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Food Justice and the Challenge to Neoliberalism

Abstract: As popular interest in food and agriculture has grown, so have an array of social movements intent on improving the ways we grow, raise, process, sell, and consume our sustenance. While scholars tend to agree with activists' critical assessments of the failures of the industrial, corporate, chemically intensive food system, they often wonder whether the sustainable, local alternatives that activists recommend are sufficient for broad social transformation. Two scholarly critiques of US alternative food systems revolve around issues of food justice, meaning the ways that race, class, and gender affect who can produce and consume what kinds of foods, and neoliberalism, which refers to activists' privileging of voluntary, market-centric strategies over those that appeal to the regulatory power of the state. This paper lays out three strategies through which the work of US food justice activists can address both critiques. These include cooperative ownership, organizing labor, and pushing to outlaw risky technologies. However, rather than being at odds with the alternative foods market, each strategy makes use of it as a venue from which to draw targeted support.

Keywords: Food justice, neoliberalism, social movements, inequality, labor.

AMERICAN INTEREST IN FOOD is so rampant these days that it almost feels unnecessary to begin by acknowledging it. And yet, food is ubiquitous not only in the sense that everybody eats, but also because it is increasingly the subject of everything from popular and academic books to policy debates to reality TV shows. Sometimes the topic is the food itself—cookbooks, celebrity chefs, and the explosion of food TV, for example. Other times it is our collective obsession with health—discussions of the latest super food or allergen, American First Lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" program, or the massive (and incredibly problematic) media coverage of the so-called obesity epidemic. Food is also finding a prominent place in our education system, including school gardens and cooking classes at the K–12 level, and an increasing number of food studies and food systems programs in universities across the country. Indeed, one reason food is such an interesting topic of study is its connection to subjects as diverse as culture and identity, personal and public health, environmental issues, politics and policy, social and economic inequalities, education, and many more.

In the United States, social movements to reform and transform the food system both fuel this rising popular interest and gain adherents from it. There are many changes that supporters of these movements desire to make, but improved personal and ecological health seem chief among them. The ecological imperative stresses organic production and local distribution. Though there are earlier antecedents, particularly among indigenous peoples and those farmers and gardeners who could not afford chemical inputs, Don Worster (1979) traces the ecological critique of US agriculture to the 1930s, when a movement for "permanent agriculture" arose in response to depressed agricultural prices and the ecological effects of the Dust Bowl. This movement resurfaced and gained ground with the growth of the counterculture in the 1960s (Belasco 1993). During that time, opposition to the state, the man, and mass production, as well as a budding environmental ethic, led to a desire for foods that were less processed, and for farming methods that countered the chemical dependency of industrial agriculture. Young, countercultural types went "back to the land" in search of this more organic lifestyle, forming communes or developing individual homesteads. Others stayed in the cities and purchased food from these new farmers through co-ops, health food stores, and food conspiracies (buying clubs in which members pooled money for bulk purchases from nearby suppliers). These new farmers and their supporters were animated by a belief that organic farming was a dance between the farmer and the forces of nature, and that cooperation between the two would offer not only sustenance, but a model for an alternative society (ibid.). Early adherents hoped that as the movement grew, demand for local and organic food produced in alternative food systems would cause it to replace the dominant, industrial model.

Today the movement for sustainable agriculture is one force driving the explosive growth in markets for local and

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organic foods. Retail sales of organic products in the United States were only $3.6 billion in 1997, but reached $21.1 billion in 2008, and organic acreage more than doubled between 1997 and 2005 (Dimitri and Oberholtzer 2009). Natural food stores were the primary distributor in 1997, but by 2008, nearly half of this food was purchased in chain supermarkets (ibid.). Big-box stores like Wal-Mart and Safeway, which the counterculture once labeled as inherently contrary to organic philosophies, are now major retailors of organic products. Local, decentralized distribution grew as well. For example, the number of farmers' markets in the United States quadrupled from less than two thousand in 1994 to more than eight thousand in 2013 (USDA 2013).

Much of the early social science scholarship on sustainable food systems and food movements seeks to document and celebrate successes and make the case for movement goals (see, for example, Lyson 2004; Hassanein 2003; Magdoff, Foster, and Buttel 2000). Scholars argued that industrial agriculture is environmentally, socially, and economically destructive. Ecologically, industrial agriculture depends on mechanization and monoculture, creating increased reliance on fossil fuel–based inputs, decreasing soil fertility, and, through erosion, polluting rivers and streams (Altieri 2000). Economically, reliance on inputs creates economic advantages for those with ready supplies of capital, encouraging the consolidation of small farms into agribusiness corporations (Clapp and Fuchs 2009). Such consolidation is aided by the US Farm Bills (Rausser 1992), which favor large-scale growers and for which agribusiness lobbies heavily (Liebman 1983). Thus, despite a cultural rhetoric depicting farmers as self-reliant and independent (Bradley 1995), industrial agriculture's dependence on government subsidies provides evidence that the industry is not economically viable (Kent and Meyers 2001). This consolidation has had devastating economic and social effects on rural communities (Bell 2004; Goldschmidt 1978[1947]). Farmers are incentivized to undermine their own security—both social and economic—as well as the productive capabilities of the land (Bell 2004). But perhaps the harshest social effects are felt by farmworkers. Despite numerous attempts to organize, these immigrant populations are often confined to seasonal work for which they are paid minimal wages (McWilliams 2000[1939]; Daniel 1981; Pulido 1996). Farmworkers are particularly vulnerable to pesticide poisoning and, ironically, often lack steady access to healthy food (Nash 2007; Harrison 2011; Brown and Getz 2011). Industrial agriculture, on the other hand, benefits greatly from what Taylor and Martin call "the immigrant subsidy in US agriculture" (1997: 855), as they pay scant wages and benefits to their workers.

While earlier generations of scholars helped to support these claims, a more recent vein of critical work has begun to think through the problems and contradictions embodied by food movement efforts within the United States. This scholarship has coalesced around two major critiques. The first is what I think of as the food justice critique. Scholars and activists have focused on the roles that race, class, gender, and other forms of inequality play in both conventional and alternative food systems. They call for a food system that is not only ecologically sustainable, but also responds to racial and economic disparities. In this way, food becomes a tool toward broader social justice organizing.

The second critique revolves around the complex concept of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a political economic philosophy that asserts that human well-being can best be achieved if the so-called free market is allowed to function with little to no intervention from the state (Harvey 2005: 2). Prominent social scientists have argued that current modes of food activism may explicitly oppose aspects of neoliberalism in their discourses, but their practices tend to embrace it, primarily by "relying on markets rather than the state to pursue change" (Harrison 2008: 163–64; see also Guthman 2008a; Allen 2008; Brown and Getz 2008). These food justice and neoliberalism critiques are interrelated, as strategies pursued through the market, such as starting a business or buying particular kinds of goods, are by definition less accessible to low-income people.

In response to both of these lines of inquiry, scholars have called for food activists to intensify their critique of production agriculture, particularly around issues of labor, as well as their attention to issues of inequality within the food system (Harrison 2008, Guthman 2008a; Allen 2008; Brown and Getz 2008). In this paper, I describe three strategies through which activists are beginning to do so. Below, I outline the food justice and neoliberal critiques in more detail. I then describe the approaches through which food movements are both attending to food justice and pushing back against neoliberalism. These strategies, and the organizations that embody them, exist at a cultural moment where neoliberalism is a dominant feature of our political economy and ecology, and rather than ignore or work around market-based approaches, they make use of them in creative and interesting ways. Thus these strategies hold the potential to become harbingers of a new shift in food and agricultural activism, one that uses market-based strategies to build toward a focus on inequalities, labor, and social justice. They have much to teach not only activists, but the scholars who have been critical of neoliberal food activism as well.

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The Food Justice Critique

Perhaps the most thorough definition of food justice comes from geographer Rasheed Hislop (2014: 19), who describes it as "the struggle against racism, exploitation, and oppression taking place within the food system that addresses inequality's root causes both within and beyond the food chain." The term was commonly used among activists prior to any scholarly writing on it, particularly by grassroots groups consisting of and working in communities of color to develop sustainable local food systems. This concept, however, has been broadened and refined through engagement and debate among activists and within the academic literature, which has drawn upon critical race theory to better understand how and to what effect exploitation in the food system has and continues to take place. Although the goals of this scholarship are transnational, to date it has focused mainly on US-based projects and sectors, and has examined the effects of specific local, state, and national policies.

Often working closely with activists, scholars have highlighted many of the barriers that make it more difficult for low-income and people of color to access local and organic food as both producers and consumers. For example, their work has illustrated the processes through which farmers of color have been disenfranchised, which range from discrimination by the USDA to forced relocation to immigration laws barring land ownership by particular ethnic groups (Gilbert et al. 2002; Norgaard et al. 2011; Minkoff-Zern et al. 2011). In response, scholars such as Monica White (forthcoming) and Priscilla McCutcheon (2013) work to capture the history of black agriculture in the United States, demonstrating its essential vitality and its importance for the civil rights and other social movements. These projects, and others like them, depict agriculture as a proud tradition in communities of color, connected to both everyday life and essential political work. In addition, food justice scholars call attention to the hardships faced by farmworkers on both organic and conventional farms (Brown and Getz 2011), and highlight efforts these workers make to improve their own food access (Minkoff-Zern 2012; Mares and Peña 2011).

Food justice scholars also examine inequalities through the lens of consumption, and argue that low-income and communities of color face a variety of obstacles to the consumption of local and organic food, and that supporters of sustainable agriculture have not done enough to bridge these barriers. For example, locally grown and organic foods tend to be more expensive than conventional alternatives, especially with regard to canned and packaged items. It is, of course, quite difficult for low-income people to afford these foods, particularly in the context of escalating housing and healthcare costs (Alkon et al. 2013; Lea and Worsley 2005). Allen has argued that the sustainable agriculture movement has privileged the economic needs of producers—small organic farmers—and has therefore argued that the price of their goods should be high. This helps to procure stable livelihoods for sustainable farmers, but is contrary to the needs of low-income people (2004, 2008).

Another important barrier is the relative lack of available fresh produce—let alone locally grown and organic options—in low-income and communities of color (Wrigley et al. 2002; Morland et al. 2002). Scholars refer to areas lacking fresh food as "food deserts," though activists are critical that the desert imagery naturalizes this political and economic process, and that too much emphasis on the presence or absence of supermarkets results in the offering of incentives to chain supermarkets rather than addressing root causes such as racism and poverty (Holt-Giminez 2012). Nonetheless, there is a fair amount of agreement that the lack of available fresh produce is an obstacle to its consumption. Scholars have traced the political and economic processes through which food retailers and other purveyors of necessary resources have abandoned low-income urban communities (McClintock 2011) and described community-based responses (White 2010; Bradley and Galt forthcoming).

A third barrier can be found in the language of the sustainable agriculture movement itself. Scholars have argued that farmers' markets and other spaces where sustainable agriculture can be practiced are often coded as white, not only because they are primarily and disproportionately frequented by whites, but because of the discourses that circulate through them (Guthman 2008b; Slocum 2006). Guthman, for example, argues that phrases common to the sustainable agriculture movement, such as "getting your hands dirty in the soil" and "looking the farmer in the eye," all point to "an agrarian past that is far more easily romanticized by whites than others" (2008b: 394). Given the disenfranchisement of so many African American, Native American, Latino/a, and Asian American farmers (Romm 2001), Guthman argues that it is likely these phrases do not resonate with communities of color in the ways intended by their primarily white orators. This cultural barrier can suggest to low-income and communities of color that sustainable agriculture is not for them, especially when combined with the lack of available organic and local produce in their neighborhoods. Food justice activists such as Bryant Terry (2009) and Breeze Harper (2010), both of whom are African American, have responded by attempting to recast sustainable food systems in ways they believe to be more culturally resonant.

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These critiques have drawn upon and helped to further a vibrant debate among food activists and other movement participants about how sustainable agriculture should best be pursued. Some argue that local and sustainable food systems are inherently more just, and more accessible and democratic, than global agribusiness (Fairfax et al. 2012). Others have focused on the need to overcome the barriers faced by low-income communities and communities of color. They have founded organizations that create farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture programs, and community gardens in these neighborhoods, and have worked to make this food more affordable through subsidies, work exchanges, and a variety of other strategies (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010). Food banks and other emergency food projects have moved toward offering local and organic food, sometimes partnering with local farmers or nonprofit organizations to do so (Friedman 2007). Other activists have begun important conversations around how race and racism are produced and reproduced in both conventional and sustainable food systems, and have worked to create local food systems that are led by people of color and function as a form of resistance to racism (Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Morales 2011; Sbicca 2012). Major foundations such as Kellogg and Robert Wood Johnson have encouraged this work with funding, and policymakers in various cities have adjusted zoning ordinances in order to encourage it. There are now thousands of nonprofit organizations and activists across the country working toward "food justice," and many of them are in direct conversation with scholars who document and analyze their work.

The Neoliberalism Critique

The neoliberalism critique, on the other hand, has become prominent among academics, but has played much less strongly into activist debate. This critique argues that food movements have largely promoted market-based strategies for social change, such as starting an organic farm–based business or purchasing from them. The dominance of such strategies has prompted Michael Pollan (2006) to refer to food activism as a "market-as-movement," in which supporters "vote with our forks" for the kind of food system we want to see. This ideal moves away from long-standing social movement strategies pursuing state-mandated protections for labor, the environment, and the poor, and posits individual entrepreneurialism and consumer choice as the primary pathways to social change. Activists encourage one another to build and support alternative food businesses, and believe that change will come through shifting market demand.

Relatedly, neoliberalism embodies efforts to relieve the state of many of the functions it has historically held (Rose 1999). These include market-based approaches to social problems like the privatization of prisons (Gilmore 2007), the delegation to subcontractors of essential public services such as the military (Krahmann 2010), and the use of public-private partnerships for development and infrastructure creation (Clarke 2004). However, privatization does not only refer to the for-profit sector. In addition to spreading the notion that social problems can be solved through the market, sustainable agriculture and food justice organizations also embody neoliberalism by doing the work that was once considered the province of the state. This work includes protecting the environment (through organic production) and feeding the hungry (through provisions of food in food insecure communities). For Peck and Tickell (2002), neoliberalism consists of two phases: a rolling back of state provisioning including a social safety net, and a rolling out of NGO and other third-sector actors attempting to take the state's place, usually with significantly less funding and a reliance on volunteerism (see also Pudup 2008; Wolch 1990; Milligan et al 2008). It is to this dynamic that author and social critic Arundhati Roy (2004) refers when she writes, "It's almost as though the greater the devastation caused by neoliberalism, the greater the outbreak of NGOs."

Not only do food activists attempt to do the work abandoned by the neoliberal state, but in their efforts to secure adherents and funding, they trumpet their own abilities to do it better. For example, supporters of sustainable agriculture highlight the federal government's inability to protect the public and the environment from pesticides, toxic-though-legal ingredients, and even contamination. They argue that the best and indeed the only way to protect oneself and one's family is through the purchase of organic food from local farmers they can trust. Similarly, food justice advocates call attention to the decades of institutionally racist development patterns that ensured that urban black neighborhoods would not prosper. But rather than calling for government investment in these areas, they argue that local residents and supporters can create green economic development through farmers' markets, health food stores, and urban farms. These examples suggest that everyday people can work together to solve social problems through the buying and selling of goods. While this is certainly empowering, the lack of a role for government policy, and its replacement with nongovernment organizations and markets, helps to relieve the state of its responsibility to provide environmental protection and a social safety net.

Taken together, sustainable agriculture and food justice organizations pursue a "market-as-movement" approach to

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social change through which they provide market-based and nonprofit replacements for services that were once seen as the responsibility of the state. In doing so, they foster the notion that we as individuals are responsible for maximizing our own physical and economic health, and that we can do so through the consumption of local and organic food. This focus on consumption constrains what Guthman (2008a) refers to as the "politics of the possible," or our collective imaginaries of what kinds of social changes can be brought about. Expanding on this notion, Guthman and DuPuis write, "we have all but abandoned notions of citizenship as participation in the public sphere for a more individualist notion of self as the citizen consumer whose contribution to society is mainly to purchase the products of global capitalism" (2006: 443). Guthman, DuPuis, and others have argued that in order to fundamentally shift the food system into one that is environmentally sustainable and socially just, activists will need to identify the threads of neoliberalism that inform their own discourses and, even more so, their practices, and to find ways of organizing that can create broad-based constituencies to pursue transformational changes.

Academic critiques of neoliberalism are not without their detractors. Gibson-Graham has argued that structuralist representations of capitalism not only obscure alternatives but "dampen and discourage non-capitalist initiatives, since power was assumed to be concentrated in capitalism and to be largely absent from other forms of economy" (2008: 3). Moreover, they argue that such representations discourage action: "In the vicinity of such representations, those who might be interested in non-capitalist economic projects pulled back from ambitions of widespread success" (ibid.). The authors instead advocate for work highlighting diverse economies, including alternative and nonmarket forms of exchange, in order to inspire actors to engage these kinds of projects. This strategy, they believe, will guide actors toward the progressive possibilities within neoliberalism (Laurie and Bondi 2005).

Rather than dissuade actors from engaging in noncapitalist initiatives, critiques of neoliberal tendencies within food activism can motivate scholars and activists to turn our gaze toward those projects that resist the primacy of the capitalist market. What follows are three such strategies: cooperative ownership, food workers' movements, and policy campaigns to restrict bad actors. Each of these strategies is conscious of the ways that race and gender pervade both industrial agriculture and its alternatives, and works to increase social justice within the food system. Moreover, each of them makes use of the market-as-movement strategy that has come to pervade so much of food activism while pushing beyond it. While they are imperfect in their abilities to address both hierarchies of oppression and neoliberal modes of thought and action, such strategies may help to strengthen and inspire activists and supporters from many parts of the food movement to see the progressive possibilities beyond neoliberalism, and to create bridges to other forms of social justice activism.

Worker Cooperatives

Worker cooperatives are businesses in which workers own, work in, manage, and share in the profits of the enterprise. Salaries tend to have low ratio differences and profits are generally shared on the basis of a worker-owner's labor contribution. Cooperatives are generally managed through workplace democracy (Adams and Hansen 1993; Meyers 2006). Worker cooperatives can be found all over the world. The largest is the Indian Coffee Houses, which began when workers thrown out by the colonial Coffee Board in the 1950s seized control of the businesses. Cooperatives have been rapidly growing in Latin America as a result of both economic crises and the election of leftist leaders (Dangl 2005; Malleson 2010).

In several US cities, food justice organizations have turned to worker-owned cooperatives in order to ensure that the benefits of their work accrue to the communities in which they work. One example of this is the Mandela Foods Cooperative in West Oakland, California. Mandela Foods Cooperative (MFC) was founded in 2008 by a group of local residents and food justice activists in order to address "lack of access to healthy food, healthy jobs, and economic development" (mfc.org). Though independent, it was founded alongside the nonprofit Mandela Marketplace, which incubates a larger food enterprise network including local farmers and nutrition educators. While Mandela is the first worker-owned cooperative explicitly founded to pursue food justice, plans are underway for several more in such cities as Detroit, Cleveland, and Minneapolis. In addition, existing worker-owned and consumer-owned cooperative grocery stores such as Madison's Willy Street Co-op and the Mariposa Food Co-op in Philadelphia have begun to explicitly embrace food justice.

Mandela Foods Cooperative currently has four worker-owners, though it hopes to add more as profits grow. All are African American West Oakland residents. Employees are entitled to apply for membership after working 1,000 hours. A minimal $2,000 buy-in can be paid through a combination of cash and sweat-equity, either up front or over a number of years. Each worker-owner supervises a particular area of the store such as produce or bulk goods. Decisions are made by vote, where each worker-owner has one vote, and a representative from the nonprofit also has a vote.

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Mandela Marketplace's Executive Director Dana Harvey and Senior Manager Mariela Cedeño explain why this hybrid worker-owner/nonprofit structure works in West Oakland:

> Dana: The worker co-op model is because that would bring people from the community together as owners and have a support network for owning the business. It wouldn't be a sole proprietor with all the responsibility on one person to be the owner because they might not have the experience.
>
> Mariela: It was more for practical reasons. The ideology is important but it was more about how do people have equal power in how it's run, get equal profits in how it's run, and have equal say in how it's run. That, by definition, was a cooperative.
>
> And the reason we established ourselves as a non-profit to support and incubate Mandela Foods is because four worker-owners from West Oakland didn't have the credit or the networks or access to the kind of financing they would need to build out something that was going to cost $750,000 whereas a non-profit has the skill set to be able to network and access grants to represent them or provide guarantees to help them get that financing (Author interview, July 10 2014).

In many ways, MFC does similar work to many other food justice organizations, focusing on bringing healthy food into neighborhoods with few other options. When asked about the food options available before MFC opened, local resident Ennis Jones responded, "bags of chips, fritos and McDonalds. There wasn't anything down here." With its large selection of produce, which it sells for significantly less than health food and grocery stores in other parts of Oakland, MFC certainly changes the West Oakland food landscape.

But as a worker-owned business, MFC does more than provide a place to shop. In a video on Mandela's website, local resident Nwamaka Agbo describes the added value. "Just to see your neighbors and friends be owners of a business is extremely powerful and empowering for members of the community" ("Mandela Foods Cooperative" 2011).

Worker owner James Burke expands on this thought:

> I think a lot of people in the community are happy just to have another place to shop that offers a different kind of variety than what you see in the other locations here, but for those that understand more about who we are and what we're trying to do and who we are because you're seeing people from the community, people you might even see on a regular basis and now they're part of something. They're not just employees, but this is their business and they're opening in their community trying to support their neighbors (Author interview, July 10 2014).

For James and Nwamaka, what sets MFC apart from other food justice organizations is a sense of pride in community ownership.

But that this is not all that sets MFC apart. Worker-owned businesses are not straightforward capitalist enterprises. Indeed, according to Marx, they are not capitalist enterprises at all, as no one sells their labor in exchange for a wage. In his Inaugural Address to the International Workingmen's Association in London in 1864, Marx said: "The value of these great social experiments cannot be over-rated. By deed, instead of by argument, they have shown that production . . . may be carried on without the existence of a class of masters employing a class of hands" (Marx 1869). In a contemporary sense, cooperatives are one way to resist the reproduction of proletarianization, as worker-owners avoid the alienation from the means of production necessary under capital (Figueroa 2013).

This is not to say that MFC is never complicit with neoliberalism. It maintains a strategy consistent with the "market-as-movement" approach that characterizes most local/organic food, community food security, and food justice organizations. Those who want to support food justice through MFC largely do so through their purchases, ensuring the business's profitability. It also takes on some of the burden from a state that offers decreasing benefits to poor and food-insecure families, and that fails to invest in poor communities and communities of color.

However, MFC challenges neoliberalism in several ways. First, as a worker cooperative, MFC explicitly opposes the upward redistribution of wealth that Harvey and other theorists believe is essential to neoliberalism. This, however, could be said to be true of many food justice projects, whether cooperative or not. Though executive directors likely make much more than hourly workers, it seems unlikely that the pay differentials mirror the corporate world. Still, at Mandela, worker-owner pay is tied only to hours worked, and responsibility for various tasks (ordering, stocking, etc.) is evenly distributed.

In addition, through its cooperative structure, MFC not only ensures local ownership but disrupts the inevitability of capitalist agriculture and food distribution. It expands the "politics of the possible" beyond a form of market exchange that is predicated on the exploitation of labor by capital. Moreover, it contests neoliberalism's focus on the self-improvement-seeking individual, replacing it with a more communal, and indeed cooperative, vision of how improvement should be pursued. Worker-owners embody the belief that one's business does not succeed or fail on its merits alone, and recognize that community improvement is a collective endeavor.

Food Workers' Movements

One of the strongest critiques of the local/organic food, community food security, and food justice movements is that they

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ignore the injustices faced by workers. Patricia Allen (2004) argues that food activists' adherence to the "market-as-movement" model focuses their attention on the needs of business owners, which in turn obscures the struggles of workers whose interests may be at odds with their employers.

This, however, is beginning to change. Organizations representing workers in many parts of the food system are gaining ground, in part by connecting with supporters of sustainable agriculture and food justice.

FROM THE SEED: THE COALITION OF IMMOKALEE WORKERS

Perhaps the best-known example of this is the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), a human rights organization working to address corporate social responsibility, sustainable food, and human trafficking through community organizing. It has grown tremendously from the small group of farmworkers who, in 1993, began working together to improve their community and their lives.

Beginning in 2001, the CIW's Campaign for Fair Food addresses the issue of farm labor exploitation by leveraging the power of major corporate buyers. Under pressure from the CIW, eleven multibillion-dollar food retailers have agreed to enter the coalition's Fair Food Program, which establishes higher wages, a code of conduct for more humane labor standards, and a cooperative complaint resolution system (ciw-online.org). Through this program, retailers pay a penny per pound "down the supply chain, directly to farmworkers," which significantly increases pickers' wages (Lappé 2012). In addition, the CIW's Anti-Slavery Campaign has worked with government officials to document, investigate, and liberate over 1,200 workers and has "pioneered the worker-centered approach to slavery prosecution" (ciw-online.org). These efforts are connected, as the Fair Food Program includes zero tolerance for forced labor, encouraging growers to police themselves in order to maintain sales.

CIW campaigns have included rallies, work stoppages, hunger strikes (especially a month-long strike by six workers in 1998), and marches (including an historic 234-mile march from Ft. Meyers to Orlando, Florida, in 2000). They have attacked involuntary servitude by working with federal prosecutors to identify and investigate trafficking, and to campaign for the passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act in 2000. They have also raised wages across the tomato industry, which had been sliding since 1980. As part of the Campaign for Fair Food, the CIW has worked with students, religious communities, labor organizations, and communities to pressure one retailer after another to sign the Fair Food Agreement. They are currently focused on adding supermarket chains to their list.

In confronting corporations that claim to provide "food with integrity," to borrow Chipotle's slogan, the CIW has built connections with supporters of local and organic food and community food security, and has identified with the struggle for food justice. Noted food movement authors such as Eric Schlosser (2004), Frances Moore Lappé (2012), and Tom Philpott (2009) have written about the organization in major newspapers like the *New York Times* and *LA Times*, and publications often aimed at progressives such as *Yes Magazine* and *Grist*. Schlosser even testified at congressional hearings about abuses faced by tomato workers, along with former tomato worker and CIW co-founder Lucas Benitez (Williams 2008). Farmworker and CIW organizer Gerardo Reyes Chavez argues that the fair food campaign "marks a turning point in the sustainable food movement as a whole, whereby . . . farmworkers are finally recognized as true partners — every bit as vital as farmers, chefs, and restaurants — in bringing 'good food' to our tables" (quoted in Kunichoff 2012).

Farmworkers, however, are not the only exploited workers in the food system, The Restaurant Opportunities Centers United are also working to increase pay and improve working conditions among food workers, this time in the food service industry.

TO THE TABLE: RESTAURANT OPPORTUNITIES CENTERS UNITED

Restaurant workers hold seven of the eleven lowest-paying occupations in the United States, earning less, on average, than farm and domestic workers (US Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011). Tipped workers in many states make only $2.13 an hour, as they have for over two decades. Only 20% of restaurant jobs pay a living wage, and women, people of color, and immigrants are often prevented from holding those positions. Few restaurants offer sick days and/or benefits (Jayaraman 2012).

The Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC) was founded in 2002 by Fekkak Mamdouh, a former headwaiter, and organizer Saru Jayaraman. Today, ROC United is a national coalition of twenty-six member groups, and advocates for the needs of the more than 10 million restaurant workers across the United States. Although focused on the restaurant industry, ROC United pursues many issues common to low-wage workers including minimum wage, paid sick days, compliance with basic employment standards, and healthcare.

ROC United differentiates between the low-road and high-road business models. Low-road businesses violate

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workers' rights through wage theft, racial discrimination, sexual harassment, forced and/or unpaid overtime, and more. ROC United uses a combination of worker organizing, litigation, and public pressure to change these circumstances. Since 2002, ROC United has won thirteen "workplace justice" campaigns against high-profile companies. Their victories have netted more than $7 million in financial settlements and the institution of grievance procedures, raises, sexual harassment and antidiscrimination policies, sick days, and job security.

In addition, ROC United works to support those who take the high road. They have opened worker-owned cooperative restaurants—COLORS in Detroit and New York—and aim to open more. In addition, they have founded a restaurant association called Restaurants Advancing Industry Standards in Employment (RAISE), whose members provide living wages, offer sick days, vacation, and/or insurance, and provide training and internal promotions. Through RAISE, member restaurants can receive guidance on compliance with employment, immigration, health and safety laws, access to low-cost health insurance, free training for workers, and recognition such as a positive listing in ROC United's National Diners Guide.

Most broadly, ROC United also works to change policy in order to improve working conditions. Their current lead issue is raising the tipped minimum wage, which has been $2.13 for over twenty years. ROC United works toward this and other issues by conducting participatory research documenting the industry. Recent reports have focused on the child-care needs of working mothers, the price impact of raising the minimum wage (which they documented as a dime per day), and the profitability of high-road practices. In addition, a series of regional "Behind the Kitchen Door" reports documented inequality and opportunity among workers, and culminated in Jayaraman's book of the same name.

Jayaraman sees the local/organic food movement as laying some of the groundwork for ROC United's campaigns. She cites bestsellers like *Fast Food Nation* and *The Omnivore's Dilemma* as examples of books that have had huge impacts on the food system, and hopes her book can do the same. "The point of this book," she said, is "to educate people about what's behind the kitchen door. If you care about your health, if you care about locally-sourced and sustainable, you can't just care about the cows and the pigs and how they're treated. You have to care about the people touching your food" (quoted in Paulas 2013). Like the work of the CIW, ROC United's campaign has been featured in many of the publications that appeal to supporters of local/organic food, community food security, and food justice, and Eric Schlosser wrote the Forward for *Behind the Kitchen Door.*

Neoliberalism has been unrelenting in its destruction of workers' rights, wages, and benefits. Indeed the breaking of prominent workers' strikes by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher are often seen as moments in which neoliberalism became the dominant political economic philosophy in the United States and United Kingdom (Harvey 2005). Moreover, Americans tend to think of themselves not as haves and have nots, but as haves and will haves, not as workers and owners but as owners and will-be-owners. The development of a worker consciousness has long been considered essential to the transformation of the political-economic system within which the food system exists.

In this way, the worker-based campaigns of the CIW and ROC United directly challenge neoliberal policies and subjectivities. They encourage workers to identify as workers, and posit workers as worthy of livable wages, modest benefits, and more generally, decent lives. They demonstrate how businesses large and small are dependent on their workers in order to create sellable commodities, and how, without struggle, workers are not remunerated accordingly.

These worker campaigns do make use of the "market-as-movement" to build support, but the market is not their fundamental vessel for change. Both the CIW and ROC United reward and publicize businesses that take the "high road." This serves to create the kinds of diverse and alternative economies highlighted by Gibson-Graham (2008). However, these activists are doing much more than creating alternatives and encouraging consumers to "vote with our dollars" in their favor. They also go after businesses engaging in egregious practices to demand they improve, using not only consumer choice but also demonstrations and lawsuits to achieve this. Moreover, these organizations go after the kind of policy change that will shift industry standards nationwide, making fair pay and treatment not only benefits that accrue to those lucky enough to work for high-road employers, but to all workers throughout the food system.

Workers' rights organizations are not the only ones who go after bad actors and use legislative campaigns to raise standards across the food system. Other organizations use the same tactics to restrict the use of pesticides and genetically modified foods.

Bad Actors

Supporters of local/organic food mainly seek to create and support market-based alternative food systems, and community food security and food justice activists work to make these alternatives accessible to low-income communities and communities of color. Other activists, however, work to restrict

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the use of harmful agribusiness products such as pesticides and genetically modified organisms (GMOs). While these campaigns do make use of the market, particularly when regulatory avenues fail, their collective campaigns challenge the neoliberal logic by restricting harmful practices rather than providing optional alternatives.

METHYL IODIDE

For years, methyl bromide was widely considered one of the most dangerous pesticides in US agriculture. A pre-plant soil fumigant best known for its use on California strawberries, it has long been associated with respiratory, kidney, and neurological effects (Baselt 2008). Methyl bromide is also recognized as an ozone-depleting chemical, and was phased out in countries that are signatories to the Montreal Protocols. Agribusiness companies began to search for alternatives.

One prominent alternative was methyl iodide, developed by Arysta LifeScience Corporation. But many scientists and activists feared that it was even more toxic than methyl bromide. Not only is it listed on the California Proposition 65 list of carcinogens (methyl bromide is not), the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) found that it is toxic to fetal development and thyroid levels, and increases risk of miscarriage (Lim and Reed 2010). Both pesticides are particularly toxic for farmworkers and rural communities because of their ability to drift from application sites.

Despite these concerns, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved the pesticide in 2007. But California, where the pesticide would be used, has its own process. In 2010, Governor Schwarzenegger gave his approval, ignoring the advice of the scientific community, who wrote "use of this agent would result in exposures to a large number of the public and thus would have a significant adverse impact on the public health" (Froines et al. 2010).

The following year, amidst investigation as to whether the approval process was improperly politicized, Shwarzenegger's successor Governor Jerry Brown agreed to reconsider. Anti-pesticide groups like Californians for Pesticide Reform, Pesticide Watch, Earthjustice, and the United Farm Workers began a campaign to convince him to deny approval.

The campaign was multi-pronged and multi-faceted, and according to Dana Perls, an organizer with Pesticide Watch, this was an important part of its success:

> I think the reasons that the methyl iodide campaign was a success, and it took 8 or 9 years, were a couple of things. One was that there was so much clear science opposing this chemical. But the other reason was that there was a very multi-pronged approach, so you had legislative and you had people working at the national and state level, and you had people working at the grassroots. The people who were going to be on the front lines were communicating with the people who were sitting behind closed doors. [(Author interview, August 1 2014).

First, there was standard political activity. Activists convinced forty-four state legislators to sign on to a letter demanding Brown take action on this issue. A petition garnering more than 30,000 signatures was delivered to Brown by more than 100 community leaders.

Earth justice and California Rural Legal Assistance filed a lawsuit against the California DPR challenging its approval of methyl iodide. Within the course of this lawsuit attorneys obtained the public release of documents substantiating that state officials had manipulated the scientific evidence in order to support approval, mixing and matching "risk assessment methodologies that are not interchangeable" (quoted in Urevich 2011).

There was also public protest and direct action. During one protest on the Capitol steps in Sacramento, activists donned moon suits and gas masks, and used dry ice to stage a mock fumigation. On the day that the first spraying occurred in Fresno County, community activists held a demonstration outside the county Agriculture Commissioner's office. Activists also protested outside the offices of Arysta, urging the company to protect public health and the environment.

The campaign also promoted alternatives to chemically intensive agriculture. Anti-pesticide activists highlighted the strength of organic strawberry production in California. For example, Jim Cochran, a thirty-year veteran farmer, testified at the State Labor Employment Committee hearing that the chemical is unnecessary to successful agriculture.

After years of this campaign, Arysta pulled methyl iodide off the market, citing concerns about the fumigant's "economic viability in the US marketplace." This was a major victory for the anti-pesticide campaigners. In a statement headlined *Si Se Puede*, the United Farmworkers wrote: "We did it! Through public pressure and supporting litigation . . . the use of this dangerous poison has been limited. . . . The UFW will stay vigilant to ensure Arysta does not bring the toxic back" (ufw.org). Perls, the above- described organizer, confirms this interpretation, noting that "the grassroots got so loud that there wasn't any point in approving it."

While this is certainly an important victory for the anti-pesticide community, it is worth noting that, in giving in, Arysta avoided a larger defeat. When it pulled methyl iodide, Arysta made null the above-described lawsuit, which was about to be decided. Alameda County Superior Court Judge Frank Roesch had announced that he was about to decide against the manufacturer (Standen 2012). Had that decision been rendered, it would have affected the processes through

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which future pesticides would be registered. According to Perls, Arysta was getting pressure from other agribusiness companies to pull the product before that could occur. "If they lost the lawsuit, it would have huge implications for other pesticide companies and that would just have a crushing affect on the market. They gave up that one product in order to keep status quo of the process that was in their favor."

Nonetheless, this campaign demonstrates the positive impact that collective campaigns can have, broadly protecting those who are most vulnerable to toxic pesticides, as well as the soil, air, and water.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

Globally, perhaps the largest collective agrifood campaign has been to regulate and restrict the use of genetically modified (GM) foods. Genetic modification involves the mutation, insertion, or deletion of genes. Plants have been engineered for faster growth, resistance to pathogens, production of extra nutrients, and other purposes. Roughly 85% of US corn, 91% of US soybeans, and 88% of US cotton are genetically modified (centerforfoodsafety.org).

Opposition to genetically modified foods has long been a central issue for food sovereignty activists. GMOs promote increased centralization in agriculture, becoming another input which favors large, well-capitalized farmers. Food sovereignty activists like Vandana Shiva also argue that the seed supply is itself centralized, making it more difficult for farmers to access alternatives to non-GMO, nonhybrid seeds that they can save and reproduce. In this way, farmers are no longer in control of what is planted in their fields.

In Europe, anti-GMO activists created consumer campaigns and direct action aimed at shifting public opinion against the new technologies by characterizing it as "risky, unhealthy, and linked to the ills of industrial agriculture" (Schurman and Munro 2010: 86). They achieved bans and significant restrictions on many GM technologies, including the halting of new crop approvals by the European Commission. Many additional countries, particularly former colonies that export primarily to Europe, have observed these dynamics and chosen to forego GM foods as well (Paarlberg 2006; Herring 2006).

The striking percentages of many US commodity crops that are genetically modified would suggest that activists have had little effect. In *Fighting for the Future of Food*, however, Rachel Schurman and William Munro draw on counterfactual logic to argue differently. Without anti-GMO activism, they claim, the technology would be much more widespread. US activists succeeded in delaying the release of GM products such as rBGH and wheat, and have convinced fast-food companies to forego the use of GM potato. Moreover, Schurman and Munro argue that activists have thwarted the development of new GM products by forcing biotech companies to factor boycotts, lawsuits, and other political factors into the cost/benefit ratio through which they calculate new product development. US activists have also worked to support GMO restrictions in other nations, contributing to the creation of a global regulatory regime that governs trade in GMOs.

Of all the strategies discussed in this article, collective action campaigns such as the struggles against methyl iodide and GM foods counter neoliberalism most directly. Harvey writes that the role of the neoliberal state is "to be activist in creating a good business climate [and is therefore] necessarily hostile to all forms of social solidarity that put restraints on capital accumulation" (2005: 79). Activists opposing methyl iodide and GM foods urge the state to side instead with popular movements to protect public health and the environment. It is worth noting, however, that in the United States, these campaigns have not been successful in compelling the state to do so. Rather, public opposition has used the threat of state sanctions to change the economic calculus through which companies decide which products to pursue.

One factor that Schurman and Munro cite in explaining why GMO restrictions were particularly hard to come by in the United States was the lack of consumer interest. Compared to their European counterparts, US consumers were more concerned with price and convenience, and less concerned with food quality. This observation, however, is based on campaigns from the late 1990s and early 2000s, before the rise of US movements for sustainable agriculture and food justice. Schurman and Munro speculate that consumer campaigns against GMO foods will have wider appeal than they did a decade ago.

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers and Restaurant Opportunities Centers United have successfully mobilized consumer campaigns, not to create alternatives, but to target bad actors and convince them to improve their practices. It seems possible that, as GM products such as wheat resume field trials, consumers will successfully mobilize against them. Consumers will also likely continue to play important roles in state campaigns to label GMOs, as they have in Maine and Washington.

Discussion and Conclusion

Efforts to make food and agricultural systems more environmentally sustainable and socially just have been supported by

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a body of scholarship articulating and fostering movement accounts and goals. While the early academic literature tended to be uncritically supportive, later bodies of work have focused on critiques of food justice and neoliberalism (Alkon and Mares 2012). The former topic has been strongly debated by activists, often in dialogue with the authors, and has produced a vibrant discourse about how efforts to create sustainable local food systems should address inequalities of race and class, and to a much lesser extent, gender and sexuality. The latter conversation, however, has remained largely within the confines of academia.

Scholars critiquing food movements as neoliberal have called for activists to better attend to issues of social justice, food access, and labor, and to work to limit the power of industrial agriculture. This essay describes three increasingly prominent strategies through which food movements are beginning to do just that. Worker-ownership provides an alternative to capitalism in which there is no distinction between the owners of the means of production and those who labor within them. In addition, through workplace democracy, they provide a model for creating organizations characterized by the struggle for justice internally and externally. Workers' rights campaigns advocate for those who are most harmed by the industrial food system, and challenge a neoliberal state to accede to the demands of labor. They simultaneously make visible important dimensions of the food system too often ignored by supporters of sustainable agriculture and food justice. Together, these two strategies interpolate notions of food activists as workers exploited by neoliberal capital, rather than as entrepreneurs or entrepreneurs-to-be. Lastly, policy campaigns restricting the abilities of bad actors to dominate the food system most directly confront the power of neoliberal capital by attempting to mobilize the state to prioritize human and environmental health. When these campaigns build alliances with farm and food system workers and their communities, whose health is directly threatened by industrial agriculture, they create justice-based movements to constrain the power of neoliberal capital.

Yet it is important to note that these strategies, and the organizations that embody them, do not oppose the "market-as-movement" and indeed make use of it in creative and interesting ways. Worker-owned coops compete with capitalist businesses for consumers, and encourage patrons to "vote with their forks" in order to support them. Mandela Foods Cooperative employs a politics of consumption in order to create a noncapitalist institution that is governed by workplace democracy. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers and Restaurant Opportunities Centers United also make use of the "market-as-movement." Their goal is to enroll consumers in various types of campaigns, whether shaming low-road employers into improving working conditions or procuring policies that improve workers' lives. Both groups also highlight "high road" employers through the CIW's fair food agreements and ROC United's dining guides, thus highlighting diverse economies. Neither organization, however, argues that supporting these employers by voting with one's fork is sufficient to achieve lasting change. Lastly, policy campaigns such as those working to prohibit methyl iodide and GMO foods target consumers of local and organic food as likely supporters for their work. And interestingly, both campaigns failed to prohibit the practice at hand, but succeeded in convincing manufacturers that it did not make good economic sense.

This suggests that critiques of food movements as neoliberal may not be conscious of the ways that individual, consumer-based strategies can build support for more collective ones. As strategies that resist neoliberalism begin to emerge and draw support from those that embody it, new questions for understanding food movements, and the dynamics of neoliberalism and resistance to it more generally, begin to emerge. First, why have strategies that resist neoliberalism become particularly prominent at this cultural moment? Opposition to GMOs, for example, has long been a part of food activism, and has been among the reasons supporters choose to buy and sell organic food. Why, then, have labeling campaigns emerged in the United States now? In addition, the CIW was founded in the mid-1990s and ROC in 2001. Why have these organizations become more prominent now? How have their alliances with more traditional food movement supporters such as Michael Pollan and Eric Schlosser been formed? What is it about the internal dynamics of food activism, or the political climate more generally, that has fueled this shift?

Secondly, how have market-based food movement organizations responded to these new strategies? Under what circumstances have they been supportive, urging producers and consumers to expand their activism beyond the tips of their forks? And for those producers and consumers who do not want to become more politically involved, what are their reasons? Are they primarily interested in personal health rather than social transformation? Do they believe that collective action is unlikely to be successful?

Lastly, what kinds of new alliances do these new strategies make possible? Do they appeal to new and different classes of actors, expanding the pool of supporters for food and agricultural issues? Are food and farm workers interested in other forms of change in the agrifood system, or do they seek only to improve their own living and working conditions? For example, are food and farm workers organizing through ROC

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United or the CIW likely to also become involved in campaigns to ban pesticides or label GMOs? Are they more likely to desire organic and local foods or increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables? In other words, how can these new strategies fuel one another, and how do they expand the politics of the possible?

In sum, scholars have often noted the neoliberal nature of food and agricultural reform efforts, arguing that they rely on markets rather than the state to pursue the changes they desire. This is problematic because markets are inherently undemocratic, favoring those with more economic power and responding less, if at all, to those who lack it. However, in the past several years, new strategies have emerged that push back against neoliberalism and seek to address racial and economic inequalities. These include a small but growing number of worker-owned co-ops, mobilizations to improve the lives of workers throughout the food system, and campaigns to restrict some of the most harmful practices of chemically intensive industrial agriculture. These new strategies make use of what has come before them, the market-as-movement that urges supporters to participate as consumers and entrepreneurs. Indeed, consumer support has often been key to the successes gained by these more collective strategies. This suggests a new way forward for food and agricultural activists, in which they build upon their economic successes to create broader and more collective campaigns. Whether and how this may continue to occur is a question to which scholars should be particularly attuned.

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