composting (Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy 2013).

Community gardens are rarely planned development but instead are brought about by community members and institutions such as FFM to become resources to "meet current needs associated with subsistence, protection, and civic functions" (Lawson 2005:3). People in Cuba have been actively creating community gardens for over 15 years and Venezuela's government has a targeted percentage of produce from urban gardening (see Katz 2006 and Lamb 2005 for examples). Community gardening can become problematic in that "the tendency to layer multiple agendas on gardens makes achievable objectives difficult to ascertain" (Lawson 2005:11). However, community gardens are pervasive and they appeal because a garden shows "immediate results, is highly participatory, and is relatively cheap compared to other strategies, such as new housing, more jobs, or school reform" (Lawson 2005:11). Lawson states that urban garden programs "have dovetailed with many different agendas, including the desire to disperse urban populations, Americanize immigrants, improve education, ease labor relations, and counter social anomie" (2005:288).

While past programs were meant to be temporary, today advocates call for gardens to be more permanent resources for community members (see Lawson 2005). I further argue that community gardening is a way for people to take ownership, control

and agency of their own lives in a time of economic despair. This brings me back to the question that Blay-Palmer asks: are alternative food systems (or sustainable food systems) simply quick fixes to address people's food fears in an increasingly insecure food system or do they have a deeper rooting? As I argue about community gardening, Blay-Palmer notes that eating from local food systems in general "gives people hope that through the quotidian act of eating they can recapture some of their lost power" (2008:15). In order to create new food systems relationships need to be based on cooperation and interactions, not competition, and she argues that the current food movement is taking steps towards reconfiguring towards these goals (Blay-Palmer 2008). These cooperative and interactive relationships are central in urban gardening as well as farmers' markets, CSAs and other community oriented food systems that hold trust and sustainability at the core in pursuit of related goals. While some areas within the food movement do work within capitalist modes of exploitation, such as many food co-operatives[2], other organizations are building new systems and resisting, even revolting against exploitation.

Creating access to food is a core aspect of creating a sustainable food system and creates relationships between different groups within the AFS. For example, food access, Lawson notes, links gardeners with concerns of other groups including farmers, food banks and social service agencies among others: "Community gardens figure into the discussion as a resource for people to grow fresh fruits and vegetables for their own consumption or for sale" (2005:270). They also add "resiliency and options to neighborhoods, particularly inner-city neighborhoods that have been deserted by the large

[2] While food co-operatives usually operate within capitalist roles of management, they do often support farmers' markets and other local food efforts that bring consumers in direct contact with producers who control their own surplus.

supermarkets and, as a result, have fewer resources for fresh food and pay higher prices" (Lawson 2005:270). Lastly, she points out that community gardens offer a greater variety of food choice which leads towards producing greater food sovereignty.

Within producing food sovereignty there are other benefits to individuals, including the emotional fulfillment of loyalty and pride in being able to buy local foods. Webber and Dollahite argue that in order to achieve sustainability within the food system further education regarding sustainability to all income levels will further help people to understand the relationships between their food, how it is produced and sustainability (2008). Furthermore, this will aggressively target the niche market and work towards eliminating elitism and anxiety within our food system, including the AFS.

Producing Food Security through Food Sovereignty

Eric Holt-Gimenez and Raj Patel argue that food sovereignty and our food systems must remove themselves from unregulated global markets, speculators and global monopolies as it is "the human right of all people to healthy, culturally appropriate, sustainably grown food and the right of communities to determine their own food systems" (2009:2). The United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) warned of food shortages beginning in 2006, but in 2007 food prices exploded along with record harvest reports. The global trend of over 30 years in cheap food hit hard and has become known as the "global food crisis" (Holt-Gimenez 2011). This crisis has created a need for farm and food policies to address the needs of local communities (Holt-Gimenez and Patel 2009). Furthermore FAO's announcement created a mass movement of official solutions to global hunger that aimed to "fix" the global food system or to reform it. However, none of the institutions considered that they might actually be a significant part

of the problem. Coincidentally there were no proposals offered to transform or significantly reform the way in which food is secured and made into a corporate market.

The USDA cites that in 2012, 14.5% of U.S. households suffered food insecurity and 40% of these households had incomes lower than the Federal poverty line; most of these households were in urban areas (Coleman-Jensen, Nord and Singh 2013; USDA 2013b). The use of "food insecurity" also is at conflict with the current "obesity epidemic" occurring with the issues of the types of food being used and promoted by government agencies to create food security through large scale agriculture and monocropping. Furthermore, the epidemic hits low income households that fall into the federally defined categories of food insecurity. While there are variances in food security in the U.S., I do not want to imply that the United States is a food insecure nation in the same way that many other countries experience hunger and famine. However, access to fresh and healthy foods is limited and supports the need of increasing our food sovereignty most especially in light of obesity trends in the U.S.

Obesity has not been a sudden global genetic shift and we have likely always been vulnerable to this but due to the external and environmental factors it was less common in the past: "The modern environment has relaxed many of those constraints and may even have added factors that further predispose many of us to weight gain" leading to "a large number of paths to obesity" in today's world (Powers and Schulkin 2009:319). Michael L. Powers and Jay Schulkin discuss several biological factors that do contribute to the pressures of increased rates of obesity, however, they argue that this does not mean we should sit back and do nothing (2009). While our evolutionary preferences have helped our survival when food was less accessible, we have the capability to evaluate this and

take action both as individuals and as a society. Powers and Schulkin further point to the need in considering other factors including nutrition, exercise and substance abuse which all pay a toll on our health requiring a layering of factors on obesity and health in our modern world (2009). I would additionally argue that social and economic conditions play a considerable role. In this sense, in order to understand the material conditions as well as the importance of considering the "discursive processes through which conditions are accepted as a 'normal' part of our society and how these make sense to people at precise historical moments" are all relevant in considering food sovereignty (Lyon-Callo 2008a:25). What are the political-economic conditions causing the lack in food sovereignty and who benefits from these conditions?

Food security starts at the community level and is "the ability to acquire culturally appropriate food through local, nonemergency sources" (Lawson 2005: 270). One goal of food security activists is to "bring low-income consumers into the local food systems movement" with the biggest barriers being price and location (Webber and Dollahite 2008:188). A common misconception is that even if fresh foods were made available to low-income households, they would not choose to purchase these foods over processed foodstuffs. Webber and Dollahite argue that this is not the case and they demonstrate through their site and data collection that "when financial barriers are broken down, low-income households do purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables" (2008:188). Financial situations are not the only factor, however. Within data collected from low-income households regarding food quality, Webber and Dollahite's informants reported "freshness" to be the first most important quality followed by taste (2008:193). Participants in the study also emphasized the importance of buying local to support their

communities. Lastly, participants desired to buy directly from producers due to the thought that the food would be healthier and safer than foods bought in grocery stores. The authors state that this is due to a sense of trust found in direct transitions from producer to consumer rather than through a middle-man (2008). Trust is vital in creating sustainable systems and may be reached through increasing food sovereignty, enabling a *local* and *healthy* food security to be reached. The next section will focus on specific examples to discuss the challenges and successes in building this trust between consumers and producers in the attempt to develop local and sustainable food systems.

Alternative Food Systems

While the focus of this thesis is on community gardening's role in the Alternative Food System, I do not want to diminish the importance of other movements within the AFS. Farmers' Markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) and other food justice organizations such as Fair Food Matters Kalamazoo are all intimately linked in creating a sustainable food system. What these all have in common is the idea of cooperation and interactive relationships in building community around food while holding sustainable efforts at the core. These systems work towards and offer alternative approaches that are less exploitative than the Industrial Food System in an effort to serve a wider audience by beginning locally. While the range of local food movements in the US is diverse and continues to grow, ranging from food banks located in so called "food deserts" to the more elitist trends of Slow Food, these alone will not end hunger. As Holt-Gimenez and Patel argue, we "must change the social consensus regarding our food system" (2009:169). In other words, common sense notions need to be tackled within the food system. Changing the way we think about food, demanding changes in the food system and applying pressure to politicians are all components that Holt-Gimenez and Patel (2009) argue for. Small scale agriculture is intrinsic in this effort and provides one model toward sustainability according to the authors (Holt-Gimenez and Patel 2009). I further argue that efforts in farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture, co-operative food markets, and, of course, urban community gardens tackle the way we consider food and strive towards a sustainable and secure food system. This section highlights my own experiences, as well as those of individuals I interviewed in the

Kalamazoo community who are involved with changing how we see our food, including members of Fair Food Matters, local Farmers' Markets, and CSAs.

Fair Food and Farmers' Markets

Shopping at a local farmers' market means planning ahead and knowing what day or days of the week it will be open as well as what season. While slightly less convenient than popping into a supermarket any day and often any time of day, many people favor farmers' markets and chose to shop at these Alternative Food Systems. Kalamazoo offers several farmers' markets throughout the year, including the Bank Street Winter Market with over 40 vendors throughout the winter season; the Food Co-op sponsored 100-mile Market that seeks vendors within a 100 mile radius; the Kalamazoo Farmer's Market also sponsored by the Co-op; and the Fair Food Matters project Northside Neighborhood's Douglass Farmers' Market which seeks to offer fresh and healthy food in a neighborhood that is often marginalized and excluded from healthy food access. Affordability and location are high on the list of considerations for customers. What keeps these markets not only alive but continuing to grow and spread each season? I argue that Farmers' Markets remove the barriers between consumers and producers, enable relationships and trust to develop and allow open dialog about food, which gives people safe and healthy options.

Less than ten years ago finding a local farmers' market proved to be much more of a challenge. Since then, however, farmers' markets have begun to permeate common sense notions. The growth of farmers' markets and individual farm stands has grown exponentially from under 2,000 markets nationwide in the early 90s to over 8,000 in 2013 (USDA 2013a). While this growth has slowed down over the past two years with only a

3.6 percent increase from 2012 to 2013, there is still a need and room for further growth beyond the "high demand" and high population areas. This includes growth within lower income populations, many areas of which do not have easy access to fresh produce. Several programs are working toward such goals by creating opportunities for Bridge Cards and SNAP benefits to be accepted at farmers' markets. Furthermore, to encourage and further enable SNAP users to shop at local farmers' markets, pilot programs have been launched to earn double points, including Michigan's own pilot program Double Up Food Bucks.

What does going to a farmer's market look and feel like? This can vary from market to market and season to season. The diversity of customers ranges, as does the produce. One aspect that struck me was the differences and similarities found shopping at the beginning of a season and at the end in terms of atmosphere and population. How did these changes happen and from this, what other changes are now possible? How accessible are farmers' markets, and are they inviting and appealing?

At the Kalamazoo Farmer's Market, Kalamazoo's largest and oldest market, the most interesting variations occur seasonally from the beginning to the end of season. These changes influence the population and even the ease of access to get to the market. For example, in the spring it is best to walk to the Kalamazoo Farmer's Market as finding parking can be near impossible. However, on the last day of the Kalamazoo Farmer's Market, parking is simple – the lot is near empty. The brisk fall winds sweep through the stalls, carrying flurries of snowflakes through the remaining fall vegetables, of which there is an abundance of mostly roots such as carrots, beets and turnips. The overwhelming choice of different squash beats out any grocery store: acorn, spaghetti,

butternut and buttercup. Apples, piles of kale and Swiss chard, Brussels sprouts, and garlic are all out on display. Tasty walnuts, hard to find wild mushrooms and a few cultivated mushrooms are front and center on some vendors' stands. Preserved goods, chocolate, baked goods and crafts are still readily available. Permeating the air is the scent of grilled onions and peppers to be served as a snack or lunch as shoppers browse. Farmers keep warm by portable heaters and turn them towards the shoppers who put up their hands to greet the warmth. Lush cranberries overflow their cartons and are placed near chestnuts to encourage customers to think about holiday meals. The cold pavement chills us to the core as we meander around to the vendors exchanging money for the last of the seasonal veggies.

Shouts from farmers are heard across the tables, "Last day, everyone, last day." People chatter about the foods. An elderly woman tells me that she has been taking classes at the Food Co-op for cooking and now she is experimenting with different squash. She points to one and asks the vendor what it is. "Buttercup squash, it's slightly sweeter than acorn" said the farmer. She takes two and places them in her already bursting sack. Today's special was to fill a grocery sack or basket full of squash for only six dollars. "I'm moving the squash to the other side; it is too cold over here for people to look. The truck will block the wind" said one vendor's assistant as she brushed off a few flakes of snow from the squash. Dozens of people wander through, filling their recycled bags and baskets. The last day of the fall season comes to a close. Vendors laugh and gather their leftover goods, shake hands and pack up their trailers and trucks, exchanging goodbyes until spring.

While late fall is relaxed, in springtime there is an excitement for the soon-to-be market and the parking lot is full as are the streets around. Customers browse carefully often bumping shoulders but all seem in upward spirits breathing in the crisp fresh air. Those that live nearby chose to walk to the markets. This time of year, it is much more difficult to wander freely throughout the market proper. Customers are close together, often bumping into one another but not in a pushy manner. Laughter and chatter consume the atmosphere as people browse and sample the spring vegetables. Many vegetables have been started in greenhouses such as cucumbers, tomatoes, squash and other vegetables normally only available later in the year. Green garlic and spring greens are usually available early. Rhubarb spreads its leaves in early May, as do raspberries and even strawberries getting ready to bloom. Asparagus breaks ground and is harvested in May. By mid to late May, green bean plants emerge from the earth. Snow peas come in June. An abundance of fresh foods, ranging in product all in season, are available for purchase.

In the Kalamazoo farmers' markets, almost all forms of payment are accepted by vendors including cash, checks, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/Bridge Card) benefits and other food support programs. Credit and debit cards are also becoming more widespread. While these forms are all available, one market manager, Emily, noted that while all of these currencies are used, about half of the sales at her market, which targets a lower income area, are still in cash. "There are a decent number of people who just barely don't qualify for SNAP or they don't apply to it because there is stigma attached to it. Or lots of strings attached to it. There are a lot of

people that could use food assistance who don't get it so they end up paying in cash. And also people who don't need food assistance that come to shop which is nice too."

When I asked Emily why she became involved she told me a story about her time spent overseas which gave her a greater sense of the work that needs to be done here to improve our food system: "Going somewhere else and seeing that they actually have their local food system figured out a little better than we do. I was in Bolivia. Fresh locally produced food is the norm. Fresh fruits and vegetables." She continued, "The women in our village get up in the morning and either go down to their friend's house which is the store and see what vegetables came in, or they dig up what they have and make soup. Nobody buys processed foods, maybe spices or things like that. It was a luxury." She noted that sometimes she would purchase items like Kraft Macaroni and Cheese to counter homesickness but it was expensive compared to purchasing fresh foods. Coming back to the U.S. provided her with reverse shock in what the normalization of food is: "We are eating at restaurants. I thought I was generally healthy because I was cooking at home but I was cooking Pasta Roni or other boxed meals. And I was definitely raised on convenience foods like mac and cheese and hot dogs were one of my favorite meals as a kid. A lot of taking stuff from the freezer and putting it in the microwave and pouring melted Velveeta on it. That kind of thing which felt to my mom like cooking. It was cooking." These foods, that this manager says she does still appreciate, are also what she said are the very symptom of the Industrial Food System that she now works to alter.

There are around 1.9 million SNAP recipients in Michigan, which is over 4% higher than the national average. Programs like Double Up Food Bucks use funds raised

from foundations to match purchases made at participating locations, including many farmers' markets. Double Up Food Bucks has operated at Michigan farmers' markets since 2009 and was piloted in Detroit at five markets. The Food Bucks tokens can be used towards any Michigan grown fruits and vegetables, often which are cheaper to purchase in season at farmers' markets. According to the Fair Food Network's (FFN) 2012 Evaluation Report, SNAP redemptions at Michigan farmers' markets are higher than any other Midwestern state by a significant amount, reaching into the millions with the closest follower under half a million (Fair Food Network). The 2011 to 2012 season brought an increase of 16% in the total number of SNAP users at markets with nearly 50% increase in SNAP dollars distributed and a 54% increase in SNAP dollars redeemed at participating markets. This has not only brought in more new customers but also has increased the diversity at markets with more young families and low income individuals (FFN). This system and others continue to develop while increasing accessibility to healthy, fresh foods and making way for farmers' markets to be less about catering to a niche group and more inviting to a diversity of people. As Emily, who has been involved with FFM and farmers' markets since 2010, said, the major function of farmers' markets is to build relationships, which is helping organizations like FFM to be more accountable to the target populations being served, "…to actually spend more time listening to what they actually want and need and at the same time still pursuing our mission of increasing access to healthy foods because we understand it to be linked to causes of health outcomes and the bigger issue of making life better for everybody."

Community Supported Agriculture

According to Holt-Gimenez and Patel (2009), who make a plead for the need to fix the US food system, critics say that local and ecologically sustainable agriculture cannot produce enough food for human populations, thus the need for cash cropping mass-produced produce. Instead, Holt-Gimenez and Patel (2009) maintain that small scale organic farming does produce enough. Their case study further tested the "more land theory" and showed that adding green manures would revive nitrogen depleted soil and would actually use less land than proposed plans that relied upon synthetic nitrogen fertilizers. However, farmers are having trouble getting credit to purchase and cover production costs, including purchasing the label "organic." My own research further supports that this label is near impossible for small scale farmers who have turned to alternative labels in order to promote their produce and help consumers make choices. CSAs create relationships between farmers and the consumers, who usually remain quite separated from one another. This subsection further explores the label controversy and discusses one Southwest Michigan CSA farmer's experience in both her challenges and successes.

A fellow community gardener introduced me to Jasmine. Jasmine's farm opened during the spring of 2010. The first time I arrived at her garden was a bright, sunny morning; the dew hung heavy to each blade of grass. I completely soaked the sneakers I was wearing and the hem of my jeans. I made a mental note to myself to bring my own work boots the next time. I could hear chickens clucking, and a large yellow lab ran out to greet my arrival. Jasmine told me to head right up to the barn but I could see that I was not the first person to arrive. Several people were browsing the squash, onions and

potatoes that Jasmine had displayed. There were jars of preserves and a freezer with summer vegetables frozen and labeled for those of us who wanted to stock up. Crafts of different sorts were displayed. Going into her barn was like going to a miniature farmer's market: I could get everything right there.

I started chatting with Jasmine, and she showed me a little bit of her cozy shop that she was rearranging for the winter months ahead. As we began discussing the importance of local food, economy and knowing what goes into food (something Jasmine highlighted throughout the interview) I could not help but notice the Red Bull can Jasmine held in her hand. I share this component of the interview not to criticize Jasmine for drinking an energy drink, but because this addresses just one of the many conflicts of what people told me about the local food movement and actions that do not always follow suit in terms of healthful eating. It is not perfect, and it is a process. In the face of these challenges, what drives people toward the ideals of "local?" Jasmine's main concern is for her family: "The whole reason I started growing produce is because I didn't want my kids eating GMOs and that's why I always had it on a small scale was because at least then they were getting everything I knew that wasn't sprayed because it was a big problem I knew." Since the first time I met Jasmine, she has continued on the path of natural foods, right down to drying her own seeds.

In the fall of 2013, Jasmine sent me a mysterious email saying that she was working on a new project that I needed to come see. When I arrived, the barn doors were closed, which seemed odd to me as she always had them open before. Her sign had also changed, replacing the "organic" title to "natural." Furthermore, she no longer had open hours listed for the public to come to her. Jasmine had gone from having people come

out to the farm to being a vendor at a farmers' market. During our discussion she let me know that she made this decision because she was able to reach a wider customer basis and the advertising was easier. More people visited the weekly farmer's market: "Every Saturday when we are down at the market it is me, my husband and my two daughters. My girls have to do the samples because I try to make them talk to people and make that eye contact. They are 10 and 13 so I have noticed a tremendous difference just this year of them being able to speak louder and have a little more confidence and that was a big thing for me. That was something we couldn't do before because I was open here on Saturdays when I had the barn open." She continued, "That was a frustration for my husband because he wasn't sure where he should be. He can't help there, it wasn't his shop. At the market we are very family oriented and we know all of the vendors, there's a good network and everyone gets along well." While people would often comment on loving seeing the farm, coming out into the country was often inconvenient. At the market, Jasmine sells out of eggs within forty minutes and the conversations she has with customers brings her business for the wintertime months and extra income during the fall: "I've actually had a few people that have paid me to do their canning, for someone like us we are always clawing and scratching to be able to make some money and make someone happy."

I asked Jasmine about the farm's name change. Previously the word "organic" was used but now her sign read "natural." Jasmine discussed what happened in an unusually quiet tone, "Someone brought it to my attention and I really had to investigate after I put my sign out. It was strange, but I had no idea, they really came and poked me in the eye for it." While Jasmine did not elaborate on what kind of trouble she faced,

hefty fines are often issued by the misuse of labels. Jasmine told me that she had to change her farm's name due to government regulations on the use of the word "organic." She could not afford the thousands of dollars to "own" this word. She continued, "If you ever see a sign on the side of the road that says 'organic' it is unlikely. Especially for a small farmer, it's impossible. You would never be able to make enough to pay that off." I asked Jasmine if she knows any farmers who have the "organic" label, "No small farm should ever have 'organic' on their sign and if they do you should ask questions." With a slight chuckle she added, "Then they will be scared."

As an alternative, Jasmine explored a nationwide network called Certified Naturally Grown: "It is a list of all farmers that have been inspected but can't pay for the organic name. Smaller people like me. What you do is pay a membership fee, around $200." Jasmine continued to explain the process, "Local farmers, who are also certified, cross train. There is a checklist involved, and you inspect each other. So that's what we did. Two hundred versus thousands." The most important aspect for Jasmine is that she now has extra protection as a farmer. "I'm now covered by the federal government. That was a big deal for me."

What exactly does the "natural" certification entail? All of Jasmine's vegetables are naturally grown: "We do not use any of those things [chemicals] and it is the same standards as organic. That's the key. It's nothing less than having not paid the big government fee." Since obtaining her certification Jasmine has also shifted the focus of her farm: "I downsized on everything. I stopped doing everything in the barn and focused more on small areas. I'm trying to be more creative. I have a few vertical

gardens so I didn't have as many weeds and I consolidated everything into the large greenhouse."

Since her start up in 2010, Jasmine has continued to work with families through the CSA by creating weekly produce baskets. In the past, she delivered them herself or would have customers take the winding roads to her farm to pick up their produce. Now the families are able to conveniently pick up their baskets each week at the farmer's market. In 2013, she supported eight families from May until October. "Each week there is about $15 in produce and I do a lot of specialty things just because I like to including farm fresh eggs each week." I inquired about what her other specialty items include: "I work part time at a hydroponic lettuce place every day so I get excellent lettuce that is hydroponically grown and is all natural. I throw those in the basket and other things I have, canning, homemade salsa, pickled cucumbers, pickled beans. Each week is a surprise and they get what I have an abundance of." She tries to vary the baskets and cater to her customers' wants: "If I feel that we have given say too many pears then I will make something, maybe a dessert and give them a baked good." She smiled, sighed and continued, "People love it. I'd say about this time a year I struggle at the end, things are dying now. This year was a huge year for mold and rot on a lot of the squash plants so a lot of things I was hopeful for this time of year didn't produce. A lot of that was bad irrigation on our part because we are having trouble with our house well which is where our water comes from. All these unforeseen things that happen like that, so we live and learn."

Her main focus, and the new project for 2013 and 2014, was launching her Jalapeno jelly, which has become her bestselling item, in mass quantities that she sells at

her local farmer's market and other local retailers: "I am producing the jelly like a crazy lady these days as the upcoming snow is going to make all the peppers die off. Hard to believe how fast the season went." When I asked Jasmine how she came up with the idea of Jalapeno jelly she told me that she was inspired by her husband who loves the jelly: "As you know I love to can all fresh produce as possible. I personally thought this was just a great recipe for my crazy family and friends." From there Jasmine played with recipes until she came up with her own combination. She would then take her jalapeno jelly and other jellies to the farmer's market and give away samples. "Well, low and behold it was always the jalapeno jelly that people were interested in. They always would say 'No! I'm not a spicy person.' Then when they tried it, they were pleasantly surprised." The jelly took off from there. "People would wait in line wanting to sample it and people ordering cases for holiday gifts/stocking stuffers. One thing I've learned about business is that you throw a lot of things out there and you stick with the ones that are successful." Sharing a product that was a recipe close to her own family was important to Jasmine: "sharing a recipe that is 'simply sweet and spicy' for others to share in this unique experience and to let people to move out of their comfort zones, cook differently, tantalize their taste buds and try to go out on a limb for a new experience." Jasmine continued, "It's sort of cheesy, I know. It is how I truly feel though.

Her project in selling canned goods and her jelly was no simple task. In order to begin canning, Jasmine had to get certified and obtain food licenses. Jasmine told me that she worked with Michigan State University (MSU): "I did a couple programs with them where they help with the business plan and directives on who to talk to about food licensing. They walked me through a sales sheet, who to talk to and gave a lot of

guidance to get you to the right people." Furthermore, MSU conducted the necessary inspections and recipe testing: "We were dealing with different pH levels at one point and modifying the recipe a little bit. All of that took time. It seems like it would be an easy thing but each thing, nutrition facts went on for months with testing." Her next task was to obtain a bar code, which had to be purchased.

Jasmine's hard work was recognized by the local business association which named her farm the "Most Successful Business for 2013." Her response to this recognition was humble: "I am so small in this large world. I have no control of anyone's life but my own and my family's. I want to do what is right for us and the environment." She continued by talking about stepping away from technology and slowing down, working together in hopes that people turn to family and neighbors in trust to help one another: "Farming is not simple, it is a craft, it a learned skill that is mostly developed by errors through experience." Jasmine stated that often people do not understand the process of producing vegetables and even what the vegetables look like, "If it does not look perfect the customer sometimes thinks it is not good. Thus, also causing waste to the farmer who is left with an imperfect looking pepper that no one bought because of its imperfection but now a product not sold (because it's grown naturally without chemicals) is waste." She continued telling me about her experience trying to give away the leftover produce, "When a farmer tries to give that produce away for free to a mission or elsewhere they will not take these items because people don't want to or don't know how to use the produce given to them. This is terrible." Due to this, Jasmine has taken on additional roles in her community: "It is my mission to improve this as I cannot believe that we have all of this produce at and during the season that hungry people may not eat

because no one knows how to make it! For these reasons alone I feel compelled to change that. We have so many hungry." Jasmine's next mission is to gather a group to discuss and teach others about growing food. "Knowledge is key and it just feels right."

During our discussions, Jasmine has often hinted at the possibility of a drastic change that would make eating local the only option. One example of this occurred when we were discussing what "local" means to her:

> I think we all are headed towards a very difficult time. The world is really at a changing point. Local to me means that if you can't go to Walmart tomorrow, who do you know that you can get food from? Because you have to know someone you can get food from, if you don't know how to grow it which no one knows what to do—it is so much easier to go to the store and spend four dollars on pears and bitch about it and yet you aren't going to grow it, take the time. There's this whole circle of life in my opinion and back in the day we were meant to work hard, worked for your food. When you ate something you acknowledged it, it's such a basic sense, you knew you got this piece of food from somewhere nearby. Nobody does that anymore. I think that is scary because I know people who don't know that you can save a seed from an apple and try to grow it. Or know what's a GMO. Really, they don't know that and I think that's super scary. There's a chance that no one is going to have a grocery store to go to and then what are they going to do?

Jasmine's concerns for people knowing where their food comes from and where they would go in a time of crisis is a significant drive for a portion of those involved with the local food movement in terms of food fears. This is also what feeds the Industrial Food System, creating a circular pattern that sustains the IFS. In efforts to combat this people are learning where their food comes from through involvement, networking and working towards sustainable means. This also serves a communal appeal while also invoking ideals of the movement somehow being a nostalgic revisit to our past. Jasmine often notes the need to step away from our technology: "We have become so oblivious to many things happening around us because of the convenience of our technology and I think we really don't know what it's going to be like. I don't think anyone is paying

attention. Priorities are so backwards. Every day we need to know how we are going to feed ourselves if stores aren't available." While many of my other contacts would agree with Jasmine on needing to know how we are going to feed ourselves, they do not suggest that we return to the past. Pat, a local food advocate on Eat Local South West Michigan (ELSWM), wrote that, "we just lost our way for a generation or two, and relied on corporations to feed us heavily processed food-like products," something many agreed with on ELSWM. Seremetakis argues that the English use of nostalgia has come to mean a romantic sentiment that freezes the past while also removing it from relationships to the present through social transformations (1996). While it is often suggested that local food is seeking out the past in an idealistic nostalgia ELSWM group members argued that the local food movement is not a visit to the past but is instead a response to current recognition that industrial food is unsafe, inhumane, unsustainable and unhealthy.

Pat discussed the local food movement as being very real. He wrote to me, "As we reach peak production on some non-renewable resources (especially oil), our family is preparing for a time when choosing local food becomes more of a necessity and less of a choice." Pat was not the only person who addressed the idea of local becoming necessity over choice. Chelsea, one of my main gardening contacts and who I will discuss further in the next section, also said that creating sustainable communities is important in order to handle potential a crisis, such as if food could not be shipped: "We know we would be okay," she said. Other ELSWM group members indicated that dependency on oil and seeing food coming from other parts of the country and world is driving them to look locally.

Other reasons people look to local foods, and especially organic or natural foods, is for freshness and to be more mindful of their health and environment. Both of the gardens Chelsea coordinates are not only local but also what she calls "organic" (however, they are not currently certified). For Chelsea, eating naturally is not an elitist trend. Instead, it is a way to be healthier by staying away from any chemicals, resulting with a more natural product. Popular writer Michael Pollan writes about organic foodstuffs and the so-called "elitist" trend as having been tampered with by such corporations as Wal-Mart through the globalization of organic food (2006, 2007b). Pollan wrote that Wal-Mart forces organic prices down which makes organic foods available to consumers in mass quantities (2006). While this may sound positive, the next step is to consider how Wal-Mart plans to maintain such prices and whether or not these same so called "organic" foods will be as sustainable as local "naturally" grown foods. As Pollan pointed out, supermarkets only want to do business with big farmers. This same trend of "organic" foods in supermarkets is now extending with "local" foods being available at Walmart. Both are changing the meaning of the words "organic" and "local," further confusing consumers. As Pollan criticized, the definition of these words has ended up in the control of the federal government, undergoing all of the usual politics (2006; 2007b). One ELSWM group member was a bit more positive about this supermarket trend. Karen discussed the importance of being self-sufficient and how eating local is a step in that direction "as it's closer to the table than unknown supermarket stuff from Mexico." She then continued by telling me about how local foods are even available at Meijer where big supermarkets "now label their produce as to its origin." Of course this would not have been possible without the FDA's labeling

guidelines which furthermore use these labels as a marketing strategy that places the blame onto consumers by offering the "choice" to buy what the government labels promote as "local" and "organic." As my conversation with Karen suggests, along with a general consensus from many ELSWM members, there is a concern with health, and eating locally is not necessarily an anti-global movement. Some of what Chelsea, my gardening contact, shared indicates a concern for a more local grounding and a departure from more global aspects; however, this does not necessarily mean all gardeners and local food consumers are against globalization. As Chelsea said, convenience and price are still driving factors. ELSWM members discussed the importance of supporting local economies, farmers and the communities in which they live as being a few of the driving factors behind why they eat local. Something interesting both Chelsea and ELSWM members brought up was a concern about the "what if" something happened in terms of a global crisis.

The Guilt of Eating "Healthy"

The push for knowledge is supported by all of the local food efforts I have discussed thus far. This is commonly discussed in public meetings held by Good Food Kalamazoo (GFK), a group of individuals and organizations concerned with working towards a local and healthy food system. One of GFK's current goals during their Good Food Roundtable meetings, open to the public, is to first slowly begin to understand what is occurring on the policy level with the USDA, including the Farm Bill, and then to act. Emily, with FFM, notes that the concern at Good Food Kalamazoo revolves around "trying to figure out what we can do as citizens to steer that more actively and locally, if we can create local food policies that override oppressive federal and state policies that

don't work." Time is another component that Emily and others often bring up: "There is a lot to understand, I think people want to understand," Emily paused here and laughed, "If they have time to be able to investigate. People want to hold the food system accountable for healing us and keeping us well." At the same time people are working to hold the food system accountable, they are also experiencing their own emotions and anxieties within the food system as they try to uproot the issues *within* the current hegemony. This subsection concentrates on the guilt and anxiety associated with the more elitist aspects of the local food movement as well as suggests further considerations for activists.

How do we think past acting individually to act collectively? The question "Who benefits?" always remains. After all, those in power do not necessarily want to change. Zizek's *Violence* points towards two types of violence, with subjective violence being the more visible. Objective violence is hidden within the "normal" state that includes two subcategories: symbolic violence found in language and systemic violence, "the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems" (2008:2). This violence is something that we need to make visible and bring to the forefront in order to combat the current dominating system of exploitation.

"Our blindness to the results of systemic violence is perhaps most clearly perceptible in debates about communist crimes" which Zizek argues are easy to see because we are "dealing with subjective evil, with agents who did wrong" and we find an acceptable place blame (2008:14). However, when attention is drawn to "the millions who died as the result of capitalist globalisation, from the tragedy of Mexico in the sixteenth century through to the Belgian Congo holocaust a century ago, responsibility is

largely denied" (2006:14). As he points out, this is somehow seen as an "objective" process it was not planned and there is no "Capitalist Manifesto" to blame (2006:14). This violence gives rise to neoliberal dominance and exploitation that, as Lyon-Callo further argues, form the base of current hegemonic beliefs (2008a and 2008b). These beliefs make statistics such as the fact that one in nine Michigan residents relied on food stamps in 2005 (twice the number of the previous decade) to be unsurprising (2008a). "It has become almost commonsensical that manufacturing, which produced $73.1 billion in Michigan last year [2007] and accounted for almost 25 percent of all jobs in Michigan ten years ago, will no longer produce good jobs" (Lyon-Callo 2008a:29, brackets mine for clarification).

This not only inhibits economic insecurity, but as Lyon-Callo argues, it produces emotional insecurity and affects how we feel. Pierre Bourdieu and Lyon-Callo both argue that a necessary feature in neoliberalism is the product of insecurity within *everything.* For example, Lyon-Callo discusses the emotional insecurity that comes from thinking about "competing for a job with everyone else on the planet and with the dominant imagining that imperialist, neoliberal global capitalism is natural and inevitable" (Lyon-Callo 2008a:40). This insecurity is not only within the poorest individuals but also the elite, who Bourdieu states deal with the anxiety "at the destructive effects of the power they wield and led into compensatory actions by the very logic that they want to neutralize" (1998:100). The intentions within community activists are there. What we need to further develop, however, are the alternatives as well as a willingness to uproot "common sense" notions.

Within the food system similar issues occur with notions such as "local" and "organic" foods are only for those who can afford them, the elite. These foods have certainly targeted the wealthiest populations in the U.S. and have created an elitist niche within the local food system. Sandor Ellix Katx (2006) confronts this and asks the question of not how to avoid the elitism but how to disarm the structures that create the privilege. As Webber and Dollahite (2008) argue, low-income households do desire healthy food but face barriers such as limited income and fewer locations to access fresh food. My contacts also indicate their desire for the elitist aspects of the local food system to expire and insist that these notions are not helping to make the movement appealing: "I feel nervous going to a potluck when I know there are going to be a lot of "foodie" people there because you're supposed to bring something homemade, organic, locally produced and I might not have time for that, I might not feel like doing that or I might not be able to afford doing that" said Emily. She continued, "So even as someone who is fairly privileged, I feel that, I feel that the movement is still, we had a couple of people at a workshop recently who had not heard the phrase local food movement, they were people of color, and they wondered what does that even mean. It was alienating to hear that phrase; there is a movement going on that they weren't aware of." FFM is striving towards making sure everyone is aware and that local foods are not just for the elite. Emily dislikes her association with the term "foodie" but understands it as a part of her identity: "There are parts of it that I hope will expire, the part about raising up food is an important part of our lives I hope this persists. I do think there is a lot of righteousness and judgment that goes along with the local food movement, organic food movement that is not helpful in helping it to appeal to all people." Furthermore Emily stands behind

local being a better choice and alternative but she makes it clear that it is only better *if* it is accessible: "I think the implication 'if you don't eat local you're a bad person' is really not helpful. I hope that is a trend that expires soon."

Beyond her goals of helping make local food accessible to all, Emily has had firsthand experience with feeling pressure, guilt and anxiety with eating "healthy" due to her own diagnosis of cancer. "There was this automatic pressure to take Chinese herbs and drink wheat grass juice and get pretty extreme with food. While I have enough science background to know why some of those things are effective, I think the spiritual component of being gentle with ourselves, the psychological component of not expecting myself to be perfect is just as important to my stress levels which then affects my biology as making sure my apple is local or organic."

One example of guilt she told me about was when she made fruit leather with some leftover pears that were at the farmer's market: "I was describing to someone how I made it and she said 'You peeled the pears.'" Emily's mock tone was dramatically shocked and accusatory. "I was like, 'Uh yeah.' I didn't ask her why she asked it like but it was definitely an accusation. At the time I just said, 'Well, they aren't organic so I peeled them.'" Emily paused a moment and then continued, "I think the implication was there is nutrients in the peel that I should have eaten instead of composting." In a sing song tone Emily sang out, "I thought, 'Sorry, I didn't want peel in my fruit leather.'" Emily sat quietly after sharing this story, still weighing it in her mind. She then told me that perhaps she may be even more sensitive to feedback such as this because she is so involved with the local food system. Even when experiencing her favorite treat, ice cream, Emily admitted to the pressure surrounding it: "Ice cream, one of my favorite and

worst favorite foods. It tastes good but well, that didn't really do anything good for my body other than tasting good. There's that kind of guilt and pressure both on myself and from others and on each other." This is the emotional turmoil Bourdieu identified as a result of the reproduction of insecurity in all aspects of our lives.

How can we further not only combat but find alternatives to the inequalities and insecurities created by the common sense notions? As Katz argues, "There is nothing fair about poverty and the gross inequalities of resources and opportunities that are reflected in every aspect of our society, food choices included" (Katz 2006:23). One alternative Katz discusses in terms of granting access in a way that is not driven by profit is occurring in West Oakland, California. The People's Grocery is a nonprofit mobile market on wheels that makes five stops on a specific route three days each week. It sells healthy food at prices people can afford and emphasizes local produce that is grown in community gardens. The grocery has grown to include youth programs that stress food production and marketing founded on "the basic human right to food" (Katz 2006:24). Katz underscores the importance of activists demanding healthy food choices in schools from school gardens to lunch programs serving locally grown foods. "Encouraging local food means weaving food production back into the web of community life" which integrates into curriculum "to teach kids practical life skills while also allowing them to explore basic concepts of biology, nutrition, economics, design, teamwork, and problem solving and to produce some of their own food" (Katz 2006:25). Resulting in further removing education in a direction away from the "educational monoculture of our age in which standardized tests reign supreme" (Katz 2006:25).

For Emily, there is something unique about Kalamazoo's efforts: "I'm not really sure why Kalamazoo is so fired up about it, maybe everywhere towns this size are like this but I think there is something really special about the combination of access to such a diverse range of agricultural products in southwest Michigan and then I imagine it has something to do with the amount of philanthropy. There is support for programs like ours; one third to one half of the funding comes from grants which wouldn't be possible without the wealth that contributed to those foundations and the staff to keep things running." This wealth, provided by the wealthiest people in the area, brings to a full circle the vicious cycle of our current system that continues to create food insecurity while also sustaining the programs that work to alter and counter insecurity. The Alternative Food System's many movements including farmers' markets, CSAs and food justice programs are all working to counter the hegemonic food system. These systems work towards alternative approaches of cooperation and interactive relationships in building a community around our food. However, without continued discussions and movements away from the hegemony, we will continue on this circular pathway of thanking the wealthiest few for the exploitation of neoliberal policy.

Next- Door- Strangers: Finding Connections through Community Gardening

I stepped out of my car into a quiet, cozy neighborhood surrounded by trees and completely separated from the urban city of Kalamazoo, Michigan. The garden seemed randomly placed: it was a small, empty lot, located between two neighboring houses, and each home had fences and trees separating the lots from the garden giving the garden this sense of detachment from the more urban environment. I looked around for the garden coordinator or other gardeners, but I did not see anyone. I was about fifteen minutes late to the weekly Tuesday communal garden night— why was no one else present? The garden was directly in front of me, so I decided to venture over and get my first glimpse. Being fall, most of the garden was plowed and covered with straw in preparation for winter. The remainder of the squash and sunflowers were partitioned off to make sure they did not get plowed under. I walked around, careful to avoid stepping on the recently tilled soil, noticing how everything was meticulously labeled, including the corn and sunflowers. This looked nothing like my mother's garden back home on the farm, which was usually overrun by weeds by this time of year. I stopped by the chicken coop to coo at the three birds and, to my surprise; they all came right up to me without any hesitation, happily clucking away. I took some photographs of the birds and the garden to kill time, hoping someone might come before dark. The minutes ticked by but no one arrived. I knew that participation tended to dwindle toward the fall and I found myself content to just breathe in the smell of fresh, moist earth while visiting with the hungry chickens.

Previously mentioned, I grew up in rural northern Michigan, where there were gardens in every farmer's backyard. Children ran barefoot throughout the neighborhood,

and if my mother was running low on eggs or our hens were not producing, she would send me to one of the neighbors to grab some straight from the coop. When I moved to Kalamazoo in late 2010, I became involved with the community gardens almost by accident. I was doing research on local food and found an online group that posted questions and answers about finding local products ranging from fresh eggs to figs. From here, I made connections with several people who work in the gardens including the Oakwood Neighborhood Garden, the Vine Neighborhood Garden and the Growing Community Garden. I also met two people who worked with the Salvation Army who were collecting resources and knowledge about starting a garden. While not every day in the garden was as quiet as what I described above, there are many days when only a few individuals are working in the garden. One question about community gardening is why people decide to become involved. There does not seem to be one simple answer to the question of why people become involved; however, many individuals and organizations attempt to address it.

Fair Food Matters (FFM) of Kalamazoo, Michigan, mentioned previously, has many branches to reach their goals of building, educating, supporting and empowering the local community around local food, including the community garden program. There are many different community gardens in Kalamazoo; however, this section will focus on two gardens that I became the most involved with, the Oakwood Neighborhood Community Garden and Growing Community Garden. The Oakwood Neighborhood Community Garden was the very first garden that I became involved with. There the goals are specifically to grow food for any people who are involved with the garden in the neighborhood. The Oakwood garden, once an empty city plot, had about 15 families

regularly involved during the 2010 season. Growing Community Garden has a different goal in mind, that of feeding those that need food. Growing Community Garden has several families involved as well as the local church that supports the garden. Most of their food is donated to the local food organization, Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes. The community garden members in both gardens are becoming more aware of their foodstuffs. Coordinators are doing research, creating workshops and developing crop rotations and soil health to sustain their gardens. Along with the question of why people become involved is a question of growth: how and why did gardening, along with CSAs and farmers' markets, go from just a few to expanding not only within Kalamazoo but to virtually all over Michigan (and the rest of the U.S.) within a ten year period? I argue that the most vital component of the 'why garden' question includes utilizing fresh, whole foods to achieve healthier lifestyles; sustaining local economies; growing food for the community; and building safe, community relationships in areas where people do not have large plots of open land to grow their own gardens. These components are all a part of a larger effort, a movement of people working to regain control and ownership within their own lives in a quest for security in an increasingly insecure world. This gives them something tangible to hold onto in the face of other economic and emotional insecurities.

What makes gardening an avenue that people turn towards? Gardening has concrete results and grounds people into a direct task, taking care of the earth and plants, and gives direct results, the food we are able to consume. Healthy, fresh food from an easily-identifiable source is one of the main reasons community gardening has become so widespread: many people want access to fresh foods, to be more mindful of eating healthy and to know where their food comes from. Jeffrey Hou, Julie M. Johnson and

Laura J. Lawson discuss Seattle's community gardens in terms of being models of community open space that intend to provide "multiple environmental, social, economic, and health benefits" through the garden structures, what they provide for people and what is needed to sustain the efforts of community gardening (2009:3). They define community gardens as promotions of individual and community activity, connection, expression and health in the urban environment while they also reveal the potential of community gardens to address urban issues (community food security, urban ecosystem health, active living, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods and open-space networks and concerns with low-income and minority communities, immigrants and seniors). One example Hou, Johnson and Lawson provide is their study of Thistle P-Patch (2009). This garden provides psychological and therapeutic benefits to the immigrants and refugees involved. Many of the gardeners come from backgrounds in farming when they were younger and the return to the gardens is argued to provide the emotional and therapeutic benefits. Hou, Johnson and Lawson note that the interviews they conducted revealed personal accounts of gardeners' experiences and the therapeutic aspects of happiness growing while pain and sadness subside (2009:91). A more specific example of health benefits is detailed in regards to the health of elderly immigrant gardeners in the Danny Woo International District Community Garden. Hou, Johnson and Lawson argue that the garden provides a place for low income elderly people to be physically active while growing food for their own benefits (2009). These gardeners also benefit from the social environment without which they would not have the opportunity to go outside their small apartments and meet other people. The challenge in this garden, according to the authors, is that there are about six different languages spoken which sometimes limit the

relationships between the gardeners (Hou, Johnson and Lawson 2009:104). Hou, Johnson and Lawson state that through community gardens environmental, social, health and economic concerns can be addressed. Within this, community gardens are a "defined area of tillable land made available to groups of individuals, households, classes and others to garden" (Hou, Johnson and Lawson 2009: 11). This includes the size, location, age, participation and other elements which fluctuate within this definition. Most gardens get their start through individuals who "realize a need or desire for gardening and either make that need known to a public agency or institution, or take matters into their own hands to acquire a site and create a community garden" (Hou, Johnson and Lawson 2009:30-1). Intake of fresh vegetables and fruits also increases with those who garden or have household members who garden. One example of this can be seen in a study of a group of community gardening participants in Flint, Michigan. These gardeners are 1.4 more times likely to consume fruits and vegetables per day and 3.5 times more likely to have five fruits and vegetables per day versus those not active, or not living with a participant, in community gardening (Alaimo, Packnett, Miles and Kruger 2008, see also USDA 2013a).

Similar to the gardens in Seattle, the Kalamazoo gardens have slowly spread across the area on an individual and communal level with help from such organizations as Fair Food Matters (FFM), Common Ground (run by FFM), The People's Food Co-op, various CSAs and farmers markets and other food outreach programs and events. Such nonprofit organizations and public funding "enable urban gardening to shift from being viewed as an interim or temporary use of vacant land to becoming a permanent public resource and amenity" (Hou, Johnson and Lawson 2009:61). Katz points out that "Many

of the most successful urban gardens are successful because they have plugged into existing neighborhood social networks and institutions" (2006:99).[3] Lawson (2005) also discussed the more permanent direction that current gardens are heading towards. Whereas gardens have a temporary function in history, she argues that the difference today is that, "most advocates assert that gardens have a long-term functions as open space that promote nutrition, education, household income subsidy, recreation, and psychological and environmental restoration" (Lawson 2005:12). However, this does not mean that gardens are without their share of difficulties including obtaining land, funding and participants.

Hou, Johnson and Lawson (2009) concentrate on gardens that have evolved over extended periods of time in their presentation of six gardens to discuss how the sites, people and organizations influence each space. They concentrated on gardens that have evolved over many years, specifically 30 years, although they do briefly discuss shorter spanning gardens. Kalamazoo's gardens tend to be much younger, however Giving Garden has been active since 1997 and The Five Senses Garden was completed in 1969. The Five Senses Garden was one of the first designed to engage the developmentally disabled and won a special citation from the American Association of School Administrators in 1970 and was included in the 1969 report of the President's Commission on Mental Health (Common Grounds 2014). The gardens I was actively involved with are still within their first decade.

[3] These organizations can range from school gardens to organizations devoted to feeding those that are hungry. One such example is the Allen Street Neighborhood in Lansing which is associated with the neighborhood association. The Northside Business Association in Kalamazoo also taking steps to redevelop and rehabilitate the Northside area in Kalamazoo. Urban parks around the country are also beginning to dedicate space to fruit and nut trees with Seattle leading the way in design, curriculum and collaboration along with the U.S.'s first food forest. See Katz 2006 and Leschin-Hoar 2012 for examples.

In the following paragraphs, I will focus on individuals' experiences in terms of difficulties and benefits. Through this study, I address elements that previous researchers have called attention to as well as further dialogue, research pathways and options for continued growth in stabilizing and continued development of food sovereignty. While Hou, Johnson and Lawson (2009) view community gardens as a promoter of community activity within urban settings, Amory Starr and Jason Adams take this a step further and argue that community gardens represent an anti-globalization movement through localization as one of the "movements within the movement" (2003: 19). Starr and Adams point out the economics of local production as a response to globalization and to defend and rebuild local economics. Background research conducted while establishing relationships with the community gardens gave indicators that local people are concerned for a more local grounding and a departure from more global aspects; however, this does not necessarily mean that gardeners are fully against globalization as Starr and Adams might have us believe. Instead, I suggest that community gardening is one way that the gardeners feel more in control of their own lives. Other important aspects that gardeners tended to focus on include supporting local economies, farmers and communities; becoming more mindful of health; and sustaining the environment. While these topics are the ideals expressed by many, we are also led to a question of whether or not community gardens actively address these issues or if these ideals are only held and used as marketing strategies.

Lawson argues that from the 1970s to the present gardening became a way of community organizing to counter "inflation, environmental troubles, and urban decline" while many impulses also continued from the past including, "education, nutrition,

beautification, and recreation" (2005: 14). Gardens have come to be representations of "community empowerment and grassroots activism" (Lawson 2005:14). She calls this "gardening for community" which encompasses "individual gardeners, neighborhood groups, citywide gardening organizations, extension agents, educators, designers, and social-service providers" (Lawson 2005:238). The American Community Gardening Association's (ACGA) agenda also leans towards social benefits (for an extensive discussion of ACGA see Lawson). Their mission includes building "community by increasing and enhancing community gardening and greening across the United States and Canada" (ACGA 2014a). The ACGA's website further elaborates:

> The Association recognizes that community gardening improves people's quality of life by providing a catalyst for neighborhood and community development, stimulating social interaction, encouraging self-reliance, beautifying neighborhoods, producing nutritious food, reducing family food budgets, conserving resources and creating opportunities for recreation, exercise, therapy and education. [ACGA 2014a]

Community and the sense of ownership were often referenced in my own interviews with gardeners. The following conversation occurred between several regular participants and me.

On a hot day in July, gardeners were weeding and picking vegetables in the early evening. Kim, a young mother in her thirties, was weeding and her three sons, two adopted and one biological all under the age of eight, were helping by carrying the piles of weeds we dug up to the compost pile. There were two other young boys around the age of seven running around the garden sometimes pulling a weed but mostly just stirring up dirt and asking questions about the vegetables. Henry, another gardener, was describing to me and the boys how to keep the Brussels sprouts growing.

Henry: See how they grow? You have to remove the bottom leaves from the plant as the sprouts grow in. And over here the garlic looks ready. We can dig some up for you to take home. Leave it sit for two weeks and it will continue to dry out right on your counter. Just keep it out of direct sunlight. The heads are small but you will still get a lot of cloves.

Boy 1: What are these? [Pointing at the zucchini] Can I take them home?

Henry: Zucchini. Go ahead and take a few, we have more than enough. There are a couple of cabbages down the row, take those too.

Me: Whose kid is that?

Kim: I'm not sure but they live in the neighborhood and come get food often. As long as they are using it at home and not just collecting it we don't mind.

Henry: Hopefully they are taking it home to share and not waste it.

Kim and Henry would not let me leave today without taking some garlic, green beans, peas and summer squash home. We worked until sunset when the bugs became too aggressive.

While the sense of community and sharing is often quite strong, like in this example, one of the biggest costs associated with the gardens, besides initial startup, is time and commitment. While groups like Common Ground Kalamazoo provide a network of shared tools and resources, the organization does not provide the labor. Having the time dedicated to growing food is sometimes overlooked, which is both a benefit and hindrance in a community-grown garden. With the growth in unemployment and underemployment, the assumption might be that people would have more time;

however, often due to a lack of "know-how" many are still unlikely to volunteer. On the other side, those who are employed continue to work longer and longer hours.

Lawson's historical focus also includes four contemporary gardening programs in Seattle, San Francisco, Philadelphia and New York City. Lawson (2005) discusses each garden's efforts in continuing the growth of urban gardening as well as the challenges gardens face in terms of surviving and stability specifically in terms of losing land space to development as there is not policy or procedure in place to protect gardening spaces. Her last chapter discusses specific ongoing roles played by garden projects currently: "neighborhood garden, community food security source, job-training and entrepreneurial garden, and school garden" (Lawson 2005: 264). Her specific examples of this were all located in California which provides an ideal growing environment as the area she was in had an almost year round growing season. She notes that hard data is difficult to obtain but that there is literature available noting individual experiences, however, Lawson does not include any examples but instead focuses on descriptions of the gardens in order to describe what is required to start and sustain gardens and the different ways in which gardens may evolve in terms of changing needs as models for other gardens to learn from and expand on in order for gardening to continue to be successful. She notes the importance of individual experiences as highlighting "the experiences of individuals who reconnect with their rural background, first-time gardeners who are thrilled with their newfound connection to natural processes, and others who, in the process of building their garden, were empowered to take on other community problems" (Lawson 2005: 266). While some people grow to save money, others grow gourmet or ethnic veggies unavailable in stores. Lawson's conclusion argues that an overarching theme of gardens

includes "the impulse to provide communal land so that people can garden" and that other results include that gardens build morale, develop relationships with neighbors, brighten up declining neighborhoods, help with rising food costs, encourage healthy recreation and inspire people to essentially get in touch with the country and that difficulties arise when garden goals become too broad (Lawson 2005: 287-88, 293). She further notes that gardening cannot alone solve the issues within capitalist systems but that "taking matters into their own hands and doing everything possible to improve their situation" does show a "self effort" (Lawson 2005: 290). Instead, she states that "Gardens satisfy cultural values and help people feel that they are doing something to improve their situation" implying that although the gardens help people to *feel* like active participants that the goals are still too broad (2005: 293). While I agree with Lawson's argument that "urban gardens need to be looked at as part of a larger set of actions that pertain to local, regional, national, or even global issues," and that they should be studied in order to continue sustainability, Lawson overly simplifies the deeper meanings for individuals in terms of their own agency and emotions (2005:293). Although she misses meaning to individuals, her final strategies for sustaining gardens through balanced local leadership and the precaution of a top down development which she says happens often do make sense. Her final suggestions are to blend a top-down and bottom-up investment[4] approach, the need for securing land and, finally, continued public outreach:

> The notion of a City Bountiful suggests a city abounding with vegetables, fruits, and flowers that people grow for themselves and their community. Such a city provides opportunities for people to engage with their environment through the process of gardening and with their community through the social interaction of organizing and maintaining the gardens. Like the garden itself, the City Bountiful is a vision that needs to be nurtured. [Lawson 2005:302]

[4] My understanding of Lawson's use of "investment" here is not only monetary but time and commitment as well.

These pivotal strategies are well underway and continue to be developed in Kalamazoo's community gardening network as well as in other Michigan and U.S. gardening networks as gardens pursue their individual and varying goals. One goal that weaves through all gardens is creating food sovereignty. The community goals and struggles faced by gardens maintaining active participation are essential for garden sustainability. One community gardener from Growing Community Garden, Steve, was not only a first time gardener in 2013 but he also stepped up into the garden management role. Steve is in his mid-twenties and has a very positive, eager and enthusiastic presence. His main concern is about empowering those less fortunate and involving them in their food.

During a formal interview at a local coffee shop, Steve told me that he was diligently involved with the garden from May through July. In July, he left for a week and when he got back he was surprised to find that the weeds had taken over. This began a struggle to bring the garden back around to being under control. "I just see people that say, 'Yeah, I want to get interested in that' but then other things come up; they get busy or they forget about it and that's understandable."

Not everyone has the time available to work in the garden on a daily basis so sharing the responsibilities with neighbors allows for tasks to be distributed and maintained. Hou, Johnson and Lawson argue their vision for urban gardens as being an organized effort to serve individuals, neighborhoods and cities in terms of hybrid public spaces that serve the various social needs involving the community (2009). They point out that community gardens are not just a typical common space in that they "provide a model for people to interact with a place that is different from other forms of park and

open space" because they "foster deeper connections among members of a community" (2009:189). Their upbeat conclusion marks the key to community garden success as active involvement. However, tasks often end up falling on one or two heavily involved gardeners when others become engaged with other activities and end up stepping away from the garden. One conversation between two of the regular gardeners from the Oakwood Neighborhood garden discusses the struggle of getting enough water to the garden:

Kim: We need to set up a better system for watering the garden. Lately it has just been me and the garden needs more water right now because it has been too hot.

Henry: Do we know if that grant came through to pay for some new sprinklers? Maybe we can set up a watering schedule.

Kim: We tried doing that last year and it fell through. People weren't coming and watering on their designated days. They would either forget or maybe got busy. I ended up doing it most of the time so the plants didn't die.

This issue can further be seen in my experience discussed earlier of arriving to the Oakwood Community garden on a planned gardening evening only to find no one there. Having the time to dedicate is often mentioned by experienced gardeners. During an interview with Chelsea, a college educated gardener in her mid- to late thirties who has not only participated in gardens but also has managed a garden, we discussed what happens to gardens over the summer. She said that each year the Vine Garden starts out with about 60 families ready to participate but halfway through summer, people slowly stop attending leaving Chelsea and a few others to maintain a garden in which other people stop by only to pick up the food that only a few harvest. For Chelsea, the network

of sharing information with other gardeners and coordinators around town, working in the garden with her neighbors and developing workshops are vital. She coordinates with her network via email, Facebook and walking to neighbors' homes. While Chelsea said that the Oakwood garden tends to "run itself," the Vine Garden still needed more support. Chelsea gave several indications as to why this happens including people being too busy, people not necessarily understanding the amount of work a garden takes, or possibly needing a coordinator that is a resident of the Vine Community (at the time of this interview there was not a resident coordinator, however more recently community members have stepped in).

The gardens I have worked in usually start out with dozens of families involved, but as people get busy during the summer months, there is a pattern of fewer people attending to the gardens. Garden managers counter this by continually recruiting volunteers throughout the summer months. The slow decline in volunteers varies from becoming too busy with other tasks (such as what Kim was referring to) or simply not understanding the amount of work a garden takes. Steve, from Growing Community garden discussed how his garden works to recruit members. He said, "Since it is located at the church it is run through the church the pastor and deacon say things during the services. I'm not a member there but I have attended church there." Steve also noted attending career and volunteer workshops as well as the master gardening class offered by Michigan State University Extensions. He has also gone door to door with flyers in the neighborhood which brings in volunteers as has the use of websites such as Volunteer Kalamazoo. Steve also discussed the struggle with keeping people involved, "I get frustrated if only one or two people come out." Growing Community garden holds

weekly garden meetings on Wednesday evenings which guarantees that the garden managing staff would be available. "It can be discouraging at times with only one or two people, or there have been weeks when no one has come out, then it falls on me to take care of the garden and that's fine, just with my lack of experience I could use a little help." Even with this discouraging element Steve remains positive, " Overall the big things great community in terms of resources, just something you have to stay on top of and it can be hard to get people to constantly commit to coming out."

Another issue I hear from gardeners is that some people only come to take the food once it is ripe and do not help with the work to produce the food, as Chelsea indicated above. Steve, from Growing Community Gardens, also indicated some frustration with this. He said, "A lot of people just come into the garden and take food. If people come to the garden and put in the effort to harvest food, that is fine. We also offer any volunteers who volunteer in the garden are allowed to take part of what they work for. Obviously, if you take food we would like you to take some time tending the garden, but if not that is what it is there for." He continued, "The worst part is people usually would take to food before it was ready to be picked which means they weren't getting the best quality." This struggle was something Steve said that he thought about frequently and had to come to terms with for not only him but for other gardeners. The difficulty for them was not due to having the produce for themselves but not being able to see the final products of their hard work as almost ripe food would disappear overnight. After speaking with the church deacon and the other regular gardeners, he realized that that is what the food is there for, "I just wish I could know who they are or see them because they often took food that wasn't quite ripe. I would tell them that if they just

wait another week it will be much better." He also noted that he does not know if it is about whether or not they can afford it but whatever the case is, "that's what it is there for."

These issues with participation help to show how different people relate to the gardens; that they have different motivations for their involvement; there are difficulties in sustaining local eating, especially convenience; and the issue of keeping enough people involved so that not all of the work falls onto a small subset of committed gardeners is often problematic. Although Chelsea indicated that Oakwood is now self-sufficient, she is not blind to the flaws in the gardens. She noted that she takes it upon herself to care for the chickens during the winter months and she also started 36 flats of vegetables at her home in April, moving them inside every evening to protect the plants from frost.

While some gardeners are looking to be activists in breaking with common sense understandings of the food systems, such as Steve, others may want to augment their own diets on a more personal level. The challenge of keeping people involved is tackled in a variety of ways in the Kalamazoo gardens besides what Steve discussed with me. Several gardens have "themed" evening gardening including the Oakwood Neighborhood Garden where people bring a local dish to share and snack on or wine/beer nights (adults only of course). These themed nights seem to catch a lot of attention by social media and word of mouth and attract both old and new faces. One example is a beer night at the Oakwood garden. Heather, a young engineer, joined the garden in June as she had just moved to the neighborhood. When asked how she heard about the garden, Heather responded by saying that she had been walking around the neighborhood and saw the

sign. Later, she saw Kim working in the garden so she stopped and asked about getting involved. Kim told her about the special drinks and gardening week and that brought Heather on board. Our conversation paused here as other gardeners joined us. This was a particularly busy evening. Stephanie and her friend, Tim, joined us a little bit later. I grabbed a couple of beers for them and they joined us in weeding. Kim came by shortly after and brought homemade mushroom bread that she made to share. Her boys were at home tonight. Another gardener in his mid-forties joined us as did a family of three. They had just gotten home from their son's karate lesson and he was still in his uniform whites. His mother told him not to get dirty, which of course did not happen. We all laughed, drank and chatted while weeding. The kids hauled the weeds to the compost pile and helped set up watering at the end of the evening. Themed nights were always the busiest evenings that I experienced at Oakwood.

Day long garden events are also a tactic used by several gardens including Growing Community garden. Steve said that contacting organizations works particularly well, "We have had youth groups that have come up from Illinois, a group from Columbus, Ohio that will just commit to one day in the garden, about 6 hours. I think the largest group was about 25 students and adult volunteers and they would come out and do a lot of the work, enough that for the next 2 or 3 weeks it was just maintaining, no catch up, it was just keeping up what they had already done." This was one of Steve's favorite methods of getting active participation. For a garden growing food mostly for charity, this approach has been successful. One of Growing Community Garden's goals is donating food to local food pantries. "There is a post, food pantry Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes with a location at the church. Most days the food gets taken, weighed, we

count how much food we have gathered and we take it inside and distribute it to the people at Loaves and Fishes." Steve continued, "There is also a free store that the church operates, that we have given food to as well. I don't know how much they have used. The free store is more about clothing and toys but when we do have extra food, when they are operating and we take food in they are receptive to it."

Another reason for the continued growth of the gardens is expressed by gardeners as a concern for a more local grounding, food security and a departure from more global aspects. Convenience and price are still driving factors for consumers but the importance of supporting local economies, farmers and the communities in which they live are a few of the factors of why people are committed to eating local. Food security on an individual level and on a group level spring up in conversation and include conversations about where to shop, especially during the off season of gardening (an issue especially in Michigan as the growing season is limited). These conversations often get quite heated. Kim, discussed earlier, visits the garden she participates in two to three days each week. She does not work and instead stays home to raise her sons. She has indicated that the garden is both fun but also a source that her family relies on for fresh foods. While her boys always work clean clothing to the gardens (until getting covered in fresh dirt), their clothing were unadorned and did not have the name brand labels that many of the other participants and their children would often wear. Jason, another neighborhood gardener that I saw in the garden on occasion, always came alone and would mention having just gotten done at the office. Jason, Kim and I were talking about how we obtain food when the conversation was brought to an abrupt halt:

Kim: I love having the garden during the summer. It's great to have more food than we can even handle. Two of my boys are adopted and had never had processed foods before coming to the States. This [the garden] makes it much easier to keep processed foods out of their diets.

Jason: I don't like how stores like Wal-Mart and Meijer are taking over.

Kim: I shop at Meijer most of the time.

Jason: [surprised] Why would you do that?

Kim: [tone was defensive] I can't afford to shop at the farmers' market all the time because I have a family. I usually end up going to Meijer. It is convenient and the prices are good.

[Directed to me] *Kim* continued: With just my husband's job and the three boys, I can't always get food just locally. It's just too much.

I let her know that I shop at Meijer too, especially in the wintertime and as a student. She smiled and we kept on digging. When examining this conversation, we can begin to see insight into the idea of virtuous eating, including guilt and anxiety associated with our food. Jason's surprised tone triggered a defensive response from Kim. She retreated from the conversation and then turned to me to explain.

Kim is not alone among community gardeners who chose convenience and price over more expensive alternatives. Chelsea, from Oakwood and Vine, told me that while she does can and freeze some of the garden produce, during the winter she reverts to convenience. She also indicated that although she wants to eat only local, the price still is not within her budget so she mixes and matches, making as many meals at home and with local products as possible. "It's all about baby steps" she said and continued telling me

about how for the past two summers she has processed and canned some foods. Her ultimate goal: to grow into a self-sufficient lifestyle where she only eats locally and organically produced foods throughout the year. One component that keeps Chelsea pushing forward through the challenges is the importance of building community and creating this food sustainability. "Once people start working with others in their neighborhood, the sense of community starts to build which is the biggest bonus of community gardening," she continued, "people two streets down from each other don't know one another these days." Chelsea said she now is not afraid to let her own children wander the neighborhood, "It's nice, my kids are at the age where they can take off on their skateboards and I know that people two or three streets down, two years ago who I didn't know, have an eye on them [her children]" (brackets mine for clarification).

Steve indicated that Growing Community Gardens is also not only about community but about knowing where food is coming from and creating food security as a means towards social justice: "I don't think the reason people are doing it is because they want to be farmers. I think people really want to know where their food comes from. That's for people who can afford to go to the grocery store but they want something where they are more in touch with their food. For maybe us, social justice." He continued, "It's more about people no longer being dependent on fast food. We want to break that chain on processed foods." He paused briefly and then admitted to being guilty of eating fast foods quite often. "I think a lot of people take pride in making a homemade meal instead of just McDonalds. We want to show that it's just as cheap as and even cheaper than going out to eat. Better food and better quality. There is a lot that goes into it, everyone has their own reasons. I'm interested because I want to eat

healthier but say people that come into the garden and just take food might just be hungry and perhaps can't afford it or if they just have the need to come into the garden and take food that's what it is there for."

While Steve indicated social justice being his core reason for gardening, other gardeners discuss that local food is becoming a necessity rather than a choice due to the potential of a global food crisis as well as the movement away from processed foodstuff. The idea of creating sustainable communities is important in managing a potential crisis, such as if cross-country or international food could not be shipped to communities. Having the gardens to produce food gives community members reassurance, autonomy in their actions and greater food sovereignty. An example of this can be seen in Steve's case above when he discusses social justice and breaking from the processed food industry. The local food movement can also seem like a nostalgic revisit to our past, but instead, I would suggest that it is more so a response against heavily processed foods and a way to take control of our own lives within a system that is heavily reliant on grocery stores, supermarkets and a mass produced food system. This autonomy and desire for ownership is what pushes community gardening spaces as well as alternative-hegemonic and counter-hegemonic spaces forward in their goals of active, social practice in a challenge to common sense notions of the food industry and is grounded in deeply connected desires to break from mass produced food systems and take control within their own lives. This stems from individuals looking to create autonomy within their own lives to greater issues of social justice as not everyone's experience is the same, indicating that there is a large dynamic within urban community gardening. While community gardening may not bring about a revolutionary movement on its own, it is a

step towards creating more self-sufficient and sustainable programs that support local economies, sustain freshness through healthier diets and build community bridges where previous divides existed between and isolated next door-strangers. Instead, connections and trust are built, neighbors watch children playing outside and the ability to share locally grown kale, or perhaps borrow an organic egg, from a neighbor become empowering at a local level.

Producing Sovereignty: A Call to Action

The farm town I grew up in is dying with my father's generation. My own generation is moving away from agriculture because competing with industrial agriculture is pushing out the small farmers. We cannot make a living by competing with large scale agriculture which is supported by capitalist demands. I see this each time I visit home. My father's farm is shrinking as he grows older. He no longer has the chickens, turkeys or cattle. The small barn that I grew up playing in and filling with hay each summer sits unoccupied except for a couple of lingering farm cats and a few remnants of the last wagonload of hay I helped stack. This story is not unique and can be seen demonstrated across the U.S. and globe even as the local food movement pushes for small farms and gardens: "Becoming a producer subverts the consumerist paradigm" (Katz 2006:30). Although Katz does not say that this is easy, it requires persistence, hard work, it is seasonal and it is nothing like the convenience of shopping at a supermarket. Furthermore, "eating out of the garden requires an education, which most of us in the twenty-first century lack" thus the need for continued education in order to resist the global food system (Katz 2006:32). Where do we go from here?

We have the capacity and capability to grow food. As Katz argues, this does not have to begin due to the threat of starvation or emergency: "We do not have to be dependent on a global corporate system that is neither stable nor sustainable" (2006:98). As I have stated throughout, the most integral components of the "why local" and "why garden" questions for both community gardeners and other local food advocates includes supporting local economy, finding freshness through a healthier diet, sustainability and

self-sufficiency, and finally, building community relations. I have argued that these efforts are all a part of individuals working towards having control within their own lives. While becoming involved in our local food systems, whether through farmers' markets or community gardening is a step towards a counter hegemony with less alienation; I do not want to make the overly simplistic argument that if all individuals make the choices to do this then our food system would stabilize. A conclusion as such would largely ignore history and our current common sense notions as well as continue to support the hegemony by excluding and blaming those individuals who do not have the means to make these choices; whether monetary, time or knowledge. We need to further break from this paradigm in order to take the movement to the next level. Countering what is common sense must be more than individual efforts. It must include community and helping one another in both a goal towards individual wellbeing and communal wellbeing. As previous authors have suggested, a part of reaching this goal includes utilizing common grounds in schools where children are learning about their food; how to cook with vegetables; and how to grow food (see Katz 2006; Webber and Dollahite 2008, and Wilk 2006). Creating accessibility is also important; however, simply bringing fresh foods to a food bank and dropping them off does not help if recipients do not know how to use them. We must change how we think about food. Understanding the historical background, current trains of thought and why people are motivated to become involved with the local food movement is vital in uprooting and changing what is common sense and regaining our autonomy rather than having false notions of free choice and placing the blame on individuals.

My call is no easy task I realize and at times feels daunting; an intention of the current system no doubt but it can occur. Changing how we think about food also means adjusting our expectations within local and seasonal eating frames, meaning that foods we are used to eating are not always going to be available. "We can learn to love what grows abundantly and easily around us and reorient our tastes and our habits" (Katz 2006:28). Katz shares the example of what occurred in Cuba in order to demonstrate that it is possible to change common sense capitalist notions. In 1989, 57 percent of the calories consumed by Cubans were imported but when their trade partner dissolved with the Soviet nations of Eastern Europe, two-thirds of Cuba's food supply, as well as everything its agricultural system depended on, was lost. Malnutrition and resulting diseases became widespread as the U.S. economic blockade continued into the early 90s. Cuba was forced to transform their food system. "Food production was decentralized, and farmers in each region were encouraged to diversify rather than specialize" (Katz 2006:29). Along with this, community gardening was encouraged officially while public education programs were used to spread knowledge about food production methods. "Urban gardens alone produced more than eight hundred thousand tons of food, mostly vegetables" (Katz 2006:29; see also Holt-Gimenez, Eric and Raj Patel. 2009; Holt-Gimenez 2011). As Katz argues, crisis is not the only reason to instill local food production. The many reasons offered by local food advocates in Kalamazoo are essential: flavor, nutrition, community and stability. As Katz states, "it's good for us who live in a culture of constant convenience consumerism to be reminded that the time-honored methods of producing food can still feed people perfectly adequately" (2006:29). Abundant global food may not always be readily available to consumers.

In Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman: Preludes and Nocturnes,* issue four, the Sandman goes to hell in search of his helm, which was stolen by a demon. When he discovers who the demon is, Choronzon, a duke of hell, the Sandman is forced into a battle of "reality." In this battle, they exchange confronting dreams where they shift shapes and imagine new realities; a dire wolf stalking prey, a hunter mounted on a horse seeking the wolf, a horsefly to sting the horse, a spider to eat the fly. The battle continues this way and Sandman realizes that he must switch tactics in order to win his helmet. Now the Sandman says he is the world supporting and nurturing life. The demon counters with an exploding nova. Next Sandman is the universe embracing life. The demon counters "I am anti-life, the beast of judgment. I am the dark at the end of everything. The end of universes, gods, worlds. . . of everything" (Gaiman 1995:125). The demon thinks he has won when the Sandman states simply, "I am hope" (Gaiman 1995:125).

While the world is not necessarily ending at the battle between a demon and the Sandman, this hope is alive and is strong. Hope thrives in local food movements. We do not yet know what the full impacts of these local food movements will be; whether they will simply counter hegemony without providing a true alternative in confronting "reality;" eventually lose to capitalist reign; or truly provide alternatives that change the ways we consider food and our food system. Regardless of what category community gardens, and other aspects of the local food movement, are placed into, they are beginning to change how people think about their food. This challenges and leads to pushing for further changes. At the same time, community gardening and other local food movements are reforming community through efforts in working together on a local

scale furthering hope and confronting common sense notions within our food system. However, doing so is not easy and will not go unchallenged by the hegemony.

Appendix

Approval Letter from the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Approval Letter from the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: April 14, 2014

To: Jen Hoffman, Principal Investigator
Paige Edwards, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 11-02-57

This letter will serve as confirmation that the change to your research project titled "Owning Our Food System: Urban Community Gardening and Local Food Movements" requested in your memo received April 10, 2014 (to change project title to "Owning Our Food System: Urban Community Gardening and Local Food Movements") has been approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

The conditions and the duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: March 19, 2015

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