Sustainable Agriculture, Local Food Systems, and Growing Community:

An Ethnography of Amy’s Farm

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Introduction:

Within the past decade information on, and critique of, global industrial systems and economies have entered into public focus. The proliferation of poverty, violence, and exploitation cause some to step back and reexamine their own lives and position within power structures. Study of global power generally offers few inroads for a single individual to make any personal positive changes or resistance to the dominant narrative.

Notably, within food production some of the most tangible and personal alternatives available arise. While one person effecting global finance, production, or politics seems unimaginable, one person can curb their support of genetically modified seeds, monoculture produce, and petroleum-based transportation. Significant individual steps may be taken, whether through support of farmers markets or a personal garden plot. Naturally, to expand food production past simply one’s own personal needs, requires planning, knowledge, and creative financing, not just a few feet in the back yard. Increasingly, people are returning to the land to actively strengthen and reinvigorate humans’ relationship with food, environment, and community.

This paper will study one small, organic, urban farm in Ontario, California to reveal how changes in food culture can be made on a local level, the way these changes have an effect on community, and the farm’s struggles and challenges. Personal work on the farm coupled with research into the food justice movement offer both a theoretical and realistic examination of counter-culture food movements. Both researchers are students in nearby Claremont, CA and interned on
the farm for 8-10 hours a week. Gordon’s interest in alternative food stems from food allergies and illness directly related to industrial agriculture. While in Botswana for study abroad she directly experienced, and developed an abhorrence for, the exploitation of other countries for food resources. Rosenthal, after taking the class “The Political Economy of Food” at Scripps College, found a passion for food justice and helped to start a garden at El Roble Middle School. Study abroad in Nepal also contributed to Rosenthal’s interest in farming, as she assisted her Nepali family in subsistence farming.

First, this paper will examine current literature on food movements and how academics treat gardens in particular. We will provide background information on local food movements, CSAs, and monoculture GMO produce. History of not only the farm, but of the land the farm sits on, will facilitate examination of the farm’s current position in the community. The systems and events a farmer must organize and the communities involved in an urban farm are detailed through programs, volunteers, and looking at who comes to the farm. To finish, we discuss the future of the farm and make conclusions on its impact in the community. We also include a brief report on our own work done at the farm and possible areas Amy’s could revisit and change.

While organic farming possesses vast potential for change, empowerment, and health, it also involves untold labor, creativity, resourcefulness, and hardship. Popular research generally focuses on the results of the farm, erasing the farm and farmer. Through a detailed ethnography, our goal is to portray the farm as the complicated, varied organism it is.
Methods and Theoretical Framework:

The methods to be used are observation, narrative, survey, participation, and informal and formal interviews.

To gain understanding of the farm and its relationship with the rest of the community, observation is key. By working at the farm for ten hours a week, we can mentally map who comes and goes at Amy’s. In our observations, we catalogue such details as frequency of/ size/ mood of tour groups, health of the garden, efficiency of work done, and individuals who spend a substantial amount of time working on the farm. Through observations of the farm we will not only be able to identify key participants but also key initiatives, projects, and resources the farm draws upon.

By examining the history of the farm, and including the historical context of the land, we will better understand how a few acres in Ontario, California have eluded track home construction to provide organic food to its local community. Why has the use of the land been so varied, and what led Randy to have a change of heart? Narrative will place the farm in the context of the Inland Empire while building the core foundation to understand the forces giving rise to the farm’s current place, situation, and community.

One formal interview with Randy Bekendam, the head farmer, provides information about the history of the land, future, and strategies of Amy’s Farm. Though he has not been farming vegetables for very long, his wealth of knowledge is expansive. Randy lives and feels the struggle of an urban farm and has insight into the future of farming as a movement. No one can better know where the future of the farm lies than Randy, and therefore tapping into his information is central and
invaluable to this study. Through a formal interview setting, we can ensure focused and comprehensive information to specific questions, while having the opportunity to expand upon new revelations.

Interviews done informally at the farm contribute to the exploration of community members’ experiences with the farm. We attempt to uncover why people come to Amy’s and how they discovered it. Additionally, through these interviews we gain insight into power and work division among those who frequent the farm. We used this time speaking with those connected to Amy’s to better understand the network of individuals on the farm, allowing us to present a more complete picture of what sort of community integration happens within the farm, including unmet goals. Surveys were minimal, with mostly the same goal to expand the viewpoints of the farm, focusing on people using the farm stand on Saturdays.

Participation, or labor, cannot be understated in its centrality to our research. This participation drew from our theoretical framework but also as a true method of research. Initially the place of labor in research felt a hindrance to making in depth inquiries into the farm, however the opposite proved true. Without direct involvement in the farm it would have been impossible to conduct interviews in a constructive manner. Labor gave us the ability to know who to ask for the interview, what to ask, and request favors of people’s time, as time is always short at the farm. Even more so, without the labor of the farm we would have inevitably glossed over the realities of a farmer. Rather, through labor, we realized this was an untold voice in the literature.

For the purpose of our research on Amy’s Farm, we use an epistemological
framework, meaning that we, as researchers, attempted to become as close as possible to our subjects. Randy and the interns have made a strong bond. Not only do we all work together, but we discuss the future of the farm, possible marketing opportunities, and make joint decisions on planting and harvesting. In fact, we became so involved with working on the farm that our work has to be analyzed in this paper. Over the semester, we spent ample time in the field and became true “insiders,” being greeted by everyone with excitement and friendliness. While not focusing on patriarchal systems, we employ typically feminist methods for research as we aim “to establish collaborative and non-exploitative relationships... [and] to avoid objectification” (Creswell p. 26). Additionally, a pragmatic standpoint was taken, as we became personally invested in the success of the farm. With a critical eye, we examine what works and what does not work on the farm, and constantly make suggestions to Randy. From this pragmatic viewpoint, the paper seeks to learn from the Amy's' history and failures to flush out the difficulties of running a farm and possible ways improving the system. The literature studied in addition to surveys and observations are combined to help us come to conclusions about Amy's Farm and urban farming in general.

**Background Information on Global and Local Food Systems:**

The purpose of this paper is neither to add to the already large pool of literature on why and how communities are revitalized by a developed local food economy, nor to detail why that need exists. However, it may be useful for readers to have a brief overview of some points of the current global and local food systems.

In the United States today, a monopoly exists on what type of seed farms
can buy, grow, and harvest. In most major farming states, growers must use genetically modified seeds (generally form Monsanto) because heirloom varieties are not only less desired for purchase by large companies (e.g. McDonald’s demands absolute consistency for every tomato it uses) but are also less available for purchase. Once farmers plant these seeds, they are legally prohibited from the traditional method of seed saving. Saving seeds is how farmers have, for centuries, helped plant varieties evolve to be what is most desirable for human consumption and logical for the climate and terrain. In this technique, when plants are ready for harvest, the farmer chooses the plants with the most desirable characteristics and save their seeds so they may improve the crop for the next year. On a farm with rotating crops, this seed could be saved for future growing seasons, or traded with neighboring farms for different varieties. (Shiva, 2000)

Presently, the terminator gene implanted by Monsanto, coupled with the mandatory legal contract farmers enter into when purchasing seed makes saving seeds from the farmer’s own land impossible and illegal. In the United States, farmers initially resisted such seed, but eventually were won over by Roundup and the modified seeds that resist the poison. The remarkable ability to keep plants safe from pests and weeds while not destroying the produce itself is literally the only way a farmer is able to stay afloat in the current large scale market. Once a farmer makes the choice to use Roundup ready seed, the scale, production, and labor saved makes returning to traditional farming unimaginable and is rarely, if ever, done. In addition to forcing farmers to use limited types of seed or varieties, processing companies and large buying corporations pressure farmers to grow in monocultures
so the harvest is as large as possible, though only realizable through huge amounts of petroleum based fertilizer. These two changes together, round up ready seed and monocultures, put our food system in jeopardy and exploits farmers who have worked for hundreds of years to develop seed. This system effectively destroys the natural growing ability of the land while keeping the farmer on the brink of financial ruin; large distributor and production CEO's however make millions through nutritionally compromised products (Shiva, 2000; Patal, 2008).

Beginning in the early 1970s, a number of intellectuals and community activists began to identify shortcomings in the American food system. They created the food justice movement in the hope of restoring access to heirloom seed, encouraging communities to eat local and organic produce, and assist America’s poor in healthy food consumption. (Patel, 2008 and Winn, 2008).

Feenstra (1998) identifies why and how communities are revitalized by a developed local food economy. By beginning with a principle of produce production that benefits both farmer and consumer, both automatically benefit be it monetarily, nutritionally, or through building community. Additionally, a stable and reliable local food system insulates community members from national and/or global market price increases.

In revitalizing a local food system community members control the food. Therefore, the community decides where excess food goes. In many cases, local food banks may be given the week’s surplus produce, allowing low-income individuals to eat healthy, fresh, organic food otherwise unavailable. Grocery stores throw unsold produce away. Farmers’ Market Nutrition Programs and food stamp
usage can also distribute produce to low-income neighborhoods. Coinciding with this switch from polyculture to monoculture was the change in the American diet. Michael Pollan discusses the current “eating disorder” of the entire nation, stating that Americans simply do not know what to eat for dinner. In a “melting pot,” people tend to lose culture and traditional knowledge of foods, leaving them directionless in what to eat. Additionally, the modern supermarket provides an array of foods that are quick and easy to consume, though they do little to nourish the human body. (Pollan, 2006)

The Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Model of local, organic food distribution is one avenue to link individuals and farmers in the modern market. For the farmer, the CSA ensures buyers for their produce for the entire year. CSAs provide security for the small and vulnerable farmer. (Cone and Myhre, 2000)

The Human Organization describes the basic structure of the CSA as follows. At the beginning of each year, the farmer and the community have a meeting. Together, they decide how much food needs to grow to sustain the members for twelve months; the community members then buy a “share” of that years produce. Instead of the usual model where all risk rests on the farmer, the community shares in the risk. If the crop fails or freezes, no food is produced, and the customer receives no refund of their money.

CSA programs can be tailored to fit specific community needs and desires. In some systems, in addition to the annual fee, members pay a weekly fee. If a highly knowledgeable individual or community is involved, members can contribute to decision-making processes on the farm. If the members would like to contribute
physically to the farm, they can go and garden with the farmer. Indeed, some models require CSA members participate in labor.

Outcomes of the CSA system include benefits to the community in much the same way Feenstra links farms and communities. For the consumer, the CSA ensures a diet including fresh, local, and organic produce. Farms that run CSA programs have stability and financial guarantees otherwise difficult to attain. Lastly, CSAs brings together community members, encouraging new friendships and bonds. Manual labor on the farm likewise connects individuals that may otherwise have never met. The Human Foundation found that higher participation of shareholders resulted in a more stable CSA. Of the CSAs studied, the top reasons for becoming a shareholder were “concern for healthy environment, source of organic produce, source of fresh produce, support of local food sources, and knowing how and where their food was grown.” (Cone and Andrea Myhre, 2006, p. 190) The farm is a place where farmers, shareholders, and often children can mingle, promote healthy lifestyles, and have fun. For more information on the merits of local food systems see Nabhan, (2002), Feenstra, (2002), and Sannina (2006).

**Literature Review:**

The above basics of food production are detailed throughout scholarship. However, this scholarship goes only so far as to either champion local, small scale production (unilaterally assumed to be organic or "beyond organic"), or to condemn global production. Urban organic farming and gardening form a significant pool of study, yet scholarly literature largely ignores the humanity of the farmer and complexity of the farm. In process, farming requires a lot of time, cooperation, and
knowledge while in reality the end goals and results of community and support are neither obvious nor innate.

Articles such as Doolittle’s “Gardens Are Us, We Are Nature: Transcending Antiquity and Modernity” argues that gardens are inextricable from the human psyche and humans inherently need to seek some release through nature and personal garden space. This assumption of psychological need and healing through garden space is generally a first in framing gardens within literature. Joel Salatin, a farmer from Virginia, speaks with typical inflammatory language and unilateral condemnation of industrial food production throughout “Everything I Want to Do is Illegal,” all the while offering an almost utopian picture of his farm.

These heaven and hell models are almost impossible to get away from in literature accessible for consumers, whether it be films such as “Food Inc.” and “King Corn” or books like Michael Pollan’s “The Omnivore’s Dilemma.” All this literature creates a highly polarized examination of food systems. Two case studies provide first-rate examples of the typical championing and focus given to gardens in the academic literature.

Case Studies

Toronto and the South Central Farm make up two of the most widely documented and publicized food justice case studies. As such, they provide excellent opportunity to examine how literature treats food as well as areas of neglect within the academic community. First, we will examine the widespread and government supported food economy restructuring in Toronto, Ontario and then look at the treatment of the South Central Farm in Los Angeles, California.
The City of Toronto has made a concentrated and widely documented push to expand food sources and opportunities within the city. In her essay “Tending Cultural Landscapes and Food Citizenship in Toronto’s Community Gardens,” Baker (2004) profiles several garden initiatives in Toronto. She paints gardens as not only places for recreation but also as sites of political, social, cultural and economic resistance to dominant narratives. Baker’s paper provides a particularly clear example of the trend within food literature to focus on glorifying the garden model, while ignoring many of the struggles and shortcomings inherent within community gardens. Possible problems of racial tension within gardens are glossed over in a few sentences. Baker also presumes that individuals become friends with neighbors through the garden and that elderly gardeners will teach the young or novice. (Baker, 2004)

Baker makes several assumptions and broad statements about community gardens: community garden initiatives intentionally tailor themselves to diverse ethnocultural communities, while transportation and language form the largest barriers to involvement. She depicts the natural effect of gardens as less vandalism, people move less and know each other better, and overall fewer social conflicts arise. All the gardens profiled by Baker offer an easy, open, and direct network of resources to start and maintain gardens. She neglects a more in depth examination of the process of starting a garden, or even looking at a failed garden.

Irvine, Johnson, and Peters (1999) provide an in depth analysis of a garden in their essay “Community gardens and sustainable land use planning: A case study of
the Alex Wilson Community Garden”. Once again, a fairly idyllic portrait is painted of
the garden as it offers health, biodiversity, and community. Scharf in “A Nonprofit
system for fresh-produce Distribution: The case of Toronto, Canada” is one of the
few essays that at all looks into the development of Toronto's food system- one
supported by a myriad of governmental and nonprofit organizations. Yet, a gap in
the literature persists as she neglects to examine how boards formed and what food
infrastructure needs in terms of support both for implementation and proliferation.
Despite focusing on the administration of one food initiative in Toronto, Scharf, like
the gardens, overlooks what requisite movements and support are present in
Toronto. For instance, all of the articles draw on research performed by Toronto’s
Food Policy Council, but the willingness of the council to perform community
research is never examined. (Irvine, Johnson, and Peters, 1999 and Scharf, 1999)

South Central Farm

Unlike much of the research on Toronto, formal scholarly works continually
focus on racial and money power plays made in regard to the South Central Farm.
Irazabel and Punja (2009) made the most noteworthy contribution to the subject
with their essay “Cultivating Just Planning and Legal Institutions: A Critical
Assessment of the South Central Farm Struggle in Los Angeles”. They profile the
garden from racial, political, financial, and social standpoints. (Punja, 2009)

Gottlieb (2007) also focuses on the same racial, political, financial, and social
struggles of the farm while championing and romanticizing the farm pre-bulldozing.
A film, “The Farm” follows the same model of championing and then exposing the
racial, political, financial, and social conflicts. However, these articles draw upon
only one side of the strength of the South Central Farm for study. As a result of the huge legal entanglement, scholars abandon another potential topic for study- the farm was largely successful on its own. Community gardens often fail or simply fall into neglect, yet the South Central Farm was able to grow into a huge thriving community; truly the ideal of a community garden. Certainly, the farm still has much to instruct in terms of how the farm implemented, organized, sustained, and regulated itself; all issues central to and underrepresented in current scholarship. (Gottlieb, 2007)

Missing from both Toronto and South Central Farm studies are the voices, activities and realities of the farmers. While an account of farming may seem only surface level and token, it is crucial to understanding what is involved in a garden or farm. While the championing ideals set out in these articles are exciting, they offer no true guidance on the realities of the gardens and farms on a ground level for outsiders or those wanting to become involved. Gardens are positive and powerful things, however, that does not exclude them from hardship, hard work, and failures. Research presently ignores the lives of the gardeners, while proselytizing on their reality. The goal of this paper is to fill the gap relating to farmer’s experiences in reality through a detailed ethnography of Amy’s Farm in Ontario, California

**Site Profile:**

Amy’s Farm is a polyculture urban farm in Ontario, California. Located off of Euclid Avenue and Eucalyptus Avenue among the iconic dairy farms of the region, Amy’s farm attracts local families, gardening enthusiasts, students, and grocery shoppers. Randy Bekendam and Amy Owen raise livestock, grow vegetables,
cultivate micro greens, run a CSA, give tours, and host a farm stand on Saturdays in addition to their non-profit efforts. Though they are not certified organic, the farm grows with beyond organic principles, prohibiting pesticides or herbicides in their garden (even those certified as USDA Organic). Using a SPIN farm model, Randy and Amy hope to produce enough food to sustain themselves, pay off their debt, grow as a business and non-profit, and train and launch new farmers. Tri-City Demonstration Garden is a community garden located on Garey Avenue adjacent to the Tri-City Mental Health Center. The clinic donated the land upon which the garden sits, and today a labyrinth, fruit orchard, community plot, and demonstration SPIN plot are available for public use.

The mission of Amy's Farm is to "**Cultivate**: community life, friendships, and social justice, **Educate**: health and sustainability for people and places, **Preserve**: agricultural lands and organic ways of growing food." (www.agrariansolutions.org) This mission encompasses the overarching goals for the farm, which are ultimately human based initiatives. Randy's original plan to execute these objectives manifested as a vision of selling half of his produce and giving the other half away; a goal Randy is still striving towards. As the farm has matured a constant goal is to find a model that will support a living wage, or more immediately, to simply keep the farm financially viable. Instilling the value of local, organically grown food is a clear reason for Amy's Farms existence, however the relationship between price, market, and demographic have not been totally reconciled. Amy's Farm wants to inspire others to place value on their health and food, while giving access to satisfying and non-demeaning labor.
The farm operates without true staff. Randy and Amy have personal and financial stake in the farm, with additional labor provided on a volunteer basis. Randy is head farmer in charge of the animals and garden, while Amy mainly operates the website and grows microgreens. Randy does, however, work collaboratively with Amy. She provides transplants for delicate vegetables, and she gives advice and opinions at all stages of the growing process. Randy is at the farm more than full time, often working from 7:00 am to 5:00 pm. Amy, however, puts in far fewer hours as she is raising four children. Additionally, she is pregnant, making work more difficult. Amy interacts very little with the volunteers or tours. While Randy does not give tours, he is in charge of bringing out various animals for them, thus consuming much of his precious time. The tours are done by volunteers who receive a base fee per tour, produce, and tips in addition to a place for their kids to play and learn about farming.

Interestingly, volunteers by and large complete most of the most laborious and time intensive tasks in the garden. Randy, though he has a priority list, makes sure the person enjoys the task they have been given and do not mind completing it. Several of the most involved volunteers actually have their own plots in the family garden to experiment with and grow what they like. Education is very important to Randy, and he is receptive to teaching any personal interests in gardening as well as using new ideas from the volunteers. For instance, when Charlie and James, two volunteers, decided they wanted to let the cows graze weeds in the open field, Randy fixed the fence surrounding the weeds and allowed James and Charlie to graze the animals.
The labor structure of the farm is fairly straightforward, much of the labor structure is horizontal. Randy takes the advice and opinions of volunteers and Amy seriously. When a task is given to an individual, Randy has full confidence in the individual's ability to complete the job. Over the last three months, Randy, in the presence of the Pitzer interns, has yet to raise his voice or become angry with anyone for making a mistake. Amy's, however, is a non-profit and therefore has a board of directors that evaluates the state of the non-profit's goals. At Tri-City, Randy works with those who designed the site, community members, landowners, and individuals who donated the various parts of the garden to make decisions and coordinate upkeep. The work culture is one that is calm yet focused, and it seems to have a generally positive effect on volunteers returning to do more work for Randy's cause.

One of the significant aspects of Amy's Farm is the lack of intermediaries or hidden motives - it is tangibly transparent and honest. The most significant outreach into the community is the tours of schoolchildren and their parents who come to the farm in the spring. Over 200,000 children have visited the farm, offering unique exposure to farming within the Inland Empire. Teachers bring new classes back year after year. A teacher from Hillside Elementary illustrated the impact of the farm beautifully, "Our students had a wonderful time and could not stop talking about all the wonderful things they did. We are only allowed two field trips this year, and I feel I made the best choice by bringing our students to your farm. It's rare for children living in the inner-city to ever experience a farm and be involved in hands-on activities." (http://www.amysfarm.com/testimonials.html)
These hands on activities form the crux of Amy’s relationship, be it with schoolchildren, volunteers, or customers, everyone must come to the farm (save a few restaurant clients) and interact with where their food is grown. Randy by no means believes he knows the only way to farm and is constantly and honestly asking interns and volunteers for opinions on most any component of the farm. Randy is also interested in the opinions of his CSA members with whom he gathers information on what vegetables are most desired in the community.

Though located somewhat out of town, Randy still manages a few hundred dollars worth of sales every weekend at his farm stand. When it came time to slaughter turkeys he invited those purchasing to come be a part of the process- and people came. This sort of transparency, kindness, and welcoming attitude permeates the farm.

**History of the Farm**

The history of Amy’s is representative of other land trends in the Ontario, California area, beginning as early as the 1940’s. A Japanese man acquired the land and began farming potatoes during World War II. After some time, a family bought the land and turned it into a horse farm. For a generation, the farm raised horses, however the owner’s children did not have an interest in continuing to live an agrarian lifestyle.

At this time, 1975, Randy Bekendam graduated college. Randy came from a family of agricultural workers, with farmers on both sides of his family. His father’s side of the family farmed dairy cows, and his mother’s family crop farmed. Randy “naturally followed the dairy side,” and immediately Randy had difficulties farming,
as a large amount of capital was needed to be successful at the time. Additionally, Randy’s father, a dairy farmer, was “squeezed” out of the industry due to the pressure to “get big or get out.” (“Second Interview With Randy Bekendam”) Because he did not have the money to start a large dairy business, Randy raised young stock for the local dairies. He leased the land that Amy’s now sits on in the early 1980s and ran his calf operation for years. However, like many in the 1970s, he began to grow and expand his operation rapidly to advance financially and eventually evolved into a CAFO (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation). This meant he intensively raised calves for nearly twenty years.

Randy’s calf operation, the Bekendam Cattle Company, went bankrupt in 1997. After twenty-two years of raising cows, Randy had nothing but debt to show for his hard work. Additionally, Randy was confronted with the reality of an unsustainable business culture. As he pondered the future of the farm and his career, this theme of sustainability took prominence. After thoughtful consideration, Randy decided to start Golden State Holstein’s, a family corporation owned by his daughter and son-in-law, Amy and Brad Owen. They began giving tours of the farm, an initiative that has continued to be lucrative. Golden State Holsteins continued to raise cattle for the next few years, though this business eventually ended and was gradually replaced by evolving models of urban farming. At this point, Randy also struggled with the reality of losing his land due to plans for tract home development. Real estate developers offered Randy’s landlord up to $500,000 per acre, but she was determined to get more money for her land. After
the housing market crash, developers and contractors in rural areas terminated plans for tract home construction.

Two things caused a shift in Randy’s intentions with the land in 2006. For years, earning a living raising calves had become more and more difficult. Additionally, Randy struggled with the ethics of raising animals in an intensive fashion. When Ethan Esparza was shot in a drive-by shooting the day before his fourth birthday, Randy underwent an overhaul of consciousness. His own grandson, Nathan, shared a fourth birthday with the deceased. To promote stronger community bonds and a holistic approach to the earth and humans, Randy decided to start two non-profit organizations and convert his CAFO system into an urban organic farm. The first non-profit was named E.T.H.A.N, an acronym standing for Everyone Together Healing All Neighborhoods. This non-profit founded the Tri-City Demonstration Garden—a space where individuals from all backgrounds can farm and garden together, strengthening community bonds while providing fresh, healthy food to the area. The garden is located centrally on Garey Avenue in Pomona, California, and has transformed from a once vacant lot into community plots, fruit orchard, succulent labyrinth, and picnic area.

The farm began producing vegetables, milk, and meat after Tri-City’s creation through the second non-profit, Southern California Agricultural Land Fund, or SCALF. The other stated goal of SCALF is to advocate the conversion, by the government, of Southern Californian farm land to easements, thus eliminating the fear of being kicked off of one’s land while preserving urban land for agriculture. Paid farmers, Lizzy and David, managed the land and operated a growing CSA
(Community Supported Agriculture). To grow enough to support his sixty member CSA, Randy employed the SPIN Farm (Small Plot Intensive) model. The CSA proved too large of an undertaking so early on, and the farm did not profit enough to pay the living wage salaries to the farmers which Randy is committed to.

Therefore, Randy again had to focus on sustainability, adopting a model of family farming reliant on what he and his daughter Amy could feasibly do themselves. Before December 2010, Randy spent most of his time working with the non-profit, organizing community garden projects like Tri-City, setting aside land for SCALF, and advertising for the farm. His goal had been to demonstrate how people could live normal lives working forty hours a week or less and still productively run a farm. Rethinking this strategy, Randy decided to spend 2011 working exclusively on farming. At years end, Amy and Randy will evaluate how much labor was put into the land, the produce output, and their financial gain. ("Interview with Randy Bekendam.")

Through their hard work and the assistance of local volunteers, he has limited enrollment to his CSA to 13 members, and offsets the income loss by having a farm stand on Saturdays. He also operates a milkshare, allowing community members to buy a share of a cow and milk that cow a few times a week. Randy also runs a cowshare for beef. The principle of a cowshare or milkshare is a way to get around regulations on meat and dairy processing by having a group of people “purchase” the cow and then “hire” Randy to raise the cow. In addition to all growing operations on the farm, Randy also employs local women to give tours of
the farm to schools from around the area. Randy charges seven dollars a head for a tour, making it the most profitable sector for the farm.

Randy still struggles to devote time to farming due to the high flow of tours between February and May. Luckily, Randy was able put four interns to work, amounting to about thirty hours of labor a week. Additionally, other community members volunteer their time on the farm. Over the last few months, Randy estimates that interns and volunteers have done roughly 80-90 percent of the work on the farm.

The weight of his debt acquired during the bankruptcy represents the single largest barrier to profitability. Nevertheless, Randy believes that in two years all of his debt, $100,000, will be paid. At this point, Randy and Amy, currently both being supported by their working spouses, would be able to take home larger pay checks from the farm, and their vision for the farm could continue to come to fruition.

**Farm Programs:**

The key to Randy's approach to agriculture relies on diversity both in plant life and community involvement. Just as one monoculture crop can fail, providing no back up, so can models for outreach and involvement. Therefore profiling the myriad ways of interacting with the farm is necessary to any understanding of the role of the farm in the community, as well as what a farmer must administer to remain viable. The farm can be examined from this angle in two essential groupings - monetary and free access.

Randy made the decision to vastly scale back his CSA in January of 2011. Going from 60 to 13 members means decreasing guaranteed income by
approximately 460%- over $35,000. CSA’s are generally treated as an idyllic community-building tool. However, at Randy’s it proved a crushing burden; indeed one of Randy’s ex farmers, Lizzie, left the farm vowing to never participate in another CSA again. The problem, of course, being that the CSA in and of itself is not the community but rather a tool to facilitate community. Therefore, scaling back and ensuring only members who are truly dedicated to the farm and its mission are involved has relieved a huge amount of pressure and obligation.

Randy made two important decisions to adhere to his goals of fostering food respect and value in January. The first is the change to the CSA. Running tangent to this decision, Randy no longer participates in farmers markets. Instead of catering to the demands of non-committed customers as with the larger CSA, people who wish access to the produce must place enough value on what Randy is providing to come themselves and participate at his farm stand. In a sense, Randy is refusing to give up his pride and value in his labor, product, and vision. He explains this as a main reason for choosing to maintain his prices, rather than lower them in the hope of selling more. Randy has made a commitment to infuse value and respect into his operation; to lower the prices would be putting sales above stewardship. He would rather give the food away than sell more.

To be sure, none of these decisions are easy, and Randy lives in survival mode for the entire year- constantly reevaluating, planning, and living in constant uncertainty. For instance, when the price of Alfalfa doubled in one week Randy lost his ability to make money off his cowshare program. The problem is that when families have agreed upon a price, Randy must produce a product regardless of
what happens. With alfalfa at its current price Randy is more providing a time-consuming service than a money-raising venture.

Randy has not quite reconciled the position of the milkshare at the farm. It exists mostly to get the cow milked so it can continue to be a part of the tours. Members pay $10 monthly and receive around 10 gallons of milk. Clearly, no profit is made off the milk. It does, however, attract a varied population to the farm. Some migrants use the milkshare as a way to reconnect to their lives in their home countries. Others use it to instruct their children, while others simply desire raw milk and the chance to have some involvement in their food.

Even continuing the largest moneymaking program for the farm is no easy and clear decision. Tours of the farm, virtually all to young elementary school children, make up approximately two thirds of the income on the farm presently. While money is certainly a motivator in offering the tours, the farm also has as a central tenet of its mission to serve as an educational site. Schoolchildren from all over LA, San Bernardino, Orange, and Riverside counties come to the farm for an hour to an hour and a half, often for their first exposure to growing vegetables and farm animals.

Obviously, analyzing and assessing what sort of impact the field trip to the farm has on children and their parents who visit is next to impossible. However, the farm undeniably provides exposure these children may never otherwise receive. The commitment to education and need for money combine to make the tours an inextricable part of the farm. Unfortunately, the detriment of the tours comes in deterring Randy from focusing on farming or marketing. The tours take up much of
his time, despite the fact that he does not run them. Were Randy to scale back the
tours, he would have more time to pursue his farming full time, as well as conceive
of and implement new programs and outreach on the farm.

Such programs would expand on those he already has such as community
days. Community days can vary in their form but all are essentially done with the
goal of exposing more people to the farm. Each spring Randy holds a Seedling Sale of
tomato plants. Amy grows dozens of varieties for sale. While the seedling sale
naturally aims to make money, it also serves as a tool to attract new people to the
farm and provide a space for families to gather on the weekend and relax outside.
Other community days are planting, beautification, and general work days. All these
provide space and opportunity for members of the community to come together,
but, more importantly to Randy’s goals, as a chance for education and involvement.
Indeed, as a result of a planting day four years ago, Pitzer now provides interns
through the Ontario Program, and a beautification day in Pomona resulted in the
design and creation of Tri-City Demonstration Garden.

Tri-City, though a result of the success of a workday pulling different people
together, also represents much of the hardship of farming and organizing around
food. Built with the intention of drawing on community around the adjacent Tri-City
Mental Health Center, the garden has fallen into neglect, with members abandoning
their plots and bermuda grass weeds taking over the land. Moreover, the garden has
failed to attract people from Pomona who could truly use the garden to supplement
their food intake. Instead, gardeners are almost exclusively hobbyists from
Claremont rather than in need of food. Without clear inroads and organization in the surrounding area the garden will not thrive.

Therefore the garden is being overhauled and changing from an individual member plot to communal plot model. Tri-City Mental Health Center has pledged to become more involved and is indeed taking steps to improve the garden, though ultimately time and organizing could always be an issue. On a recent citywide beautification day the garden had sixty volunteers for the day but was barely able to scrape two active members together to organize and administer the volunteers. However, the garden does have a vast and diverse group of allies- Tri-City, nurseries, schools, landscape designers, and ministers are all involved in the garden in some manifestation. The challenge for Randy is finding the time and organization to mobilize everyone effectively.

The goal of Tri-City is demonstration and inspiration, not food production maximization as with Amy’s Farm. A new partnership at Amy’s could have significant potential at a site like Tri-City. Judith, from Claremont Food Bank, comes to the farm twice a week and has access to produce to harvest for the food bank. Without Amy’s, no fresh produce would be available at the food bank. The operation is starting out small, dependent on one woman’s dedication and volunteerism, but the potential to have food bank members come to the farm and work for food is very possible. Tri-City could prove the ideal site for this as it is located more centrally in an urban location, while Amy’s is somewhat removed from the city.

Volunteers:
Over the last four years, a network of volunteers excited about farming, education, and Randy's mission has developed. Dozens of individuals, from mothers and their children to graduate students, make time during their week to garden at Amy’s Farm. In return for this labor, Randy insists that all volunteers take home produce, making this system mutually beneficial. Randy relies on these work hours to run the farm, as he cannot pay a farmer to do the work. Volunteers get to learn about farming and can subsidize their food cost through take-home produce from the farm. Through this give and take, the farm is sustained.

*Local Children*-  
Some individuals volunteering on the farm can be grouped into categories. Local mothers give tours on the farm but do very little gardening aside from occasionally weeding. Their children accompany them to the farm as many as four times a week. While moms do not garden, the children weed, harvest, help with planting, and even feed and walk the animals. They provide a helping hand and eagerly learn. Generally, the children ride with their parents to the farm, however, some bike from their homes, making them the “greenest” volunteers on the farm. These local children provide a constant source of labor and are one of the only regular and dependable groups of volunteers on the farm.

*Pitzer Interns*-  
The second group of weekly volunteers is the Pitzer College Interns. Over the last two years, a group of college students studying Ontario, California volunteer and do research at the farm. Because of the ability to receive college credit for the internship, students are able to consistently work ten hours a week. This semester,
four students, ourselves included, chose urban farming as at least part of their topic, providing about thirty hours a week in free labor. On the farm, these interns participate in all stages of farming produce as well as animal feeding. In addition, the interns help with tree maintenance at Tri-City Community Garden in Pomona and completely replanted a section resulting in fourteen rows for a demonstration farm.

**Individual Volunteers**

Supplementing these two groups that heavily frequent the farm, individuals from Ontario and Claremont also make an effort to learn and work with Randy. James lives in Ontario and is unemployed. In addition to his interest in learning and practicing methods of farming, he benefits from the food he takes home in exchange for his labor. James’ knowledge of farming, mostly gained through reading, contributes to many decisions and experiments on the farm. Recently, James planted his own plot in Amy’s Garden and harvested stinging nettle to make a potent fertilizer. His position of unemployment largely defines his availability and hours.

Randy has partnered with local judiciary offices to make his farm a site possible for individuals to complete mandatory community service. Though he has only had one individual stay on the farm for all of their service hours, the partnership has already had a mutually positive impact. Benjamin, an eighteen year-old from Claremont, CA, was sentenced to community service six months ago. He considers himself deeply spiritual, though not religious. When asked about his political leaning, he stated that he was both liberal and conservative.

Already involved with food justice at his school, he eagerly did his community service at Amy’s Farm. Before his community service, he knew about
Amy’s but did not have the time to visit. He had to do sixty hours of community service and did it all at Amy’s Farm. Now, he returns to the farm to “help out and learn what I can.” Amy’s is the only place in the area where he can learn about farming and he believes “Randy is a good teacher.” Benjamin helped start an organic garden that has turned into a class at San Antonio High. Though he thinks his friends would benefit from working on the farm and “would love it,” they don’t come out and garden because, in his opinion, “they’re lazy.” (“Interview With Benjamin”)

Today, Benjamin is enrolled in Citrus College, but he is soon transferring to a school with a horticultural and food justice program. He takes food home from the farm and the whole family is excited about him working at the farm, as his dad is a chef. Though he does not have the time to farm as much as he would like, Benjamin still makes an effort to help. One major barrier to participation on the farm is a lack of transportation access. Benjamin’s long-term goal is to have his own farm and compound. He wants to be an example of a “better way to farm and sustain ourselves, or even a small portion of ourselves.” After the end of the school year, Benjamin will be leaving Southern California, and his relationship with the farm will most likely diminish, though he hopes to remain friends with Randy for a long time.

When asked why he likes farming, he stated, “everything has a spirit, and being connected with a spirit is blissful at least.”

Volunteers on the farm range from all walks of life. Many from the Ontario area are religious, having heard about the farm through church connections. Others are college students with liberal and non-religious leanings. Some volunteers have children, and some volunteers some are children. Many volunteers are simply
retired garden enthusiasts who find peace and joy working at the farm. One thing that unites nearly all Amy’s Farm volunteers is their love of nature. The children roam the farm, picking broccoli for a snack or playing with the worms. An older woman takes her time as she plants seeds, as it is relaxing and enjoyable for her. Benjamin, an unlikely gardener, said it beautifully, “being with plants heals you... they pump out love... they have nothing but love....” (“Interview With Benjamin”)

**Visitors to the Farm:**

*Tour Guides-*

Over the course of a week, hundreds or thousands of individuals pass through the gates at Amy’s Farm. In the spring, one day may have up to five or six tours, employing all of Amy’s tour guides in one morning to show hundreds of children around the farm. There are three tour guides at Amy’s. All of them are mothers and live close to the farm. The stories of the tour guides are all rather similar, young mothers who stopped teaching when they got pregnant.

Speaking with one guide, Heidi, we found that not all stories are so simple. Heidi has been working at the farm since March of 2010, but she had known about Amy’s for almost a decade. Prior to marriage and children, Heidi taught high school language in Glendora, West Covina, and Diamond Ranch. Once she became pregnant, she and her husband decided that Heidi would stay home with the children and home-school them. Through involvement at Tri-City Demonstration Garden, she became good friends with board member Paul Kak. Twenty months ago, when Heidi’s husband passed away, Kak got her the job at Amy’s to help out with finances and allow her to continue homeschooling. (“Interview With Heidi”)
Previous to working at Amy’s, Heidi had never considered the merits of local, organic farming. “I used to not care about organic or anything like that, and now I have a hard time not choosing those things.” Perhaps most important to her experience on the farm is the opportunity it gives her children.

“It’s kind of like a free ranch experience that a lot of kids today don’t get. Because we have to be so careful about you know... as parents we have to be really aware. We don’t offer them freedom to play and be kids. Some parents rely on video games and TV, but my kids, by being out on the farm, are learning, able to use imagination with play time and learning a good work ethic for working out at the farm and working with integrity and being a blessing to others. It’s caused them to think about the foods they eat and if they are healthy.” (Interview With Heidi)

Working at Amy’s provided Heidi an income and safe haven for her children during a particularly difficult time.

*Shoppers-*

A survey given at the farm stand sheds some light on who comes to Amy’s and why. Respondents to the farm stand survey provided their city of residence, including Chino, Pomona, Rancho Cucamonga, Los Angeles, Ontario, and Claremont. When asked “What keeps you coming back? What do you gain from coming to Amy’s Farm?” some responded that they simply come for the produce or “veggies.” One twenty four year old respondent stated “I worked as a tour guide and now I am part of the milk share/ my grandparents had a ranch near by about 15 [years] ago.”

Connections to farming or gardening are often cited in the surveys, as well as discussion. Another respondent stated that they “will come back for gardening tips” and being “free for kids” is important. Family is a constant on the farm, as many who
attend the farm stand bring their children to look at the pigs, walk through the
garden, and stock up on produce for the week.

Multiple respondents stated that they had master’s degrees, with every respondent reporting at least associates as their highest degree of education achieved. This information is consistent with research done on who buys organic produce. The Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station study found that higher education levels directly correspond to the rate of organic consumption. This is true of all ethnicities, genders and classes. (Knudson, 2007)

**Future of the Farm:**

From inception of the garden three years ago, Amy’s has taken a path no one could have predicted. Therefore, any discussion of the future of the farm in this fourth experimental year must be examined with the understanding that the farm exists in a fluid, sometimes reactionary, often pioneering, constantly evaluating state. By choosing a family farm model with no payroll and dependent on volunteers, the farm took a risk and trusted things to work out. Come September, this model will be altered by the disbursement of a $195,000 grant from the USDA to train farmers. Randy views the farm as ideally a training site to launch new farmers, so the grant falls tandem with this goal. The first year (starting in September) Randy will choose one immigrant farmer to hire who will receive a salary of $40,000 with $10,000 in benefits. This farmer will stay on a second year when an additional immigrant farmer will be hired at the same rate. The grant allocates $45,000 to support whatever needs have to be met to train the farmer (what precisely this will entail is still unclear).
The grant aims to set up people with a passion for farming with training and hopefully savings to then go and start their own farm. Randy, aside from his distaste for grant money, is nervous about starting farmers at such a high salary when there is no way these wages can be sustained once the grant ends in two years. Upon launching their own farm these immigrants will be making half that at best, coupled with whatever debt may be incurred to buy supplies. Because the farm aims to train people and not hire them there is also some concern about becoming dependent on the labor of employees rather than family and volunteers. The grant did not originate from within, but rather through Nancy Mentie and her nonprofit, Uncommon Good. As a result, the grant may not have taken the ideal form for Randy’s vision or methods. Regardless of any misgivings on the advisability of taking the grant money, the wheels are in motion and Randy is committed to the plan.

Uncommon Good has also received a grant to build a super adobe structure in Claremont. Though this does not directly affect Randy it is possible he could use methods gained from that exercise to build a super adobe structure on the farm for the new migrant farmers, WOOFERS, or interns. Randy feels a super adobe on the farm is another opportunity to educate and market the farm. Just as a diverse farm can weather change more effectively than a monoculture, Amy’s must find as many ways to market the farm as possible. In a sense, the farm mimics the food system in Toronto as it draws on the strengths of having many players involved from government, non-profits, neighborhoods, and research.
One of the greatest strengths of the farm lies in the incredibly vast pools of people and expertise to call upon. Already The Back Abbey in Claremont supports the farm through microgreen purchase and now the owner is building Amy’s Farm into his business model for his next restaurant venture. The idea for the upscale French-cuisine Claremont restaurant is based in sourcing 80-90% of its ingredients from Amy’s. The farm would be able to grow specific produce with a guaranteed buyer of volume and price. This guaranteed buyer could represent a certain financial security for the farm. However, how selling primarily to expensive Claremont restaurants fits in with Randy’s vision of educating and spreading health through food is unclear. Perhaps the restaurant could allow Randy to make enough money, so that he could give away half his produce, a central tenet to his initial vision. Of course, the restaurant could also prove to be somewhat the equivalent of a 60 person CSA, wildly stressful and unsustainable.

The life of a farmer exists in a complex relationship to the future. Despite diligent crop planning and constant marketing, Randy lives in a sort of limbo in which plans, labor, yield, opportunity, and even access to land are always up for debate. Farming is a profession largely dictated by externalities, while still maintaining a very close and intimate control over the immediate and tangible in front of the farmer. There is a beautiful independence and self-reliance with farming, but forces outside are strong enough to rarely feel secure.

Discussion and Conclusion:

Refashioning a food system is by no means simple, and though communities have made important strides towards this goal (Hewitt 2009 and Baker 2004), the
hard work behind that triumph is greatly neglected. The challenges of urban, organic food movements are massive, but, if overcome, the resultant health, community, and independence are all well worth the fight. From analysis of the history and current operations of Amy’s Farm, struggle, reinvention, and hard work are clearly constants in successful organic urban farming in Ontario, California. Randy, after years of conventional farming of calves, reinvented himself and his operation in hope of revitalizing the local food system. Initially, there was little available in the way of support or advice, leading Randy to muddle his vision by growing too big too fast. Deep and serious self-evaluation led to varying versions of urban farming on Amy’s, finally resulting in a model that will certainly change again, but is keeping values closer to its heart and with much greater results. Without a large network of volunteers, garden enthusiasts, and friends, Randy could not have regained focus and inspiration for truly sustainable business practices.

While it may seem foolhardy to, as a practice, rely on volunteers for labor, in so doing Amy’s Farm is putting outsider involvement as a priority above simple production. By not only focusing on production, the whole of the farm grows stronger. In this new model, the constant need for people, voices, and community involvement are crucial for success. Tri-City and Amy’s both offer different visions for food justice; despite having a better location, Tri-City has failed to develop and mature in the same way as Amy’s. A lack of focused promotion can be cited as one explanation, but more importantly, the failure to ever truly integrate the community into its model (like at Amy’s) has left Tri-City struggling to survive.
Often, a vision of the “urban organic farm” seems too difficult or idealistic to accomplish. The labor can be exhausting- one cannot blame humans for looking for easier ways to produce food. Mechanization and chemicals make sense when the only focus is on the end production result. Randy, however, stands as living proof that when the whole system is considered, hard work can reach much farther than a salad mix. Presently, society degrades the idea of hard physical labor. In doing so, the requisite creativity, introspection, philosophy, resourcefulness, and positivity in a non-demeaning labor model are foregone and forgotten.

When building a demonstration plot at Tri-City, the unbelievably laborious and mind numbing task of clearing and sifting all the dirt on the plot felt like a senseless way to set up a garden that would never come to fruition. However, it was, in fact, our only real chance to experience what starting a garden from nothing was like. Keeping morale up and continuing work was only possible through the positivity of Randy. In the end, when we were able to look at the fourteen rows we had created, we were able to relate to the struggle of maintaining faith in the correctness of our actions. The struggle though, was worth it, and it seems as though it will be worth it too in the years to come for Randy and the greater Ontario community at large.

**Action/Labor:** *(see Appendix A)*

Since January 31st, four Pitzer interns have been working on Amy’s Farm and at Tri-City Demonstration Garden. Randy requires help in the garden, as other farm matters claim much of his time. From day one, we worked at full force helping him convert his winter garden to spring, and eventually his spring garden to summer.
He taught us how to do this using the SPIN farm model. This involved clearing beds, rototilling, building the beds, planting, laying drip tape, thinning, and weeding. We helped Randy harvest produce for his CSA and farm stand. This required learning how to harvest different vegetables, learn to properly wash them, and then bunch them and put them in the cooler.

Over time, our abilities as farmers grew, and we were able to accomplish more in the time allotted. Also, we had fewer questions for Randy, allowing him to spend his time accomplishing other tasks. Though not exhaustive, the following is a list of significant tasks done for the farm and at Tri-City. To begin, at Tri-City we cleared a 20X40 plot, sifted it for Bermuda grass, dug a protective barrier trench and planted fourteen rows of produce including tomatoes, garlic, potatoes, and peppers. We cleared weeds covering the sitting area, thinned the fruit tree orchard, weeded the labyrinth, and espaliered the pomegranate trees. Additionally we participated in community meetings on garden planning.

At Amy’s, we planted rows of lettuce, carrots, mustard greens, beans, squash, onions, radishes, beets, and close to a thousand potatoes of seven varieties. We transplanted beds of tomatoes, leeks, purple basil, peppers, and cauliflower. On all these rows, we laid and tested drip tape. The interns thinned young plants and more difficult older plants, on occasion spending two or three hours perfecting one row. We dug out dozens of overgrown or old rows of mustard greens, lettuce, broccoli, cress, onions, fennel, and beets. We fed the animals. We built a pig pin and moved the piglets in a wheel barrel. We cleaned out the trash, full of old food from tours covered in maggots. We spent a full day trellising peas. We dug dozens of
trenches. We removed countless weeds including stinging nettle, the plant that bites back, once injuring one of us so bad that she had a rash for days. Often, we delivered Randy’s produce to The Back Abbey and Crossroads. Of all of these tasks we kept meticulous notes, including seed weight and harvest weight, so that Randy can evaluate his farm’s output at year’s end.

Other than the physical manual labor that the interns did for Randy, we also helped him with his strategy for farming and opened new markets for his produce. We constantly brainstormed with Randy on the quality of food, what worked and what did not, where things should be planted, spacing, and really anything that was involved in the farm work. Charlie was able to introduce Randy to Zenia from the Grove House and Randy now receives an order every week. When Zenia put in a large order for a raw food panel, it was the Pitzer interns that picked all of the produce and prepared it. We helped form a relationship with Randy and the Shakedown, another market that Randy will be able to turn to in the fall. One day we accompanied Randy to the Pomona dining hall and crashed a meeting to deliver bins of lettuce in an attempt to sell them produce in the fall. We showed visitors around the farm, and taught other volunteers things that we had already learned.

Our entire experience on the farm was rooted in action, and we were able to benefit both our site and the Ontario and Pomona communities through our work. Personally, whatever frustrations we felt in class or with other events in our lives, coming to farm gave a needed outlet. The ability to see the tangible impact of our work was invigorating and a source of deep satisfaction. A certainty that our actions and presence made a difference on the farm every week is a large part of what made
this a successful internship.

**Recommendation and Critique:**

Amy’s Farm’s main obstacle is labor. Food will get too old in the fields from no one to harvest, weeds take over, and planting does not get done at the optimum time. Randy does not have the resources to hire help, and while the farmer coming in September will change the labor structure, he nevertheless needs to be able to count on himself, not grants. Therefore, we have identified several areas that could be made more efficient or do not represent enough value to validate continuation.

One such area is the beef cattle. Feeding in the morning can take up to three unfocused hours, and the beef cattle consume the largest amounts of alfalfa and Bermuda grass, both of which have recently doubled in cost. The maximum Randy is able to charge for a cow is around $800. While we don’t know the exact costs of feed for a year (they change), the cost of a calf, the antibiotics, and the cost of Randy’s lost time are undeniable. Moreover, the farm is not actually geared towards animal production, and while Randy certainly feeds his animals less corn and they have more room than industry animals, they still never see pasture and don’t contribute to the cycle of the farm.

While the beef cattle do eat rows of old produce that are being ripped out, they still require additional hay. With the current model the beef cattle get the majority of the richest food on the farm. What may feed three cows, could feed dozens of chickens, multiple goats and sheep, and pigs. Because Randy’s laying chickens are currently fed mainly pellets, nutritionally, their eggs are not much better than store bought eggs. Randy may not have the time or skill to build a mobile
chicken coop in the foreseeable future, so taking the forage given to the beef cattle and feeding more chickens over a longer period of time could result in a much higher quality product. Randy started in cattle, so we are sure it feels comfortable to have them around, however he no longer runs a cattle operation and they are more an add-on than integration; one could even argue they distract him from farming. He has milk cows for the tours, the beefs do not add much to the farm.

The milk cows also need to be examined further. Presently Randy has three milk cows on the farm. Only one is being milked, the other two may be bred at some point but otherwise do nothing. Actively breeding the two cows or getting rid of them should be a priority, as otherwise they represent similar drains on time and feed as the beef cattle. The one cow in production provides approximately 120 gallons of milk each month to milkshare members, These members pay ten dollars a month, or about a dollar a gallon. The milk is worth eight a gallon. Of course, the members have to milk the cow themselves so Randy can't charge the full $8 but even going from $10 to $20 could make a big difference, without representing a huge burden on families. Randy views the milkshare as a way to get the cow adequately milked so it can be kept for the tours, otherwise he would have to purchase a $2000 machine to get the work done or purchase more calves. Defining the role of the milk cow at the farm could help in marketing and feed costs.

The tours also inhabit an interesting space on the farm, as they make a large amount of the profit, yet take up so much of Randy's time that he is hardly able to step in the garden and farm. Therefore, it could be beneficial to hire another tour guide, train the current ones on how to bring out the animals to show the tours, or
hire James (who is in need of income) to walk the animals out and play the roll of “farmer.” In completely stepping back from the tours Randy would be able to do a lot more work in the garden. Of course, Randy enjoys the children and may consider his participation as a treat.

Amy’s has made progress this semester as far as giving away food is concerned. The Food Bank and Food Not Bombs have both opened up, so that Crossroads is not the only site receiving food. Food Not Bombs and the Food Pantry are both in Claremont though, an area already receiving Randy’s food while Ontario is neglected. With minimal research, perhaps a good action project for future interns, other outlets could be identified in the more immediate area. With access to these closer areas there would also be fewer barriers (e.g. transportation) for recipients of the food to then come to the farm, work, get produce, and generally participate in the farm. The community could be opened up significantly by expanding beyond Claremont back to the neighborhood. Randy’s food is far more local than any other in the area but it’s not always reaching the truly local people.

**Statements of Positionality:**

*Casey Gordon:*

Forming a positive and trusting relationship with Amy’s Farm has depended more on the labor I provide and my reliability as a volunteer than my own positionality as a young white female. Although perhaps spatially exclusive as a result of being hidden among dairies the farm by and large is welcoming to most people who come. Indeed, I have yet to see anyone not thoroughly welcomed onto the farm. A number of Latino and African American volunteers work on the farm.
who receive the same sort of access and trust that I receive as a white person. While the owners of the farm are white I cannot say I feel any effect this has on acceptance of volunteers. I have also been surprised that being significantly younger than many volunteers manifests mainly in being assigned somewhat more labor intensive tasks than older, perhaps less strong volunteers. Generally though my creativity and opinions on the farming process are still valid and sought after. Having been taught a task I am trusted to be competent enough to continue on my own. For instance I once decided to thin the bean plants while I weeded the bed. Though Randy had not had in mind that the bed needed to be thinned he expressed gratitude for reminding him of the thinning we did on the pea plants (similar vine structure) rather than being upset I had taken the initiative without his prior consent. By working at the farm for a few months Randy believed in me based on work I had completed.

Division of labor can be drawn on traditional lines when both male and female volunteers are present (e.g. I am set to planting while the male may dig trenches). It would be easy to look to dominant male narratives on strength to explain this, but I don’t feel that level of consciousness in Randy’s actions, rather the boys complaining they don’t have the fine motor skills to be very good at planting and are, in truth much slower than the girls. Nevertheless, Randy makes a concentrated effort to expose all interns to all aspects of the process, regardless of gender (I have certainly dug my share of trenches). Moreover, if no males are present I have often been assigned heavy labor tasks. Though Randy is religious and I am not I have yet to experience conflict over this issue. The option for religious discussion is clearly available at the farm but in no way expected or forced. While
Randy and I may engage in philosophical discussions pertaining to community, farming, education, or any number of subjects there is no sense of coercion or expectation; we are both simply enjoying the chance to converse and share while working.

Overall, in terms of treatment I don’t feel that my position has greatly impacted my experience at the farm. As a school intern I perhaps receive more instruction than more experienced volunteers but that is to be expected. The trust and relationship with Randy is based on a willingness to learn and work hard, rather than on my own history. Mostly my position as a white, middle class, 21-year old female has impacted my experience in interest and access to the farm. I don’t doubt that most any volunteer is welcome at the farm (it is a site for completing mandatory community service), but I have been exposed to food justice issues and whole foods and produce for most of my life. Having a history of cooking with fresh produce, as well as having an uncle with a farm, means that I have already been set up to be sympathetic to the goals of the farm as well as food justice initiatives. It has taken a conscious effort to not simply blindly support the farm but to take a social constructivism standpoint and truly examine what is happening at the farm.

Grace Rosenthal:

As a researcher in Ontario, California, my demographic background is different than the community at large. Namely, I am an upper-middle class Jewish girl from Texas. At my site, these qualities had a distinct, though understated, effect on the way I viewed situations, interacted with the community, and gathered my data.
To begin, being a woman on the farm led me to assert my physical strength and wit. When visitors came, I attempted to seem as professional and competent as possible, due to my gender. Gender also allowed me to become closer with Amy, as I was able to empathize with her during her pregnancy. Through this strong relationship, difficult questions could be asked in a casual manner.

Age was another demographic that affected my work in the field. Being young and inexperienced in both research and farm work, I made sure to listen carefully and ask for help when necessary. At times, when I did not have the foresight to ask for help, certain tasks were not done to the fullest extent. These mistakes cost Randy time and possibly money, however, he is always calm and understanding. My age may also have had an effect on ideas I had for the farm, often proposing too “idealistic” or “naive” viewpoints. Also, my age and possible detachment from reality may have also led to my, on certain days, not working as hard as possible.

Coming from a religious background, I was able to understand where Randy’s connection to the earth came from. Though talking about the powerful greatness of Jesus can sometimes be uncomfortable, Randy’s thoughtful and levelheaded discussions of religion were often a welcome change of topic. Religion began as a point of concern for me in my interactions with Randy, but actually led to a better understand of his morals and driving forces on the farm.

In general, though these things about me affected my work with the farm in subtle ways, everyone who works on the farm receives the same respect, attention, and workload from Randy. Though I was inexperienced, Randy trusted my opinion.
Yes, I am Jewish, but Randy does not care. He will talk about kindness and
generosity with anyone, independent of their religion. Randy’s openness or possibly
even blindness to socio-economic stratus, race, gender, or age is just one part of
what is enjoyable about the farm as a volunteer.

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