“The hotter, less predictable climate is inviting modern society to learn more than words and equations on pages and screens. This invitation welcomes all to dig their hands deep in soil, reveling in the sensual pleasures of bread labor.”

–Madhu Suri Prakash

Sustaining Ourselves: A Political Ecology Perspective on Urban Agriculture as Community Development
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Dedicated to everyone.
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Introduction

Today “food” as it is socially understood is nearly unrecognizable from traditional forms of growing crops. To take an item from the supermarket shelf and trace it back to the soil would take complex knowledge of global systems of trade and industrial production. Due to globalization of the capitalist economy, as one of the largest industries, contemporary food production prioritizes efficiency and profit without regard to the people it directly affects. This system mass produces cheap and convenient food, heavily relying on fossil fuels and killing the biodiversity of the land. This capitalist way of producing food has fundamentally changed the way we interact with our food and has built a thick wall between consumer and producer. People are more disconnected from their food than ever before, as many people go through life without ever thinking about food as another life form. Michael Pollan describes modern conventional food: “any food whose provenance is so complex or obscure that it requires expert help to ascertain” (Pollan 2006). This disconnect has further destroyed the relationship between man and nature, making it easier to exploit and degrade ecosystems, and as a result, compromise our health and safety. Alternative food projects are sprouting up all around the world, responding to the need to reconnect with our food and its source. These alternative food projects are crucial as they work to localize economies and re-engage communities physically and emotionally with their food and one another. Through community gardens, school gardens, local farms, and the many forms of urban agriculture, personal experiences of food production redefine and renew our connection to the food we eat.

Food is a center of all cultures, traditions, ecosystems, and personal health. It is important to maintain a consciousness of how the food system dictates our connection to the natural environment, and a connection to our essential means of living, experiencing,
and surviving. Using qualitative data gathered from four sites of urban agriculture in the Inland Empire, we evaluate local food production and how it helps community and individual health, well-being, and economic security. The essay uses multiple scales of analysis to examine community agriculture projects as a response to contemporary food production in the United States and the distance that this system has put between product and consumer. We outline global, national, local, and individual impacts of both the industrial food system and urban food projects, first by providing a historical literature review, then presenting our findings and their implications, ending with a critique of the urban farming movement and discussion of creative solutions to the deficit of food understanding and connection in modern American culture.

Research Sites

*Linda Vista Community Garden*¹

Linda Vista Community Garden was founded as a Pitzer in Ontario project in collaboration with Fresh Start Ministries in the spring semester of 2011. Allen Quick, a former PIO student was looking to start a community agriculture project and through the Ontario program was connected with George Hernandez, Director of Fresh Start, who had a property he hoped to grow on, but lacking the structural capacity to do so. The garden originally was cultivated and sustained by Pitzer students, as community members and families began to sign on to the project and take ownership. Last Spring, Dolores Vega, one of the community members involved agreed to sign on as the Garden Manager, and has been taking care of the crops and managing the garden consistently since. The Linda Vista project is still in its very early stages, as it continues to develop as a branch of

¹ Full names of study participants have been changed to protect confidentiality.
Fresh Start Ministries and hopefully will continue to grow with more community involvement and a more sustainable workforce.

The garden has no official mission statement to date. Through weekly core group meetings and one-on-one discussions, an unofficial mission statement has emerged. Linda Vista Community Garden aims to become a center of community health and social life. By providing inexpensive access to personal plots, opportunities to work within a democratic organization in conjunction with other community members, and access to urban farming practices and knowledge of organic agriculture, the garden hopes to create opportunities for Ontario families to grow food for themselves, learn about agriculture and sustainability, have access to healthy food, and work together to create a stronger sense of community spirit. The garden aims to strengthen the community's cohesiveness, help to cultivate individual and collective connection and understanding of the food we eat, as well as connection and understanding to one another through working together.

Currently, funding for the garden is limited and sporadic. Most resources come from donations, and some Pitzer in Ontario and personal money has been used to buy tools and small utilities for the garden. As of now, Linda Vista is part of the larger organization of Fresh Start Ministries, though Fresh Start is a charity and does not have a large budget nor does it allot the garden any part of the budget it has, though collectively Linda Vista and Fresh Start have applied to grants and are awaiting response. Linda Vista functions on the site of an old elementary school that is still the property of the Ontario Montclair School District, and is shared with other organizations. The OMSD provides the project with space to grow, and covers expenses of water use, which seemingly simple, is a critical and large contribution.
Staffing is one of the obstacles Linda Vista currently faces. As of now, the core group (Advisory Council) consists of Dolores Vega, Espe Lopez, Vida Levi, Allen Quick, Sophie Weiss, and in smaller parts Lucy Block, Dorothy Little, and Elena Tanner. Currently the group is simultaneously trying to utilize community outreach to gauge popular interest and involvement, and find individuals who are interested, invested, and could potentially take on future leadership roles within the garden. Within the current staff group, there has been some miscommunication and confusion around authority, garden leadership, and ownership over the past few months that have resolved as of recent weeks. A large part of the advisory council’s work thus far this semester has been to change the relationship and power dynamics between Dolores and the Pitzer students as well as between her and George, both of which have been successful. George has been making consistent effort to keep Dolores and the rest of the garden staff informed on the goings on of Fresh Start and the site, and has been verbally acknowledging her status as Garden Manager.

Another hierarchical challenge has been between Linda Vista, Fresh Start, and the school district that owns the property. Where there was little communication with George before, there was next to no communication with the district, to the point that most of the staff was not even aware that the land belonged to another party. Since it has been established that Fresh Start is working on the property owned by the school district, many red flags have gone up regarding restrictions and regulations that OMSD never communicated. Dolores and the Advisory Committee have decided to work within the limitations at the current site for now, while still seeking to build a relationship of communication and respect with OMSD and Fresh Start. Over the course of the next season, the operation is expanding its efforts to Second Chances Church, where on a
church-owned property, and independent of Fresh Start, there will be much more room to develop and grow as an organization in ways that aren’t possible at the current location.

In short, the garden ideally aims to be a collective food production and education space that is run by community, for community. Currently, there are 4 families who have plots in the garden, and Espe and Dolores are the most involved local residents. If the project continues to develop as planned, even with the relocation, the garden will still become a thriving community space that provides resources for urban farming, nutritional health, training, a social center, and social services.

From Linda Vista, we highlighted individuals Allen, Vida, Espe, Dolores, and Libby. Allen Quick is a Pitzer student and founder of the garden. Coming from a middle class background, Allen grew up in Alta Dena, California with his parents and brother. Only in the last couple of years Allen became interested in urban farming communities when he started spending time with more intellectual activist social groups upon coming to Pitzer. After going on a trip to New Orleans his first year, he came back ready to educate himself on the social injustices and realities that exist in food production and was inspired to start a garden. Through the Pitzer in Ontario program, Allen started the project with George Hernandez in the fall semester of 2010, and has continued to support the garden in the year since then. At the time of the study, Allen was taking a semester off from Pitzer.

In February of 2011, Dolores Vega signed on as garden manager, and has been maintaining the garden in the ten months since. Dolores and her husband, Miguel, live in Samoa Village, a mobile home community off of Philadelphia and Sultana in South Ontario with their two children, Linda, a recent high school graduate, and Eduardo, in the
sixth grade. Miguel works as the manager at Marie Callendar’s pie shop, and Dolores, though formerly a certified nurse in Mexico could not work as a nurse without fluency in English and now stays home to take care of her family.

Espe Lopez is also a recent graduate of Ontario High School, and an audit student in the Pitzer in Ontario program during the fall semester of 2011. Espe also comes from a strong Mexican family, lives in Samoa Village. She has been hosting Pitzer Spanish Practicum students with her family for the past 12 years, which is how she has learned about food justice. Before helping out at the garden, Espe has developed a close relationship with Dolores, as another prometora (Spanish Practicum host family), and for much of the semester has helped Dolores at the garden most days of the week.

Vida Levi is another Pitzer junior. Also from an upper-middle class background, Vida grew up in New York City, and got involved with the Linda Vista project through Allen. Vida was introduced into the world of food culture and justice through his mother’s love of food, cooking, and culture, and pursued it as a window to social justice when he started learning about sustainability and environmentalism from his peers in high school. Since then, Vida has organized several trips, one called The New York Trip, and two New Orleans Trips where groups of peers his age have studied food justice and local food projects in those urban contexts. Vida took a semester off school to work at Our School at Blair Grocery, a school and community farm project in New Orleans, and is now studying neuroscience.

Libby Reiter is a junior at Brown University. At the time of the study, Libby was taking a year away from Brown to work with different urban farming projects. One, City Slicker Farms in Oakland, California Linda Vista, and a third in Brookline, Massachusetts, name unknown. She grew up in the Bay Area of California with her two sisters and
parents, where she learned a lot about local food and organic agriculture from her family and peers.

Generations

Generations is a network of individuals and organizations within the Inland Empire (Ontario-Upland-Claremont region) engaging with issues surrounding food justice through collective community education and food production. The group was formed in fall of 2011 by Dorothy Little of Incredible Edible Garden, a community garden in Upland, and Harvest & Deliver, a volunteer based food collection program that gleans fruit from private homes to donate to food banks in the Inland Empire. Pitzer students represent all three research sites and the Pitzer in Ontario program in the Generations network, and have attended several of the group meetings. Generations serves as a loose network of individuals and organizations that can provide support, education, and resources to each other in the realm of farming in this region.

From Generations, we interviewed Dorothy Little and Elena Tanner. Elena Tanner is a public politician and sustainable architect. The two met in 2008, when Dorothy had first come to Southern California and was facing problems regarding land ownership when trying to start her community garden. Dorothy has a background in large pharmaceuticals and corporate healthcare, but when she saw her parents going downhill 15 years ago, she was inspired to make some personal lifestyle changes so that she could be alive and healthy to see her grandchild grow up. Elena has a background in public policy and design, and runs a green design and architecture firm with her husband. Together, they emphasize an integrated approach to architecture and urban planning. Similar to Dorothy, Elena also experienced a shift in priorities later in life when
she realized how her eating habits were destroying her health. Adjusting to the idea of environmentalism and organic, healthy diet choices was a large paradigm shift for Elena, but now she has participated in the start of several garden projects and is fully invested in food justice through urban planning and policy.

Amy’s Farm

Amy’s Farm is a Chino-based organic family farm operation. John Brown, farmer in charge, dedicates a ½ acre to food production, though this aspect of the farm has only been developed over the past 5 of the farm’s 12 years of function. John named the farm after his daughter, Amy, who now helps her father run the farm, and brings her own children with her to help work. Amy’s Farm is a non-profit organization that focuses on community, education, and preservation.

The farm strives to cultivate community based on the belief that food can bring people together. John has a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), where community supporters learn about the relationship between small-scale production and consumption of food, and purchase a share of the season’s crops, in return receiving a weekly food basket. Amy’s Farm oversees a second community-building program, the Tri-City Demonstration Urban Farm and Community Garden. This project is located in Pomona and demonstrates the SPIN method of farming to educate and give the local community a chance to farm and grow their own food. The SPIN method of farming is an inexpensive and efficient way to produce food in a small area.

Amy’s Farm educates about health and sustainability for people and places a number of ways. As mentioned before, Amy’s Farm demonstrates organic farming at Tri-Cities, but also hosts educational tours for Elementary, Middle, and High School
students. These tours give students the opportunity to see where their food comes from through experiential learning. Over 200,000 students have visited the farm, demonstrating the vast impact of its educational programs (Amy Owen 2008). As well as tours, the farm hosts educational farming workshops for students to learn how to practice methods of food production independently.

The farm also focuses on preserving agricultural lands and growing food organically. Amy's Farm is a poly-culture farm, which emphasizes the right of plants and animals to live in an uninterrupted symbiotic relationship. Poly-culture farms emphasize the interconnectedness and interdependencies of the different levels of life forms, while monoculture farms only produce one crop. Amy's Farm does not use any pesticides and does not use any degrading machines to till the land. John believes that more land should be put aside for agricultural use rather than using land for housing and office developments to build higher revenue. A lot of land is used for these purposes to gain profit, and less and less land is left for food production, but agricultural land is important to maintain in order to feed the community through sustainable and healthy means.

Amy's Farm is at the grassroots of the food justice movement. John has focused on working to grow organic and healthy food for the community. He thinks that is the most important thing he can be doing now for the community. John told me after owning a CAFO, he wanted to better the world, not destroy it. The way John decided to better the world is to start at the foundation and produce something everybody is entitled to: fresh, organic, and healthy food.

At this site, we interviewed John Brown, the owner of Amy's Farm. John has been a cattle rancher for almost all his life until his concentrated animal feeding operation
went bankrupt. In 2006, a little boy was shot in a drive by in Pomona and John decided that he wanted to do something to better the world and put his efforts into organic farming. Never farming in his life, John started with no prior experience. John has three daughters who all live nearby and 13 grandchildren who often come to the farm and explore. John is in his mid-60s and is from a white cattle-rancher family. Amy’s Farm has now been growing organic vegetables and has been giving student educational tours for five years. John feels like he is making a change by growing organic food for the community and educating the community on where their food comes from. John hopes to find abandoned land in cities and create urban farms for low-income neighborhoods.

San Antonio High School, Food Justice Program

In the fall of 2010, a Scripps Professor and two Pitzer students founded the San Antonio food justice after school program. San Antonio High School is a continuation high school that is predominately low income, minority, and at risk youth. More than 80% of 122 students are racial/ethnic minorities, with Latinos making up nearly 60%. A large number of students have had contact with the criminal justice system and had low GPAs, which enabled them to go back to their original high schools (Neiman Auerbach, 2010). The goals of this program were to empower youth through gardening and cooking and teach students about the impacts of industrial agriculture. The program started slowly and only 7 students joined in the first semester. The next semester, there were 26 students who attended two times a week. Through grants, San Antonio has gotten materials and has built twelve fully planted beds. San Antonio is also currently building an outdoor classroom, which will enable students to have classes in the garden. Students can attain community service hours and academic credit to students from the program.
This is what usually draws students in, but after they start getting involved in the gardening, many students realize they actually enjoy it. This program is challenging the industrial food system by educating students how to grow their own food and make healthy decisions. This program has also created a safe and welcoming community for students to come to after school. Students become inspired and empowered and learn how to work with their peers. This urban agriculture project is a way to educate the youth about the importance of food and food justice. It teaches kids to start thinking critically about where their food comes from. The youth are the future and the first step to changing a failing industrial food system is to educate and empower youth.

From San Antonio, we interviewed Rico Benito, Manuel Chavez, and Abby Henderson. Rico is a student at San Antonio High School. He attended San Antonio his freshmen year and then came back for his junior and senior year. Rico lives with his mother in Pomona and comes from a low income and minority background. Rico has been attending the food justice program since spring 2011. Manuel is also a senior at San Antonio High School and started attending the food justice program with Rico in spring 2011. Manuel comes from a low-income minority background and is currently living with Rico and Rico’s mother in Pomona. Abby Henderson is a senior at Pitzer College and co-founded the San Antonio Food Justice Program with another Pitzer student. Abby grew up in Seattle and is from a white middle class background. She has grown up gardening at home and her mother has had her own garden for 25 years. Abby has had a lot of experience working on farms and gardens. Abby has worked on a biodynamic farm, a production-based organic farm, and taught educational programs for 1st and 2nd graders at City Farms, an experiential learning center in Washington. Abby has worked at San Antonio for 3 semesters and writes the curriculum for two classes.
each week. Abby is currently living in the Co-op, the 5-C environmentally sustainable house. Abby is passionate and committed to teaching and empowering the students at San Antonio through the food justice program.

Ethical Considerations in Research

Qualitative ethnographic research in practice presents both a rich and dangerous opportunity. While ethnography is a powerful tool to gain insight into all communal forms of life that may not be accessible by any other means, it also makes the studied populations vulnerable to the interpretation and representation of researchers and an academic community that may not have the community's interests in mind. Because of the power that research gives academics, it is crucial that researchers enter the field with a consciousness of the role they play in the community's life, as well as their role in creating a bridge between the community and outside audiences.

With this delicate balance in mind, a researcher must consider the subject of one's research as more than just another subject, but a community of individuals that the researcher is responsible for representing. A researcher must be cautious of her presence in a community as well as establishing this awareness throughout collection of data and written findings. It is crucial to remain aware of one's voice when compiling information for an outside audience, and to consider how to represent communities in which researchers are outsiders, keeping in mind both how an academic audience might view the research, how it is presented, and how the community itself would respond to the representation.

In conducting research, it is crucial to maintain consciousness of the power dynamics between parties as well as consideration to work with the studied communities
rather than exploit them for a researcher’s own benefit. There are inevitably power dynamics between researcher and community, and perceived or dominant power relations as dictated by race relations and socioeconomic status do not necessarily define these dynamics. Whether the studied demographic is an indigenous community in Central America, or the top 1% of America’s billionaires, a researcher still has significant power over her subject simply by commanding the task of studying and representing it to a larger audience. With this in mind, researchers have to be careful to keep from offending or subjugating the studied group by making sure not to exploit the subject group, incorporating a component of the work dedicated to the needs of the community; such as directing the research thesis at drawing awareness to the needs of the community as a case study for larger institutional problems.

With this awareness, researchers have to maintain acute awareness of how they impact power dynamics within the community. Researchers can often enter the study with different social and cultural values and beliefs, and to manage this discrepancy researchers can utilize their study to advocate for the researched community and build a personal connection with participants.

Methods and Methodologies

We utilize narrative inquiry and participatory observation to collect and analyze data at each of ours sites. We find that narrative inquiry and interviews provide key personal and individual perspectives on the larger global question we raise concerning the reciprocal impact of the global food industrial complex on local projects. Through collaboration, openness, and conversation, interviews allow us to access important emotional and personal narratives that provide key individual level impact that is important to supplement analysis on the community, state, and international levels.
Through participatory observation, we document our own personal experiences and perspectives and a basic sense of lived reality within the communities impacted. Between narrative highlights of individuals at our sites and our participatory observation, we outline each of our sites as different examples of local and urban food projects that provide context to all of the themes identified.

Throughout the study we employ feminist, Marxist, and cultural methodologies in combination with subjectivist epistemology and a materialist-realistic ontology within a critical and feminist-post structural interpretive paradigm. As read in Denizen's Handbook of Qualitative Research, "post structural feminist theories emphasize problems with the social text, its logic, and its inability to ever to represent the world of lived experience fully" (Denizen 2000, 21). Instead of positivist criteria, post structural feminist theory uses reflexive, multi-voiced text that highlight lived experiences of oppressed communities. Through emphasis on "dialogue, caring, accountability, and praxis," and by using essays, narration, and a critical standpoint, feminist methodology provides a framework that helps us analyze our experiences within these communities. Marxist methodologies provide the tool of economically grounded socio-cultural analyses that we utilize to contextualize our ethnographic and narrative findings within an economic system. Thirdly, cultural studies use a multi-focused lens and many parts of Marxism, feminism, and postmodern sensibility (Denizen 2000, 21), through social criticism that we use here to contextualize the cultural and racial aspects of our communities. Feminist, Marxist, and cultural studies utilize the materialist-realistic ontology that emphasizes that "the real world makes a material difference in terms of race, class, and gender" (Denizen 2000, 21), or, that the global economic food system and power balance has created race and class-based material inequalities for the
communities we highlight. Through blending the economic, cultural, and personal lenses of each of these methodologies, we can create a much more rounded representation of the problem we address. Finally, a subjectivist epistemology emphasizes the idea that "knower and respondent co-create understandings" (Denizen 2000, 21), which we feel describes the relationships we have with our sites, within which we as researcher and researched educate each other about the construct and significance of food that we all function within.

Theoretical Frameworks: Political Ecology and Community Development

To use a political ecology lens to evaluate local food projects as a form of community development, we first need to understand what political ecology and community development mean. Political ecology is an evaluative framework that combines political economy and ecology to understand how ecological conditions influence, but do not determine, the development of social structures and institutions by imposing challenges and opportunities for meeting basic needs, and how managing those resources define social dynamics of status, power, and privilege. Political ecology utilizes the Marxian concept that labor is a process in which both man and nature participate, and in which man starts, regulates, and controls the material reactions between himself and nature as modes of production that embody how the two interact. By looking at the world through a perspective of natural resource management, control over public wealth, and production, political ecology acknowledges ecosystems and human systems as equal players. Specifically, political ecology tries to understand the inequality in the distribution of power between and amongst actors, and the dynamic involvement of the natural environment in this process.
Development in its most fundamental form combines advances in science and technology, democracy, values, ethics, and social organization towards a collective humanitarian effort of producing a better world (Peet & Hartwick 1999, 1; Peet & Hartwick 2007, 1). What “producing a better world” means in this sense is utilizing public and private resources to improve living conditions of the world’s poor. Unfortunately, this pursuit can easily be manipulated by political and economic elites, and as an extremely broad mission, is also entirely subjective and relative. Because of this, development is one of the noblest projects in theory, but in its conventional forms has been manipulated by western powers and transnational corporations and institutions under neoclassical and capitalist assumptions to prioritize economic growth and profit as the answer to all prayers. Dominant international aid, assuming that growth and expansion of capital will provide all necessary means of improving standards of life universally, takes a “more of everything for everyone approach in the context of a lot more for a few” (Peet & Hartwick 1999, 1), or in other terms, economic growth directed by political and economic elites. An alternative to conventional development practices of international aid and economic growth, “community development” specifically refers to development efforts on a community level that are built for and by local communities collectively as a means of improving standards of life.

Largely, political ecology focuses on understanding and critiquing this global capitalist economy as the monopolizing force that dictates how we interact with our natural environments and the modes of production that feed consumerist culture. Acknowledging the interdependence and complex relationship between human populations and ecosystems, this perspective understands the global capitalist economy as disrespecting and degrading ecosystems and indigenous communities across the
globe, and seeks to uncover the social origins of ecosystem degradation. Political ecology attempts to illuminate the dialectics between man and nature, man and man, and the productions of material goods that emerge from these interactions.

Agriculture is one of the oldest forms of development in its traditional sense, in that it is the method that human populations have used to sustain themselves for thousands of years, both as food and as a source of income. Modern agriculture as a form of development has evolved over the course of the 20th century since the industrial revolution and introduction of neo-liberalism as one of the industries that has been entirely compromised in the name of economic growth. Aims of accruing the most capital in the least amount of time have led to increasingly homogeneous modes of development and growth. Today monoculture is the dominant form of agriculture, and food is processed in factory farms that mistreat animals, crops, and degrade the land in effort to produce food to be as cost-effective as possible.

We claim that urban agriculture is a primary mode of human contact and interaction with natural resources and production, and by doing so use a political ecological and community development context to understand how it impacts ecosystems and communities.

Literature Review

To date, recent literature on the current food system has focused on exposing the indecencies and inequalities of the industrial food economy. Authors Michael Pollan, Vandana Shiva, and Wendell Berry describe how the rise of factory farming, monoculture, and big business have completely redefined Americans’ relationships to food, as the emergence of supermarkets and expanding global trade have put increasing distance
between consumer and food source. Leading authors describe a cycle in which agribusiness has manipulated government through language and profit incentives to turn a blind eye to the monopolizing and exploiting of the industry, while simultaneously manipulating the American public through several kinds of stealth marketing, diverting people from realizing how far our relationship with food has deteriorated.

Wendell Berry claims that our society and economy do not encourage or respect the best ways of food production, but instead encourage and reproduce ignorance that is endemic to our society and economy (Berry 2006, 17). The growth of this industry has worked explicitly to disconnect individuals and communities from the food they eat, so that big business can exploit public natural resources and ecosystems and sell us the cheapest possible food to generate the highest profit. In this sense, the catastrophic growth of this industry has created an enormous rift between Americans and the food we eat, a rift that serves to inform and reproduce the system that created it. Berry says that we have learned to take it for granted (Berry 2006) and he outlines the detriments of industrial agriculture: how such practices are destructive of farmland, farm communities, and farmers, wasting soil, energy, and life through their dependence on cheap fossil fuels and consumer ignorance, all of which combining to create erosion, pollution, and financial and nutritional despair (Berry 2006). To add, Pollan sums up the missing connection to the food we eat when he claims that “what is most troubling, and sad, about industrial eating is how thoroughly it obscures all these relationships and connections. To go from the chicken to the Chicken McNugget is to leave this world in a journey of forgetting that could hardly be more costly.... But forgetting, or not knowing in the first place, is what the industrial food chain is all about, the principal reason it is so
opaque, for if we could see what lies on the far side of the increasingly high walls of our industrial agriculture, we would surely change the way we eat” (Pollan 2006).

A worldwide urban agriculture movement has emerged from increasing numbers of local community food projects. As a response to the large-scale food industry, these projects and local action are providing a source of hope in urban deserts. Authors Madhu Suri Prakhash, Bethany Turner, and Luc J.A. Mougeot describe local urban projects as sites of localized community development, where communities form around issues of health and nutrition, and inexpensive organic food. On urban farming, Prakhash claims, "there is no scarcity of precedents and lessons from the past to address the current predicaments wisely" (Prakhash 2010, 86). The urban farming movement utilizes lessons from traditional agricultural practices to reform a broken modern food system.

Part and partial to the urban agriculture movement is a growing emphasis on localization. According to Vandana Shiva, a 'local food, global solution' policy would aim to keep production much closer to the point of consumption, which would help protect small farmers and rebuild local economies around the world (Hines, Lucas, & Shiva 2007).

The issue of proximity to food source is not the only factor keeping us from understanding our food, but also the entire discourse and system through which we have been taught how to experience food. Bethany Turner describes how besides the lacking economic understanding of our food and our role as food consumers, we are lacking physical and socio-cultural understandings of food. She describes how these local food initiatives “take seriously the role of bodies in our lived experiences” and promote physical, socio-cultural, ecological and economic sustainability (Turner 2011). According to Turner, urban realities have commodified food and alienated westerners from food
production. Additionally, DeLind critiques the oversimplified glorification of the local food movement, and claims that they narrow “their focus to the rational and the economic, local movement activists tend to overlook the role of the sensual, the emotional, the expressive for maintaining layered sets of embodied relationships to food and place” (Turner 2011). In sum, there is an abundance of literature on the emergence of community gardens and urban farming projects as a response to the inadequacies of the industrial food system, but across the board literature agrees that there is still need for a more dynamic and defined collective relationship to our food.

To build on this collection of literature, through our qualitative research we intend to address the emergence of a new connection to food, a hybrid of traditional agrarian practices utilized in modern world and urban environments. What the existing body of literature has done successfully is to depict the system, within which this crisis has developed, and the large response to it through urban farming projects, and the need for a revolution in food consciousness. Still to be defined is how we are reconnecting to food in the modern world, how this revolution in food consciousness is manifesting, and how this connection will create the change that is needed.

Our analysis of data gathered from Amy’s Farm, San Antonio, and Linda Vista will provide a unique perspective into the growing food justice movement by looking at the emergence of a local and urban food movement in a ‘food desert’ classified region, an area where there is very little access to supermarkets and fresh produce, high access to chain restaurants and fast food, and little existing activism or social change movements. These urban food projects within the Inland Empire create a unique and dynamic perspective from which to examine the food justice movement.
As Michael Pollan wisely reminds us, “we can change the way we make and get our food so that it becomes food again—something that feeds our bodies and our souls. Imagine it: Every meal would connect us to the joy of living and the wonder of nature” (Pollan 2006). Through examining individual experience with food through narrative inquiry, we hope to illuminate how some communities are starting to make that change and build a level of food consciousness that both appreciates the earth for giving us food to eat, and appreciates each other for growing together.

Findings: Individual, Community, and Local Impact of Urban Agriculture

Through experiencing and working in and with communities engaging with local urban farming projects over the course of three months, has become evident how these modes of food production and community life benefit all involved in interrelated and dynamic ways. In sifting through the many themes that emerged from our findings, several areas of influence stood out as the most important changes in these communities.

Economic Justice

Food production is intricately tied to economic processes, both as a determinant and a remedy. As stated above, it is one of the oldest forms of development in terms of simple sustenance and food security as well as income. American food production has been transformed by capitalist incentives to the point that traditional farmers and subsistence communities may not even recognize its product as a form of food (Kingsolver 2008). Global economic forces of capitalism and neo-liberalism have
constructed the food economy in a way through which corporations capitalize on the exploitation of natural resources so much that food has been entirely transformed.

As the organic movement has taken shape, fresh and organic produce has become increasingly marketable, part of a worldwide trend of "greening" (Kingsolver 2008, Pollan 2008). Unfortunately in the United States, monoculture and factory farming are largely subsidized by government resources (Pollan 2008), so despite the enormous ecological and monetary costs of running such massive facilities and distributing products across vast distances, processed foods actually cost less than local organic food at the market (Pollan 2006). Because of these price inequalities, not only has the local organic food movement been widely stigmatized as an upper class white phenomenon, but healthy, ecologically and economically conscious foods are only accessible to families with the resources to spend extra on them (Pollan 2008). Espe told us how unequal access affects her family and community:

“Why can’t we have healthy food and be able to pay for it, you know? I’ve been shopping at Fresh & Easy, and it's organically grown, but it's more expensive. I don’t have the privilege to be buying little tiny portions for a really extreme price.”

One of the students in the San Antonio High School Food Justice Program, Rico Benito, also explained how his family usually shops at Stater Bros. or Food For Less. Once a week they get to shop at Trader Joes, which provides healthier, sometimes organic options, which is always exciting for his family. Often, the larger chain supermarkets provide mass-produced, processed foods, which are more affordable to lower income communities. Despite these two individual

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2 Espe Lopez, interview by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
3 Rico Benito, interview by Keiko Budech, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
experiences, still the stores that they considered better or special were large corporations that are just as involved in the industrial food system. Healthy and environmental benefits of organic and local food are compromised for unreasonably low prices.

Food production is subject to demand and supply chains as much as any other industry. As white upper class families left the cities for the suburbs following de-industrialization (Eisenhauer 2001), so did the market in healthy higher quality foods. Because of the extinction of marketplaces in urban American cities and the exodus of supermarkets from inner city neighborhoods, there is almost no access to fresh food in poor and minority neighborhoods (Eisenhauer 2001). Food businesses prefer to market more to people who have money, rather than those who have little (Kingsolver 2008, 19). Not only are healthy, nutritious foods not affordable to low income communities, they are also entirely inaccessible to inner city families who don't have the resources to travel long distances to a sufficient grocer. This disparity is in no way caused by a lack of food, as mainstream development perspectives may argue; “in fact, all of the world’s farms currently produce enough food to make every person on the globe fat” (Kingsolver 2008, 18). We are producing more food than ever, but simultaneously global hunger and extreme poverty is increasing worldwide. It is not a problem of quantity that we face in access, but purely distribution. Because of the rampant distribution inequality, American portion sizes have ballooned while families starve on the street and across the developing world.

Small community farming projects impact these realities by creating sites of local organic food production spread out through cities and regions that generate significantly higher access to fresh and healthy food for many more communities. Espe started
working at Linda Vista’s garden because it is such close proximity to her home, and told us “this area is supposed to be the 'troubled' area, so [the garden] can probably help as a place to fix any problems.”⁴ Here, Espe identifies the ways that small community farming projects can draw in many more communities and address local problems simply by being small enough to tune themselves to the needs of local community. Similarly, Dorothy Little and Elena Tanner told us about the influence of non-contiguous sites of food production throughout a city, explaining how these small production sites can have much wider influence than one large central farm that still only draws a consumer base within a certain radius.⁵

Families growing their own food save a lot of money just by avoiding the expense of buying produce at the store.⁶ After growing vegetables at Linda Vista, Dolores saw that she had much more room in her family's budget; suddenly there was an abundance of organic vegetables for her family, which she never had before.⁷ This was what initially sparked her interest in the project, and she explained how much impact she thinks this could have on her community:

“Right now it’s difficult to find a job [and] what’s better than growing your own fruit and vegetables to not have to worry about what you’re going to feed your children tomorrow? ...The situation every day is more critical, so why not let the community know that they can grow their own food and eat for free.”⁸

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⁴ Esperanza Lopez, interview by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011
⁵ Dorothy Little and Elena Tanner, interview by Keiko Budech and Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
⁶ Esperanza Lopez, interview by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011
⁷ Dolores Vega, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011
⁸ Dolores Vega, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011
Not only does it help food costs for family farmers, but also sometimes community farms can even generate profit. It takes a very small plot of land to produce enough food to feed a family, and often families and individuals involved in urban farming produce much more food than they need.9

Economic class unfortunately can determine food consciousness as well as basic access to healthy food. Our eating habits for the most part define what we understand of the food we eat and the system that it comes from, so without access to fresh local food, many communities aren't necessarily informed of the difference between processed and organic foods, or fast food and local eateries. Abby Henderson, one of the Pitzer students who now directs the SAHS Food Justice Program, explained how: "for some [of the students], it's the first time they have ever heard the word organic, and other ones are interested in understanding the science of GMO's."10 Privileged individuals don't only have access to better foods and more options, but a greater sense of understanding and awareness to inform those choices. Libby told of her understanding of food as an indicator of privilege:

"My relationship with food also is a marker of the privileged life I lead. I am someone with several food sensitivities, so my cautiousness and pickiness around which foods I eat are something that remind me every day how lucky I am to be able to even know these special needs my body has and try to address them."11

Libby's awareness and gratitude for the fresh fruits and vegetables she had growing up changed acutely after she started working with several urban food production

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9 Dorothy Little, interviewed by Keiko Budech and Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
10 Abby Henderson, interviewed by Keiko Budech, Claremont, CA, November, 2011.
11 Libby Reiter, personal communication, November 2011.
organizations and saw how "hard some people have to work to give that to others." Both she and Dolores discuss how important it is for communities to work with the land to develop an understanding of food processes, but many do not have the luxury of time to devote because of other responsibilities of working to support their families.

Both Dolores and Libby felt that community agriculture projects help this reality by providing a space where families can grow their own produce but not devote all of their time to it, participate in a larger community garden, and by "promote consciousness around food while still acknowledging the different life scenarios within a community." Community farms and gardens remove that factor of privilege from the equation of access to food; healthy food is a universal right, and these projects make food production equally accessible to all.

Health Equity

Physical health is commonly associated with food and eating habits. In its most fundamental function, food provides us with life: sustenance, nutrients, and energy to survive. Unfortunately, today typical “food” found in supermarkets and restaurants cannot be equated with good health: "The multiple maladies caused by bad eating are taking a dire toll on our health - most tragically for our kids, who are predicted to be this country's first generation to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents" (Kingsolver 2008, 18). As American society has become over-saturated with consumerist values of “more more more,” the role of food as sustenance has been compromised by mass-produced gluttony.

12 Libby Reiter, personal communication, November 2011.
13 Dolores Vega, interview by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
14 Libby Reiter, personal communication, November 2011.
This reality of mass-compromised health is not only attributable to the growing trend of eating more, but to our food itself. Due to the rise of global capitalism and the ever-increasing priority of profit and efficiency, dominant forms of food production have been homogenized and compromised in efforts to save costs and time. The vast majority of food production: fruit, vegetable, and grain farming, dairy, and meat production, are all controlled by a small handful of American corporations.

Seventy percent of our mid-western farmland has shifted to single-crop corn or soybean farms, each one of them now the size of Manhattan (Kingsolver 2008, 14). Not only do these farms mass produce one crop, but “owing to synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, generic modification, and a conversion of farming from a naturally based to a highly mechanized production system, U.S. farmers now produce 3,900 calories per U.S. citizen, per day” (Kingsolver 2008, 14). For this, we can thank Late Capitalism or Monopoly Capitalism: commodity farmers need to produce maximum yields to get by, so they do.

Because these facilities are so large and few, typically food is produced extremely far away from its destination (Pollan 2008). To make this possible, fruits, vegetables, and meats are fixed with chemicals and preservatives to ensure that they last beyond the long journey from production site to the shelf with enough time to be bought and consumed (Pollan 2008). If traditional farmers of early America were to walk into a supermarket or factory farm today, they wouldn’t recognize what was going on as anything close to food production.

The industrial food system has created vast health inequity by making processed foods more accessible than healthy, and systematically muting popular consciousness of what ‘healthy food’ means. Some of the cheapest food available is that from fast food
restaurants, where many working class families eat because that is what they can afford. To make the most profit in the least time, fast food is processed and loaded with preservatives, leaving little to no nutritional value. Of the 38 processed ingredients in a single chicken nugget, 18 of those ingredients come from corn and the rest of the additives you probably cannot pronounce (Michael Pollan 2006). It is hard to consider industrially produced food nutritious when it is made up more of ingredients we have never heard of. Because of the financial inaccessibility of organic and fresh food, lower class communities are structurally set at a disadvantage and are far more likely to experience the side effects of over-consumption of processed chemical foods, commonly in the form of obesity, illness or heart disease. Big Agribusiness has figured out how to use that surplus of calories by convincing Americans to eat all of those extra calories when initially no one wanted to eat more than 700 calories per day (Kingsolver 2008, 14). American portion sizes have increased exponentially over the last century, part of an obesity epidemic throughout the population that is threatening individuals with high blood pressure and heart disease (Pollan 2006).

Health should not be determined by income. Access to real healthy food is a human right, and every person should be able to eat food that clearly was once a plant or animal, not something that might have some of the same ingredients as your toothbrush. Urban agriculture combats this injustice by producing healthy and chemically free food that is accessible to any community that seeks it out.

Conventional agriculture treats crops and animals as objects to be manipulated, rather than equals in a natural environment in which we are just as much a part of the ecosystem as they. Kingsolver exposes the indecencies of government subsidies in perpetuating the manipulation of food rather than protecting those who make it: "The
government rewrote the rules on commodity subsidies so these funds did not safeguard farmers, but instead guaranteed a supply of cheap corn and soybeans* (Kingsolver 2008, 13). Commonly factory farms will feed their livestock with whatever is the most cost-effective, which often means some form of excess corn due to the subsidies allowing corn to be the most widely distributed and manipulated crop in the United States. Corn and soybeans have been mass-produced and transformed into thousands of different American products: "These two crops, formerly food for people and animals, became something entirely new: a standardized raw material for a new extractive industry, not so different from logging or mining" (Kingsolver 2008, 13). Industrial farms grow plants in fertilizers containing nitrogen and phosphorus that can run into our water and pollute the air. Mass amounts of pesticides and herbicides are also sprayed on crops to protect them from pest and weed problems. When pesticide and herbicide residue enters our bodies, or we are frequently exposed to pesticides in the fields and in the air, it raises the risk for certain cancers, may disrupt the body's reproductive, immune, endocrine, and nervous systems. (Horrigan et al. 2002). We consume these chemicals every time we eat food produced in this manner. We also breathe and drink these chemicals that are polluted from the farms. These unnatural forms of food cause obesity, heart disease, and diabetes in higher rates that we have ever seen before (Kingsolver 2008, Pollan 2008). This is mainly due to factory farms and the high amounts of saturated fat and large amounts of corn that is found in the meat and also found in processed foods (Horrigan et al. 2002).

Gardens are an excellent way to remove class differences because they are easy to build and maintain, and can function in any community. It doesn’t take many resources to start a garden at any school, church, or home. Linda Vista is located in a
predominately Latino neighborhood. Founder, Allen Quick, claimed “a community garden is the biggest bang for your buck in terms of building health equity for the communities. It provides you an assurance, a security, and a food security.” Due to the disconnect between people and their food, it seems challenging to start growing food, but once started, it becomes apparent how simple of a process food production can [and is meant to] be. After participating in the Food Justice after school program, Rico, a student at San Antonio High School, felt that “raising your own food is not a far off and outlandish thing now.” This sense of self-sufficiency has given people from all backgrounds access to healthier food.

At the moment, the industrial food system controls what many people eat by making the least nutritious food the most accessible. In growing our own food, we have the power to decide what goes into our bodies. Libby, a volunteer at Linda Vista, said “food justice efforts are important because access to healthy food is a right, not a privilege. No one should be denied eating the things that keep us alive and healthy.” Food in its natural form - free of pesticides and chemicals - is a universal human right, and the fact that something so fundamental as that is now jeopardized is an atrocity. As Libby said, “Denying someone food is denying them life.” Community farms start to bridge the gap between class and health, in small part lessening the physical detriments of economic stratification.

This small-scale agriculture provides two solutions towards combating these health concerns: healthy food and physical exercise. Organic farms provide nutritious food that is not loaded with pesticides and chemicals, and because of the close proximity

15 Allen Quick, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
16 Rico Benito, Interviewed by Keiko Budech, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
17 Libby Reiter, personal communication, November 2011.
18 Libby Reiter, personal communication, November 2011.
we have to the food we grow, we are aware of exactly what we put into our bodies. Corporate food businesses hide what goes into the food we eat, and without that knowledge, people continue to eat poorly. Dolores Vega, the head of the Linda Vista community garden, thinks, “The most important thing is to know that planting your own food is healthy. [We have to] remind people to be healthy. Because what are we eating?”

The food we eat affects how we function on a long term and daily basis; to ensure our own safety we must build an awareness of what we eat and where it comes from.

In a society that doesn’t require or value physical exercise, the work of maintaining a farm requires people to be outside and active. As most animals are, human societies were at one point centered on producing their own food. This lifestyle required men, women and children to hunt, gather crops, chop wood, and engage in the strenuous activities of finding, killing, and preparing meals for the group (Prakash 2010, 87). Slowly, growth of industrialized food has replaced the need for the activities once involved in staying fed. Now there are ways to get any food any time, day or night, no physical strain required; but not without cost. We have exchanged exercise and nutrients for laziness.

Manual labor involved in food production offsets the convenience of food access and the little necessity to exercise or get out of the house, which largely contributes to poor health. When asked what he would be doing if not the Food Justice Program, Rico replied, “I would go home and sit. I would hop onto the odyssey program [a computer program].”20 The San Antonio students get out at 1:50 and the food justice program is the only extracurricular after school activity. Students can work in the garden rather than going straight home or getting involved in unhealthy activities such as gangs, drugs, or

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19 Dolores Vega, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
20 Rico Benito, Interviewed by Keiko Budech, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
street crime, as many kids with too much unstructured time do. Instead of staying inside glued to the screen, farming gets individuals outside, enjoying nature, breathing fresh air, and learning about their environments.

The food we eat impacts our mental health and well-being as well as our physical health. Our food gives us energy to get through the day and maintain stamina and focus. Manuel, a student at San Antonio High School, acknowledged how the food he eats affects his performance at school: “We all eat, and whatever we eat defines how we feel and how we go about our day. You can have a cinnamon roll for breakfast, [but] that isn’t going to bring out all the potential in your brain.”

Sophie (author and intern at Linda Vista) recently took a food intolerance test from which she discovered how greatly certain foods impact her mental health. Since removing those foods from her diet, she experiences a much higher reaction to them; heightened depression, anxiety, and sickness.

Farming and gardening are therapeutic by nature. Espe described working at the garden as “a way to de-stress and be at peace with yourself.” There is little distraction on the farm and in doing these physical activities outdoors; you are focused on the land and on yourself. It is a good time to self-reflect and become detached from the problems in your life. Dorothy Little, founder of Generations and the Incredible Edible Community Garden, explained that her members “Have said it is a very serene feeling that they have at the garden...very meditative. I couldn’t have planned it. This was never even anticipated.”

Little described in a Generations meeting a community garden at a physical rehab center in Upland that is used as an activity of physical and mental therapy.

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21 Manuel Chavez, Interview by Keiko Budech, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
22 Esperanza Lopez, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
23 Dorothy Little, interviewed by Keiko Budech and Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
for the clients. The beds are designed for wheelchair access, and clients can still interact with the garden despite physical handicaps. There is also a new field of horticulture therapy that promotes plant-human relationships to induce relaxation and reduce stress, fear and anger, blood pressure, and muscle tension (Bellow et al. 2008).

Dolores Vega shows how this work can impact mental health. After her mother’s death, Dolores worked in the garden as a way to cope. She explained, “Instead of thinking about the absence of my mother and [her] illness, I was thinking about what we are going to plant here and there. And wow! What a beautiful onion! Yes, it hurt a lot, but not like [it did for] the rest of my family.”24 The responsibility of maintaining the garden distracted Dolores from her mother’s death and occupied her time, while her family had a much harder time. Working at Linda Vista also helped Dolores’s son:

“I have a son with ADHD and... it has helped [him] a lot... Right when he started therapy for ADHD was when I was just getting involved in the garden. I used the therapy and psychiatry practices along with the garden. He spent a lot of time here. He always had problems sleeping, even at 1 or 2 in the morning he couldn’t sleep, but between the psychiatry, therapy, and the garden, he would get home, take a bath, and go straight to sleep.”25

Both Dolores Vega and Dorothy Little described how working on gardens and being more aware of their health helped them transition through menopause. Dolores explained:

“Before there were attacks of menopause, and now even those are gone.
Believe me; my family has noticed it also, because before the days after my

24 Dolores Vega, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
period I was crazy and angry and now? Nothing. Everything’s totally relaxed. [Gardening] has changed my life emotionally and my family.”

Dorothy’s new lifestyle of gardening and healthy eating helped her through menopause; it “took away the insomnia and the rising blood pressure that is a problem with all the women in my family.” These physical and emotional experiences mark just how starkly the physical activities, therapeutic nature, and nutritious produce from community farming can impact our health.

Improving health conditions within a community is a value at the core of development; health conditions that are entirely determined by food produced from our natural environment. By acknowledging the significance of our ecosystems and the food they produce on our health and well-being, community farming demonstrates political ecology’s emphasis on the interdependency of that relationship and the importance of respecting it. In this sense, our health is dependent on the health of our ecosystem. Without that respect, our health deteriorates, as we are now witnessing across America. In the end we are what we eat. What we put into our bodies becomes part of us and defines how we feel. Food gives us energy and the ability to function; it affects our performance, it is a key part of living that determines our well-being and it deserves to be respected as such in production and consumption.

Environmental Benefits

One of the glaring problems with our current food system is its environmentally destructive nature, using fossil fuels, peak oil, and petroleum to produce, refrigerate, process, and transport our food (Kingsolver 2008, 4). Industrial agriculture is the

26 Dolores Vega, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
27 Dorothy Little, interviewed by Keiko Budech and Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
number one contributor to global warming and emits a third of the greenhouse gases in our atmosphere (Pollan, *Deep Green*, 2010). Conventional food production degrades the environment by polluting the air and water, destroying soil structure, and using mass amounts of energy. Industrial agriculture facilities pollute the air by releasing extreme amounts of methane gas from factory farms and other pollutants from the semi-trucks that wheel our produce across vast distances (Hazlett et al. 2008). We have become so removed from our food source that at this point “the average food item on a U.S. grocery shelf has traveled farther than most families go on their annual vacation” (Kingsolver 2008, 4). In the United States we now consume about 400 gallons of oil a year per citizen - about 17% of our nation’s energy use for agriculture, a close second to transportation oil costs (Kingsolver 2008, 4). and industrial food facilities pollute groundwater, from which we obtain most of our drinking water (Hazlett et al. 2008).

Conventional farms are now primarily single-crop monocultures, which degrade the soil and contribute to deteriorating biodiversity (Hazlett et al. 2008). These homogeneous crops are sprayed with pesticides and herbicides and grown in synthetic fertilizer made with nitrogen and phosphorus that can be dangerous to our health and to our ecosystem (Hazlett et al. 2008).

To grow food, we need healthy nutritious soil. Soil is a crucial resource, and contrary to how agrifood business acts, is not renewable. By growing the same nutrient-extracting crops every year, the soil is exhausted and eroded. Due to use of fertilizers and pesticide sprays, the sediment carries chemicals and deposits downstream into our water supply. Plants are only able to absorb 1/3 of the nitrogen in applied fertilizers, and the rest of the nitrogen turns into potent greenhouse gases and are released into the atmosphere (Hazlett et al. 2008).
Conventional food production uses a lot of energy to produce mass amounts of food. Every single calorie we eat is backed by at least a calorie of oil, often closer to ten. (Hazlett et al. 2008, Kingsolver 2008). This problematic ratio is due to the industrial methods of plowing, planting, harvesting and processing machines that depend on petroleum and fossil fuels (Kingsolver 2008). Through these modes of production and management of natural resources, we do not acknowledge our dependency on them to grow food and sustain ourselves, nor do we acknowledge their mortality. Industrial agriculture has exploited the land in order to produce mass amounts of food for mass amounts of profit. This form of agriculture does not consider how mass producing food negatively impacts the environment, and how dependent this production is on the land. If we want to still be able to grow food, we have to foster a relationship of respect with the land that understands it as a mortal, expendable organism.

Urban agriculture has helped bring back biodiversity to the land, preserve ecosystems, and in small part stop mass pollution from industrial farming. Sustainable farming techniques on a local level, though very small in size, are sustainable alternatives to industrial practices that degrade the earth. Organic farming reduces water use, uses 30% less fossil fuel energy, and preserves groundwater, unlike industrial agriculture (Hazlett 2008). Soil quality is another crucial part of organic food production. Soil should be rich in bacteria, fungus, insects, and earthworms that all exchange nutrients and interact with one another, all of which are preserved rather than depleted by organic methods of farming.

Throughout his experience in different food production facilities, John has used both sustainable and unsustainable farming methods. Before starting the organic farm on his current land, John used to be a cattle rancher and owned a CAFO (concentrated
animal feeding operation). John repeated several times how unsustainable this form of farming is:

“The more you confine the more intense it is, and the more pollution and disease build up...it’s just not sustainable. You do the best you can and you use the best practices you can, but the nature of crowding that much...it’s just not natural so you never surmount the problems. You are always fighting to function... Raising animals is natural. What is unnatural about it is the overcrowding or like in the dairy industry when you take the calf away from the mother...you know that’s not a natural system.”

As John said, industrial farming fights nature in order to keep functioning. When the cattle ranch fell into debt, John decided to pick up organic farming. Instead of producing pollutants and sick cattle, John changed his farming techniques to work with nature, not against it: “Growing food is pure cooperation with nature.” Amy’s Farm is a poly-culture farm, which means that the farm is a diverse habitat where plants and animals work together. John described this process:

“We are integrated so we have some livestock that aren’t crowded; they produce manure and we use the manure in our compost and the waste plants get cycled back and fed to the animals. It’s what people have done for a millennium.”

John’s goal is “to grow as much food as we can here in a balanced way.” Amy’s Farm is a strong example of a diversified farm where plants and animals have a symbiotic

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28 John Brown, Interview by Keiko Budech, Chino, CA, November 2011.
29 John Brown, Interview by Keiko Budech, Chino, CA, November 2011.
30 John Brown, Interview by Keiko Budech, Chino, CA, November 2011.
31 John Brown, Interview by Keiko Budech, Chino, CA, November 2011.
relationship and food is grown with little extra ecological and energy costs. He uses no pesticides or chemical fertilizers and his farm is an example of how small organic farms can run sustainably and still profit.

Allen had similar feelings about how organic farming is a fundamental method of food production that has been perfected by evolution and works with the natural environment rather than against it:

“The organic method has developed for millions of years...when you actually humble yourself to think about human beings in terms of our actual existence, how long we’ve been alive; the earth has been around for at least hundreds of millions of years. It has perfected a method of evolution as a phenomenon. It happens; things improve and adapt and get better.”

Nature knows best, and when human industrial development has tried to change and influence this natural process, healthy food production and sustainable ecological agriculture is sacrificed. Allen explained:

“It is very arrogant for a human to come along, and after only a couple thousand years, we think that we actually know what is best for the environment...to actually believe in your heart of hearts that you know what is best for the environment, and you know better than this system that has been around since the beginning of the world.”

Nature’s ecosystems, what Allen called “advanced nature technology,” have organically perfected methods of food production in a renewable and sustainable fashion. Humans have manipulated land by reaping the soils of nutrients, and polluting the air and water.

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32 Allen Quick, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
33 Allen Quick, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
It will be hard to rebuild the environment, but we need to embrace the obvious downfalls of industrial food production and redesign our modes of production based on natural processes, which are simple, easy, and sensible. We should start learning from nature, and stop exploiting it.

Industrial agriculture cannot and will not be sustained much longer. As the mortality of fossil fuels and non-renewable energy creeps closer, local urban farms are growing in number. In order to reduce the degradation of the environment that industrial farming causes, governments and investors need to support the rise of these agriculture projects and invest in nature. Urban agriculture makes it possible to produce healthy, affordable and accessible food working in harmony with natural ecosystems.

*Togetherness: Fostering Community*

Food has been a center of community life for thousands of years; eating has always brought friends and families together, and throughout history societies have been built on the foundation of food production. Food is an important aspect of social life. We eat, enjoy, and get energy from it, it makes up a major industry in the global economy and provides livelihoods to billions of individuals across the globe, it holds ancient and deep cultural significance in rituals of preparing and using food in religious contexts, and it provides one of the main sources of social connection and understanding.

“Community” is an implicit aspect of these projects; they draw groups together to cultivate the land and produce food together through means that reference communal agricultural practices that have held societies together for thousands of years, translated into modern contexts. Urban farming endeavors can only be cultivated by community, for community; whether that is the intended purpose or simply a byproduct of the project.
As a necessity for survival, and what many call ‘one of life’s great pleasures,’ food is and has been a center of community life for thousands of years.

Hunter-gatherer societies have functioned on a community model of collective food gathering, hunting, preparing, and eating throughout all of human history (Prakash 2010, 87). This model of collective sustenance and cultivation, though not directly identifiable in today’s industrialized landscape, is still very much alive and present, though it manifests in community gardens in new and exciting ways.

The construction of these communities is clear at all of our sites. Amy’s Farm hosts a CSA and gives educational tours that provide families and groups in the area access to fresh produce and knowledge of organic farming, but especially as the only organic farm in the region it acts as an important point of connection between local interest groups. John claimed that the farm’s community is made up of “all of our customers and CSA members but [also] the professors that I’ve gotten to know. It’s a growing list of students who come here to work who are talking about Amy’s Farm. We’ve just been a series of connections.”34 John described how his network of farmers works together: “we have a vision of a co-op of farmers so that we are working together...even pooling our stuff for marketing purposes so we might have 5 or 10 different growers in the co-op all working together.”35

Linda Vista has manifested community through family plots, community service, and building the organization. The garden provides an urban space for families who might not otherwise have space to farm. Fresh Start uses state-required community service to educate individuals about organic community farming, and the garden has

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34 John Brown, Interview by Keiko Budech, Chino, CA, November 2011.
35 John Brown, Interview by Keiko Budech, Chino, CA, November 2011.
brought together a diverse group of individuals who work together to try to develop the garden as an organization.

San Antonio High School Food Justice Program has brought together a group of 30 students who connect over the desire to learn about food processes in a school where there are very few extracurricular activities. Abby described the community that has generated and "how the kids have come to the program for many different reasons. It was pretty evident that they are not all from the same social circle... They have really created their own group of garden kids"\(^{36}\), simply by drawing students from different backgrounds together over the universal factor of food.

Generations is a community of representatives of myriad different food justice projects within the Inland Empire; a support network for urban farming and food consciousness.

Simply the act of maintaining these organizations requires individuals to work together, both manually and organizationally in overcoming structural obstacles and producing food. Despite its many benefits, community based farming is not just a walk in the park, and comes with many challenges. Land management, community outreach, and organizational hierarchies are only a few of the dynamics that determine how a garden will develop. Upon moving to Upland, Dorothy Little set out to start a community garden to build a network of people with similar interests to herself in this new neighborhood, but before the Incredible Edible Community Garden came into being she hit many road bumps with landowners in the Inland Empire: "I let go of [the first site that I had been hoping to build]... it wasn't serving the purposes of what a community garden should be,"\(^{37}\) she was focusing all of her energy on this land battle rather than creating a

\(^{36}\) Abby Henderson, Interview by Keiko Budech, Claremont, CA, November 2011.

\(^{37}\) Dorothy Little, interviewed by Sophie Weiss and Keiko Budech, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
community space for farming. Despite the site falling through, this battle for land is what brought her to meet Elena Tanner when they read about her in the paper and reached out to her to offer help.\textsuperscript{38}

Comparatively, Allen faced significant obstacles when starting the community garden at Linda Vista Elementary School. He explained, "The project started really slowly, because it was really just me, and me just trying to do advertising... I was trying to run before I could walk, and get people interested in a project that wasn’t even there. I was trying to get people to help me build a garden that was just theoretical at this point."\textsuperscript{39}

This struggle exemplifies how challenging these agriculture projects are to manage and cultivate within a food-blind community.

Linda Vista exemplifies how obstacles can strengthen community. Over the past few months, the garden’s relationship with Fresh Start and OMSD has taken many turns. Mostly there has been a huge problem of miscommunication between the three organizations, as well as within Linda Vista’s core staff group. As the communication and relationship between the garden and Fresh Start (Dolores Vega and George Hernandez) was addressed, the garden expanded at exponential rates as a massive compost project grew in the tons over the course of a few weeks. As the garden has developed, OMSD has repeatedly drawn stricter limitations and expected the garden to adapt to meet these expectations; namely giving Linda Vista and Fresh Start five days to remove the compost and clean the back lot or face a fine of $10,000, restricting bathroom access, and requesting that the garden only open after 3:30pm. Most intimately invested in the site, Dolores has felt defeated and jerked around by these changing expectations, but has

\textsuperscript{38} Dorothy Little and Elena Tanner, interviewed by Sophie Weiss and Keiko Budech, Ontario, CA, November 2011.

\textsuperscript{39} Allen Quick, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
maintained incredible resilience: “Wherever we go, well, there are rules. And if here we were breaking them, maybe because no one told us ‘there’s a limit,’ but there’s a limit for everything.” The Linda Vista group has dealt with lack of communication and juggled different fragile relationships. Facing these barriers requires a group to set all aside and work together towards one objective, no matter what the context. Simply working together and facing challenges has a big hand in manifesting communities of individuals dedicated and motivated by the same factors.

Through working together and overcoming challenges, local farming projects build community simply by existing, but they also build community by providing a safe, fun, interactive and beautiful space for social interaction and education. Community farms and gardens become sites where communities based on culture, age, religion, or neighborhood all form for the same reason of learning about and eating healthy food. Part of why John made the shift from a CAFO to organic farming was his reaction to hearing about a little boy that was shot. The story motivated him to want to change the world, and a community has been built because of it:

“Since the little boy was shot, which was what launched me into all of this... Amy’s Farm is now connected to what has arisen out of that. It’s a long list of people that I’ve come to know and that the farm is closely interconnected with... around this effort of growing food.”

These networks and food-based communities become support systems that empower individuals to grow. Espe described how she hopes that Linda Vista will have that effect by becoming a social space where families can get together, teenagers can do homework

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40 Dolores Vega, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
41 John Brown, Interview by Keiko Budech, Chino, CA, November 2011.
and hang out, and kids can play and exercise. All of our studied agriculture projects provide that space for their communities; they are sites of social interaction and simultaneously networks of individuals brought together by common interests.

By constantly interacting with food, it builds a context through which we understand the world. Vida explained beautifully how fundamental food is to our identity by contextualizing our experiences:

“Food is everything. We eat it three times a day, we need it to live, just so many connections to it in so many aspects, whether its economically or culturally or rituals we do, things we remember, smells, tastes, etc., it builds such a huge context for all of the other experiences we have. Whether you have a lot of food or whether you don’t, whether you have good tasting food or bad tasting food or something in the middle, remembering recipes, remembering experiences over food, or about food, getting food, buying food, cooking food, eating food, talking about food. It’s really rich and vast, part of that is because it is a necessity, and something that we have to engage in all the time.”

Americans typically do not associate eating with plant life, ecosystems, or any kind of tangible relationship between people and the earth. This ignorance demonstrates both how significant eating and preparing food is as purely social, but also how deep the rift is between consumer and source.

Food has always been a center of social life; it has had cultural, ritual, familial significance for thousands of years, and many find profound joy in cooking and eating.

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42 Esperanza Lopez, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
together. Vida, Libby, and Espe all explained how they enjoy cooking and baking as social recreation and a source of happiness. Both San Antonio and Generations are food production communities that cook and eat together as well as work. In San Antonio’s Food Justice Program the students grow vegetables but then get to cook and eat the food that they have grown together**, and every Generations meeting is a potluck, where members get to enjoy the food that each other has grown and made while discussing each other’s projects.

Food often plays an important role in family life. In some societies dinner is time set aside to relax, eat, and catch up with loved ones. Through this daily experience, eating habits develop a level of intimacy. Allen told us how “having a good family” is what food has become for him; “we had dinner together pretty much every night. It was important, it wasn’t something we spoke about or something I understood, I just knew it had to happen.”** John’s wife has been cooking dinner for them for years, and despite all of the new vegetables that they have been trying since starting to produce food at the farm, she still knows a list of all of the vegetables he just will never eat.** American social customs regard meals as significant and special family traditions. Dorothy told us how even though she is vegetarian for political and ecological reasons she will still cook a turkey for her family on Thanksgiving.

Motherhood and food often go hand in hand. Several of the individuals from our sites discussed how powerful of an impact their mothers or being a mother has had on their connection to food. Allen’s mother died a few years ago, and in looking through her old gardening books from the ’70s and noticing how many fruit trees he had around his

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44 Manuel Chavez, Interview by Keiko Budech, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
45 Allen Quick, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
46 John Brown, Interview by Keiko Budech, Chino, CA, November 2011.
47 Dorothy Little, interviewed by Keiko Budech and Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
house, he realized that he had never noticed that growing food was important to her. He explained how “she was informed, which makes [him] want to be informed.”\textsuperscript{48} Allen attributed his personal empowerment to the loss of his mother; that her interest in growing food made him want to learn.

Vida’s mother did more than just make him dinner and play the role of food provider. He told of how he learned everything about food from his mom, and her emphasis on food culture taught him to see food as more than just a meal or a form of profit, but rather a way of life. Vida’s mother focused on how feminism and food intersect to build a culture, in a way exemplifying her own idea by introducing Vida into a life of understanding food and all of its complexities.\textsuperscript{49} Abby also learned about growing food from her mom, who kept a garden her entire life and raised Abby with the idea of what it means to eat healthy food and where that comes from.\textsuperscript{50}

Motherhood is commonly associated with food and cooking in traditional American social dynamics. Even though the stereotype of the stay-at-home mom who cooks and cleans for the family is long gone, many of us still remember our mothers packing our lunches and cooking us meals. Becoming mothers and grandmothers greatly influenced how Dorothy, Elena, and Dolores experience food and production. For different reasons, they all care about the future of food because of their children and grandchildren. Dolores feels responsibility to her kids as a mother, taking care of them, keeping them healthy, and feeding her family. Her goal is to change their eating habits, and over the past 8 months she hasn’t been able to combat the fatty and greasy foods that they are fed in school. Her responsibility is to take care of her children, and their

\textsuperscript{48} Allen Quick, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
\textsuperscript{49} Vida Levi, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
\textsuperscript{50} Abby Henderson, Interview by Keiko Budech, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
health: “to eat healthier is to be healthier, right now there are a lot of obese kids and I include my own.” In Espe’s family, food has always been the center of everything, and in the middle of it all is her mother cooking, always bringing the family together.

Cooking and eating food is an important part of many cultures. Espe’s family is Mexican, and she associates that heritage with her family’s food culture. She told says that their whole life is based off of food, the kitchen is the center of their house, and everyone is always there.

Linda Vista and Elena’s SIPA garden in Los Angeles are both urban farms that double as cultural community space. Elena helped to build a garden in Los Angeles that was specifically for a Filipino community, and became a social nexus of cultural life. Quickly, grandparents began showing up regularly with their grandchildren, the community would host weekly BBQs with music and socializing, and the kids worked with the elders to paint a mural of Filipino history. Parents were so excited that the children wanted to know about their cultural identity and heritage, and it provided a venue in which the community could come together and celebrate traditions that might not have been possible elsewhere.

Food production at Linda Vista is meaningful to Espe because of the nostalgia for her grandfather’s small town lifestyle in Mexico. The garden reminds her of how he would leave in the morning to walk with his donkey to the mountains, where he had land, and would bring back food for his wife, himself, and their twelve children. Urban farming gives immigrants a small taste of home by providing an opportunity to practice small

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51 Dolores Vega, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
52 Esperanza Lopez, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
54 Elena Tanner, interviewed by Keiko Budech and Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
scale food production like many once lived on in their home countries.\textsuperscript{55} For Libby, food is how she connects to her culture: “food reminds me about my two heritages, Mexican and Jewish.”\textsuperscript{56} By connecting individuals to their families and cultures, food production, preparation, and consumption build a beautiful context of identity.

Amazing relationships and connections have developed from communities eating together and working together in urban agriculture. Whether bringing family, culture, community, or friends together in eating, cooking, or farming, food is an experience that we all share. Dorothy told us about some of the relationships that have grown from working together at her community garden:

“We have had two women that were a part of the initial founders of the garden who become very good friends. Within a year the younger woman developed a brain tumor, and the older women who happened to have a nursing background and worked in hospice actually shepherded her through the process towards the very end. She eventually died last year; and they made a marvelous friendship.”\textsuperscript{57}

Similarly, at San Antonio, the food justice program brought together 30 students who before had nothing in common, but have become a tight-knit community where students can support each other as friends:

“I was here two years before for my freshmen year, and it was a much different school. ... We didn’t have any extracurricular programs. This was literally just a place you would go either to graduate or to get back to a normal high school. But now I feel like the gardening program is tying things together.

\textsuperscript{55} Esperanza Lopez, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
\textsuperscript{56} Libby Reiter, personal communication, November 2011.
\textsuperscript{57} Dorothy Little, interviewed by Keiko Budech and Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
We have the gardening program, and all of a sudden we are getting attention from all around Claremont, the agricultural and organic sustainable community looking at us. We have the gardening club, and then suddenly we have the guitar club. It’s the same people and we’ve become tightly knit.” 58

In leading the program, Abby witnessed the same growth of community:

“The first thing that really comes to mind and it might be because of my own personal connection, are the relationships built through the program. I think watching the kids’ attitude change and level of involvement or interest in the garden. I have definitely seen some really huge transformations in how the kids are and their relation to the garden and to each other because of the class. I think that is the most successful thing, the community that is built. And the garden is really a vehicle for that kind of change and growth and that has felt really tangible and exciting.” 59

Personal connections that come from working and eating together characterize the closeness of the local organic food movement. These projects remind us that food is a form of life. It sustains us; it brings us together. In these ways it gives us the physical and emotional energy to exist. Food embodies the beauty and complexity of life in one dynamic and versatile subject.

58 Rico Benito, Interviewed by Keiko Budech, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
59 Abby Henderson, Interview by Keiko Budech, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
One of the most profound influences of community farming is the personal growth that individuals experience in learning how to grow their own food and work within a community focused on reciprocal relationships of respect with the earth.

Only a few generations back, the process of growing food was common knowledge. Unfortunately in the current food climate, the vast majority of individuals don’t have any of the basic knowledge or skill involved in farming (Kingsolver 2008). This new development comes from a drastic reconfiguration of U.S. farming, beginning just after World War II that has led to the transformation of America from a rural to an urban nation in just two generations (Kingsolver 2008, 8). Under the new American urbanization, most students have no inkling that “North American school children begin their school year around Labor Day and finish at the beginning of June with no idea that this arrangement was devised to free up children's labor for the farm” (Kingsolver 2008, 8). Before the United States transitioned from an agrarian to an industrial society, Americans knew how to grow food for their families because that was required to survive: "most people of my grandparent's generation had an intuitive sense of agricultural basics... most importantly what animals and vegetables thrive in one's immediate region and how to live well on those, with little else" (Kingsolver 2008, 9). Now there is absolutely no need for any sort of knowledge of growing plants and vegetables to get by with enough to eat: "What we don’t know about farming could keep farmers laughing until the cows come home. Except that they are barely making a living, while the rest of us play make-believe about the important part being the grocery store" (Kingsolver 2008, 12). Because this knowledge of working the earth is rare and unnecessary to most, we have widely lost that relationship with our land and food that once existed.
Without an understanding of the biological processes that create the life that sustains and feeds us, Americans have no relationship of respect with our ecosystems or the material that we ingest in our bodies, and are entirely dependent on others for survival: "Knowing how food is grown is to know how and when to look for them; such expertise is useful for certain kinds of people, namely the ones who eat, no matter where they live or grocery shop. Rico mentioned that he had never grown anything before the SAHS Food Justice program beside some strawberries that were destroyed by aphids.\textsuperscript{60} Rather than analyzing that interaction as an interesting form of life, it was discouraging and didn’t inspire him to grow more food.

Simply by participating in gardening we acquire the basis of technical skills and knowledge required in growing food. Many assume that starting a farm or garden is extremely complex and dismiss it as impossibility before ever trying to learn more about it, but in reality it is a simple process. Rico explained how “...raising your own food is not a far off and outlandish thing now," before it might have seemed like a big job, but now people are starting to realize how easy it farming is and that they have the power to grow their own food and know where it comes from. All that is needed is soil, seed, water, sun, and time to maintain the beds and plants; biology does the rest.

In the Food Justice Program, Pitzer students teach San Antonio students about the injustices of the food system, how to maintain a garden, and how to cook with the plants that they grow. Projects like this help students build a relationship with their food and environment and understand these processes by witnessing them first hand. Not only school programs, but all urban farms allow individuals of all ages to learn how to grow food for themselves simply by giving them the skills of planting, watering, building

\textsuperscript{60} Rico Benito, Interviewed by Keiko Budech, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
beds, and harvesting food. Rico said that that was what he cherishes most about the program: all the knowledge that he can leave with. Abby has seen tangible results from the program; a student, Max, won a summer internship at an urban farm that was covered in class, and several of the students built gardens at home, started cooking, and bringing these themes into their lives in such a way that demonstrates the excitement, involvement and investment of the students in their food choices.

Farming and gardening are extremely dynamic venues for education and learning about community work and different levels of plant and animal life interactions. This type of education is effective and powerful compared to the standard classroom-style learning: “urban agriculture is a brilliant answer to the difficulties in these times of crisis. One of its most relevant elements is its impact in education: it allows people to reimagine it” (Prakash 2010, 88). Additionally, Broadway demonstrates how these gardens provide “classes for local residents in urban farming, how to recycle food waste using a worm bin, and how to safely deal with garden insect problems” (Broadway 2010, 34), practical skills that couldn’t be learned any other way. Experiential education is an especially profound way of learning simply by living, as the San Antonio students demonstrate:

"It is definitely a break from the standard classroom setting, and yet there is still all this learning happening. It just makes it real for them and it connects them to themselves and their friends and their school and where food comes from. I think it is a way to unite a lot of things...there is a lot of education that goes on in the garden like, 'hey what's this plant doing? What's going on? Why are those leaves yellow? Why does a plant make seeds?' So we do talk a lot in the classroom and I like to ask them to think
about things that are going on in the garden and try to be good observers.

They learn through what they are doing.”

In this sense, students are not the only ones learning, but anyone who becomes involved with community farming projects. Dolores was impacted significantly by her time at the garden, as her first real interaction with growing food. She had never made salsa or anything from an organic tomato, and after she started using the tomatoes and chiles from the garden, even her husband noticed that the salsa tasted different. The taste alone was what taught Dolores and her husband, Jorge, the evident difference between organic and conventional produce.

Additionally, Espe spoke about how she never knew about botany, composting, or micro bacteria. Espe and Dolores are not the only individuals from their community who have learned from the garden; now children have come to the garden and learned just from seeing it happen.

There are many ways in which experiential education is making huge differences in individual lives. Vida has designed and led several youth trips, one toured different farming projects around New York City, and two to New Orleans to work with Our School at Blair Grocery, a non-traditional school-based farm. He mentioned one organization, the Cloud Institute of Sustainability Education, that takes the conventional concept of school and tries to teach students the skills to be prepared to help create a more healthy and sustainable world. Food production is one realm that exemplifies the necessity of experience in absorbing knowledge: Vida explains,

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61 Abby Henderson, Interview by Keiko Budech, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
62 Dolores Vega, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
63 Esperanza Lopez, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
64 Vida Levi, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
“You’re just not going to really learn how to compost unless you do it.
You’re not going to learn how to grow food unless you do it...engagement of
actually doing it I think it helps with your reflection, or it helps create a
richer conversation between what you are learning.”

Farming gives students “the opportunity to learn about themselves, about their society,
about their communities, about nature, about a different way of being—with lessons
impossible within the confines of classrooms” (Prakash 2010, 88). These new forms of
learning and experience contextualize what power we have over what we eat and our role
in the world.

Part of the education that stems from urban farming is simply the consciousness
that can develop from growing food. Much of the reason why the food system has grown
in such destructive ways is because by separating consumer from source, it
simultaneously strips us of a relationship with our food. Prakash elaborates “the fossil
fuels of industrial agriculture have forced people deeper and deeper into this ignorance;
well-hidden by being buried under words and tomes for two centuries” (Prakash 2010,
89). Broadway explains “There is a physical and emotional disconnection for most city
dwellers between the food they acquire in a supermarket or restaurant and the place
where it is produced” (Broadway 2011, 33). Without that food consciousness, it is
impossible to recognize the indecencies that are committed to our food and therefore
our health. Espe explained how her community has very little awareness or interest in the
cycles of food production: “My community doesn’t care where food comes from. They are
just like, its food, it’s in my mouth, I’m alive, I’m okay. From what I’ve seen, they just
don’t care.”

Without that basis of knowledge, there is no potential or motive for action.

Travaline and Hunold argue the importance of ecological citizenship, and claim that urban agriculture projects are providing spaces where individuals have opportunities for public participation in, and social learning about, environmental decisions” (Travaline and Hunold 2010, 581). Vida explained the deficit in action that stems from our education, and says that "one of our biggest problems right now is being able to transfer what we think in our heads into actual actions, to walk the walk instead of just talking the talk... it’s not a fundamental of the way we learn, to actually do the things that we are learning." There can be no escape from the financial, ecological, and health injustices inherent to the current food system while we remain blind to them.

By building these relationships of understanding with our food and ecosystems, local farming creates individual food awareness and consciousness. Witnessing food production inspires us to question our food in new ways. Manuel explained this from his experience with the food justice program at SAHS: "I feel really comfortable [with] what I eat [from the garden] because I know what I am growing and I see it every day." He told us that his mom gave him store-bought oranges but now he doesn’t eat them because there are orange trees around Claremont that taste so much better than the store’s. Dolores told us that food matters to her now after working to the garden, when before it was just something to feed hunger (Dolores Vega 2011).

Sophie had never fully engaged with farming before this semester, though through social circles and courses had some basic knowledge of agriculture and its historical trajectory. Upon growing vegetables at Linda Vista and watching the lettuce, celery, radish, and garlic sprouts grow and move towards the sun, it entirely changed how she experienced and thought about food. Before food was only something that tasted good,

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68 Manuel Chavez, Interview by Keiko Budech, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
that even maybe was a symbol of larger economic processes, but after planting and nourishing food, she began to consider food as life, just as much as another person. Espe explained how she started to feel like she was responsible for protecting the life of her young plants, and was proud of them for growing.\(^{69}\) Espe and Sophie’s experiences show how our relationship and connection to food changes once we become responsible for crops that will eventually be our food.

Without witnessing that growth, there is no way to fully understand how plants grow and have life just as much as animals. Once that relationship is there, it is easy to see food and earth as equally powerful and active, encompassing political ecology’s definition of the man-earth relationship on the most basic individual level. This multidimensional and engaging education is a form of community development on the ground level; learning to farm enables individuals and communities to provide for themselves and give them power to understand their role as actors. *With this broadened understanding of what "life" can be, appreciation of the beauty of our interactions with plants becomes real.*

Engaging with food production in local contexts empowers individuals through expanding awareness of these social and ecological processes that we all engage in just by eating. Dolores and her family saw for themselves the chemical impact of conventional farming when she started bringing organic produce home:

"We saw that what we took from the garden we could put it in the fridge but it didn’t last us longer than 3 days. It was organic and doesn’t have a long shelf life. From the store, [produce] has preservatives and lasts longer in the fridge. So there’s a big difference between an organically grown fruit

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\(^{69}\) Esperanza Lopez, interview by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011
and a fruit grown with chemicals. The chemical fruit lasts a long time and is big and beautiful, and the organic has a shorter lifespan before it starts to change. For example, I bought carrots and I also got carrots from the garden and after three days the garden carrots started to look sad. Who knows how long the store carrots had been there and they were still going strong, but the garden ones? No. Since these were organic they didn’t have chemicals, which are what you watch out for, because it’s our body that’s getting hurt by eating these things - These things that take months to die take months to leave our bodies. Like those carrots; after 3 days they didn’t start to die, but they started to turn gray. And the other ones looked fine."70

Dolores comes from the community that Espe told us had very little food awareness, and simply by seeing the difference between organic and conventional produce, Dolores understood how unhealthy store-bought produce could be. Growing our own food helps us to make healthier informed choices about what we put into our bodies and what economic processes and organizations we want to support. This empowerment in choice is evident at San Antonio as well. Abby told us how she felt that:

“This program makes them start to really think about [food justice] and it raises a lot of questions that they never even would’ve begun to think about before. Just to begin this kind of conversation of ‘where does your food come from? What does it mean to buy organic food or buy local food or grow things in a garden?’ [For] a lot of them it is there first contact really with any of these issues, so it is really interesting to see them deal with it

70 Dolores Vega, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
for the first time with themselves. I think it is just getting kids to start thinking about the issues and change one by one and create an alternative. People aren’t going to change until they feel like it is personally important to them, and that’s why I think it is cool that at this garden we don’t just talk about these issues, they actually play them out, and get to physically do it twice a week.”

San Antonio students have started to take ownership of those issues and feel more connected to it; developing personal accountability for their choices and life of the plants they have cultivated. It seems so small to grow a plant and eat its fruit, but in reality contextualizing our eating in terms of the ecological conditions and the earth helps us understand so many systems that we participate in and our role within them.

Simply by giving a person responsibility, urban farming helps individuals' self-esteem and sense of worth. Allen explained how "farming gives people jobs, makes people feel needed and productive, feel involved and feel important, and instills confidence through interdependence." Linda Vista's past year has been a constant cycle of overcoming obstacles, not the least of which was helping Dolores to speak up for herself and understand that she has the right to demand respect from those working with her. Dolores has mentioned how since moving to the United States, she no longer nurses and now just stays home to take care of her family, but since coming to the garden she has responsibilities and an important role that makes her feel useful and stronger than when her role was simply to stay at home.

Espe mentioned how much the garden has helped Dolores in many ways: "If it wasn't for the garden, she probably wouldn't be in the

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71 Abby Henderson, Interview by Keiko Budech, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
72 Abby Henderson, Interview by Keiko Budech, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
73 Allen Quick, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
74 Dolores Vega, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
place that she is right now. She is a really strong leader and this garden is showing that. 'They have done this and this and this and this to me, but I am still on top.'”

She alone has been an inspiration to the core staff group at the garden, simply in demonstrating her resilience, which in some ways has been enabled by the garden itself. At the start of the semester, Dolores had been caretaker of the garden by herself for several months, and not speaking English, the school board and Fresh Start continually left her out of important decisions regarding the future of the garden, treating her more as help than as a partner. Through the course of the semester, the interns and volunteers encouraged her to demand a more reciprocal relationship with the garden's parent organizations, and with the help in numbers, were able to entirely change her relationship with George Hernandez and the garden staff. Dolores now demands authority from those who work in the garden, dresses in a more confident and business-like manner, and communicates expectations both to the garden members and partners at OMSD and Fresh Start.

Dolores is not the only one that has taken on leadership roles and found power from her work in community gardening. Since learning about environmentalism and farming in high school, Vida has organized his peers and provided means of education and empowerment through experience with several organizations (Youth Coalition for Community Action, NY210, New York Trip, and Our School at Blair Grocery). He attributed his motivation to his mother's passion for food culture and creativity in pursuing what she loved:

"[She] gave me the knowledge or the belief that you can make change, make the reality you want to see if you work hard enough at it. And it

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75 Esperanza Lopez, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
doesn't have to be something that is normal or already existing, it can be something that doesn't exist yet, and you can make it happen.”76

From this lesson, Vida has become a leader within his communities and educated many of his peers about sustainability, social justice, and food production.

Cultivating life and witnessing community form around food and the earth is a beautiful and inspiring phenomenon. Dolores, Vida, Allen, Abby, Espe, Dorothy, and Elena have all expressed how they want this work to influence their communities and the worlds they live in. Espe explained how she sees "the little sprouts and thinks, 'okay, we can do this. We can do this."77 Simply giving something life has inspired her to help her community find this same power:

"By getting people involved at the garden, they will see that something's possible. It’s like, a little seed can grow really big, and I know it’s corny, but it’s the truth. You see something grow up and mature through all of these different phases, there’s wind, all this cold, and they still grow up and become these plants that are really amazing”78

After the hurdles she has been through, Dolores is still motivated to spread the awareness and benefit that she has experienced from the garden through her community, and explained that her vision is that all of Ontario will know how important and healthy it is to grow their own fruits and vegetables.79

Dorothy Little and Elena Tanner’s work is a beautiful example of how food consciousness can not only change individual lifestyles, but also motivate and empower people to spread that power in consciousness to others. Through Generations, Dorothy

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77 Esperanza Lopez, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
78 Esperanza Lopez, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
79 Dolores Vega, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
and Elena have cultivated a community of communities to support each other in the challenges and inspirations that come with local farming. Both of these women came to find organic food and farming benefits late in life, and perhaps have experienced the greatest paradigm shift of any of us, Dorothy especially having come from a career with a large pharmaceutical. Experiencing that change has motivated them both to design projects for others and teach many communities how to start these food production projects for themselves.80

At the end of this transformative journey, the ability to reflect and understand the depth of meaning that these projects and interactions have for individuals is powerful just in helping us see how we each have been changed and can change others. Gaining this perspective enables us to see just how intricately all of these processes of life are related. Allen’s personal journey to discover this work was part of a huge shift in personal philosophy during his transition from high school to college. Earlier in life he was always angry, and as he found a group of friends at Pitzer that challenged him to question his experiences, he ended up coming on Vida’s first New Orleans trip where he saw inequalities and food production in gripping ways that he never had before. Coming back to Pitzer, he sought out knowledge and his anger became informed anger, which he channeled into the project of starting the garden at Linda Vista81. Through this personal growth, Allen was empowered to change his local community in the Inland Empire and his group of friends from home. He explained how he had drifted from the people in his life who were still doing the same things they had done for years. The only power he had to change their behavior was to remove himself from their lives in an attempt to force

80 Dorothy Little and Elena Tanner, interview by Keiko Budech and Sophie Weiss, Ontario, CA, November 2011.
81 Allen Quick, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
them to question why there would be a problem with their apathy that he had once taken part in.\textsuperscript{82} He stated that “I basically shifted within my philosophy; I realized that I actually could do something, [it was that] empowerment feeling.” Allen found power when seeing how much influence food production had at Our School at Blair Grocery, how his friends were acting to change the communities they could.

Vida explained how this type of work has helped him mediate his feelings of discontent and anger with society and how urban agriculture has been his tool for change:

"Definitely because it seems right. Definitely because it was this dramatic feeling of ‘here’s my actions, here’s my thoughts, they’re not quite connected or they’re not quite on the same level and it’s this dramatic leveling out.’ Where all of a sudden they sink together, how I felt inside, and what I was doing in the world. And so it’s really hard for me to go to school and not be engaged in this stuff at the same time. It’s really hard for me to eat whatever and not compost at the same time. It creates that dissonance, so that is why I do it."\textsuperscript{83}

Growing as farmers and finding control over what we eat inspires and enables us all to make choices to help others do the same. Eating is such an intimately personal experience in which we connect with our physicality and at the same time, use of natural resources to continue the cycle of life. Through the empowerment that some find in community farming, both power to grow our own food and agency in our choices, we are motivated to bring that empowerment to others. Farming shows us how we are actors in our ecosystems. Acknowledging this relationship and understanding our existence

\textsuperscript{82} Allen Quick, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
\textsuperscript{83} Vida Levi, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
through the lens of our individual impact on ecosystems and plants’ impact on us empowers us and challenges us to bring this relationship of mutual respect to every realm of life.

Localization and the Spread of Knowledge

The power in community agriculture is that though these projects are small, food is a universal necessity and right; these projects are not race or class based phenomena. Through these simple individual and community transformations, urban agriculture projects, though small, are creating large impacts across the United States. Many Americans are starting to wake up to the system that dictates their eating, and understand on some level that “our food choices are politically charged, affecting arenas from rural culture to international oil cartels and global climate change” (Kingsolver 2008, 19). It is truly amazing that now one quarter of all U.S. households grow some of their own produce, and organic growers, farmers’ markets and small exurban food producers now comprise the fastest-growing sector of the U.S. food economy (Kingsolver 2008, 21). As local communities are finding ways to understand and renew their connection to food through farming, awareness of the natural processes of food production are exposing the inadequacies and atrocities of industrial production.

Despite the trend of “greenism” being stigmatized as an [elite] class and race based phenomenon, environmentalism and sustainability are spreading throughout all demographics. We are all in jeopardy when food is threatened. As more individuals learn of the impact of organic agriculture, consumers gain awareness of the impact of their decisions. This collective consumer awareness, though seemingly small in influence, is growing nationwide, and creating the phenomenon of green marketing. Corporations and
organizations see the appeal in sustainable and healthy products, and are adapting to meet the needs of those demands. Though still this movement functions within the same capitalist systems that have created the need for it, simply the reaction of consumer demand to product supply is increasing national awareness. As more individuals consume healthy, local food products, companies and businesses change to meet that demand to produce sustainable products. As environmentalism becomes more marketable and advertised, the cycle continues and more individuals begin to notice the trend. In this way, consumers and producers inform each other.

In response to this inequality in access, a movement of “localization” has grown from initiatives to keep capital within local economies. Just recently introduced to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2007 is the word “locavore; a person who eats what is grown or produced locally” (Broadway 2011, 33). Localization is a recent phenomenon and gaining recognition as a legitimate cause due to the detriment of globalized powers. As local food projects grow in number, they spread the investment and consumption of food product away from monopolizing corporations. Today there are approximately 1,900 more farmers’ markets than Wal-Mart’s in the world (Rodale Institute 2010), which has only developed recently in response to higher demand for a new American marketplace. These farmers’ markets build networks of community and local farming projects, while providing several contextual experiences through which we can understand food, community, and agriculture in one location. Booths of houseplants, beekeeping demonstrations, live music, and local organic food all draw people together in a new generation of modern marketplace.

Through all of these venues; advertising, politics, consumer demand, farmer’s marketplaces and communities that educate one another, word is spreading about the
importance and beauty of organic community farming. This nationwide social and economic movement of knowledge can only culminate in influencing the economic and political systems that determine how we interact with food. All of these small interactions and realizations are building up, creating a slow paradigm shift throughout the United States, away from cheap, fast, fatty food, to welcome the benefits and importance of community agriculture for our health, ecosystems, and selves. Already, huge shifts have taken place just over the last few years, as food justice has become a topic on everyone’s lips, and American citizens are learning how they can influence these national systems through simple choices.

Social situations strongly influence individual beliefs and through our social interactions we have the power to inspire, educate and motivate one another. Everyone we interviewed was inspired to participate in urban agriculture projects by their friends and colleagues. At San Antonio, both Rico and Manuel learned about the after school food justice program from their friends who spoke highly of the program. Manuel’s has been introduced to organic food and healthier eating habits after living with Rico: “It is a big change for me. Before I was used to all this junk, like soda, but now I just drink water and orange juice, and I eat a lot of vegetables and grains and fiber.” Manuel Chavez, Interview by Keiko Budech, Claremont, CA, November 2011.

In a similar manner, Vida and Allen both learned about the importance of local food projects through their peers. In high school, a friend taught Vida about environmentalism, showed him books on society and sustainability, and in doing so inspired him to learn about environmental issues and how those issues interact with all
levels of social processes. After further educating himself and participating in different groups and organizations, Vida organized New York and New Orleans trips for others his age to learn about urban agriculture through experience. These trips “created communities of peers to educate each other, learn together, and experience together.”

Conversations with just one or two friends developed into a passion that inspired Vida to take on a role as a teacher and leader to his peers. Allen was one of the people impacted by Vida’s actions. He described Vida as his ‘hero’:

“I became a lot more empowered in terms of what I thought and what I was able to do, and a lot of that was just meeting a couple people at Pitzer, like Vida...He’s a hero of mine, and he is someone my age, who got a group of people his age really fired up and organized...He got all of us down to New Orleans. I went on the first New Orleans trip, and it was really life changing.”

Through Vida, Allen was exposed to a community and experience that fueled his new interest in growing food. Through this chain of events, friends in high school showed Vida how he could use environmentalism and community farming as source of power, through which he then brought Allen and several other Pitzer students to find that same empowerment in New Orleans. From that experience, Allen was inspired to start a community garden in Ontario, which has impacted many lives, including Linda Vista interns, Espe and Sophie, who have now started their own paths in food justice work. In this manner, the growth of community agriculture and local food projects is truly a grassroots movement. From one relationship, many people have been impacted across

87 Allen Quick, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
the country, and inspired to further pursue food justice. As those experiences multiply and knowledge spreads, this is how small scale change can create a ripple effect across local to national communities.

Elena explained to us how a friend noticed her unhealthy eating habits and prepared her food that would lower her blood pressure, causing a radical change in Elena’s life, which has inspired her to create and enable these projects for others. After staying at her friend’s house for 3 weeks, Elena went straight back to McDonalds and was immediately sick afterwards. After that, Elena started learning where her food came from and eating healthy. Elena’s friend changed how Elena thought about food entirely: she empowered her to start eating healthier, helped her lose 50 lbs., and inspired Elena to learn about agriculture, which has led her to a career of building and supporting community farming projects. With Dorothy, they together formed Generations, which manifests awareness, empowerment and support for organic and local agriculture by building a diverse network of people and experience; another example of an interaction between two people that has grown to impact many lives.

These stories are evidence that we all have power to influence those we interact with. Allen explained that for him: “Empowerment had to come from my peers because those were the only people I respected enough.” As shown by Allen and others, social change begins through intimate, meaningful interactions. In “We are Everywhere,” the authors discuss how power is spread to many by influencing people near: “A movement with no leaders organizes horizontally, through networks...While the networked money markets were tearing the planet apart, our grassroots networks were bringing us together.” (Ainger et al. 2003). These networks only grow from individuals learning and

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88 Allen Quick, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
discovering the power to inspire others they interact with, reproducing cycles of social education spread power and understanding of our food system one individual at a time.

The Inland Empire is a former site of agricultural abundance, as one of the leading regions of citrus production in the country. Today it has been classified as a “food desert,” with high access to fast food and little access to grocery stores or organic food. Despite its classification as a food desert, the Inland Empire, specifically the Claremont - Ontario - Upland area, is seeing these local food production sites grow in numbers, through groups like Pitzer and Generations that educate and encourage others to engage in food production. This is one example of how individual initiatives and spread of social knowledge have expanded to impact an entire region.

The United States and Beyond

As the U.S. experiences internal transformation from communities and citizens claiming their agency and building a movement, its actions in foreign policy inevitably reflect those domestic changes and impact the rest of the world. The US is a global super power and its decisions impact billions of people across the globe, as an enormous economic force as well as a role model and leader in social phenomena (Peet and Hartwick 2007).

Globalization has enabled significant transnational social change, simply by its function of breaking down distances that have been superseded by technology and development of international institutions and politics (Norberg-Hodge, Economics of Happiness, 2010). Social change within the United States no longer can simply be restricted to a domestic level, as every community, region, and state is so intricately
connected to other communities across the globe. Allen pinned the different emotions that go into building economic interactions, and how globalization is actually the diminishing of those barriers:

“The reality of believing and engaging in an economic system [is that] it’s about self-interest, life, and existence and what people are basing their knowledge off of. It’s about self-interest, but it is also about love... to engage in an activity is a blend of both, self-interest and love.”

This idea of self-interest and love explains how we all relate and interact, and it is those same intentions that build social change. We educate each other by word of mouth and experience, and without limiting geographic barriers; global trends and social change are spreading faster than ever before, stemming from connections all over the world.

There has been a rise in organizations and activism that respond to the threats of industrial agriculture. This new consciousness about the harms of industrial agriculture is becoming more visible all around the globe. Some reactions towards the industrial agricultural system include: farm worker organizations, organic food movements, guerrilla gardening on public space, food labeling struggles, the slow food movement, the permaculture movement, seed-sharing networks, fair trade networks, school and public health advocacy, community gardening, community shared agriculture, public concern over climate change, vegetarianism, and community-level resistance to factory farms (Weis, 2010). World over, these small movements are growing, exposing the industrial food system injustices and expanding and connecting ideas for an alternative system.

La Vía Campesina is a grassroots movement confronting the injustices of industrial food production on a global scale. This movement started in 1993 in Belgium

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89 Allen Quick, interviewed by Sophie Weiss, Claremont, CA, November 2011.
after agribusiness began to globalize and small farmers were struggling to compete with the larger producers that could afford to offer lower prices. Today there is an international movement of peasant farmers (Desmarais, 2007), who built solidarity throughout the world against the oppressive industrial food system. This is a horizontal movement of farmers who want to take back their farming rights, using a range of social tools from educating farmers on sustainable growing practices to international policy activism. La Via Campesina was represented in 70 different countries across the globe (Desmarais, 2007) and gave peasant farmers all around the world power to voice their demands for an alternative food system to replace the overbearing globalized industrial food system.

This is an example of how globalization can have both positive and negative impact. On one hand, industrial agrifood has replaced many food systems across the world, completely crushing local economies and communal indigenous societies that have existed peacefully for thousands of years (Helena Norberg-Hodge, *Economics of Happiness*, 2010). Alternatively, a strong sense of unity and solidarity has developed between small farmers around the world as they help each other find power and defend food sovereignty (Helena Norberg-Hodge, *Economics of Happiness*, 2010)).

The movement for an alternative food system is spreading throughout the world, and ideas and strategies are exchanged between communities across the globe. Like the La Vía Campesina movement, the Zapatistas, another anti-capitalist movement, emerged in 1994: “[The Zapatistas] didn’t want to seize the power for themselves, but to break it into small pieces that everyone could hold” (Ainger et al. 2003). The Zapatistas “translated struggle into a language the world can feel” and “invited us all to read
ourselves into the story, not as supporters but as participants” (Ainger et al. 2003). This generated international hope and solidarity against the powers of global capitalism.

“Our voices are mingling in the fields and on the streets across the planet, where seemingly separate movements converge and the wave of global resistance becomes a tsunami causing turbulence thousands of miles away, and simultaneously creating ripples which lap at our doorstep.

Resisting together, our hope is reignited” (Ainger et al. 2003).

Through social globalization, we each have a piece of the power that is backed by millions of others across the globe in resisting the impacts of industrial agriculture and changing dominant modes of food production.

Beyond the power of social globalization, we cannot deny the impact of the United States as a global hegemonic power. Where there is change within the U.S., it impacts the rest of the world as it has extremely powerful influence in international institutions such as the UN, World Bank, and IMF, as well as its trade relations with other nations that determine so strongly the livelihoods of the populations within them (Peet and Hartwick 2009, Ainger et al. 2003).

Challenges and Improvements

Despite the benefits of community agriculture as a form of development, it is not a perfect system and comes hand in hand with challenges and downfalls. As of now, the largest challenges to these projects are working within the framework of government restrictions paired with little public interest in exercise and agriculture. In starting a community agriculture project, city and county regulations create many obstacles. Also challenging is recruiting communities to maintain the garden when so many have been
indoctrinated into a lifestyle of watching TV and eating McDonalds. When that is all one has known, it is no simple task to change those priorities overnight, especially when the desired result involves pursuing what might be considered a harder lifestyle by requiring strenuous manual work and eating vegetables that don’t have the same fats and sugars that human bodies crave.

Housing developers and land restrictions stamp out local food projects all too often. According to Broadway, “property developers may allow a community garden on a vacant lot until housing or commercial market conditions permit construction. This was the case with the Onni Community garden at Seymour and Pacific in downtown; the garden with its 60 plots lasted two years before the housing market improved and allowed the developer to begin construction in 2010” (Broadway 2010, 34). Often urban agriculture sites are located on contaminated or toxic properties, like the Davie Village Community garden in downtown Vancouver that turned out to be built on the site of a former gas station, where the soil was contaminated with gasoline (Broadway 2010, 34). In cases like this, cities and property developers may allow garden organizations to inhabit land for a certain amount of time, but that land can be taken out from under them at any time. This commonality demonstrates the need for cities and developers to support community agriculture projects. Land quarrels like these and those at Linda Vista with OMSD are some of the ways in which these projects are extremely challenging and at times unsuccessful.

A second critique is that community agriculture projects as they exist now are not economically feasible for many communities. Several urban farms have been able to meet the needs of low-income families, in fact that is quite common, but farming is time

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consuming and many can’t take time off from their work or responsibilities as parents to engage full time in food production, regardless of their desire to.

There are some ways in which the localization movement is not achieving its goals, and that it has yet to really change supply chain management in mainstream food sources such as supermarkets. According to Broadway, “in a region with a long history of promoting local agriculture [Vancouver], these efforts have not significantly affected the availability of locally produced food in supermarkets. The economics of supply chain management mean that supermarket chains prefer to deal with suppliers who guarantee a steady volume of produce that is of uniform quality and appearance. Agribusiness firms, whether supplying organic or conventionally produced food, are best suited to meeting those requirements. The likelihood of purchasing locally conventionally produced food increases at specialty grocery stores that rely upon smaller volumes and are thus less dependent upon global supply chains. There is little evidence to indicate that the emphasis on promoting local agricultural production has affected the availability of local seasonal items in mainstream retail outlets. For local producers to break into the existing supply system, supermarkets would have to change the way they currently operate and increase their number of local suppliers, which would increase their operational costs and ultimately result in higher food costs (Broadway 2010). In a North American culture that has embraced Wal-Mart’s “Save Money: Live Better” philosophy, supporting locally produced food maybe too costly a bargain” (Broadway 2010, 39). For the mainstream supply chains to change, there needs to be incentive for the corporations that dominate food production, or the corporate system needs to be altered fundamentally, either of which local agriculture has yet to provide.
If the United States’ food culture, production, and consumer patterns are changing from within, if this movement takes shape and the food economy and public policy follow suit, it will have incredibly powerful impact on economies of the global south. Many developing nations because of World Bank structural adjustment programs have been restructured to mono-crop exports, all extremely reliant and dangerously dependent on the demand from the United States among other global powers. Because of this, the localization movement has to take into account communities across the world, careful not to universalize conditions of localization in the United States, empowering locales on all levels. Even where agrarian societies are dominant, many have been restructured to primarily produce one crop for export rather than for community consumption or subsistence, which is what makes local community based agriculture relevant and important across all global contexts. No two communities are the same, which is why standard top-down, homogeneous, large-scale change may be more destructive than productive if applied to local agriculture.

For these projects to succeed, city and state governments need to acknowledge and embody priorities of community growth, and there need to be more urban farms that can provide a source of income or supplement the need to work so many hours, which for instance could happen from a restructuring of agriculture subsidies by shifting government funding away from excessive corn production to instead support local farmers who help decrease carbon output of cities, provide healthy food for consumers regardless of class or race, and create educational spaces where citizens can learn practical skills. Currently, there is very little emphasis on community development in dominant policy, instead public discussions focus on the market economy and foreign relations from a “trickle-down” perspective (Peet and Hartwick 2009). These ideas are
also important, but manifest in large umbrella policies that fail to meet local needs. There needs to be a significant change in elite thinking away from homogeneous universals towards localized, small-scale, case-specific change. Only this kind of policy can create real impact by acknowledging the complexity and diversity of the world’s populations and needs. (Aiger et al. 2003)

Changing these deep-rooted paradigms is not an easy task, nor is it easy to change those habits that characterize our modern society, built on values that consumerism and capitalism have embedded in our societal structure and collective thought. Unfortunately, eating one tomato that a man grew himself cannot automatically reverse his years of eating Kraft mac n cheese and sitting in front of a computer. Keeping these realities in mind, social activists, economists, farming communities, and policy makers alike have to understand how to make community agriculture appealing to populations that have been manipulated and transformed under the demands of capitalism.

Conclusions

Food has always been and will always be a pinnacle of human existence, and a window into social and economic interaction and development. Unfortunately, over recent decades, food production has been manipulated to meet the desires of the global capitalist economy, sacrificing ecosystems and community health to the endless pursuit of elite profit. This restructuring and ballooning of industrial food production has had detrimental effects on local communities in the United States, significantly eliminating access for marginalized communities to fresh, organic, and local food and ruining any understanding or connection to the food we eat.
Production is man’s primary form of contact and interaction with ecosystems, and how we have utilized, exploited, and manipulated natural resources over the course of history has characterized our relationship with the earth we live on.

In response to these problems, the diminishing connection to our food and relationship of respect with the earth, many local communities have started forming around growing their own food. Urban community agriculture provides a venue for individuals to reconnect with the earth and manage their own means of interacting with public wealth to sustain themselves, while simultaneously builds a deep mutual connection with their food as they raise it. In order to heal our selves and our communities, we have to start rebuilding a relationship of mutual respect with the earth that has given us life. Community farming gives us the opportunity to do just that, through which

“Individuals remain free to cultivate hope in diverse and delicious paths being walked towards the regeneration of urban agriculture. In addition to nourishing skilled urban locavores, such paths promise regenerating happy habits of the mind and heart necessary for spontaneous, voluntary de-urbanization, in a decentralized, democratic society—important options for the re-greening of the beloved, battered, desertifying, abused earth” (Prakash 2010, 86).

These sites are classrooms that welcome all kinds of energy to interact and inform one another, human and earth, in demonstrating the interrelatedness and complexity of systems of life.

Urban farming occurs on a very small scale, but has powerful impacts on the individuals and communities involved. Despite the small impact each one of these
projects has in terms of numbers, the transformation that occurs within individuals and communities has a rippling effect throughout their cities, states, nation, and globe. The power in urban farming and the localization movement is in the intimate ways it helps people to grow and sustain themselves emotionally, economically, physically, and spiritually. Though these sites of respecting the earth through organic farming are just tiny pieces of land compared to that that has been destroyed and exploited as consequence of globalization, they create enormous change within us as individuals, returning to traditional agrarian and indigenous values of communicating with the earth in modern urban contexts. No matter the numbers, the more these relationships grow and human communities are reminded of how much we depend on our ecosystems to support us and survive, the closer we get to a more rich existence and sustainable life.
Speaking of his mother passing away, Allen explained, “You get inspired when you lose something; when it’s gone. But that doesn’t always mean that that energy isn’t there. It makes you better.” Loss of loved ones is not restricted to just relationships between individuals. As we have experienced the deterioration of our relationship to food and earth, the energy of that interdependence still lingers. American connection to land and food source may be all but extinguished, but that vacuum has not gone unnoticed, and its absence has resonated with communities across the globe that are now finding their power to demand control over the management of public wealth. The sacred and precious energy of that relationship of mutual respect still exists; its absence is felt. And it makes us better.
References


