



TO FEED A CITY

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ABSTRACT

To Feed A City is purposed to paint a present-day landscape of alternative food systems in Hamilton, Ontario and relate them to the principles and values of community food security. The inspiration for this project came upon realizing that the stories of Hamilton's burgeoning alternative food movement had yet to be captured in any permanent way, and consequently, have not been widely celebrated or learnt from.

The community devoted to this movement has recognized the imbalances of dominant food systems and is enabling a shift away from those systems which propagate disparities towards alternative systems which reconcile our food with principles of health, sustainability, justice, sense of place, and community.

This work is a condensed version of my honours undergraduate thesis. It offers an experiential perspective on alternative food systems and community food security, a definition of the latter and framework for understanding the former, as well as an assessment of Hamilton's alternative food systems in relation to the imperatives of community food security and food democracy.

TO BEGIN

It's important to remember that because the food system is so diverse and complex, it has many interconnected parts, none of which can be ignored for too long before the system falls out of balance. Focus too intently on hunger, and you'll lose sight of its cause. Devote yourself too narrowly to agriculture, and you'll forget about the consumer. Care too much about your own food, and you'll forsake food justice. There are larger purposes in life when all our interests come together.

-Mark Winne, *Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty*, 193

Whenever attempting to wrap my head around 'food', I rush to the passage above lifted from the conclusion of Mark Winne's book, *Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty*. His words caution us to maintain the equilibrium of food systems currently characterized by imbalances between sickness and health, individuals and community, capital and poverty, globalization and localism, greed and justice, environmental destruction and preservation, as well as specialization and interdisciplinarity—just a few among the innumerable other binaries embedded in our dominant food systems.

To Feed A City is purposed to paint a present-day landscape of alternative food systems in Hamilton, Ontario and relate them to the principles and values of community food security. The inspiration for this project came upon realizing that the stories of Hamilton's burgeoning alternative food movement had yet to be captured in any permanent way, and consequently, have not been widely celebrated or learnt from.

This paper is a condensation of my undergraduate thesis entitled *To Feed A City: Painting a Landscape of Alternative Food Systems in Hamilton and their Potential for Achieving Community Food Security*. I pursued the work under the auspices of an Experiential Education thesis course within McMaster University's Arts and Science Program. The content of both the longer work and the abridged version before you is founded on my experiences and actionism within Hamilton's food community.

This community has recognized the imbalances Winne points to and is enabling a shift away from food systems which propagate these disparities towards alternative systems which reconcile our food with principles of health, sustainability, justice, sense of place, and community. Hamilton is not alone in this endeavour as urban centres spanning the globe are making their disquietude with the food status quo known and looking inwards to stimulate its revision.

To begin, I briefly expand upon the conventional and emergency food systems. I ensuingly define my understanding of community food security—a concept markedly distinct from but oft confounded with food security—and present a framework for discussing alternative food systems. From here, the current landscape of Hamilton's alternative food systems is painted and assessed in relation to the imperatives of community food security and food democracy.

A TALE OF THREE SYSTEMS

THE CONVENTIONAL FOOD SYSTEM

To be able to speak of an *alternative* food system there must be another system to which it is an alternative. Although alternative food systems are increasingly widely celebrated, they reside primarily in ideology and only moderate levels of practice for the time being. On the ground, the conventional/mainstream/industrialized/globalized food system dominates fields, grocery store aisles, and dinner tables. This multi-labeled system is characterized in the literature as unjust, wasteful, inefficient, destructive, centralized, industrialized, monopolized, convenient, commoditized, and corporatized (Shiva, 2007; Prince Charles, 2007; Pollan, 2007; Lionette, 2007; Koc et. al., 1999; Power, 1999). In spite of this less than flattering reputation, it is from the conventional system that the industrialized urban world obtains most of its food.

North America has been basking in the luxury of easy access to internationally-yielded, mass-produced, cheap food since the post-war era. In the wake of the Great Depression and the Second World War, the rise of the supermarket and its promise of bottomless abundance were welcomed as blessings (Lionette, 2007). The union of globalization and neoliberalism also concurrent with this era meant that the provision of food fell to private hands within the vagaries of the unregulated marketplace (Koc et. al., 1999). It became one more commodity on which profit could be made by an advantaged few.

Since then, the urban consumer has become increasingly distanced, not only in terms of time and space, but knowledge of all the steps and intricacies that went into the creation of their meal since these processes happen out of sight (Koc et. al., 1999). Otherwise put, we usually only 'meet' our food at the consumption stage.

While middle and upper class consumers are still being romanced by the supermarket sixty years later, this food system is inaccessible to many, local small-scale primary producers and processors are relentlessly marginalized by it, monoculture farms are continually taking over small-scale farmland (Power, 1999), and non-renewable resources are being burnt through without diligence to support this ever growing and demanding system (Shiva et. al., 2007). Food has become a labour of money, not of love (MacRae & Welsh, 1998).

Industrial food however garnered and holds on to its popularity because it is relatively cheap in pure economic terms; partly because agribusinesses are heavily subsidized by affluent western governments and have monopolized the food system, and largely because the externalities of this system are being shouldered by the health of our bodies, soil, water, air, and communities.

The outputs of the conventional food system are however still not affordable for all, creating a sister crisis whereby low income and otherwise disenfranchised individuals and communities cannot afford or access the supermarket's allegedly 'inexpensive' offerings. This has opened the floodgates for unequivocal urban malnutrition and hunger across North America (Winne, 2008). Food provision for this subset of the population has fallen to yet another food system.

THE EMERGENCY FOOD SYSTEM

Hunger and severe malnutrition have traditionally given society the greatest pause. Whether as a result of fundamental religious teachings or innate human compassion, most of us will do what we can to prevent a fellow human being from teetering too close to the brink of starvation. Food is the basic human necessity in which we invest the most energy to produce, and it unites the human race in a universal spirit of awareness, sharing, and charity.

-Mark Winne, *Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty*, xx

Perceptions of the emergency/charitable food system are inextricable from how food is valued. Those who accept food charity as inevitable uphold food as a commodity which must be earned. Those who are appalled by the emergency food sector regard food as sustenance and a basic human right to which dignified access must never be impeded; and not just dignified access to any food, but food that is healthy in every sense of the word. Those unable to afford the creations of the retail supermarket industry are left with the option of being fed by the emergency food system.

The private sector spawned emergency and charity food which has been picking up the slack in North America since the scaling back of social service provisioning by government after the recession of the 1980s (Winne, 2008). This marked the beginning of the ongoing food charity era in North America which commenced with the emergence of privately-funded food banks to deal with what at the time was believed to be a temporary recession-induced emergency (Husbands, 1999). Thirty years later, food banking has evolved into a multi-billion dollar institutionalized network (Winne, 2008) depended upon by over three million Canadians annually (Power, 1999).

As Winne attests, fellow human being could not be left to, "...teeter too close to the brink of starvation," and as such, the private sector dutifully stepped up. Fellow human beings have, however, been dehumanized through the emergency food system, dependent on handouts to avoid teetering too close to the brink.

The food bank user's dependence on food charity is paralleled by the emergency food system's reliance on private benevolence. The emergency food sector is a byproduct of the conventional food system's failures, but paradoxically depends on the conventional system's wastefulness and unaffordability to sustain itself (Campbell, 2004). Donations to the emergency food system usually represent the poorest quality of food coming directly from the conventional system. It largely hails from manufacturers or distributors who want to unload these items because they have defects and are thus unsellable or are sheer surplus and will likewise not be sold or profited from (Tarasuk, 2001).

Overall, emergency food access has created a situation of paradoxical counterproductivity (Winne, 2008). This condition is described by David Cayley as one in which an institution becomes a threat to itself. As food charity expands and bigger, better emergency food services are developed, the demand rises, and services expand yet again. At one point, Cayley argues, the situation the institution is trying to mitigate becomes unmanageable by that very same institution. The emergency/charity response

to hunger, poverty, and malnutrition is thus in a sense propagating the problems it seeks to rectify. While these immediate cries must be answered, how can we instead address their real causes of food insecurity instead of incessantly slapping on band-aids?

TRANSFORMING NOTIONS OF FOOD SECURITY

The community, rather than the individual, the state, the nation, or any other system is and should be at the centre of our analysis and value system. Communitarians can be understood to be conducting a straightforward prescriptive argument: human life will go better if communitarian, collective, and public values guide and construct our lives.

-Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey, *The Politics of Community: A Feminist Critique of the Liberal-Communitarian Debate*, 1-2

The most widely accepted definition of food security hails from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The organization defines the concept as:

A condition in which all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 2008).

Based on this understanding, recipients of emergency/charity food are food insecure as physical and economic access is not a constant and there is no guarantee that the handouts are sufficient, safe, or nutritious. The emergency food system is thus treating hunger and not food security.

The FAO's conceptualization of food security is furthermore built on the four principles of availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adequacy (Koc et. al., 1999). While at first glance this definition seems holistic, it leaves a central question unanswered: Who has control over the availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adequacy of our food? Considerations of production, processing, and, to some degree, distribution are entirely ignored by the FAO's definition. Their description of food security is resultantly imbalanced as it focuses exclusively on the access and consumption end of the food system and gives no attention to where the food originated or how decisions pertinent to food systems are made.

Elaine M. Power seeks to restore the balance. She identifies two food security approaches being undertaken in Canada; the sustainable food systems approach and the antipoverty approach. She continues by noting that in dually considering the production of food through the sustainable food systems approach along with its supply via the antipoverty approach, her treatment is more complete (Power, 1999). While it is certainly more inclusive than the FAO's conceptualization, this polarization of environmental and social considerations is unproductive. What is needed to move forward is a theoretical framework for food security that is truly holistic, spans considerations throughout the

entire food system, makes connections – not polarizations, and redefines who holds the power over our food.

Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey, quoted above, offer a starting point for how we can begin to reshape our understanding of food security. They do so by challenging assumptions about the unit of reference within the conventional and emergency food systems. Both systems hone in on the individual and the household as their units of reference for whether food security and/or the treatment of hunger are being achieved or not (Fisher & Gottlieb, 1996). This normative supposition is undoubtedly embedded in a larger cultural inclination towards individualism rather than a spirit of communitarianism. Underpinning the new school of food security, however, is an unshakeable predisposition towards community.

Community food security (CFS) is a renegotiation of food security which has already been defined by many and is a concept receiving more and more attention by both scholarly and more mainstream communication. The application of communitarian ideals to contemporary notions of food security goes back to the 1970s, although Winne asserts that the CFS movement only really took hold in 1994. The most succinct and widely cited explanation of CFS came courtesy of Mike Hamm and Anne Bellows within the last few years:

Community food security is a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally appropriate, nutritionally sound diet through an economically and environmentally sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance, social justice, and democratic decision-making (Bellows & Hamm, 2003).

When juxtaposed with the FAO and Power's approaches to food security, there is no denying that CFS is vastly more comprehensive and complex, and consequently, much more difficult in practice than in theory. There are millions of Canadians who are food secure but not *community* food secure; predominantly because it is an emergent paradigm for food markedly distinguished from the hegemonic conventional and emergency food systems we are accustomed to.

Several authors and organizations are devoting much thought towards unpacking Hamm and Bellows' definition. I have categorized the principles and values of CFS they collectively put forward into four thematic umbrellas: the community as unit of reference and decision-maker, localism and sustainability, justice and equality of access, and an interdisciplinary systemic approach.

THE COMMUNITY AS UNIT OF REFERENCE AND DECISION-MAKER

CFS upholds the community as its primary unit of reference – individuals and households are considered parts therein (Winne). This principle is at the heart of CFS and from it, all other CFS specifications flow. Hunger and food security are normally attended to at the level of the individual or the household as it is very individualistic to either purchase groceries or receive a handout. What is more, these are reactive activities whereas CFS considers the proactive food needs of a community – as determined by that same community – and strives to mitigate the causes of hunger and food security at their roots (Fisher & Gottlieb, 1996).

Otherwise put, a community or neighbourhood is empowered to decide what their particular local food geography looks like according to this principle of CFS. There are several tools available to assist stakeholders in finding this common ground such as community food assessments (Winne) and participatory planning processes (Campbell, 2004), embedded in dialogue, collaboration, and actionism. Meaningful connections between community stakeholders and policy processes are also inherent to inclusive decision-making around CFS.

Moreover, collective ownership over and responsibility for food is constantly cited as a natural byproduct of CFS' participatory grassroots process. Communities that can successfully come together to enact decisions around their food are immensely stronger, more cohesive, and yield higher social capital (Winne).

LOCALISM AND SUSTAINABILITY

Favour for localism logically flows from accepting the community as the unit of reference. CFS is tied to a localized sense of place as community stakeholders and their allies concern themselves with issues of neighbourhood food accessibility (Winne, 2008). Beyond local access, the push for local production, processing, and distribution have become defining features of the contemporary food movement at large, subsequently reflected in CFS thought (Fisher & Gottlieb, 1996).

Sustainability has likewise gripped CFS encompassing ecological, sustainable, organic, and biodynamic farming practices (Community Food Security Coalition); environmental stewardship; and decreased or no dependency on non-renewable energy sources (Winne). The protection of small sustainable farms catering to the local market is thus seen as a necessity by CFS proponents who not only demand easy access to food, but food that is simultaneously healthy for the environment, the eater, and the local economy (Community Food Security Coalition).

JUSTICE AND EQUALITY OF ACCESS

A failing of the conventional food system, as described earlier, is its unaffordability for low and no income individuals and families. According to a CFS framework, healthy and sustainable food must be made affordable and available to everyone, regardless of their income or where they live (Community Food Security Coalition; Fisher & Gottlieb, 1996). Food is a right, not a luxury. Equality of access and affordability across the income spectrum is a central value of CFS, and one of the most difficult to navigate.

Justice within the food system is also heavily discussed in relation to farmers', processors', and food service workers' wages and working conditions. CFS supports income and labour justice for all these groups in conjunction with price justice for the consumer (Winne). Wayne Roberts, Acting Manager of the Toronto Food Policy Council, describes this tug of war as follows:

The right of producers to a good income doesn't override the right of poor consumers to eat. Nor can the need for cheap food override the rights of producers to make a living, or pressure producers to violate the carrying capacity of nature (Winne, 2008, 188).

The tension between justice for food system workers, justice for the consumer, and justice for the natural environment is what renders this principle of CFS the hardest to enact as the achievement of one is perceived to come at the expense of another (Winne, 2008).

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY SYSTEMIC APPROACH

A systems theory approach to food is explicitly advocated for by Robert Gottlieb, Andrew Fisher, and Mark Winne. Canadian Ludwig Von Bertalanffy conceived of systems theory in a 1974 treatise in which he elaborates:

It is necessary to study not only parts and processes in isolation, but also to solve the decisive problems found in the organization and order unifying them, resulting from dynamic interaction of parts, and making the behaviour of parts different when studied in isolation or within the whole (Von Bertalanffy, 1974, 3).

It is essential to consider the food system as a whole and embrace its interconnections, confusions, messiness, and complexity. From here, we are to learn to work with all the implicated parts and players rather than adopting a reductionist standpoint eager for easy answers. "While it may take longer, a systems approach to [community] food insecurity will ultimately be more effective," notes Winne (6). Adopting a systems approach also restores compassion as well as recognizes the importance of social networks and community participation in arriving at plans for action (Winne).

The necessity of collaboration asserted above is intrinsic to a systems approach to food. In order to work towards CFS, these collaborations happen well beyond linking policymakers to community stakeholders. They must span all sectors and disciplines related to every aspect of the food system; policy, planning, production, processing, marketing, distribution, transportation, accessibility, pricing, preparation, consumption, waste management, and education. In order to achieve CFS through a systemic lens, pieces that are not currently connecting must begin to come around the same table.

The food system envisioned by CFS devotees is needless to say ambitious but it is slowly manifesting internationally within urban centres. In addition to the conventional and emergency food systems, there is a third food system "flowering across the world" (Shiva et. al., 2007, 47) which extracts the principles and values of CFS from theory and translates them into practice.

THE ALTERNATIVE FOOD SYSTEM

When a system has failed we must change that system. When we are perpetuating the system because of our laziness and lust for convenience, then we must change or else we will collapse.

-Jamey Lionette, *Manifestos on the Future of Food and Seed*, 126

It is virtually impossible to pinpoint when the alternative food system first emerged. Many of the diverse components over which the contemporary food movement is claiming ownership are activities eaters have been participating in for centuries; organic growing, preserving, frequenting farmers' markets, and collective cooking—to name a few. Before there was a globalized or technologically sophisticated world, locally and sustainably produced, processed, and distributed food was simply the norm.

All this to say that very little is being innovated through the advent of alternative food systems. The movement is better described as a *reinvention* and renewal of how food used to be interacted with before the conventional and emergency food systems came to dominate—but with a small catch; alternative food systems are emerging in predominantly urbanized built environments which, certainly in North America, are mostly estranged from non-industrialized, non-market-based, non-conventional, 'alternative' food systems.

Nowhere in the literature is the alternative food system explicitly defined. Writers instead choose to describe it through an illustration of its parts. To give a sense of the multifaceted nature of alternative food systems, the following is a sample of its tenets:

Localized Provisioning

- Local Agriculture: small farms devoted to serving the local market
- Urban Agriculture: community gardening, urban farming, backyard/front yard gardens, residential and urban livestock, rooftop gardens, seed saving and exchanges
- Small-Scale/Community Processing: small-scale processing enterprises, preserving, pickling, canning, community and collective kitchens

Marketing and Accessibility

- Direct Marketing: farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
- Community Food Centres
- Alternative Commercial Access Options: Good Food Box Programs, buying clubs, food co-ops

Policy and Planning

- Food Policy Councils (FPCs)
- Community Participatory Food Planning: community food assessments
- Transportation and Infrastructure Projects

Education

- Nutrition and Healthy Eating Programs
- Public Promotions
- Farm-to-School Projects
- Skill Sharing Programs: farm internships, youth empowerment and skill-building programs

CFS enthusiasts are unremittingly hopeful that the alternative food system, if properly executed, can achieve community food security. Therein lays our definition of an alternative food system: a food system which embodies the principles and values of

community food security. Eloquent, comprehensive, and presents us with endless possibilities.

The 'food gap' for Winne in fact consists of a series of gaps which the pursuit of alternative food systems can begin to close. They are the gaps between the halves and the have-nots, the consumer and the producer, antipoverty and environmental activism, along with the gap between urban centres and rural regions.

Reflecting on his experiences, he names the "three Ps" necessary for a transformation of our food system and the ensuing realization of CFS: Projects, Partners, and Policy. These "three Ps" will form the framework through which Hamilton's alternative food systems will be examined.

'Projects' are most of the bulleted items above. They are, "...singular activities that social justice and local food advocates pursue [and] they are the source of innovation that inspires others to replicate and disseminate them," (Winne, 2008, 172). Projects within alternative food systems are certainly undertaken by groups beyond social justice and local food advocates but the gist is there.

'Partners' refers to the complex web of connections, collaborations, and relationships needed to integrate all the pertinent parts into a whole as systems theory advocates for. Winne admits that the effort to build and sustain partnerships takes time and will include, "...some uncommon connections and often un-thought-of players," (Winne, 2008, 172) including the conventional and emergency food systems.

He includes 'Policy' as the final requisite for CFS and alternative food system success. Public policy, "[gets] our heads above our own projects, or even above our own supper plates," (Winne, 2008, 172). The question this leaves behind is whether policy comes before projects and partnerships, or afterwards. Success stories exist on either side of the answer which speaks to the innumerable routes open to cities willing to reinvent and renew their food system by aligning it with the principles and values of CFS.

Tooled with an understanding of CFS and its embodiment in alternative food systems, we can look at what is happening in Hamilton through the lenses of projects, partners, and policy.

PAINTING THE LANDSCAPE OF HAMILTON'S ALTERNATIVE FOOD SYSTEMS PROJECTS

What I would really like to see in the mainstream is a transition to some of those alternatives. When it is just alternative and people are operating outside, it's kind of like a commune. Everybody is doing their own thing in the commune but it's so tiny that you're not transforming social relations. You're offering an alternative and people who come to visit might think that's interesting, but you're not really informing changes in the mainstream.

-Interviewee, "To Feed A City"

So what are some of the tenets of the alternative food system in Hamilton which can be taken out from the commune and translated into the mainstream?

In the conceptual exploration of alternative food systems, projects were categorized under the thematic umbrellas of localized provisioning, marketing and accessibility, and education. These categories of 'food work' are all active in Hamilton to varying extents. Localized provisioning along with marketing and accessibility are used below to organize the city's projects and begin to paint the present day landscape of its alternative food systems.

LOCALIZED PROVISIONING THE FARM

At the heart of Hamilton's alternative food movement are its small-scale farms which have made a commitment to serve the local market—and they are a dwindling few. According to the most recently updated Hamilton Local Food Directory, an initiative of Environment Hamilton's Eat Local program, there are currently over sixty farms in the rural Greater Hamilton Area producing everything from apple cider to beef. These farms target primarily local consumers as opposed to feeding into global commodity chains (Environment Hamilton, 2009). Thirty to forty years ago, this number was much larger but the business of farming is becoming decreasingly fruitful around the city.

Over the last few decades, farmers gradually picked up and left Hamilton's periphery to look elsewhere for income security. My generation's loss of interest in agriculture also meant that family farms regularly disappear, often into the hands of developers, rather than being passed on to progeny.

The three local farms I came to know best through my experiential dabbling and interview conversations were ManoRun Organic Farm, Simpler Thyme Organic Farm, and Heart's Content Organic Farmstead. They are three of a small handful of organic/sustainable/ecological family farms in the Hamilton region.

Fifteen years ago, Hamilton's rural surroundings were completely void of any small organic farms selling locally and so the fact that we currently have four is a point of pride. They are also some of the most accessible farms to urbanites as they frequent the inner city's farmers' markets and offer Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) programs which will be expanded upon in the discussion of marketing and accessibility.

COMMUNITY GARDENERS AND THEIR AMBITIOUS COUSINS

Extremely localized provisioning is happening within Hamilton's metropolitan communities, not just its rural periphery, in the form of urban agriculture and community gardening. Hamilton's community gardens are loosely networked through the Hamilton Community Garden Network (HCGN) which established itself in 2007.

All my interviewees mentioned community gardening and/or the HCGN as something Hamilton has to celebrate within its alternative food systems. At the same time, a few were frustrated that the network is taking longer than anticipated to act on its mission statement and significantly participate in the food community. This is attributable to the fact that the committee consists almost entirely of volunteers who participate in the network outside of their other work and life commitments.

The City of Hamilton furthermore has little involvement with the network beyond lending it a few of their Public Health employees. The food community is disgruntled by the municipality's obvious lack of support for community gardening and the absence of policies and procedures for establishing new community gardens in

Hamilton. Those interested in “[making] something ugly into something beautiful” (Winne 2008, 58) hang up without answers when they call the City for guidance. This frustration is confirmed by a statement from Hamilton’s Department of Public Works which reads that:

...the City has no specific policy with regard to requests to begin a community garden. [Such] a request by a group to turn part of an existing park into a community garden or a piece of vacant City-owned land would be considered on a case by case basis. However, as with any request, the group would have to assume all the capital costs, including the costs related to supplying water, fencing, erection of sheds, etc. (HCGN, 5).

The Department of Public Works does lease city-owned land to private organizations wishing to begin gardens, but as indicated above, these organizations incur all financial and managerial duties. The municipality itself owns and manages two of the network’s nine gardens; the Churchill Park community garden and the Dundas community garden. I have gardened at Churchill Park for two summers which tuned me in to both the potential and pitfalls of community gardening.

The purpose of community gardening and urban agriculture at large is a contentious area in the literature. In their treatment of alternative food system projects, some authors posit community gardening as a means of achieving food security rather than community development (Wekerle, 2004). Community gardens are a tenet of the Toronto Food Policy Council and Toronto city planning department’s plan for, “[A] future [with] adequate amounts of safe, nutritious, culturally acceptable food available to all,” (Wekerle, 2004), exemplary of the belief that community gardens are a reliable food access option.

The energy around community gardening as a means of food access in the literature is also heavily focused on low-income neighbourhoods (Meares, 1999; Nugent, 1999). While this might seem harmless and even logical on paper, proposing community gardening and urban agriculture as a food access strategy for specifically low-income communities can be discriminatory. This suggestion merely reestablishes a different version of the two-tiered food system we are currently working to get away from in which one system serves those with capital, and another system serves those without. This proposition also skews a greater purpose of community gardening which is indifferent to socioeconomic standings and likewise moves away from vesting too much faith in community gardens as a means of achieving solely food security.

Authors of another mind, notably Mark Winne and Troy Glover – the keynote speaker at the HCGN public launch event in March 2008 – are more skeptical of community gardening as a path to food security and the eradication of hunger. They question the capacity of community gardens and urban agriculture, particularly in Southern Ontario’s geography and climate, to meet our quantifiable food needs. Winne reformulates the purpose of community garden best, paraphrasing a colleague who said that, “The most important word in *community garden* is not *garden*,” (Winne, 2008, 62).

The first time I visited the Churchill Park community garden, my housemate and I were the only humans amidst the sixty-seven plots on a Sunday afternoon. The garden’s inbuilt irrigation system had not been adjusted to accommodate the unusual

amount of rain in Hamilton throughout the summer of 2008. Resultantly, plots flooded, crops failed, and people stopped tending to their gardens.

Located in the more affluent Westdale neighbourhood, Churchill Park gardeners were likely not reliant on their plot's yield to meet quantifiable food needs, hence the overgrown abandonment. Why then should there be a community garden in this neighbourhood? The more obvious purposes might be to decrease food miles, learn to grow your own food, or for recreational pleasure. While I subscribe to all of these, I believe there is an even larger purpose to community gardening.

This past summer, that same now former housemate, a mutual friend, and I established three garden plots at Churchill Park with a group of beautiful newcomer girls from Burma in partnership with the Hamilton Settlement and Integration Services Organization (SISO). Connecting with these young women and observing them as they cared for the land with boundless skill and compassion was a blessing. The quantity of food yielded was moderate, certainly not enough to feed all of their families for an extended period, but the relationships we formed and the gifts we gave and received were harvested in bounty.

Last summer, I also began working with the North Hamilton Community Health Centre's (NHCHC) Children's Garden Club in the city's north end—an underdog neighbourhood. The NHCHC is a seasoned expert in community gardening having set up their first garden in 1995. We met as the Children's Garden Club one evening a week and together we tended to the crops, sang songs, played games, journaled, cooked our yield, and laughed. The production of food was secondary to how our eclectic group of gardeners came together to so enjoyably share that space with one another.

My experiences with the SISO and NHCHC gardens are very distinguished from lone gardening in Churchill Park. The secret of their success is uncomplicated. In both cases, full-time staff members are tasked with community gardening programming which brings people together as well as retains their interest and involvement. Community gardening cannot be seen linearly as providing a patch of land and a tool shed. As Winne postulates, it is about the *community* rather than the *garden*. The garden is first and foremost a space for forging unprecedented relationships; whether these are with our food, each other, or the self.

Positing these experiences against one another exposes the unfulfilled potential of community gardening when its function relies too heavily on the production of food and not the cultivation of community. Community gardeners can unquestionably produce significant quantities of fresh food but it becomes a matter of process versus product. When we become too fixated on the product, we lose love for the process.

Hamilton's growing contingency of urban farmers, "the more ambitious cousins of community gardeners," (Winne 2008, 57), have achieved equilibrium between loving the process and generating the product. The West Avenue Growers and Backyard Harvest are two urban agriculture entities who farm Hamilton's downtown core. Both farms are able to produce food to feed themselves, to sell at the city's Makers' Markets, and to share with others. Their success is a testament to the potential for urban agriculture to simultaneously meet quantifiable food and immeasurable community-building needs.

Both sets of growers are keen to share their projects with others, inviting neighbourhood children over to harvest and cook, hosting tours of their land, going to market, and taking in eager but clueless volunteers such as myself. They are exemplary

of instances when alternative food system projects make the effort to leave the commune and bring in the world around them.

TOGETHER, WE MAKE AND BREAK BREAD

The next step beyond growing food as a community is preparing and enjoying it together, whether it is in a more informal social setting or through community and collective kitchens. The designations 'community' and 'collective' kitchen are often mistakenly used interchangeably. A *community* kitchen is a community-based cooking program in which small groups come together to prepare meals. These meals are either consumed together and/or taken home. A *collective* kitchen is a type of community kitchen that involves pooling individual resources and labour to similarly enjoy the meal together and/or take portions away for later consumption (Tarasuk, 2001).

My first experiential encounter with community kitchens was through the NHCHC. One of the health centre's community development workers operates three community kitchen programs; one for beginners, another for seniors, and the last for individuals with diabetes. According to the City of Hamilton's 2009 Food Access Guide, these are the only community kitchen programs in the entire city and are only available to north end residents.

The NHCHC at large, including its kitchen programs, relies on funding from donors to support their staffing and food procurement. Without these external private funders, the programs and the centre would cease to exist. The kitchens are therefore a community kitchen over a collective kitchen as resources are not pooled from recipients, but rather, collected from these grants. When the essentialism of the NHCHC's services is considered, this ad hoc unsustainable funding model is worrisome.

Taking yet another critical step back, since the kitchen's participants are not paying a 'membership' or 'user' fee, the centre is essentially using charitable grant money to feed the north end. From a purely economic perspective, the kitchens are in many ways a repackaging of the emergency food system. Where the traditional emergency food sector and the community kitchens do however differ is that there is a restoration of agency, responsibility, and spirit of communitarianism inherent in the NHCHC programs and community kitchens at large which is usually absent from the charitable food sector.

There used to be many more community kitchens in the north end as recently as four years ago. These additional kitchens, four to five of them altogether, were truer to the collective kitchen model as participants equally contributed resources for food procurement and collectively decided on the menu. These kitchen sessions were also extremely frequent, operating up to six times a month, and were open to the entire neighbourhood. Interest in 'general' community kitchens as opposed to the beginner, senior, and diabetes specializations however wore off and the NHCHC transitioned to solely offering the 'needs-based' kitchens.

I found impetus to reestablish collective 'kitchening' in Hamilton and worked with others to establish PEASoup, a collective kitchen in Hamilton's west end. Every two weeks, students and permanent residents come together to prepare and enjoy a meal – and take home leftovers. Prior to each session, a volunteer facilitator decides on a menu, which broadly upholds affordability, nutrition, and seasonality as priorities. The facilitator then equally divides up the requisite ingredients and assigns them to participants. I look on in awe of the conversations, teamwork, and social nature of the

biweekly kitchen sessions—topped off with flawlessly delicious, affordable, and wholesome meals.

Localized provisioning projects, namely urban agriculture, community gardening, and at a slower pace, community kitchens, are sprouting in Hamilton. What has distinguished longstanding localized provisioning endeavours from those that have flopped is the degree to which these projects have a social and community building aspect to them. Projects that, like the conventional and emergency food systems, are solely focused on individual food provisioning are predestined to an abrupt end if conventional or emergency food procurement is more convenient.

The question of convenience highlights one of the major impediments to a more widespread flourishing of Hamilton's alternative food system—accessibility. With only nine community gardens, two urban farms, a dozen or so local rural farms, and two community kitchens—it is an extremely inaccessible food system for the majority of Hamiltonians. Alternative access strategies are therefore garnering much more attention in comparison to localized provisioning activities as urbanites want to access the alternative system but lack the time or opportunity to do their own growing or engage in community cooking.

MARKETING AND ACCESSIBILITY THE FARMERS' MARKET

The most common contact points between the majority of Hamilton's urban population and the alternative food system are the city's modest, but growing, number of farmers' markets. In theory, farmers' markets are a simple form of direct marketing which reduce the distance and processes normally involved in getting fresh produce to consumers through the conventional food system. In 2008, Hamilton was home to four farmers' markets: the Jackson Square Farmers' Market in the downtown core, the Ottawa Street Farmers' Market in the east end, the Concession Street Farmers' Market on Hamilton Mountain, and the rotating Makers' Markets. A year later, the Westdale and Dundas markets have been added to the roster.

Like with community gardens, the framework for establishing a new farmers' market is nonexistent in Hamilton. The respective pushes for the Dundas and Westdale Farmers' Markets were heated and exemplary of some of the tensions to be negotiated before altering a neighbourhood's food geography.

The process to establish the Dundas market was described by a member of the alternative food community as "politically challenging" as the Dundas Business Improvement Area (BIA) was unenthused about inviting in vendors—farmers and small-scale processors such as bakers—who they see as a threat. This is a completely legitimate concern from their positionality, as is the bafflement of the market implementation committee who did not understand why not everyone embraced something so simple.

Some of the other tensions to be negotiated in the establishment of farmers' markets are around the cost of food and a farmer's living wage, a market's prioritizing of local growers versus wholesalers, and the overall purpose of farmers' markets as mechanisms of food access versus tourist attractions. The renovation of the downtown Jackson's Square market is currently underway and is a highly debated renewal

initiative. Another community member remarked that while beautification and revamping has its place, the focus of the renovation is to attract tourism rather than to reshape the market to better meet the needs of its daily clientele and farmers.

Yet another citizen envisioned a Hamilton which boasts a series of extremely localized markets and farm stands around the city similar to FoodShare Toronto's Good Food Markets. When the scope of the current farmers' market geography of Hamilton is considered, having only a handful of markets for a population of half a million is insufficient. This relates back to the earlier discussion of dwindling farmland and retired farmers.

Localizing and multiplying markets is precisely what the Makers' Markets have been doing for three years. The mantra of the Makers' Markets is unabashedly simple: locally made, locally sold. Growers, artists, and crafters are all invited to sell their creations to their communities at the markets. Their ongoing success is a testament to the interest of Hamilton's communities in accessing the alternative food system.

There is another alternative access model also receiving much praise within the city which mitigates some of the tensions around farmers' markets.

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER: COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

Community Supporting Agriculture (CSA) is a particularly promising alternative access and marketing model as upwards of two thousand CSA farms have spread around North America since the 1980s (Winne, 2008); four of which are in Hamilton. These programs also go by the pseudonym of "Community *Shared* Agriculture" as they depend on farmers and communities sharing in both the risks and rewards of local agriculture. Each CSA differs but in essence, community members pay the farmer a lump sum at the beginning of the season and are provided with a share of the yield on a frequent, usually weekly or biweekly, basis.

The success of CSA farms relies on their ability to satisfy the interests of farmers and eaters alike. Since farmers receive payment up front, they are not at the mercy of the unpredictable ebbs and flows of market business. In addition, the food shares are either picked up at weekly depots or are delivered directly to shareholders, reducing the time demand on the farmers to be out of the field. On the eaters' end, they are tapping into a guaranteed supply of often local and usually organic produce for an entire season.

Adjustments are necessary on the part of an eater accustomed to the abundance and choice of the conventional food system. Part of the understanding between farmers and eaters in a CSA arrangement is that consumers will be sympathetic when the bounty of the field is not high due to the weather and other unforeseeable impediments. Some weeks might therefore have fuller shares than others (Winne, 2008). Eaters must also reorient their expectations to accommodate seasonality and the natural yield of the earth around them.

According to one interviewee's calculations, Hamilton's four CSA farms are only collectively able to offer 500 to 600 shares to a population of 500,000. This is potentially an underestimate as an old acquaintance who worked for Plan B Organic Farm told me that their program alone sold out at one thousand shares last summer. Either way, the demand is high, the supply is comparatively low, and the infrastructure to support distribution is weak as farmers are improvising pick-up depots in parking lots and driveways.

Like the Makers' Market, CSA farms are promising unsung achievements in Hamilton with the potential to inform and influence projects like them. Their mutual success hinges on the ability of these projects to reconnect urban communities to local agriculture. New relationships with food procurement are undoubtedly made via CSA and localized markets; but perhaps even more important are the personal relationships formed between the people raising the food and those eating it.

In discussion with one of my interviewees months before our interview, they said that when they are considering the 'ethics' of a plate of food, they reflect on *whether that plate helped build community*. That line will always stay with me as the goal to uphold for our food and the system behind it. Plates containing food from the Makers' Market and CSA farms gracefully satisfy this criterion.

PARTNERS

To begin to describe the partnerships within Hamilton's food movement is a nebulous task as most of them are better conceived of as personal friendships, relationships, and collaborations rather than more bureaucratic professional partnerships. And it is a complex web.

These relationships and collaborations are inherent to Hamilton's alternative food systems. Without them, the movement supporting these systems would have undoubtedly already fallen apart. Some of the partnerships have already been alluded to and not all of them need to, or can be, elaborated upon to highlight their inextricability. I do, however, want to share two examples which exemplify what can be created when individual projects and players within the food community came together to create a whole that is more magnificent than its individual parts.

PUTTING LOCAL AND ORGANIC ON THE MENU: TAPESTRY BISTRO

Towards the end of 2008, an old hydro station on the cusp of downtown Hamilton reopened its doors. Its reincarnation as a restaurant is a testament to the feasibility of bringing the alternative food system out of obscurity and into the mainstream. *Tapestry Bistro* has formed partnerships with local growers and small processors as the eatery is dedicated to a seasonal, local, and organic menu.

The chef and co-owner spent last summer farming before the idea for *Tapestry Bistro* even began to percolate. Through preexisting connections with the farm community and new relationships with local small-scale processors, the restaurant has been able to build a menu from the alternative food system which is furthermore in line with the principles and values of community food security.

Tapestry Bistro attracts customers who would self-identify as being active within Hamilton's food movement but they do not compose the majority of their clientele. As such, *Tapestry* is skillfully bringing alternative food procurement methods into Hamilton's restaurant scene, and consequently, the consciousness and stomachs of people who might not otherwise interact with this food system. The partnership between *Tapestry* and local organic growers and processors is beautifully illustrative of what can be achieved when collaborations are forged between different factions of the alternative food movement.

PARTNERING BETWEEN SYSTEMS: THE FRUIT TREE PROJECT AND THE BAPTIST GARDENERS

Returning to Winne's concluding passage from *Closing the Food Gap*, he warns us that the food system, "...has many interconnected parts, none of which can be ignored for too long before the system falls out of balance." Likewise, we cannot consider the conventional system, the emergency system, and the alternative system as parts unto themselves. They are also interconnected.

I asked my interviewees if they saw potential for the alternative food system to alleviate some of the demand on the emergency food system. All of them replied by noting the two major partnerships between these two food systems in Hamilton: the Fruit Tree Project and the West Highland Baptist Church Victory Garden.

The Fruit Tree Project is a subset of Environment Hamilton's Eat Local program. The project's coordinator and volunteers glean fruit from public and residential fruit trees. Some of the yield is returned to the homeowner, but most of it is donated to the city's numerous food banks. On the Fruit Tree Project, one interviewee said that, "...it is interesting because it is so outside the commodity food system. It is taking food that already exists, the abundance, and making sure it gets used. It goes to show how much the earth is willing to give."

The earth also gave thousands of pounds of abundance at the West Highland Baptist Church's Victory Garden this past summer. The project is a mission initiated three summers ago by one of the church's congregants. The congregation at large purchased the land for the one and a half acre garden and devotes volunteer time and transportation to the growth and distribution of the yield. Like the Fruit Tree Project, the Victory Garden partnered with Hamilton's emergency food sector and directs the entirety of the harvest to food banks across the city.

The partnerships between Eat Local's Fruit Tree Project, the West Highland Baptist Church Victory Garden, and Hamilton's charity food services serve a dual purpose. Although the donations are not alleviating user dependency on the services, they are making locally grown freshly-picked produce available for the emergency food system to offer to its users. As such, these partnerships address health, nutrition, and environmental concerns within the emergency food system.

POLICY

CREATING POLITICAL SPACES FOR FOOD DEMOCRACY IN HAMILTON

Within the last year, the City of Hamilton's Department of Public Health in conjunction with actors from the alternative food movement gave rise to the Community Food Security Stakeholder Committee (CFSSC). The food community is both excited and anxious about this new body as they wait to see what it will do.

The CFSSC began meeting in the summer of 2008. The intention of this committee and other Food Policy Councils (FPCs) is to bring together all factions of the food system for a holistic approach to it—it is systems theory applied to a government body. FPCs have been the common response of cities across North America who want support for their alternative food systems and believe that the current governmental structures targeting food are inadequate (MacRae, 1999).

Hamilton's stakeholders on the CFSSC include representatives from the agricultural community, Environment Hamilton Eat Local, emergency food service

providers, researchers, the Poverty Roundtable, city councilors, and municipal staff. They hope to be successful in reaching their overarching mandate:

To develop a food continuum policy and strategic action plan that will move Hamilton towards being a place where all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes self-reliance and social justice.

Skepticisms were largely raised around the scope of the CFSSC's membership. Three interviewees were collectively concerned that the labour sector is absent and the emergency food sector is underrepresented. The most successful FPCs are able to bring together actors who would not otherwise interact (Campbell, 2004) and nurture "some uncommon connections and [include] often un-thought-of players," as Winne suggests. Otherwise put, interviewees are concerned that the CFSSC is just a more institutionalized version of the alternative food movement's 'commune'. It might be too early for this criticism, but a larger net must nevertheless be cast to capture broader participation.

Reminiscent of the HCGN's slow progress, both bodies are dependent on participants' personal time to move forward. While I know members will willingly give themselves, this demand speaks to the need for alternative food system 'work' to become true paid work as opposed to depending on volunteer hours. Vancouver and Toronto, two of several examples, employ numerous city employees whose jobs are to engage the citizenry in the alternative food system. Hamilton has the momentum and talent to do the same.

The CFSSC is planning to reach out to the city's populace at large through community engagement events and public meetings. An interviewee acknowledged that, "you do run the risk of establishing consensus in a small group that you can't articulate to a wider audience." Building a greater public profile and rendering the body more participatory were expressed as priorities in order to ensure that narrow consensus is never met.

Besides public engagement and education, a central objective of the committee is to "develop a comprehensive community and city-wide policy that leads to community food security". It will be the first ever community food security policy initiative for Hamilton. In light of this heavy task, the question of whether change comes from above or below resurges.

Winne is adamant that a citizenry must never renounce its role in making policy alongside officials. In the past fifty years, he continues, no gains on the fronts of hunger, food insecurity, nutrition or agriculture have been made without the "instigation and participation of an active and vociferous body of citizens" or the "incendiary spark of the populists' voice," (Winne, 2008, 149).

The non-policy food movement has been lively and active in Hamilton for decades as it has already been demonstrated. I am left wondering how the advent of a city-wide community food security policy will negotiate its way through all these preexisting relationships and projects.

What is more, to think of these preexisting spaces as apolitical is a fallacy. They are manifestations of shared disquietude with the mainstream conventional and emergency food systems. They are spaces in which we engage in insurgent citizenship, a

practice named and defined by James Holston as political acts which do not need to occur in a state-sanctioned space such as policymaking or elections (Holston, 1998). A community garden can thus be just as political as a government board room.

Too often, however, the alternative food movement is not seen as a social or political *movement* if bystanders become too focused on its individual parts (Wekerle, 2004). The CFSSC's pending policy has the choice to inform itself by this movement or to simply accept Hamilton's alternative food system as a random collection of parts without any bearing on policy decisions. The emergence of the committee marks a turning point for the alternative food movement in Hamilton as it can open up opportunities for food democracy across the city should it choose to.

COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY IN STEEL CITY AND THE FORGOTTEN "P"

Food democracy seeks to expose and challenge the anti-democratic forces of control and claim the right and responsibilities of citizens to participate in decision-making. [It is] a *method* for making choices when values and interests come into conflict and when the consequences of decisions are uncertain.

-Tim Lang, *For Hunger-Proof Cities:
Sustaining Urban Food Systems*

Lang captures the secret to achieving community food security and expansive alternative food systems in his description of food democracy above. The ferociously growing literary, media, and scholarly food discourse on which North America has become fixated has obstructed this secret.

Assessing whether Hamilton's alternative food systems are achieving community food security is predictably not a straightforward task. Revisiting the principles and values of community food security: the community as unit of reference and decision-maker, localism and sustainability, justice and equality of access, and an interdisciplinary systemic approach; this is the particular order they *must* occur in if community food security is going to be achieved via the alternative food system. As such, first and foremost, *the community must be the unit of reference and decision-maker*.

Up until the introduction of the CFSSC within the last year, Hamilton's alternative food system has been exclusively the conception and work of vanguard communities and actors therein who one day decided to pick up a shovel or write a grant proposal. The movement grew out of these initial actions and adhered to principles of localism, sustainability, justice, equality, interdisciplinarity, and a systems approach. These values did not need to be prescribed or enforced; they flowed naturally when ordinary citizens took action around food.

Within the conventional system, we conversely have no decision-making power or control over where our food is grown, how it is grown, how much the people growing the food are compensated, where or how it is processed, what it gets processed into, or how it is distributed. It arrives on the grocery store shelf – we also did not decide where that grocery store is or what it sells – and the only decision we are left to make is what to buy and eat thereafter. The same can be said for all commodities, but

estrangement from agency beyond consumerism within the food system is particularly wrenching as we blindly invest our faith in it to give us and sustain life.

The alternative food system is above all else an exercise in reclaiming agency and working towards a food democracy able to achieve community food security. There is no formula for establishing a food democracy and even fewer examples of locales which have achieved it in any perfect form. It is an ideal that we might not reach for a long time, but we will continue to initiate new projects, forge new partnerships, and author new policies that will get us incrementally closer.

All this being said, there is a fourth “P” Winne alludes to but does not include in his trifecta: Planning. If individual, very real, very place-based communities and neighbourhoods are going to be the unit of reference and decision-maker, the chief agents ushering alternatives into the mainstream, we need planning. Generally speaking, the planning field is as elusive and top-down as conventional food decision-making. What we need instead is participatory community food planning that enables neighbourhoods to decide what their local food geography is going to look like: a community garden in the park, a farmers’ market on a busy corner, a CSA depot in a school parking lot on Saturday mornings, a community kitchen in every community centre—there is no uniform vision. The strength of any vision, however, is directly correlated to whether it is the conception of those with the most at stake.

It is in the building and ensuing implementation of this vision, whatever it may be, that actors from across the spectrum of the food system come together to ensure it satisfies their needs and interests. It is, as Lang says, “...a method for making choices when values and interests come into conflict and when the consequences of decisions are uncertain.” The new role of the planner then is to navigate this unprecedented interaction of positionalities, facilitate and mediate, and ultimately work *with* the community and all the relevant pieces—from the farmers to waste management—to put the vision into action. It is messy, unpredictable, requires constant revision, and completely reshapes most of the ways in which we currently interact with food and each other.

And it all begins with listening. Farmers and consumers; organic and conventional farmers; emergency food services and food bank users; antipoverty activists and environmentalists; policymakers and planners—everyone needs to start listening to each other. Food is dogma. Everyone has an axe to grind and a mantra to boast with respect to food but “there are larger purposes in life when all our interests come together,” (Winne 2008, 193). Listening to one another and collaborating on our new shared vision for food is one such purpose.

As for Hamilton, I get ecstatic thinking about its potential to be engaging in a neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood participatory planning process as the next step. The current landscape of the city’s alternative food system I have mapped is indicative that Hamilton has the knowledge, will, ability, talent, and passion to sprout projects and form partnerships. These projects and partnerships are however being pursued in the margins and thus have yet to capture a critical mass. If the alternative food system is going to feed a city in accordance with the principles and values of community food security, the participation base needs to be broadened and individual neighbourhoods need to be bestowed with real decision-making power. From here, alternative food systems will begin to blossom across new terrain.

The current landscape of the city's alternative food systems has laid the foundation for this process to begin. It is the way to move forward beyond singular projects and partnerships. This participatory planning process is also what should be informing any policy decisions of the CFSSC.

CONCLUSIONS

As a modern global human constituency, we have gone to the moon, mastered open heart surgery, and created immortal masterpieces, but we have failed to figure out how to properly feed ourselves. Something is dreadfully wrong here.

The alternative food system is a step back in terms of its demands and dependence on science and technology, and an evaluative step back which critically examines and re-envisioning hegemonic food systems. I have an extremely difficult time picturing a world without the conventional and emergency food systems as they are all I have ever known. However, once I began questioning their normalcy, my central question of inquiry—how can we more justly, sustainably, and healthily feed a city—was invigorated.

The adoption of alternative food systems at the grassroots is the way in which Hamilton has begun to move forward—away from a two-tiered food system and towards alternative systems which close the gaps we have allowed to grow between sickness and health, individuals and community, capital and poverty, globalization and localism, greed and justice, environmental destruction and preservation, as well as specialization and interdisciplinarity.

Hamilton is not alone in this undertaking, but it is an exciting place to study and experience as it is on the cusp of garnering significantly more widespread support for and participation in its food alternatives. What will continue to guarantee alternative food systems' positive expansion is that it be directed by communities adhering to a participatory and inclusive planning process, renouncing the oligopolistic hold on the dominant food systems.

To Feed A City hones in on how Hamilton has been doing so up until now and while I cannot predict how the movement will continue to grow and bring in new participants, I am confident that it will. I do want to be so bold as to predict that any progress will only be genuine and sustained if those who have nurtured the alternative food system up until now remain involved. Ideological change and social movements always precede political will or popular adherence; a more powerful tide is on the horizon.

It is my sincere hope that new research, new experiences, and new actors to come to the forefront of shaping how we feed our cities. Because we are not really talking about food systems. We are talking about systems of *people*, how those people choose to care for one another and give each other life through the most sacred of all substances: food.

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