It Takes A Valley: Community Responses to Food Insecurity in Western Massachusetts

A Division III Thesis Paper

Johnny Williams

Committee: Sue Darlington (chair), Seeta Sistla (member)
“Food is our most intimate and powerful connection to each other, to our cultures, and to the Earth” – HEAL Food Alliance

“People need to put an emphasis on creating justice, economically, socially, educationally. It doesn’t have to be somebody has to lose in order for other to gain, everyone gains when we live in a just world.” – Ibrahim Ali
Acknowledgements

To start, I would like to thank my professor Catherine Sands for connecting me to critical scholarly resources about the U.S. food system, creating a constructive learning environment to discuss these issues in our Community Food Systems class, and introducing me to staff and directors of Gardening the Community, Nuestras Raices, and the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, several of whom were interviewed for this project.

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*This list is far from exhaustive and is meant to reflect findings from my interviews and background research*
Introduction

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines food security as all people, at all times, having physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active healthy live (qtd. in *A Plan of Action to End Hunger in Western Massachusetts*, pg. 3). For my thesis project, I decided to study the work of four nonprofit organizations in western Massachusetts that are using a variety of means to address food security needs in their respective communities. The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts estimates that 223,000 individuals in western Massachusetts struggle with food insecurity. This means that almost a quarter of a million people do not know where or when they will get their next meal (*A Plan of Action to End Hunger in Western Massachusetts*, pg. 3). As Figure 1 shows, the causes of food insecurity are wide-ranging and intersectional. Food insecurity affects people across the political spectrum and is caused by conditions as various as transportation challenges, homelessness, racism, classism, food swamps, and high cost of health care. As a student interested in sustainable agriculture and environmental justice, and as a concerned citizen of western Massachusetts, I was alarmed and intrigued by the apparent contradiction of widespread hunger in western Massachusetts despite miles of productive small farms in the region. I wanted to learn why widespread hunger persists in western Massachusetts and the different organizations that are working to employ local solutions to ending hunger in this region.

Methods

I began my research process by drafting a list of questions to ask directors and staff at four different nonprofits: Gardening the Community, Nuestras Raices, the Food Bank of Western
Massachusetts, and Just Roots. The questions I asked and the organizations that they were addressed to was informed by courses I had taken at Hampshire College and the University of Massachusetts Amherst, particularly my Community Food Systems course at University of Massachusetts. In addition to this, my questions were influenced by my experience working as a farm intern from June-August 2017 at Garden-raised Bounty (GRuB), an urban farming nonprofit in Olympia, Washington.

I interviewed one staff member from each organization and asked them a series of eight questions about how their organization functions, how they manage outreach, and how they meet the unique needs of their particular communities, etc. Interviews were recorded over the time span of November-December 2017 using an audio recording device and were later transcribed word for word. These interviews are often directly quoted or paraphrased in the latter chapters of this thesis project. Full transcripts of the interviews are included in the Appendix of this thesis.

A central factor in choosing the specific organizations that I reached out to was my underlying question of what food insecurity and its solutions look like in rural, White settings such as Greenfield in Franklin County, Massachusetts and how this contrasts with the food insecurity and solutions being utilized in the urban and racially diverse communities of Springfield and South Holyoke in Hampden County. I started out my research process by learning about how nonprofit organizations and social movements have worked towards solving hunger more broadly in the United States, and gradually narrowed my focus to center around efforts that were happening closer to home in western Massachusetts.

**Author’s Positionality**

In the process of conducting my research and writing this paper, I realized that I should include a note to the reader on my positionality as interviewer and researcher on a project about
food insecurity. Food insecurity is a phenomenon that, in both western Massachusetts and in the United States more broadly, predominately affects people of color and lower-income communities. I am a White, affluent, Irish-American student at an undergraduate institute that operates within a consortium of four other prestigious higher education institutions, known collectively as the Five Colleges. This consortium plays an active role in concentrating a disproportionate amount of wealth, food, and other resources in the college towns of Amherst, Northampton, and South Hadley to the detriment of lower-income communities in western Massachusetts such as Springfield, South Holyoke, and Greenfield. This wealth imbalance creates and maintains a de-facto system of food and housing apartheid that has been referred to by food scholars and activists as the “Tofu Curtain.”¹ This project and its author seek to center the work of organizations operating on the other side of the “Tofu Curtain” and the work that they are doing to make locally grown food accessible to communities that are not as privileged by wealth and Whiteness as those within the Tofu Curtain.

I believe it is important to acknowledge the apparent contradiction that this thesis paper and its author are very much by-products of the Five College consortium and the Tofu Curtain that I critique here. Because of my family’s wealth, I was able to enroll and attend school at Hampshire College, a private liberal arts institution, for four years. It has been in my final year of college that I have begun to seriously grapple with issues of food insecurity within and outside of the Tofu Curtain. I have never personally experience food insecurity or malnutrition and, for most of my life, have not paid much attention to these issues because I have not had to. While I

¹ In using this controversial term in this section I am aware that I run the risk of appearing to undermine the food insecurity and homelessness that is experienced by many families and individuals living within the towns of Amherst, Hadley, and Northampton. This is not my intention here. I am in no way attempting to suggest that, because of the Five Colleges, Amherst, Hadley, and Northampton are universally “food secure.” Rather, I am drawing attention to the generally higher levels of wealth, food, and housing resources that these communities have compared to Springfield, South Holyoke, and Greenfield.
will not speculate on the socioeconomic backgrounds of my interviewees, it is clear, due to the nature of their work, they have come into closer contact with food-insecure families and individuals to an extent to which I have not been exposed to and that this gives them a level of expertise on these issues that cannot be replicated through traditional academic means of taking courses and reading case studies. They are the real experts on issues of hunger and food insecurity and I am in tremendous debt to their generosity in taking time out of their busy schedules to be interviewed by me.

As a final aside, I note that the scope of this research paper is rather limited due to the relatively small number of interviews that I conducted (four in total). Many important voices and perspectives have been left out of this paper such as those of migrant farm workers, food-insecure families, homeless persons, and food service workers, to name a few. My hope is that readers of this research paper will be inspired learn from members of these communities about the unique food struggles that they endure on a regular basis.
Chapter 1: A Historical Overview of the U.S. Food System

One need only to read a cursory overview of the history of the United States to realize that land access, and by extension food access, has been implicated within larger systems of institutional and structural\(^2\) racism from the colonial era onwards. Beginning with the genocide and displacement of American Indians from their native lands, to slavery, sharecropping, and the exploitation of migrant and prison labor, the ruling class of the United States has never truly valued the labor and histories of the peoples off of which our food system was built on and depended on since colonization (Slocum 2006, pg. 337). The result of this negligence is an industrial food system with massive race-based inequalities across all of the major chains of production. Whether one looks at farm ownership (people of color own and cultivate only 2.8% of farm acreage in the U.S.) or whose labor has been exploited in growing and harvesting the crops (historically slaves and sharecroppers, and more recently prisoners and migrant laborers), one does not need to look far to find evidence of structural and institutional racism in the U.S. food system (Holt-Gimenez 2014, pg. 3). This history, though not often acknowledged in popular discourse regarding U.S. agricultural policy, *is hidden in plain sight*. Though this history, and the modern ramifications of it (particularly in regards to slavery and sharecropping) is more often discussed and associated with southern states such as Mississippi and Alabama, western Massachusetts is not exempt from this history or from the modern ramifications of it.

\(^2\) Institutional racism occurs when assumptions about race become structured into the economic and social institutions of our society. Common examples of institutional racism include when organizations such as businesses, police departments, and schools either consciously or unconsciously discriminate against people of color to limit their rights. Structural racism occurs when social structures and institutions (such as the USDA) perpetuate and produce long-term, race-based inequalities (Holt-Gimenez and Harper 2014, pg. 5).
Indeed, despite the plethora of productive small farms in the region, people of color and lower-income populations experience higher rates of food insecurity and malnutrition than their White, wealthier counterparts throughout the four counties of western Massachusetts (pgs. 13-14). Even in a region where the local foods movement³ is vibrant and quickly growing, institutional and structural racism persists and must be challenged. To ensure a more just and equitable food system for all, we need to acknowledge the role that institutional and structural racism have played historically and continue to play in creating the food system that we currently have and move forward by supporting efforts to build racial, economic, and food justice. This thesis paper will examine and critique several current initiatives to create more just and equitable food systems in western Massachusetts.

**From Settler Colonialism to Food Apartheid**

To quote food activist Neftali Duran, “we cannot talk about the food system in the U.S. without talking about genocide, displacement, and slavery” (Duran 2018). All of the land that food that is currently grown on in the United States, including the farm lands of western Massachusetts, was once indigenous land, and was stolen over the course of several hundred years by various European colonial powers through a vicious campaign of genocide, ecocide⁴ and settler colonialism. This is the literal ground that we stand on every day and upon which we

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³ The local food movement, alternately referred to as the “Good Food” movement or the “Alternative Food” movement, arose in the United States in the 1970s, in tandem with the Slow Food movement in Italy and the “Back to the Land” movement in the United States. Though it has some similarities with food justice and food sovereignty movements in that it seeks to provide an ecological alternative to the industrial agri-foods complex, it largely caters to White, upper-middle class populations and has been critiqued for its colorblind approach to food activism. See Gutham (2008), Gutham et al. (2006), and Bethea (2013) for more information.

⁴ Ecocide is used here to refer to the way that European colonizers throughout the Americas attempted to systematically destroy the traditional ecological knowledge and ways of growing food that had existed in the Americas for several millennia prior to contact. In a recent turn of events, descendants of these colonizers have attempted to recover, appropriate, and re-package these knowledge systems under the name of ‘permaculture’ (Duran 2018).
depend for our livelihoods, and yet rarely is the real history of this land acknowledged in popular discourse regarding agriculture and food systems in the United States.

This lack of discussion is evident on the local level by the systematic erasure of the history and cultures of the Pocumtuck, Pequots, Narraganset, and other indigenous groups that historically occupied the Connecticut River watershed, of which western Massachusetts is a part. As Swedlund (2015) notes, many of the towns, cities, and farms of western Massachusetts were built on indigenous land that was seized during settler colonial expansion in the 1600s. Due largely to the intermittent periods of intense warfare caused by settler colonialism, and in part due to medical factors such as exposure to European diseases such as small pox, Snow and Lanphear (1988) estimated that indigenous populations in the northeast declined by 80-90% from their pre-contact levels by 1700, with a 95% mortality rate for the Pocumtuck (Snow and Lanphee 1988, pg. 24). This massive population decline paved the way for what historians Russell Thornton and David Stannard have referred to as the American Holocaust (Swedlund 2015, pg. 147).

Food has always been used as a form of warfare in the Americas from the colonial era onwards. In the process of colonizing Mesoamerica, Spanish settlers attempted to eliminate traditional knowledge about food cultivation and by prohibiting indigenous growing techniques and crops. In the process, they decimated the local ecology of the region by clear cutting forests

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5 Springfield, Massachusetts was established as a fur trading cite on Agawam land in 1635. Northampton and Hadley were established soon afterwards in 1654 and 1659 on Norwottuck land (Swedlund 2015) Greenfield was established on Pocumtuck land after the Pocumtuck were displaced in the 17th century. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Pocumtuck lived in the lower Connecticut River Valley for 7,000-9,000 years (Lane and Dresdale 2013). Deerfield and Hatfield, Massachusetts were key sites of conflict during the French and English war and later became prominent slave trading towns (Swedlund 2015, pg. 156).

6 Anthropological studies such as Ubelaker 1992 and Cook 1976 (respectively) estimate that indigenous populations in the northeast ranged anywhere from 350,000-100,000 prior to European contact (Swedlund 2015, pg 150).
to growing wheat and other European crops. Several hundred years later the U.S. military sponsored and endorsed campaigns to eliminate the bison in an attempt to starve off Plains Indians and force them into reservations (Duran 2018).

Four hundred years of settler colonialism, slavery, and ecocide, coupled with the recent trend of corporate red-lining in the U.S., has co-created the conditions of vast areas in urban and rural centers with little to no access to fresh produce. These areas have been alternately referred to by scholars as food deserts, food swamps, and food apartheid. The USDA defines food deserts as areas “with limited access to affordable and nutritious food, particularly such an area composed of predominantly lower income neighborhoods and communities” (McClintock 2011, pg. 89). Food swamps is a term that is used in place of food deserts to refer to the essentially same phenomenon, though it has been increasingly used because it indicates that areas with limited access to affordable and nutritious food as not natural like deserts and are actually the result on intentional human decisions. Ibrahim Ali, co-director of Gardening the Community, describes food swamps as such, “There’s plenty of fast food restaurants and convenience stores, but few if any businesses sell fresh and nutrient rich produce. In addition, food swamps are mired in high processed and low nutrient foods that oftentimes contribute to high rates of obesity” (qtd. in Goudreau 2017, pg. 12). Food apartheid refers to the racially exclusive practices and systems that create the conditions of food swamps (Bradley et al. 2014, pg. 173).

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7 “Red-lining” is a phrase that refers to racist city-zoning practices that were enacted by federal organizations such the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) and Federal Housing Administration (FHA) from the 1930s onwards to maintain the desirability of wealthy, White neighborhoods and suburbs of major industrial cities (Jackson 1985, pgs. 200-203) “Corporate redlining” refers to the corporatization of this historic trend over the past fifty years as major grocery store chains and banks have left urban centers in order to find more room for larger stores, parking spaces, and most importantly higher profits in suburban locations (Morales 2011, pgs. 151-152).

8 Gardening the Community is an urban farming nonprofit that I surveyed for this project. GTC operates in the Mason Square neighborhood Springfield, an area frequently described as a food swamp because of the lack of a single grocery store in the area and plethora of fast food options. For more information on Ibrahim and Gardening the Community, see Chapters 2, 3, and 4, as well as my full interview with him in the appendix.
Food apartheid in western Massachusetts is a phenomenon that is perhaps best illustrated in the following charts. Keep in mind as you view them that Hampden County is the most racially diverse, urban, and also the poorest county in western Massachusetts. Springfield and Holyoke, where Gardening the Community and Nuestras Raices⁹ operate (respectively), are part of Hampden County.

### Table 1: Food Insecurity in Western Massachusetts
(Source: Pioneer Valley Food Security Plan Advisory Committee 2013, pg. 17)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hampden</th>
<th>Hampshire</th>
<th>Franklin</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Mass.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food insecurity rate %</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food insecurity population</td>
<td>66,880</td>
<td>15,780</td>
<td>8,240</td>
<td>90,900</td>
<td>727,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child food insecurity rate %</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child food insecurity population</td>
<td>27,530</td>
<td>4,470</td>
<td>2,910</td>
<td>34,910</td>
<td>262,650</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hampden County has the highest rates of food insecurity, including childhood food security, in western Massachusetts, exceeding the regional average by 2.3% in the general rate, and 4% in terms of childhood food insecurity (Table 1). The obesity rates of White citizens of western Massachusetts is substantially lower than the Black and Hispanic populations (Table 2).

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⁹ Nuestras Raices is an urban agriculture nonprofit that I studied based in South Holyoke, Massachusetts. For more information on Nuestras Raices, see Chapters 2, 3, and 4, as well as “My Interview with Margot” in the Appendix.
Table 2
Obesity by Race and Ethnicity – Western Massachusetts 2005
(source: Pioneer Valley Food Security Plan Advisory Committee 2013, pg. 50)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race and Ethnicity</th>
<th>Western Massachusetts*</th>
<th>Massachusetts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Hampden, Berkshire, Franklin, and Hampshire County

As Tables 1 and 2 illustrate, food apartheid is rampant in western Massachusetts, and has dire effects on the health and well-being of communities of color. However, food apartheid as a system didn’t come to be overnight, and it won’t be solved overnight either. In order for food apartheid to be dismantled, it must be acknowledged by policy makers and the general populace as a significant historical and contemporary barrier to food security in urban and rural settings.

**The Failure of the Local Foods Movement**

Despite its historical and contemporary pervasiveness, food apartheid is rarely mentioned in anti-hunger and food security programs as a root cause of hunger, food swamps, and diet-related disease that primarily affect communities of color. Even the widely respected local foods movement, for all of its cutting edge practices in organic agriculture, permaculture, and farmers' markets, tends to address the issues of racism and food apartheid unevenly if at all (Holt-Gimenez and Harper 2016, pg. 1). Alternative food programs such as land trusts, farmers' markets, and community-supported agriculture (CSA)\(^\text{10}\) tend to be dominated by folks with

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\(^{10}\) Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a business model that it utilized on many small farms in Massachusetts and throughout New England whereby consumers can pay a lump sum of cash at the start of a farm season in exchange for a weekly share of fresh produce. It is similar in many ways to buying stock in a company. CSA’s provide members with the benefit of a steady supply of farm fresh produce and give farmers the added financial security of getting paid at the start of the season, thereby allowing them to invest more in seeds and equipment or save up for next season.
White and class privilege and are often ineffective at remediating causes of food insecurity among people of color and poor communities. Due to a paucity of discussion about food apartheid and racism in alternative food spaces, these programs have a tendency to perpetuate food apartheid by concentrating disproportionate wealth and food resources in privileged communities, rather than in marginalized communities that are arguably most in need of these added wealth and food resources (Guthman 2008, pg. 392). Thus, alternative food and local food spaces have been largely ineffective, and in some cases detrimental to, remedying the conditions of food swamps and food insecurity that are widespread in many rural and urban communities in western Massachusetts, including the communities of Springfield, South Holyoke, and Greenfield that I studied for my research project.

**Defining Food Justice and Food Sovereignty**

Cadieux and Slocum (2015) sought to answer the question of *what does it mean to do food justice?* In their analysis, the authors noted that scholars and supporters of the food movement in North America have been increasingly using the terms ‘food justice’ and the related phrase of ‘food sovereignty’¹¹ to distinguish between the industrial agri-foods complex¹² and a more equitable, ecologically viable alternative. Gottlieb and Joshi (2010), for example, define food justice as “a transformation of the current food system, including but not limited to eliminating disparities and inequities” (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010, pg. ix). La Via Campesina, an international network of rural peasants and major force in the fight for an equitable global food system, define food sovereignty as “the right of peoples and governments to choose the way food

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¹¹ See Table 3 on pgs. 16-17 for an in-depth chart that maps out conceptual differences between a food sovereignty model and the dominant industrial agri-foods model, courtesy of Rosset (2003)

¹² Holt-Gimenez (2011) notes: “The industrial agri-foods complex is made up of multinational grain traders, giant seed, chemical, and fertilizer corporations; global processors; and supermarket chains. The global companies dominate markets and shipping, and increasingly control the world’s food producing resources: land, water, inputs, genetic material, and investments” (pg. 312)
is produced and consumed in order to respect our livelihoods, as well as policies that support this choice” (La Via Campesina 2009, pg. 57). Given how similar these two definitions are, it is easy to see how and why they are often used interchangeably in U.S. and international discourse about food. I would argue that the only concrete difference between food justice and food sovereignty work is the contexts in which they occur in and the historical lineages out of which they come.

A common distinction made between food justice and food sovereignty work is their origins. Food justice arose historically in urban centers of the United States such as Oakland, California; Detroit, Michigan; and the Bronx in New York City (Alkon and Agyeman 2011, pgs. 4-6). Food sovereignty, in contrast, is typically associated with rural and indigenous settings and populations in the Global South, Canada, and rural Europe (Cadiex and Slocum 2005). Food justice and food sovereignty organizations seek to challenge the hegemony of the industrial agri-foods complex in favor of a model that is more equitable, ecological, and directly benefits (and seeks reparations for) displaced and marginalized populations who have often suffered disproportionately under settler colonialism and the industrial agri-foods complex (Holt-Gimenez 2011, Table 3). For specific ways in which the food sovereignty/justice model differs from the industrial agri-foods complex, see Table 3 below.
### Table 3: Industrial Agri-foods Model versus Food Sovereignty/Justice Model  
(adapted from Russet 2003 and Holt-Gimenez 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Industrial Agri-foods Complex</th>
<th>Food Sovereignty/Justice Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>Free trade in everything</td>
<td>Food and agriculture exempt from trade agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production Priority</td>
<td>Agro-exports (wheat, soy, corn etc.)</td>
<td>Food for local markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crop prices</td>
<td>“What the market dictates” (leave intact mechanisms that enforce low prices)</td>
<td>Fair prices that cover costs of production and allow farmers and farmworkers a life with dignity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Chiefly a commodity; in practice, this means processed, contaminated food that is full of fat, sugar, high-fructose corn syrup, and toxic residues</td>
<td>A human right: specifically, should be healthy, nutritious, affordable, culturally appropriate, and locally produced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to produce</td>
<td>An option for the economically efficient</td>
<td>A right of rural peoples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunger</td>
<td>Due to low productivity</td>
<td>A problem of access and distribution; due to poverty and inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food security</td>
<td>Achieved by importing food from where it is cheapest</td>
<td>Greatest when food production is in the hands of the hungry, or when food is produced locally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control over productive resources</td>
<td>Privatized</td>
<td>Local; community controlled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to land</td>
<td>Via the market</td>
<td>Via genuine agrarian reform; without access to land, the rest is meaningless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeds</td>
<td>A patentable commodity</td>
<td>A common heritage of humanity; held in trust by rural communities and cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monopoly</td>
<td>Not an issue</td>
<td>The root of most problems; monopolies must be broken up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genetically modified organisms (GMOs)</td>
<td>The wave of the future</td>
<td>Bad for health and the environment, and unnecessary technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>Anachronisms; the inefficient will disappear</td>
<td>Guardians of cultures and seeds, stewards of productive resources…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban consumers</td>
<td>Workers to be paid as little as possible</td>
<td>Need living wages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another world (alternatives)</td>
<td>Not possible/not of interest</td>
<td>Possible and amply demonstrated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Table 3 illustrates, the food sovereignty/justice model differs from the industrial agri-foods complex in just about every aspect of the food system. The issues from this chart that I draw attention to most often in this survey are the differences between how both models view food and food security. As Table 3 explains, the food sovereignty/justice model views food as “A human right: specifically, should be healthy, nutritious, affordable, culturally appropriate, and locally produced” (Table 3). This perspective is echoed in most of the interviews that I conducted and in case studies that I read on the topics of food justice and food sovereignty. Rather than being a mere commodity, food is a human right. Therefore, any sincere attempt to address the underlying causes of food insecurity must also address the failure of the industrial agri-foods complex and the globalized capitalism that is a part of to treat and respect food for what it is is: a basic human right with a complex history that is deeply tied to place and to cultural values.

**Recent Examples of Food Justice**

It is important to note, in discussions about food justice and food sovereignty, that these phrases are merely new terms to describe struggles against colonialism that revolve around food. In reality, communities of color have been pursuing food justice and food sovereignty in their struggles against colonialism for five hundred years. With that being said, recent examples of food justice praxis (though lacking the explicit label of ‘food justice’) include the work of organizations such as Food Not Bombs, the Black Panthers Free Breakfast Program,\(^{13}\) the Delano Grape Strike and Boycott of the 1960’s (co-led by Cesar Chavez), and the rise of the NGO Food First in the 1970s. These groups can be considered predecessors to the modern food justice movement because they “used food to launch critiques of institutionalized oppression, to

\(^{13}\) See Patel (2012) and Heynen (2009) for more discussion of the Black Panthers Free Lunch Program and its impact on the food justice movement.
struggle for significant change in relations of power, and to answer a need when no acceptable help was forthcoming” (Cadieux and Slocum 2015, pg. 4). Several of the organizations that I surveyed for this research project are engaged in similar struggles today, albeit in a different time and space.

**Conclusion**

The current U.S. food system is riddled with inequalities across all major chains of production and consumption due to centuries of systemic and institutional racism. Centuries of settler colonialism, genocide, and slavery have created a system in which only 2.4% of farm acreage in owned and cultivated by people of color and where the number of Black farm acreage has decreased by 98% over the past century (Wood and Gilbert 2000, pgs. 43-44). Decades of corporate red-lining and food apartheid have created conditions of food swamps and insecurity in many urban and rural centers across the country (Jackson 1985, pgs. 200-203). In order to right these wrongs and begin moving towards a more just food system that works for all, we desperately need to acknowledge the historical legacy of structural and institutional racism in our food system and its current manifestations across all chains of the food system at large, while supporting the work of food justice and food sovereignty organizations to build economic, racial and food justice across the U.S. food system.
Chapter 2: Barriers to Access

Gardening the Community is a youth-led food justice organization that focuses on urban agriculture\textsuperscript{14} and sustainable living to build healthy communities (Roman 2016). Gardening the Community grows a wide variety of vegetables such as beets, collard greens, cilantro, and kale on a series of abandoned city lots in the Mason Square neighborhood of Springfield. These vegetables are then sold at local farmers’ markets, through the Go Fresh! Mobile market, and through the GTC Eats! farm share program, a low-cost Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program that is delivered to Mason Square residents via bicycle. In 2016, GTC youth grew and sold 3,500 pounds of produce to 550 families through the farmers’ market and 18,000 pounds of produce to 72 families through the GTC Eats! program (Roman 2016). Gardening the Community seeks to cultivate food justice in the Mason Square neighborhood of Springfield. They do this through “growing food, empowering our youth, dismantling institutional racism, and creating opportunities to assure that healthy, nutritious, local, affordable food is available for all residents in our home city of Springfield, MA” (Gardening the Community).

On a frigid morning in November 2017 I drove to the Hancock Street farm in Mason Square, one of the main plots of land owned and cultivated by Gardening the Community. Hancock Street farm by no means conforms to the typical image that many people have in mind of what a traditional farm looks like, and that is because it is by no means traditional. Hancock Street similar to the other plots of land that owned by Gardening the Community, is not located

\textsuperscript{14} The urban agriculture movement arose in the wake of the demolition of urban neighborhoods during ‘urban renewal’ and differentiates itself from the community gardening movement in that it seeks to help growers earn a financial profit and puts an emphasis on training youth to strengthen their communities. Urban agriculture addresses urban food insecurity by giving urban residents access to fresh vegetables in areas where the only other sources of food are gas stations, fast food restaurants, and convenience stores (Kummer 2008)
on traditional farmland but rather sits atop a renovated plot of abandoned land in Mason Square, amidst the bustling urban metropolis of Springfield. Hancock Street is an example of the growing trend of urban farms that are popping up with increased frequency in urban centers throughout the U.S. from Detroit, Michigan to Oakland, California.

After crossing the street from where my car is parked to the farm, I am greeted by several participants in Gardening the Community’s youth program. They point me in the direction of Ibrahim, who is instructing a group of their peers about the basics of harvesting various crops and returning their tools to the shed in an orderly fashion. Ibrahim is a tall Black man with a grey beard and a booming voice. It is clear that he is the man in charge of the operation and that he commands a genuine level of respect from the youth that is hard to find from high school students. I ask Ibrahim where he would like to conduct the interview and he points to a small greenhouse on the edge of the property.

I follow Ibrahim inside and we sit down on a set of small, fold-out lawn chairs near the door. The inside of the greenhouse is warm, sunny, and humid, in stark contrast to the frigid conditions outside. The greenhouse does not resemble what I typically imagine when I picture a greenhouse. There are no glass windows, nor is there a large variety of plants in the interior. In fact, there really is not much room other than for crouching and harvesting the numerous tomatoes that are growing inside of it. Ibrahim and I duck as we walk inside.

As I turn on my audio recording device the youth participants that are harvesting tomatoes in the greenhouse quiet down in anticipation of the interview. Every now and then one of them interrupts to ask Ibrahim a question about one of the farm tasks they have been assigned to complete, but aside for a few minor disturbances the interview goes smoothly and centers around the dialogue between Ibrahim and me. I ask my opening question and Ibrahim pauses for
a second to collect his thoughts. On the question of what factors limit people’s access to healthy locally grown food in Springfield, Ibrahim replies:

It goes back to the basic aspects of human nature, which is people are greedy, and there are people who mismanage money in our state and in our city [and] there’s structures above our city, federal, international, that affect how we are able to have food, and so, you know, all of those things and many more factors play into the way that things are the way that they are here. (Ibrahim Ali, *Personal Communication*, Nov. 11th, 2017)

Ibrahim brilliantly connects the dots between structural inequalities in the Springfield food system and government corruption, and expanding on this connection to situate it within larger structural inequalities and corruption on the state, federal, and even international levels.

Ibrahim’s analysis echoes that of food scholar Eric Holt-Gimenez, who writes:

We need to address the root causes of the global food crisis… These reside in a skewed food system that has made Southern countries and poor people everywhere highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shock. This vulnerability springs from the risks, inequities, and externalities inherent in food systems that are dominated by a globalized, highly centralized, industrial agri-foods complex. (Holt-Gimenez 2011, pgs. 311-312)

Ibrahim and Holt-Gimenez both acknowledge the ways that the industrial food systems that dominate urban centers such as Springfield are far less local and harmless than they initially appear. In fact, the harm that they cause is immense and extends far beyond the food swamps and food inequality that are the noticeable symptoms of this industrial system the local level.

Ibrahim’s analysis differs from Holt-Gimenez in that his analysis draws specific attention to the root psychological causes of local, state, and federal government corruption, such as greed and racism. Ibrahim continues:
We can go back to people of color have always been treated in this country, particularly Black people, and how there’s a disregard for our health, and a disregard for our living conditions, and a disregard for poor people of other countries’ living conditions and food intake and experimentation on things that people don’t have any say on what’s happening to them. (Ibrahim Ali, *Personal Communication*, Nov. 11th, 2017)

Ibrahim’s words again echo Holt-Gimenez by drawing connections between the disregard for the health and living conditions of Black people in the U.S. and a disregard for the health and living conditions of the global poor. Structural and institutional racism are firmly embedded within the industrial agri-foods complex, and negatively impact local food systems all over the planet, from Springfield to Chiapas and beyond. Ibrahim grounds this analysis to the local situation in Mason Square when he notes: “All of these things have just exacerbated to the point where, though there’s food out here… you’re not necessarily see people starving in the streets like you do like in other countries… there are people not getting enough food, and not necessarily their own fault for that happening” (Ali 2017). The “out here” that Ibrahim is referring to is Mason Square, the neighborhood in Springfield where Gardening the Community primarily operates. Mason Square is often referred to as a food swamp by food justice activists, including Ibrahim. These activists refer to it as such because though there are many fast-food restaurants and corner stores, there is no access to a single fresh supermarket in the neighborhood, despite years of persistent activism by area food advocates (Goudreau 2017).

Ibrahim’s analysis is supported by findings from a whole slew of studies on inequality in western Massachusetts. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, people of color make of 66% of Springfield’s population (43% of Springfield’s population is Latino, 19% is Black, and 2% is Asian) (Goudreau 2017). Despite Springfield’s relatively high level of racial diversity compared to the rest of the Commonwealth, or perhaps because of it, median household income in Springfield for 2012 was $31,356 as compared to the state median income of $65,339. This
means that the average family in Springfield earns less than half the amount of income as the average family in the rest of the Commonwealth. Clearly, median household income is not equal between Springfield and the rest of the Commonwealth, nor is it within Hampden County, where Springfield is located. Indeed, neighboring communities such as Wilbraham, Longmeadow, and East Longmeadow have the highest median family incomes in the region. These communities also happen to be White at rates of 90% or higher. (Goudreau 2017, pg. 12). These statistics illustrate that structural racism and classism are alive and prevalent across the counties of western Massachusetts.

Income inequality is no doubt a primary factor in the lack access to local food that many households and individuals in Springfield experience. Why is this so important? Numerous studies have suggested that lack of access to fresh food has detrimental effects on the health of adults and children in Springfield. The Springfield Health Equity Report, released in 2014, showed that an estimated 67% of Springfield adults are overweight or obese, compared to 59% in the state overall. Disparity between obesity rates in Springfield and in the rest of the Commonwealth are even more shocking in regards to childhood obesity. According to the 2011 Massachusetts Department of Public Health Report, 41.8% of children in Springfield screened during the 2010-2011 school year were either overweight or obese, as compared to the state average of 32.3% (qtd. in Goudreau 2017, pg. 12). It is amongst this backdrop of income inequality and high rates of obesity that Gardening the Community operate within. As the above statistics show, income inequality has real and tangible negative impacts on the health of urban communities such as Springfield.

Ibrahim’s comments about the disregard for the health and living conditions of Black people echoes the writings of food scholars such as Eric Holt-Gimenez, Rachel Slocum, and
Anuradha. These authors comment extensively in their work on the role that the enslavement and land dispossession of Black farmers had in creating the food system that we have today. Anuradha (2000) cataloged the massive land-loss of Black farmers in the Jim Crow era, noting that Black farm ownership declined from its peak at 15 million acres in 1910 to just under 1 million acres by 1999 (Anuradha 2000, pgs. 3-4). Woods and Gilbert (2000) noted that the number of Black farmers declined as well, from 926,000 in 1920 to 18,000 by 2000, a 98% decline (compared to a 66% decline in the number of White farmers) (Wood and Gilbert 2000, pgs. 43-44). Black farmers were on the verge of extinction, as evidenced by the fact that Black farmers (who made up 1% of the nation’s farmers) were disappearing at a rate five times faster than White farmers (Anuradha 2000, pgs. 3-4).

Black land dispossession was not confined to the Jim Crow era, nor did it end with the Civil Rights movement. Furthermore, Black land dispossession did not happen simply because Black farmers decided voluntarily that they wanted to give up farming. Rather, as Hinson et al. (2008) notes, Black land dispossession in the 20th century was largely due to obstructionist USDA, Jim Crow, and New Deal policies, coupled with actively violent terrorist attacks on Black farmers by the Klu Klux Klan and other White terrorist groups.

Despite the numerous readings I had done on this topic previously and the frequent discussions about food apartheid in my Community Food Systems class, the immediacy of Ibrahim’s words affect me in a way that other sources have not. Though Ibrahim puts on a strong face there is a pain and struggle in his voice that I cannot help but take notice of. It’s clear from speaking to him that this is not simply an academic discussion to him; it’s a pained recollection of a legacy of racism and injustice in this country that he has had to struggle with his whole life and has had to confront directly in his role as co-director of Gardening the Community. In
response to a question about how Gardening the Community responds to systemic racism and classism in the U.S. Food system, Ibrahim replies:

I think that one of the most important things that we do in regards to fighting racism is that we put the emphasis on White folks to start doing their job... I think that my people, Black people particularly, have done enough, died enough, suffered enough... at this point in time, 2017, White folks need to do some work. Whether they’re rich or poor, they need to do some work. (Ibrahim Ali, Personal Communication, Nov. 11th, 2017)

Ibrahim’s words here contain a level of clarity and urgency that few of the sources I have read so far have been able to articulate. His frank analysis of the structural and institutional racism in the U.S. food system and his later call to “put an emphasis on creating justice, economically, socially, educationally” linger in my mind long after I shake his hands at the end of the interview and walk back to my car. I leave the conversation inspired by Ibrahim’s words and painfully aware of the work that I still need to do to give up more of my time and money and in order to emphasize creating social, economic, and food justice.

Food Justice in South Holyoke

On a cold and rainy November morning, I made the slightly less strenuous drive from Hampshire College to La Finca, a four-acre plot of farmland managed by Nuestras Raïces. Nuestras Raïces is a grassroots urban agriculture organization based in Holyoke, MA. Their mission is “to create healthy environments, celebrate ‘agri-culture’, harness our collective energy, and to advance our vision of a just and sustainable future” (Nuestras Raices, n.d.) I came

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15 Ibrahim later expanded on the above statement, adding that “People who have been able to financially able to benefit from this system over the centuries, they really need to do their part, give up more of the money. People need to put an emphasis on creating justice, economically, socially, educationally. It doesn’t have to be somebody has to lose in order for other to gain, everyone gains when we live in a just world. So that’s important for us” (Ali 2017)

16 La Finca is a Spanish term that translates as “The Farm” in English

17 Nuestras Raïces is a Spanish term that translates as “Our Roots” in English
here to meet with Margot Wise, the farm manager of Nuestras Raices, for a tour of La Finca and to ask her some questions for my research project.

Though Holyoke is similar to Springfield in that it is a bustling urban center, especially compared to many of the small towns that dominate western Massachusetts, you would not know from visiting La Finca. La Finca does not have the feel of an urban farm like the Hancock Street farm in Mason Square and reminds me much more of the rural farms closer to Amherst. Margot explains to me later on in our interview that La Finca is a “community space where people can come and get a little bit of respite from city life. It’s in the city but it’s open land with open trees and I think that it’s something really important that we provide also” (Wise 2017). Looking around the farm, it’s easy to see how it would make for an idyllic respite from city life. The farm is located next to the banks of the Connecticut River on a strip of conservation land owned by the Sisters of Providence and leased to Nuestras Raices. Beside the gravel driveway and sidewalk leading into the farm there is hardly any concrete nearby, a stark contrast with the Hancock Street farm. The air is fresh here, there’s no smell of gasoline or sound pollution from the nearby city, and as the rain falls you can hear birds chirping in the distance.

I meet Margot near the entrance of the farm and we walk back together towards her farm office in a space-heated trailer van. There’s no youth working on the farm this time of year, in fact, we are the only two people on the property at the moment. Margot is White, average height, with curly dark brown hair and arresting blue eyes. She describes herself in the interview as “young-ish” and fits the description. We sit down in her dimly lit, makeshift farm office, she turns on the space heater, and the interview begins.
I start with the same question that I asked Ibrahim: “What factors limit people’s access to healthy, locally grown food in the communities that you serve?” Margot pauses for a few moments as she contemplates her response. She begins:

If you really break it down you could go as far back as settlers, White people landing in America and basically pillaging and killing Native Americans and then having slaves, I mean all of that is still present in our current food system... I would say that it permeates everything... And you can see it in Holyoke, the poorest neighborhoods and the neighborhoods with the least access to food happen to have the most people of color, and that’s not an accident. (Wise, *Personal Communication*, Nov. 21st, 2017)

One of the first things that strikes me about Margot’s response is the parallels between her response and Ibrahim’s. Both of their responses directly mention historical legacies of institutional and structural racism and connect these legacies to present-day barriers to food access in their communities. One of the main differences in Margot’s response, however, is her positionality. Margot, like myself, comes to this conversation as a beneficiary of these historical injustices, rather than being directly burdened by them. Still, Margot’s response strikes me as earnest; she seems like she genuinely cares and knows what she is talking about. This is not surprising given her position as farm manager at a Puerto Rican farm in Holyoke, a city with a long history of racial tension and strife.

The first large wave of Puerto Rican immigrants arrived in the U.S. during the 1950s, after being forced from their native land and driven into the U.S. wage economy by obstructionist U.S. trade policies such as a ban on coffee exports that effectively bankrupted most of the island’s subsistence farmers. Without coffee as a primary source of income, Puerto Rican farmers could no longer live of the land, and without access to land could not feed their families. By 1960, a fifth of the island’s population, 400,000, had emigrated to the U.S.
mainland, many recruited by agricultural companies eager to exploit their labor (Klindiest 2008, pg. 196).

South Holyoke received a high volume of these immigrants, who were drawn to the city by its abundance of housing vacancies, low rents, and proximity to farm and factory jobs (Klindiest 2008, pg. 196). Unfortunately, by the time that many of the Puerto Rican immigrants arrived, most of the mills and nearby tobacco farms had closed down and the city’s economy was in decline, leaving Puerto Ricans with little opportunity for jobs (Kummer 2008, pg. 1). Due to xenophobia and racism, Puerto Ricans were often scapegoated for Holyoke’s economic decline and subjected to hostile, racist acts such by the town’s White population such as White landlords committing arson on their own buildings in an effort to scare off Puerto Rican tenants (Williams 1992, pg. 54). Indeed, in downtown South Holyoke, where a majority of the city’s Puerto Rican population resides, half of the city’s available housing has been burned down or condemned since 1970, and there is not a single supermarket within walking distance (Klindiest 2008, pg. 195). Under Mayor Proulx, $10,000 of Holyoke’s budget was devoted to demolition. (find dates) Between arsonist landlords and a racist mayor and city governance, 3,000 buildings in Wards 1 and 2 (the Flats and South Holyoke) were destroyed between 1970 and 1981 (Williams 1992, pg. 55). Institutional and structural racism left little opportunity for Puerto Rican immigrants in Holyoke, as evidenced by an unemployment rate for Puerto Ricans in Holyoke that lingers around 25% and the fact close to three quarter of South Holyoke’s children live in poverty. It is out of this context that Nuestras Raices formed in 1992 (Klindiest 2008, pgs. 195-195).

**A Brief History of Nuestras Raices**

Nuestras Raices was founded in 1992 by members of the La Finquita community garden in South Holyoke with the goal of building a large-scale farm and greenhouse in downtown
Holyoke (Pioneer Valley Food Security Plan Advisory Committee 2013, pg. 43). Many of the farmers at La Finquita had had prior experience growing tobacco on nearby farms in Massachusetts and many had grown a wide variety of Puerto Rican cultural crops prior to leaving the island. Between 1992-1995, Nuestras Raíces went through a rough patch of false starts and fund embezzlement before community organizer Daniel Ross stepped in to lead at the age of 22. Described as “the Michael Jordan of community organizing,” Ross guided Nuestras Raíces from its early years, helping the organization grow from one community garden to where it is currently is now, with nine community gardens scattered throughout South Holyoke, a greenhouse, two renovated buildings, a community kitchen, a bilingual library and La Finca (Klindiest 2008). During his time at Nuestras Raíces, Ross helped draw in numerous local health centers, churches, school, and youth participants to the organization, and was instrumental in garnering attention and vital funds from the Kellogg foundation.

Margot’s response begins to intersect with Ibrahim’s when she brings up the Mason Square in her response to my question of how Nuestras Raíces addresses food insecurity in their community. Margot responds:

> So in Mason Square, which is a neighborhood in Springfield, it’s a 1 ½ mile radius area they have 10 McDonald’s so that’s a deterrent from getting people to cook, and there’s no supermarket. So it’s natural that if you live there you’re gonna do what’s easiest and buy the food that is the easiest, the cheapest, and most likely to make you sick down the line. (Wise, Personal Communication, Nov. 28th, 2017)

Though Nuestras Raíces, and by extension Margot, are primarily concerned with addressing food security needs in their home community of South Holyoke, their level of concern and solidarity with Gardening the Community’s work in Mason Square are inspiring to me. This solidarity makes sense given that both organizations share a common mission of making locally grown
food accessible to urban, low-income communities of color, communities that otherwise would not have any access to fresh local food without them. As Margot mentions later in our interview, this shared concern goes beyond simply growing food:

...We do a lot on the local level. I would say that we mostly focus right here in Holyoke, but we have some partners in Springfield at Gardening the Community that we’ve been cultivating a really good relationship with in the past couple of years. And so we had our youth come together a couple of times and do stuff together. (Wise, Personal Communication, Nov. 28th, 2017)

Youth development and education are key and often overlooked parts of both Gardening the Community’s and Nuestras Raices’ missions, and will be elaborated upon in further detail in Chapter 3: Division of Labor. One of the key components of Nuestras’ youth programs is their innovative nutrition classes, facilitated by their FoodCorps staff member. Margot explains:

A staff member who just dropped me off teaches gardening and culinary classes in the schools… One of the biggest ways that we can have an effect is by teaching young people… She did a class where they had a $10 challenge, in groups they had $10 that they could spend and a supermarket and then they made a meal out of it, and they made it kind of a competition. It was a really good way to get kids to think creatively about using food in different ways. (Wise, Personal Communication, Nov. 28th, 2017)

Nuestras Raices’ innovative gardening and culinary classes raise awareness of how to eat healthy on a budget and are one of many ways that the organization works to remove barriers to accessing healthy food. Margot later mentions to me that, as a nonprofit, Nuestras is somewhat limited in the scope of their actions because they are prevented from explicit political lobbying and sometimes their programs are cut short due to lack of funding (Wise 2017). In spite of these obstacles, members of the organization successfully convinced the current mayor of Holyoke not to sign a school food contract that, in Margot’s words, “doesn’t have anything to do with local or healthy food.” In addition to this, staff have hosted numerous cooking and activism workshops
through the Nuestra Comida program, such as community cooking classes where participants learn how to make homemade Adobo and Sazon,\(^\text{18}\) and the Holyoke Food Justice Conference last May (Wise 2017).

I leave Margot’s farm office at La Finca and walk into the cold rain outside. As I walk across the street to my car, I find myself ruminating on Margot’s words. I drive home with a greater level of clarity about how to increase access to local food in western Massachusetts. For more information on what you can do to cultivate food justice in your community, see Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 (source: gardeningthecommunity.org)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>11 Things You Can Do to Grow the Movement for Food Justice</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.) Organize for racial justice; find out who is doing food/racial justice work in your community and get involved</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.) Reclaim abandoned land and grow food for your neighbors</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.) Talk to your friends and neighbors and food and racial justice (how some community have access to healthy, affordable locally grown food while others don’t)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.) Supporting living wages for food workers and farm workers</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.) Join your local Farm Share (CSA) program; encourage them to offer a sliding scale fee and flexible payments for members</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.) Organize to get grocery stores to locate in neighborhoods like Mason Square</td>
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<td>7.) Look at what doesn’t work and build alternatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.) Petition to get fresh, healthy food into public schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.) Support local growers; shop at Farmers’ Markets whenever possible (especially the Mason Square Farmers’ Market!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.) Get your community’s grocery stores, corner stores and institutions to buy locally grown food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.) Become an active member of your local Food Policy Council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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\(^{18}\) Adobo and Sazon are popular spices in Puerto Rican cooking that are often commercially produced with preservatives, MSG, and other unhealthy additives (Wise 2017)
Food Access in Greenfield

On a sunny December afternoon, I drove an hour north to the town of Greenfield, MA for an interview with Andy Grant of Just Roots farm. Just Roots is a 501-c3 non-profit whose mission is to increase access to healthy, local food by connecting people, land, resources, and know-how (Grant 2017). Franklin County, in which Greenfield is situated, is the most rural county of western Massachusetts and the second most impoverished, behind Hampden County, where Springfield and Holyoke are located (Pioneer Valley Food Security Plan Advisory Committee, nd.). As one might expect due its rural location, Greenfield has the feel of a small farm town, especially when compared to Springfield and Holyoke. Greenfield is less racially diverse than Springfield and Holyoke, and more similar to Amherst and Hadley in terms of its racial demographics. According to U.S. Census Bureau information, Greenfield’s population is 93.3% White, 1.34% Black, and 1.10% Asian, whereas Amherst is 79.3% White, 5.1% Black, and 9.1% Asian and Pacific Islander (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

Just Roots is located on a farm ten minutes outside of downtown Greenfield. If I had not driven through town to get to the farm I might have not noticed that there was a town nearby at all. Just Roots formed in 2008 after a series of conversations between citizens in Greenfield who wanted to find municipal land to grow food on and start community gardens. The group eventually settled on a 60-acre piece of municipal farm land that was owned by the city of Greenfield and had formerly belonged to a farmer named Justin Roots.\(^\text{19}\) Justin sold the land to the city of Greenfield in 1850, where it later became a poor farm.\(^\text{20}\) Poor farms typically existed on the outskirts of towns and served as an early predecessor to social security in that they

\(^{19}\) Not surprisingly, this is where the name Just Roots came from.

\(^{20}\) According to Meryl, the director of Just Roots, poor farms have a long and fascinating history and are worth further researching. Though they are outside of the scope of this research paper, I believe that they would make a fascinating topic for further study.
provided work opportunities, housing, and food to individuals who had fallen on hard times. The land became known as the Greenfield Poor Farm until 1950 when it was leased to farmers to grow corn to feed cattle (Steensburg and LaTronica 2018).

In November 2010, Just Roots gathered 300 Greenfield residents for a public forum on a Saturday to envision how the land might be used if they were to receive a deed for it. The major outcome of the forum was the three pillars of Just Roots’ mission: to build a community farm that focused on food, education, and community. After submitting a formal business proposal to the city government, Just Roots was rewarded with a 15-year lease on the 60-acre property that was formally farmed by their namesake Justin Roots. Over the past seven years the land has been transformed from a corn farm to a vibrant production farm with greenhouses, hoop houses, and a community garden (Steensburg and LaTronica 2018).

I pull in to a long gravel driveway and park in a dirt parking lot next to the Just Roots farmhouse. I walk in through the front door and come into a room that looks like a mix between a kitchen and a living room. There is a bookshelf with an impressive collection of donated books and DVDs, several small couches, a refrigerator, and a small sink and counter in the kitchen. Several staff, whom I assume are on break, are sitting around discussing local politics. I receive a warm welcome and am informed that Andy is at a meeting in town and will be arriving shortly. I sit around idly for ten minutes until Andy walks through the door and shakes my hand.

Andy is a middle-aged White man of average height and sports a medium-length haircut with a trimmed beard to accompany it. He seems at ease with returning to work and is dressed casually in jeans, boots, and a sweater. Andy has a palpable enthusiasm about him and seems excited for the interview to start. We decide to stay in the common room for the interview and he asks me questions about my research project as I set up my recording equipment. After my
equipment is set up I ask Andy my opening question; “What factors limit people’s access to healthy, locally grown food in the communities that you serve?” Andy pauses and reflects before responding:

…Many people don’t have a car and Franklin County is the only county in the Commonwealth that doesn’t have weekend bus service. So getting to the Farmer’s Market feels impossible to people who are living out on the margins… Also the cost of locally-sourced food is out of reach for most people… it has become an elite food source which has been mainly the domain of White, affluent homeowners, people with cars. (Grant, *Personal Communication*, Dec. 7th, 2017)

Though Andy indirectly mentions race when he says that [locally grown food] has become “an elite food source which has been mainly the domain of White, affluent homeowners, people with cars,” his response lacks the strong racial critique of the U.S. food system that Ibrahim and Margot mentioned (Grant 2017). Andy’s response makes sense when we remember, as I mentioned earlier, that Greenfield’s population, according to the 2000 U.S. census, is 93.3% White. In other words, racism is not a leading factor of food insecurity for Greenfield’s residents because most of Greenfield’s residents are White.

One way that Just Roots and Gardening the Community make locally grown food more accessible is by offering low-cost Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares to their customers. Andy explains:

We provide an accessible CSA farm share and specifically we are set up to take the SNAP card as payment for the farm shares… And we make it even more convenient by [having] the cost of the farm share deducted automatically from the EBT card on the right day of the month, we call that Auto-SNAP. So that makes it more affordable and convenient at the same time… (Grant, *Personal Communication*, Dec. 7th, 2017)
By accepting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)\textsuperscript{21} as a form of payment for their CSA program, Just Roots and Gardening the Community expand the market for locally grown food in their communities to area residents who are on food stamps and otherwise could not afford the full price for locally grown food. Indeed, a common critique of CSA’s and farmer’s markets is that they are inaccessible to low-income populations and customers of non-White cultural backgrounds. Andy addressed these critiques indirectly at different points in our interview, first stating:

Farmers’ markets and co-ops, while they had the origin of getting food to ordinary people like I’ve said have kind of become cheeky or elite food locations. So breaking that cultural barriers of people from all sectors of the community feeling welcomed in these spaces is also a challenge. (Grant, Personal Communication, Dec. 7th, 2017)

Andy’s comment shows that he is cognizant of some of the potential pitfalls of farmer’s markets, by noting the fact that price and income level are not the only barriers making these methods of food distribution potentially inaccessible. Indeed, there are larger cultural barriers, such as the culture of local food spaces more broadly, that can have an elitist or ‘cheeky’ vibe to it. Andy’s observations are substantiated by food justice scholars Holt-Gimenez and Harper (2016), who note:

Even the widely-hailed “good food” movement—with its plethora of projects for organic agriculture, permaculture, healthy food, community supported agriculture, farmers’ markets and corner store conversions—tends to address the issue of racism unevenly… The hurt, anger, fear, guilt, grief and hopelessness of racism are uneasily addressed in the food movement—if they are addressed at all. (Holt-Gimenez and Harper 2016, pg. 1)

\textsuperscript{21} For more information on SNAP and how it is utilized by the organizations that I studied see Chapter 4: The Role of State/Federal Programs.
Holt-Gimenez and Harper (2016) take Andy’s analysis one step further by explicitly naming racism, specifically the uneven acknowledgment of it local food spaces, as a major deterrent to CSA and farmers market participation by people of color. Their findings are supported by several case studies on CSA membership by people of color, such as Guthman (2008), Guthman et al. (2006), and Holt-Gimenez and Harper (2016).

A key finding of Holt Gimenez and Harper (2016) was that local food organizations tend to fall into three camps in regards to the question of racism in the food system. The first camp are organizations that are “committed to dismantling racism in the food system and center this work in their activities.” Gardening the Community and Nuestras Raices would fall in this camp because both organizations center people of color in their leadership and actively seek to dismantle racism in their own organizations and in the food systems that they are a part of. The second camp are “sympathetic but are not active on the issue [of racism].” Still, a third camp exists that “sees racism as too difficult, tangential to their work, or a divisive issue to be avoided” (Holt-Gimenez and Harper 2016, pg. 1). It has been my observation from living in western Massachusetts for four years that most local food organizations in this region likely fall in the second and third camps. So where does Just Roots within this spectrum? Andy addressed this question indirectly in our interview, stating:

To me food justice requires a thorough analysis of the systems of oppression and a dedication to dismantling or undoing those systems. And that is a level of articulation and maturity that we have not reached yet as an organization. While individual participants and staff members have strong convictions about food justice and about dismantling racism it hasn’t coalesced as a fundamental commitment by the organization. (Grant, Personal Communication, Dec. 7th, 2017)

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22 I am sure that there are far more studies on this topic that have been done than the ones I mentioned above. A key realization that came up during informal conversation with one of my interviewees was that CSA programs are sometimes not a popular or culturally appropriate way of distributing food, particularly in non-White immigrant communities who are unaccustomed to the concept of paying large sums of money for food several weeks prior of receiving it.
Based on this response I would say that Just Roots falls within the second camp of organizations that are “sympathetic but are not active on the issue” (Holt-Gimenez and Harper 2016, pg. 1). Andy indicates this fairly directly by stating that even though “individual participants and staff members have strong convictions about food justice,” dismantling has not been embraced as a fundamental commitment by Just Roots (Grant 2017).

I find Andy’s humility about the mission of Just Roots and its growing edges to be refreshing. He does not skirt or shy away from my question about food justice, nor does he exaggerate the extent to which Just Roots as an organization engages with these issues. Andy elaborates on this further when he notes:

> We have focused on access and community building and farming, having the farm as a hub of our activity and a training ground for future farmers and a connecting place for the whole community and a source of an abundance of nutritious food that we distribute widely. And that does mitigate against injustice, the unequal distribution of healthy food, but it doesn’t get to the root causes (pardon the pun). (Grant, Personal Communication, Dec. 7th, 2017)

It’s clear from these responses that Just Roots addresses local food security issues primarily through their low-cost CSA programs and mobile market programs. Though these efforts may mitigate against classism in the food system, it’s clear from Andy’s response they lack a strong racial critique that “doesn’t get to the root causes of injustice” (Grant 2017).

After the interview is over I shake Andy’s hand and walk out of the farmhouse with him. It’s clear to me from our conversation that Just Roots is doing crucial work surrounding food access in the Greenfield area, and they have some important work to do before they can fully claim the label of food justice that their name alludes to. It is my belief that Just Roots will eventually get there. Part of my hope comes from Andy’s final remark in our interview. He notes:
Three people from Just Roots recently went to a discussion at La Mariposa collective in Turners Falls where three people from Gardening the Community came up to tell about their work. And specifically how GTC has addressed racism. That was quite inspiring and I’m anticipating that Just Roots as an organization will be learning from models like that and incorporating more explicitly a concern to dismantle racism in the food system.

(Grant, Personal Communication, Dec. 7th, 2017)

Andy’s response points to a growing awareness between the nonprofits that I studied of how each other’s work complements and contrasts with each other. Andy’s comment reminds me of comments that Margot made during her interview about Nuestra Raices’ partnership with Gardening the Community and how their youth groups work together.

The Role of the Food Bank

In early December I drive half an hour to the rural town of Hatfield, Massachusetts to meet with Andrew Morehouse, executive director of the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts. The headquarters of the Food Bank are not located near a major urban center like Gardening the Community and Nuestras Raices and they are not on a farm either. The Food Bank is located in a large warehouse, in close proximity to rural farmland, but separate from it. There are no youth working here, it’s mostly middle-aged adults dressed in business casual attire. I check in at the front desk and am asked to have a seat in the waiting room because Andrew is in a committee meeting that is running late. Ten minutes later Andrew walks out, shakes my hand, and invites me into his office.

Andrew is a middle-aged White man with a tall, slim build and somewhat curly, trimmed, greying hair. He is dressed in a button-down shirt and dress pants; he is the executive director of a large nonprofit and dresses the part. In spite of this, Andrew’s office is decidedly humble. There’s no grandiose bookshelf or cheesy motivational posters on the wall. There’s just a simple carpeted floor, a plain desk with a computer, and a pair of glass windows behind it that look out
into Food Bank’s parking lot. Andrew asks me a few questions about my project as I set up my recording device and he finishes snacking on a banana for lunch.

I ask Andrew my initial research question about what some of the barriers are to food access in the communities that the Food Bank serves. Andrew pauses for a second, and then replies:

Clearly, income is one. Transportation would be another. Knowledge of where locally grown food or where locally produced food is available. Knowledge that it’s important because it has, at the margin, a lot more nutritional value, and it has other added benefits.... Much of the food that is produced locally is seasonal so what do people do during the months when this food isn’t available to purchase? (Morehouse, Personal Communication, Dec. 1st 2017)

Andrew’s response surprises me at first. Although he alludes to class as a barrier to accessing local food by mentioning income as a factor, he makes no mention of historical or contemporary legacies of racism as underlying causes of food insecurity and hunger in western Massachusetts. In fact, his response does not mention race at all. Compared with Ibrahim’s and Margot’s responses, Andrew’s response is decidedly timid and apolitical. I pause for a few moments and consider why this might be. It occurs to me that White privilege may be a contributing factor, but then again that did not seem to be as much of an issue when I interviewed Margot. Perhaps Andrew’s response has more to do with the organization that he works for and his position of power within the Food Bank. Though the Food Bank shares a common mission with Nuestras Raices and Gardening the Community of increasing access to locally grown food, the Food Bank does not include an explicitly racial critique of the food system like Nuestras Raices and Gardening the Community do. This becomes apparent when I ask Andrew how he views the Food Bank’s work in relation to the larger food justice movement. He replies:
We see the value of the Food Bank as a credible organization that is well-respected by people from across the ideological spectrum…So we’ll take on controversial topics as we’re able to educate the public and garner the kind of support that we need to take those positions and those solutions, those strategies, those actions, in a way that are going to be sustainable and again have the support of more and more people in society. (Morehouse, Personal Communication, Dec. 1st, 2017)

Although Ibrahim, Margot, and Andy were all comfortable using the phrase “food justice” in our interview, Andrew did not mention it once during our interview and only made one passing comment about food justice after our interview on the condition that his specific comments be kept off the record. Was this an example of White fragility? Was this a genuine lack of knowledge about food justice discourse and politics? Or was Andrew’s response a strategic public relations move to avoid the possibility of alienating donors of the Food Bank by using language that might make them uncomfortable? I’m still not sure. It’s clear from other parts of our interview that the Food Bank is already ‘pushing the envelope’ in some ways by challenging the traditional role of food banks as an apolitical source of emergency food. This is evident in the Food Bank’s active role in the formation of a Task Force to End Hunger that started last May. Andrew elaborates:

That task force⁵²³... issued an action plan...and both class and racism were identified as underlying causes of food insecurity and hunger, as well as many other underlying causes… we are devoting much of our staff time and board time to learning more about [racism], learning how class and race affect food insecurity, and we… need to speak specifically with individuals that experience food insecurity to hear their stories… (Morehouse, Personal Communication, Dec. 1st, 2017) [shortened for cohesion]

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⁵²³ For more information on the Task Force to End Hunger in Western Massachusetts, see “A Plan to End Hunger in Western Massachusetts”. Commenting on the formation of the Task Force, Andrew notes, “We brought people together from diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise and across all four counties to think about how we would go about ending hunger and what the underlying causes to hunger are and ultimately what the solutions to ending hunger would be over the long-term” (Morehouse 2017).
Though Andrew did not address institutional or structural racism in his initial responses to my question about barriers to food access in the communities that the Food Bank serves, his response should not be taken to mean that the Food Bank is not concerned about these issues. Indeed, the Task Force to End Hunger would likely not have identified racism and classism as underlying cause of food insecurity and hunger if it had not been at least somewhat of a concern of the Food Bank. The fact that the Food Bank devotes staff and board time to learning about how class and race affect food insecurity and that they are willing to engage in open dialogue individuals who experience food insecurity are promising signs. Still, it is clear from Andrew’s responses that dismantling racism in the food system is not a primary concern of the Food Bank, certainly not to the same degree as it is for Gardening the Community and Nuestras Raíces.

**Conclusion**

It is clear from speaking to the individuals that I interviewed that they all have differing perceptions about the factors that limit food access in the communities that they serve. Ibrahim and Margot were very upfront about racism (both historical and contemporary) being an underlying barrier to food access in the communities that they serve. Because of this, Gardening the Community and Nuestras Raíces center people of color in their organization and actively seek to dismantle racism in the food system. Andy talked more about classism as a barrier to food access in Greenfield and because of this Just Roots strives to improve food access by making their food more affordable and accessible to lower-income folks in Greenfield. Because of Greenfield’s predominantly White racial demographic, dismantling racism in the food system is not an active concern for Just Roots as an organization, though this does not mean that staff and employees of Just Roots do not care about this issue. Likewise, Andrew Morehouse noted that the Food Bank is not as concerned with issues of dismantling racism in the food system
because the Food Bank sees their work as more concerned with improving food access in general throughout counties of western Massachusetts. All four of the organizations that I studied are negatively impacted by the industrial agri-foods complex, but not in the same ways. Because of this, they respond to barriers to food access in different ways.
Chapter 3: Division of Labor

None of the organizations that I interviewed for this project do their work in a vacuum and none of them are ran by one person exclusively. The section below includes responses to my questions about how labor is divided, how outreach is conducted, and lastly, the role of youth leadership is in their organization. Because Just Roots and the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts do not include youth leadership as a function or program of their organizations, you will not find responses from Andy or Andrew in the final section of this chapter.

The fifth question that I asked in my interviews was, “How does your organization navigate the dual concern of maintaining a functioning production farm on top of the logistical work of running a non-profit organization?” Ibrahim responded to my question as follows:

That’s why we have two directors. I have to make sure that the youth program is running effectively, and I have to make sure that all of the food and everything regarding that is running effectively, and then I share responsibility for the grants and administrative aspects of the organization. So this place runs in a dual-directorship because of that reason... (Ali, Personal Communication, Nov. 11th, 2017)

By having two directors instead of just one, Ibrahim is able to focus on task that are manageable for him to take on, such as growing the food and handing a smaller portion of the grants and administrative work. Despite this, Ibrahim still picks up a lot of the slack due to the lack of overall staff that GTC has. He notes, “I do a lot more than I probably should be doing, but we do not have the staff to cover everything that we need to do, so people have to do more than one aspect of things” (Ali 2017). Part of the way that GTC mitigates this problem is by having a board of directors. Yet even though they have a board of directors, this does not mean that everyone on the board is pulling the same weight. Ibrahim notes:
And then we have a board, some of which are more active than others, and we’re trying to make sure that that development continues to happen, but it’s not easy to get people to join a board and we’re trying to negotiate how to get people to stay involved and still do effective work for the organization, there’s all of that. (Ali, Personal Communication, Nov. 11th, 2017)

One of the themes from Ibrahim’s responses is that it can be difficult to get outside stakeholders involved and motivated in sharing responsibility for the functioning of GTC. Because of this, and their overall lack of staff, a disproportionate level of work still falls on his shoulders. However, as Ibrahim later notes, he receives plenty of help when it comes to growing the food:

So my staff, and all of the youth that are in the program do all of the work that takes place here. We have a few interns, but they’re not necessarily out here growing food…so we have to think about how we’ve going to deal with the farm stand in an effective way for the people who live out here, so there’s that. And then we take volunteers of course… but most of the work, like I said is done by the youth. (Ali, Personal Communication, Nov. 11th, 2017)

One of the key takeaways from Ibrahim’s response is that youth play at crucial role in the functioning of Gardening the Community. Although GTC relies partially on volunteers and interns most of the work is done by the youth. Nuestras Raices is similar to GTC in that they rely on a combination of volunteers, paid staff, and youth to achieve farm tasks. Margot notes:

… We have lots of groups of volunteers that come, which is nice for getting bigger projects done or getting large amounts of weeding done, and then the six-week long youth program. Those kids actually get paid at the end, they get a stipend at the very end of the six weeks, so they are working, they are also here to learn about agriculture. (Wise, Personal Communication, Nov. 28th, 2017)

Not only are youth participants learning about agriculture, they are getting hands on experience doing farm tasks, all the while being a huge help to Nuestras Raices by taking care of burdensome tasks such as weeding. Furthermore, the youth at Nuestras (similar to the youth at
GTC) are paid a stipend which allows them to take pride in the work that they are doing, have some extra income, and gives them a reference for applying to jobs in the future.

One of the main differences between Nuestras Raíces and the other organizations that I studied is that most of the farm work at Nuestras Raíces is done by area farmers who rent plots of land from the organization, rather than traditional production farming\(^{24}\) done by a farm crew or urban farming done with youth participants. Margot commented on this in our interview, stating:

> So we rent out plots to farmers, they can be anyone, but typically they are Puerto Rican and typically our farmers have tended to be older men. It’s not because we sought them out but because that is the demographic that has a history of doing agriculture in Puerto Rico… the farmers run their own businesses. (Wise, *Personal Communication*, Nov. 28th, 2017)

As part of the deal for renting Nuestras’ land, the farmers receive prepared land that includes irrigation, and they are on their own for buying their own supplies and selling their food. They are not receiving any form of a paycheck from Nuestras (Wise 2018). And yet, despite their financial independence, many of the farmers do receive help from Margot when it comes to selling their crops. Margot notes:

> It is part of my job to help them find markets and help them access markets if they need help with that. So I was buying stuff from them for our CSA this year and I was helping them out with the SNAP machine at the Holyoke market, helping them get more sales that way… so in small ways I was helping them get access to different markets. (Wise, *Personal Communication*, Nov. 28th, 2017)

\(^{24}\) Production farming is more akin to the approach that Just Roots utilizes that involves a more intensive cultivation of the land to grow larger quantities of food for wholesale use by local restaurants, at farmers’ markets, and for large CSA shares. Nuestras Raíces has recently began to do production farming under the direction of Margot but this is still in its initially phases,
It is clear from my interview with Margot that Nuestras Raices is unique among the organizations that I studied in the way that they operate. Though Gardening the Community and Nuestras are similar in that they both feature robust youth programs, the youth at GTC grow a majority of their organization’s food, while at Nuestras the youth help out on smaller tasks such as weeding and are only around for six weeks. Despite the differences in their youth programs, administrative work is handled similarly at Nuestras Raices to how it is at Gardening the Community. Margot notes:

So, we actually have administrative offices separate from the farm that focus more on running the organization and on different aspects of community outreach, volunteer coordination, administration book-keeping, all that stuff. That stuff mainly happens at the office. We have two full-time staff kind of running the farm, and then two part-time people helping out at the farm. (Wise, Personal Communication, Nov. 28th, 2017)

Similarly to GTC, Nuestras Raices has different staff for focusing on administrative work and farm work. While GTC relies on Third Sector New England for help with bookkeeping, legal work, and accounting, Nuestras relies on their own staff to manage these factors. Even with their 10 staff members helping out in the office and on the farm, farm work is tedious and requires more help than the two full-time farm staff and two part-time farm staff at Nuestras can do on their own. Margot confirms this when she adds, “Even that is not really enough [to accomplish farm tasks]. We had interns this summer that made it possible, and the youth group that we had made it possible” (Wise 2017).

While Nuestras Raices and Gardening the Community are both able to make the ends meet on their farms, they both rely heavily on youth, volunteers, and interns to get extra farm tasks accomplished. Just Roots is in a similar position to Nuestras Raices and GTC due to their shrinking staff size and lack of funding. In a public talk at UMass Amherst, Meryl and Jessica, the co-directors of Just Roots, noted that their staff has shrunk over the past year to three full
time assistant growers, a part time bookkeeper, and a part time business manager. Staff at Just Roots perform different tasks and aim to check-in often with each other to prevent overwhelm and tally their successes and failures (LaTronica and Steensburg 2018). Though the Food Bank does not do traditional farm tasks like the other three organizations that I studied, they still rely heavily on volunteer labor to make their ends meet. Andrew explains:

There was a time we calculated the actual number of volunteers that supported the food bank and it was around 750-1,000. Now we calculate it in terms of hours and in the last 12 months we know that we benefited from, I think it’s around 1600 volunteer hours… We couldn’t operate without volunteers. (Warehouse, Personal Communication, Dec. 1st, 2017)

If we do the math on Andrew’s estimates, it shows that every volunteer that the Food Bank received during the last twelve months worked on average between 1.6 - 2.1 hours. This is a significant amount of free labor, especially if we consider that between 750-1,000 people worked this many hours over the past twelve months. So what exactly do volunteers at the Food Bank do if it’s not traditional farm tasks like weeding? Andrew notes:

They primarily work in our warehouse helping us inspect and sort the donated food or they volunteer at our distribution points... at those distribution sites there are crews of volunteers who receive the food, break down the palettes of food, and put them on tables that elders walk by, kind of like an assembly line, and fill their bags of groceries. (Warehouse, Personal Communication, Dec. 1st, 2017)

The primary distribution site that the Food Bank uses is their brown-bag, food for elder’s program where they distribute food to 7,500 elders a month at one of 46 councils on aging or senior centers across the four counties The other distribution program is their mobile food bank program. This program drops off food (primarily vegetables) once or twice a month in 20 neighborhoods with high levels of food insecurity and poverty. According to Andrew, the mobile food bank is “designed to be a safety valve for us to be able to distribute produce very quickly
before it spoils so we have a lot of volunteers there” (Warehouse 2017). Given the magnitude of these volunteer programs, it is safe to assume that volunteers at the Food Bank certainly have a lot on their plate (no pun intended). But just how much food do the volunteers distribute per year? Although Andrew did not have a precise statistic for this, he noted that the Food Bank in total distributed 10.7 million pounds of food to 223,000 residents last year (Warehouse 2017). If this food were distributed equally to each of these 223,000 residents that would be approximately 4.79 pounds of food per resident per year. Although 10.7 million pounds of food sounds like a lot, in reality this does not break down to being all that much food per resident, especially considering data from the USDA that indicates that, in 2011, the average American consumed 1,996 pounds of food (qtd. in Aubrey 2011). This is roughly 417 times the amount of food that the Food Bank was able to distribute per person last year. And while it has been argued by many that the average American consumes (and wastes) far more food (particularly poultry and meat) than they need to, these statistics make it clear that the Food Bank is still a long way away from achieving its mission ending hunger in western Massachusetts.

Another question that came up during my interview with Andrew is what kind of food does the Food Bank distribute and where do they receive it from? Andrew answered this in depth during my interview with him:

About one half of our food comes from the public sector, of that half a quarter comes from the federal government in the form of dry good items mainly from a USDA program called TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program.) The other quarter of the public sector food that we receive comes from funding we receive from the state government of Massachusetts through a program called MEFAP (Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program). (Warehouse, Personal Communication, Dec. 1st, 2017)
Clearly, the Food Bank is dependent on funds and programs from the public sector to feed their food insecure constituents. Thought they allocate 9% of these funds to buying Massachusetts grown food products and half a million pounds of their produce comes from within the Pioneer Valley, it is safe to say that the majority of their food is by no means local (Warehouse 2017). This is a stark contrast between the Food Bank and the other nonprofits in my study. Not only does the Food Bank not grow its own food, but most of it is not local either. And yet, the Food Bank feeds a much larger portion of the population of western Massachusetts (nearly a quarter of a million people every year) than the other organizations I studied. It is quite possible that they simply do not have the means to feed this large of a constituency using only local solutions.

Not only is the Food Bank dependent on federal programs and funding to receive their food, they are also largely dependent on the private sector. Andrew notes:

Most of [our private sector food] comes from retail supermarkets (Stop and Shop, Big Y, Ocean State Job Lot, Costco, BJ’s, the list goes on and on and on). Some of it comes from wholesalers like our neighbor next door CNS wholesale grocers. Many other retailers including Walmart, the list goes on. About half a million pounds is donated from area farmers. Another one million pounds we purchase from a farm broker up in Quebec, Canada. (Warehouse, Personal Communication, Dec. 1st, 2017)

Although the Food Bank is largely dependent on donations from retail supermarkets, they also receive a lot of support and donations from local farmers and regional farm brokers. Though they are certainly less community and land-based that the other nonprofits that I studied, the Food Bank’s primary concern is feeding its constituents, and for the time being that means relying on a mix of local, regional, transcontinental, and private/public support.

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25 There is great irony in the fact that the same supermarkets that donate excess produce to the Food Bank also co-create conditions of food swamps and food insecurity in some of the urban and rural communities that the Food Bank serves by divesting from red-lined communities such as Mason Square. See Introduction for information on this.
Outreach

In addition to growing and/or distributing food, every organization that I interviewed does some form of outreach to spread the message about upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, etc. Gardening the Community uses a variety of different means to do this. Ibrahim notes:

So we do… newsletters, emails, social media, etc…with the young folks, we don’t really go out and recruit at high schools, it’s definitely more of a word of mouth... When it comes to promoting our markets, and stuff like that, you know, anything goes, flyer-ing, knocking on doors, trying to get news articles, trying to get on television, everything is kind of on the table. (Ali, Personal Communication, Nov. 11th, 2017)

Nuestras Raices relies more heavily on their social media presence to spread the word about upcoming events. Margot notes:

We have a staff member that does community outreach and volunteer coordination, and she manages our Facebook page and our email list. I do our Instagram because I’m at the farm and so I take pictures at the farm and post them. Our website is under construction and so right now a lot of people find us and communicate with us through Facebook… When we do events we get a lot of people that see our events through Facebook. (Wise, Personal Communication, Nov. 28th, 2017)

Just Roots uses a mix of community outreach events and social media presence to spread the word about upcoming events and life on the farm. Andy notes:

I just came from an outreach event, so that’s part of it, tabling at different opportunities in the community. We do have a website, justroots.org, and a Facebook page and a Twitter and an Instagram account. The Twitter and Instagram are mainly life on the farm…Facebook we do use for promoting events like our festivals or community workshops. (Grant, Personal Communication, Dec. 7th, 2017)

GTC, Nuestras Raices, and Just Roots all use a dynamic mix of social media, poster making, and outreach events to spread the word. The Food Bank uses all of these methods as well as TV
spots, billboards, and newsletters to spread the word to their different constituencies and stakeholder groups. Andrew notes:

So for folks who are food insecure and want to access our services the type of media we use, clearly we have a website, we drive traffic to our website through all of the social media tools; Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. We run radio spots with the support of our donors. Occasionally billboards and TV spots... We have flyers that we distribute on a monthly basis to all elders of the brown bag program it goes right into their bag. (Warehouse, *Personal Communication*, Dec. 1st, 2017)

The Food Bank uses the largest amount of media out of the organizations that I studied to spread the word about their upcoming events and programs. In addition to their “News Bites” newsletter, the Food Bank has quarterly newsletter to educate their donors about food insecurity and hunger, an annual report, and advocacy alerts to advance their public policy priorities (Warehouse 2017). This makes sense given the fact that the Food Bank aims to serve roughly 223,000 people a year, a far larger demographic than GTC, Nuestras Raices, or Just Roots serve. It also makes sense given the broad support that they receive from public and private donors, businesses, and volunteers.

Outreach is a critical task for any organization attempting to address hunger, particularly nonprofits. Informing constituents and potential volunteers and funders about upcoming events and programs helps these nonprofits stay relevant to the communities that they serve and allows them to continue to advance towards their mission statements. One extra way that Gardening the Community and Nuestras Raices stay relevant to the communities that they serve is through their youth development programs.

**Youth Leadership**

As I mentioned earlier, both Gardening the Community and Nuestras Raices rely heavily on youth leadership to complete farm tasks such as weeding and growing food. A central
difference between the two youth programs is length of time: GTC’s youth program is year round whereas Nuestras’ program is for six weeks during the summer. Because their youth program is year round, Gardening the Community is able to sustain longer term participation from their youth crew. This affords GTC has a greater opportunity for long term youth development. According to their 2014 Annual Report, four youth participated actively on the GTC Board of Directors, ten worked summer jobs, and 27 participated in GTC programs throughout the year (Gardening the Community 2014). However, as Ibrahim notes, the importance of this development extends far beyond simply teaching youth how to do farm work:

I don’t think that young people who are in middle school need to be sitting at a desk, they need to be outdoors working toward improving their community... If you don’t get these young folks involved, what they do is they don’t develop any empathy for the people around them… And then we create monsters and we recreate monsters, and that’s not what this world needs anymore, we need better young men, we need better young women. (Ali, *Personal Communication*, Nov. 11th, 2017)

At first glance it may appear that transforming the Springfield food system is the principal goal and mission of Gardening the Community. However, the emphasis that GTC places on transforming the lives of young people should not be overlooked. This work starts with getting young people more involved in their communities, rather than sitting behind a desk. This is the basis upon which radical empathy is built, and from which a better understanding of local food systems and the inequalities that they perpetuate emerges. When young people start to feel more invested in the communities that they are a part of, the likelihood of creating and re-creating monsters diminishes substantially. By participating in this kind of work, organizations like Gardening the Community are doing more than cultivating food justice, they are cultivating restorative justice as well.
Conclusion

All four of the nonprofits that I studied divide up labor in different ways and for different tasks. Just Roots and Gardening the Community utilize a dual directorship structure where one director is in principally in charge of farm related activities while the other is in charge of the nonprofit management. Nuestras Raíces features a similar divide between staff who work on the farm and staff who work in the office. The Food Bank is unique in that they do not own a farm or grow any of their own produce. Because of this their labor is more split up by those who are distributing the food and those that work in the offices.

All four of the nonprofits rely heavily on volunteer labor to make their ends meet and social media to advertise upcoming events and conduct outreach. Nuestras Raíces and Gardening the Community are both unique in that youth are employed in their organizations part time through stipends. This extends the size of their work force and provides valuable opportunities for youth development. And, as Ibrahim notes, it gives youth an opportunity to “be outdoors working toward improving their community” (Ali 2017). One thing that is certain for all four of the organizations: they will all ultimately depend on the next generation of young leaders to ensure that their valuable work will continue into the future.
Chapter 4: The Role of State/Federal Programs

Cicone and Jacobs (2009) define non-profit organizations (NPO) as organizations dedicated to furthering a particular social cause or advocating for a shared point of view. NPOs use their financial surplus to further achieve their ultimate objective, rather than distributing their income to the organization's shareholders, leaders, or members. Because of their status as tax-deductible charities, nonprofits do not pay an income tax on the money that they receive. They can operate in religious, scientific, research, or educational settings (Cicone and Jacobs 2009).

All four of the organizations in this study address local food security needs through an NPO framework. However, it would be misleading to say that all four of the organizations operate with the ‘surplus of revenues’ that is alluded to by the above authors. Meeting local food security needs in an accessible and affordable way is by no means a lucrative business. Andrew Morehouse, director of the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, made mention of this when he stated:

Those who are food insecure are at one level our customers but they don’t pay anything for our service. So we have to reach out to a different set of stakeholders to support our organization. They are not only state and federal government, they are more importantly, primarily individuals and businesses. Two thirds of our funding… come from individuals and businesses in the community. (Morehouse, Personal Communication, Dec. 1st, 2017)

One unique feature of the Food Bank is that they do not grow or sell any of their food. On one level this is one less expense to take into account because they do not have to hire a farm crew or lease valuable farm acreage. It is also one less source of revenue, meaning that they have to rely primarily on individuals and businesses to make their ends meet. As Andrew later mentions, this is sometimes easier said than done:
It’s a bit of a dance to be able to convince donor stakeholders to support our organization while at the same time trying to educate them that if we’re going to end hunger we’re going to need to go beyond simply feeding people and look at the underlying causes of hunger and what kinds of institutional changes do we need to make over time. That’s something that we have to do very very carefully and strategically… (Morehouse, *Personal Communication*, Dec. 1st, 2017).

Because they are beholden to the economic investments of their public and private stakeholders, the Food Bank is in a delicate position. They walk a fine line between receiving funding from outside stakeholders for their crucial task of feeding food insecure citizens while educating these stakeholders about the steps needed to eradicate hunger in the region of western Massachusetts. Although all four of the organizations that I interviewed rely on donations and grants to make their ends meet, it is likely that the Food Bank receives more attention and funding from donors across the political spectrum than the other nonprofits I interviewed. This became evident when Andrew stated that:

> We see the value of the Food Bank as a credible organization that is well-respected by people from across the ideological spectrum and in fact we believe that if we’re going to end hunger we are going to have to change people’s understanding of what hunger is, of what its underlying causes are, so we need to educate the public and that’s something that will take time and we won’t be able to succeed at that in one generation. (Morehouse, *Personal Communication*, Dec. 1st, 2017).

Because the Food Bank receives donations from donors and businesses ‘across the ideological spectrum,’ they are less likely to utilize the radical language and praxis of food justice organizations such as Nuestras Raices and Gardening the Community. If the Food Bank or Andrew himself were to advocate openly for a dismantling of racism in the food system or for other food justice related concerns, they could lose their credibility as a well-respected bi-partisan organization and risk losing funding and resources from moderate and conservative leaning donors and businesses. Without access to this funding and resources the Food Bank
would be less well-equipped to provide food for the 223,000 food insecure citizens of western Massachusetts.

Despite the fact that Nuestras Raices and Gardening the Community do not pull from as large of a community of donors, they still manage to make ends their ends meet, mostly from the help of grants and private donors. Margot notes:

I know that we’re 100% dependent on grants, we get grants from federal sources, from the state, from MDAR, and private funders as well. So we just applied to grants that we see that are kind of in line with what we are doing, and we are pretty good at getting grants…My goal is to make the farm more sustainable economically and to have the markets and the CSA help pay for even some of the farm expenses. (Wise, Personal Communication, Nov. 28th, 2017)

Just because they rely entirely on grants does not mean that Nuestras Raices and Margot lack future business ambitions. As Margot mentions, running a functioning production farm is an expensive task, and it will likely take several years before La Finca becomes economically sustainable (Wise 2017). If history has shown anything about Nuestras Raices, it is that it is a tirelessly innovative organization. I have no doubt that Nuestras will develop the economic sustainability that it needs to run its crucial programs in South Holyoke. And its programs are in fact crucial. Indeed, as a 2007 study from the Creative Center for Community Development shows, Nuestras’ annual budget of $560,000 results in a $1.03M increase in the local economy of Holyoke (Oehler et al. 2007, pg. 1).26 Studies like this show that even while Nuestras Raices is heavily dependent on grants it still has a major economic and social impact on the surrounding city of Holyoke.

26 The study also notes that the impact of non-local visitors to Nuestras Raices’ urban gardens was $148,311 and that impact of the small businesses that were incubated by Nuestras Raices is $1.07M annually (Oehler et al. 2007, pg. 1)
Gardening the Community is in a similar position to Nuestras in terms of their reliance on grants. As Ibrahim notes:

So we write grants, we’re trying to build our donor base, which is from people all over the country, but definitely there’s a big big local network that we’re cultivating to contribute to our bottom line. We’ve done city and state grants that have to a big extent but no federal grants, actually the USDA grant, so there’s one federal grant, they’re very complex, and our administrative folks that we work with… (Ali, Personal Communication, Nov. 11th, 2017)

Although Gardening the Community only relies on one federal grant to function, they have been able to get by with local grants from the city and state and from gifts from private donors. They are unique among the organizations that I surveyed in that they pay an outside organization (Third Sector New England) to manage their accounting, lawyers, insurance, etc. (Ali 2017).

Despite this extra help, Gardening the Community is still heavily dependent on grants. According to their 2014 annual report, Gardening the Community received 77% of their operating revenue from grants, 12% from donors, and 11% from their own sales (Annual Report 2014). This means that roughly 89% of their operating revenue comes from outside sources. Just Roots is in a similar situation. Andy comments:

Early on we had the idea that the proceeds from the farm would go a long way to covering the cost of the organization. That was an unrealistic goal. So we’re largely grant funded and reliant on individual donors, some of whom give large sums of money and others give, you know the whole range of contributions.

Just Roots receives one third of their funding from grants, one third from gifts, and one third from income (LaTronica and Steensberg 2018). This means that two thirds of their income is dependent on outside sources. In other words, if their grants and donations were to run dry, GTC and Just Roots would be in big trouble. The Food Bank is in less dire of a situation. According to
the Food Banks’ Fiscal Year 2017 report, they receive 15% of their funding from donations, 6% from grants and 74% from food.\textsuperscript{27} Though they may have different levels of dependence, it is clear that all four\textsuperscript{28} of the organizations that I studied are dependent on grants from federal, state, and outside sources in order to function.

The Role of SNAP and HIP

All four of the organizations that I surveyed are able to provide farm fresh food at an affordable price partially due to their ability to accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Healthy Incentive Program (HIP) as forms of payment from qualifying customers. SNAP is the modern form of the federal food stamps program. Based on an initial 1962 USDA pilot program, the Food Stamp Program aimed to make food more accessible for lower-income Americans and boost revenue for local grocery stores in the process. In a 1963 address, President Kennedy pressed Congress to make the program permanent, stating:

There have been encouraging results from this program. Low-income families are receiving better diets--they have been able to obtain meat, poultry, fish, milk, eggs, fruits, and vegetables. Retail food store sales in these areas increased percent in dollar volume. There have been savings in distribution costs and benefits to the economy of food stamp communities. (Bartfield et al. 2016, pg. vii)

In the fiscal year of 2013, fifty years since Kennedy’s initial address, more than one in seven Americans received food stamps through SNAP at a cost of $80 billion dollars, making SNAP the second largest safety net program in terms of recipients and cost (Bartfield et al. 2016, pg. vii). Since the 1990s, SNAP benefits have been distributed via Electronic Balance Transfer (EBT) cards that closely resemble credit cards. The main reason for switching to EBT was to

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\textsuperscript{27} The Food Bank’s Fiscal Year 2017 statistics did not specify whether this statistic was from selling excess food to food pantries, to churches, or to other sources.

\textsuperscript{28} I was not able to find precise statistics or an annual report for Nuestras Raices’ budget
reduce some of the stigma that came with paying for food using a physical food stamp (USDA 2014). One of the ways that Just Roots takes advantage of the SNAP is that they allow their customers to use it as a form of payment for CSA shares. Andy notes:

Well, we provide an accessible CSA farm share and specifically we are set up to take the SNAP card as payment for the farm shares… So this is something of a specialty for Just Roots, we are providing farm shares to people who are on low or very low income, in fact we have the largest SNAP farm share for a single farm operation in the Commonwealth. (Grant, Personal Communication, Dec. 7th, 2017)

By accepting SNAP as a form of payment, Just Roots is expanding the market for local food in Greenfield and challenging the classism and elitism that often comes with local food spaces.

Another program that is heavily utilized by the nonprofits I studied is the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP). Andrew explained to me how HIP works:

Individuals who receive SNAP benefits are able to access the HIP program by going to a local farmer’s market, a farm stand, or by being a member of a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farm… Through that program SNAP recipients can purchase locally-grown fresh vegetables… and for every dollar they spend they will receive a dollar up to various markers depending on family size. (Morehouse, Personal Communication, Dec. 1st, 2017)

Basically, HIP allows individuals and households who already receive SNAP benefits to double those benefits by getting a dollar back on their SNAP card for every dollar that they use at a local farmers’ market, farm stand, or CSA program. Not only is this of great benefit to the consumer, but to the farmer as well. Margot expanded on this:

Now, as of this summer, we have mobile SNAP equipment so at the Holyoke market we are able to accept SNAP, with HIP benefit… Basically, the farmers made extra money because of it and we made extra money because of it because people are buying more vegetables than they normally would because they have this extra money to use, so it’s great for our farmers, it’s great for people. (Wise, Personal Communication, Nov. 28th, 2017)
As Margot mentions here, the benefits of HIP are two-fold. First, it benefits SNAP recipients because it rewards them for spending their SNAP dollars at farmers’ markets and CSAs, such as those operated by Nuestras Raíces, Gardening the Community, and Just Roots. Second, it provides farmers and farms, both for-profit and nonprofit ones, an added layer of security and access to a new market of lower-income consumers who may not have been able to purchase their products before. Indeed, as Andrew mentions, families on SNAP are able to receive up $80 a week in HIP benefits depending on the size of their family (Warehouse 2017). This means up to $320 invested in the local food economy per family per month depending on family size.

Because there are ca. 223,000 food insecure individuals in western Massachusetts, and many if not most of these individuals are eligible for SNAP, it is easy to see the vast potential of programs like HIP for increasing local food access (A Plan of Action to End Hunger in Western Massachusetts 2014)

Margot further unpacks a common misperception about poor people in Holyoke. She notes:

I don’t know if that’s maybe a wrong idea some people have about poor people in our communities, but the truth is that if they had the money, if they had the choice, all of the people in our community would be eating a lot more fresh stuff, they would be eating a lot more healthy, and they really really want that, and that’s what I found at the Holyoke market this summer. (Wise, Personal Communication, Nov. 28th, 2017)

Margot’s experience at the Holyoke farmers market challenges critics of SNAP and HIP who assert that poor people do not deserve or do not want access to locally grown food. Just Roots is also working to challenge the common assertion that poor people do not want/deserve access to locally grown food. Their plan for doing this is by conducting a two-year study aimed at proving the health benefits of CSA membership. Andy explains:
What we expect at the end of [the two-year study] is that it will convince the insurance industry, first insurance companies here in Massachusetts and we already have letters of interest from two major insurance companies, it will convince them that CSA farm shares are a wellness benefit that they should pay for, just like gym memberships are paid for by insurance today. So that’s something that we’re working very hard to prove scientifically. (Grant, Personal Communication, Dec. 7th, 2017)

If they are successful in their study, Just Roots will expand the market for CSA farm membership throughout Massachusetts by convincing private insurers to fund CSA memberships like many currently do for gym memberships. This would expand the food security safety net put in place by HIP and SNAP to families who are near the poverty line but not eligible for SNAP. This could also have a monumental effect on how farm-fresh food is perceived throughout the country. Instead of being viewed primarily as an elite luxury item, access to local food could become the new norm again in this country, as it was for most of our country’s history (Grant 2017). Time will tell just how successful this study is, although I believe that Just Roots is off to a good start based on the fact that they have already received letters of interest from two major insurance companies.

Just Roots is not the only nonprofit that I studied that has partnerships in the public health sector. The Food Bank is currently coordinating a pilot project with the Holyoke Health Center called the Food Insecurity Screening and Referral Initiative. Andrew explains:

It’s a partnership…with the Holyoke Health Center which agreed to conduct food insecurity screenings of its pediatric patients. When they tested positive, they would refer them to the food bank for our nutrition services, obviously access to food in their neighborhood, obviously assistance with enrolling in food stamps and SNAP benefits, obviously access to nutrition education services… (Warehouse, Personal Communication, Dec. 1st, 2017)

By connecting with the Holyoke Health Center, the Food Bank hopes to find and provide food for food insecure patients before their health risks from food insecurity (which include diabetes
and malnutrition) become jeopardizing. The pilot project is not limited to the Food Bank and HHC though. Andrew goes on to note:

Our other partners include community action agencies, housing assistance agencies, education institutions, and what we’re doing is those very same patients’ households who were referred to us as food insecure...we’re referring them to five other partners, housing assistance being the most important, most in demand, child-care was the second, education was the third… (Warehouse, Personal Communication, Dec. 1st, 2017)

By connecting the dots between several of these through their share initiative, the Food Bank and Holyoke Health Center are helping to fill in the gaps in a frayed social safety net.

The Future of SNAP

In addition to being innovative, the Food Bank and Just Roots’ research collaborations are also very timely. The future of SNAP (and by extension HIP) hangs in the balance as the 2018 Farm Bill is being negotiated in Congress and the Trump administration is in the process of unveiling a proposed new program, tentatively referred to as “America’s Harvest Box”, that would cut half of all SNAP funding (a reduction of $213 billion over 10 years) as part of the 2019 budget. SNAP benefits would be replaced with generic boxes sent to SNAP recipients filled with mass-produced non-perishable food items like cereal. Many anti-hunger advocates, including SNAP administrators in Hawaii, Washington, and Minnesota have criticized the proposal, calling it a major step backwards in the fight to end hunger in the country (Linderman 2018). Others have compared it to wartime rations and soup kitchens from the WWII and Great Depression era. Jordan Rasmussen, a policy associate at the Center for Rural Affairs, a progressive rural advocacy group, said, “This action would not only destabilize attempts to bring more healthy, fresh foods into the homes of America’s food insecure, but would keep dollars out
of local grocery stores and farmers’ markets, which are critical assets to all communities” (Evich 2018).

Unfortunately for recipients of SNAP, many of the Trump administration’s proposals, though outlandish, racist, and xenophobic (i.e. the Wall, the Muslim Ban, and the rescinding of the Dream Act) have a consistent track record of getting support from a Republican-controlled Congress. Without significant civilian and bipartisan uproar, programs like “America’s Harvest Box” could become the new norm in this country, limiting the resources of nonprofit food organizations like the organizations that I studied while simultaneously asking them to pick up the government’s slack.
Conclusion

The mind map presented in Figure 1 illustrates the many causes of food insecurity in this country. Chapter 1 elaborates on these causes and connects the structural and racial inequalities in our current food system to their roots in the genocide, slavery, and displacement of settler colonialism. Chapter 2 examines the responses of staff at several community-based food nonprofits in western Massachusetts to questions regarding the barriers to accessing local food in their communities. Chapters 3 and 4 explore how these nonprofits operate, conduct outreach, and use federal programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) to make their own programs more effective and accessible.

For many of the nonprofits that I studied, food is considered much more than a mere commodity in need of more effective and equitable distribution. Food has a complex history, one that is tied into and affected by much larger systems than the modern market-based economy. Rather than being a mere commodity, food is a human right. Therefore, any sincere attempt to address the underlying causes of food insecurity must also address the failure of the industrial agri-foods complex to respect food for what it is: a basic human right with a complex history that is deeply tied to place and to cultural values. Food insecurity, and the systems that co-created it, will never be dismantled through a market-based approach.

Though the mainstream local foods movement may have good intentions with its marketing of fair trade, local, and organic products, these products and the spaces that market them operate within a niche culture of affluent, predominantly White, consumers. At best, these products have a miniscule benefit on the workers and environments that produce them. At worst, these products encourage individualism and draw attention away from the systemic inequality
and environmental degradation that are endemic within the industrial agri-foods complex. By advocating for a ‘vote-with-your-fork’ style consumer “activism,” these market-based alternatives are drastically limited in their ability to effect lasting, systemic change.

Though there exist many critiques of the nonprofit, “within the system” approach to social change, the problem remains that an estimated 223,000 individuals struggle with food insecurity in western Massachusetts (Food Bank of Western Massachusetts 2014, pg. 3). This means that nearly a quarter of a million people do not know where and when they will receive their next meal. Though these statistics are useful in understanding the scope of food insecurity in the region, one must be careful not to universalize the experience of food insecurity. Food insecurity looks drastically different in urban and rural settings. It is also important to note that lower-income and communities of color in western Massachusetts are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity. Any attempt to remediate, let alone end, the food insecurity that is endemic in western Massachusetts must carefully consider the race and class-based causes of food insecurity. Though the dismantling of food apartheid will likely not occur overnight, it is my hope that the organizations that I surveyed will continue to expand in their role of challenging and undermining food apartheid in western Massachusetts. The health and safety of 223,000 people depend on it.
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Appendix

Interview with Ibrahim Ali, Nov. 11th, 2017

Johnny: What factors limit people’s access to healthy, locally grown food in the communities that you serve?

Ibrahim: I think there’s a lot of things that get in the way of there being a just food system here. One, you know, is it goes back to the basic aspects of human nature, which is people are greedy, and there are people who mismanage money in our state and in our city [and] there’s structures above our city, federal, international, that affect how we are able to have food, and so, you know, all of those things and many more factors play into the way that things are the way that they are here. We can go back to people of color have always been treated in this country, particularly black people, and how there’s a disregard for our health, and a disregard for our living conditions, and a disregard for poor people of other countries’ living conditions and food intake and experimentation on things that people don’t have any say on what’s happening to them. All of these things have just exacerbated to the point where, though there’s food out here, I would say that you would really have to look very, I don’t want to say very hard, you’re not necessarily see people starving in the streets like you do like in other countries, but for sure like there are people not getting enough food, and not necessarily their own fault for that happening.

Johnny: How does your organization go about addressing these factors and why? (2:05-4:05)

Ibrahim: Well the why is because we believe in our young people here and we want to give them an opportunity and a way for them to affect the things that are troubling our communities as regard to food. That’s one thing… The way that we do it is you know on one level we are trying to educate young folks, make them aware of what’s happening to their food, make them aware of the things that they eat, give them ways that they can be leaders for themselves and for their communities and for their families around food. In other broader ways we try to bring food and try to grow food that is relevant to the people that live here at a price that’s affordable and make connections with other people and other farms and try to make those linkages, and try to make sure that people are not being divided that need to sell the food and we have people who need the food, so we want to strengthen those relationships.

Johnny: To what degree (if any) does your organization work to address systemic racism and white supremacy in the U.S. food system? What about classism? (4:05-11:14)

Ibrahim: So a simple question. How do we go about fighting racism? Well, I think that one of the most important things that we do in regards to fighting racism is that we put the emphasis on white folks to start doing their job. It’s not enough for me and I don’t want to be that guy fighting racism or trying to be the pioneer in that situation. I think that my people, black people particularly, have done enough, died enough, suffered enough, you know there’s some things we need to do, some work we need to do, but at this point in time, 2017, white folks need to do some
work. Whether they’re rich or poor, they need to do some work. People who have been able to financially able to benefit from this system over the centuries, they really need to do their part, give up more of the money. People need to put an emphasis on creating justice, economically, socially, educationally. It doesn’t have to be somebody has to lose in order for other to gain, everyone gains when we live in a just world. So that’s important for us. I think that one of the things we do just kind of directly is to make sure we can have those conversations and to make sure that we can reflect on how our organization does and doesn’t perpetrate those sorts of things is all of our board and the youth we all do undoing racism workshops through the people’s institute, so that allows us to have a relatively good conversation, not good conversation but clear conversation about what racism is, what racism isn’t, who benefits, how we are going to slowly deal with these things so that it doesn’t become such an overbearing elephant in the room. And I realize that we are a very unique organization, if you look at other farm organizations around the country, you don’t really have any sort of, in many instances, in some instances, should be more, but most of the organizations are not run by people of color, particularly if they’re based in urban areas, there’s very few of them that have employing multiple people and they’re run by people of color. That doesn’t mean that they aren’t doing good work or that they don’t have a racial analysis, but it does mean that there’s something there that we need to look at. I think that doing things like undoing racism really allows for those conversations to take place, and you know if it means people getting upset and whatever they got to do then so be it. As one of the trainers has said and I really believe that we’re dealing with life and death issues, it’s not just somebody doesn’t like the KKK and they go to a march and they go home and eat meat loaf, we are dealing with life and death issues and we try to slowly deal with these things so it’s not a joke for me or anyone in my family that has to deal with this on a daily basis, so I think that it’s very important that it be taken completely seriously…

Johnny: What about white supremacy and classism?

Ibrahim: I don’t really think about white supremacy like that, I don’t think anybody’s really supreme over me or anything like that, so I don’t tend to rock with that term that much, I’m not oblivious to white men. Well I think that there’s people, if we’re gonna talk about classism, I guess there’s the different perspectives. This is gonna go way off. There’s different perspectives. I think that the Left, whatever the Left is, if you want to accept this dialectic of Left and Right, then I guess that we’ll talk about the Left, because that would be Massachusetts would reflect those sort of ideals I guess, we’re in Massachusetts so we’re gonna talk about the Left. I think that they have a moral crisis going on, a crisis in creation going on, that doesn’t really give them a rational basis, there’s no foundation for this so called left, because there’s no foundation it’s not rooted in anything that is really that’s real, their politics tends to be all over the place and there’s no moral compass for what is called the Left, that’s why they can’t get themselves together cause people can’t agree. And so maybe the Left will get their moral compass back but that would depend upon who’s gonna be running the show. As far as the Right is concerned if we’re going to talk about the Right and classism, they have aligned themselves with people who are money, and that’s their agenda, that’s what they support, and they really are cowards in many respects. All of the guys in suits that tell people to drop bombs and have never even stepped foot in the field of warfare, never really, but they think they’re the smartest people in the room so they can send people that live around here’s children to go to war for nothing, and it’s okay, to create chaos in the Middle East, and you have to go kill babies and what have you. And you’re gonna be able to come home and just live with that. Okay what’s the next question?
Johnny: What role (if any) do you see your organization playing in the larger food justice and community food security movements in the United States? Why? Does your organization see itself as part of a larger network/movement or is it mostly concerned with local issues? (11:15-14:01)

Ibrahim: Well, we are a black-led organization, which is a rarity, to a certain extent in this type of work, so I think that we have a responsibility to kind of hold that down in our city. Our cousins, our family in this food justice world in the United States, many of us grew up in the culture of hip-hop, before it was exploited and so we share certain ideals, and so there’s a tendency for food justice people that I’ve come around to realize that we can’t just be about local issues, we have to know them and understand them, but our ability to see this thing through, as far as there actually being real food returning to human beings is gonna take more than just our networks. It’s gonna take some collaboration with rural people, it’s gonna take some art and music, and it’s gonna need to, you know, bring folks together who might not have always seen the path the same way. I think that there’s a lot to be said for the fact that farmers are now once again getting acquainted with each other in a way that’s a little bit more structured around the country, and people are doing it more in the cities and I think it’s a necessary thing. I don’t see people moving out of the cities anytime soon to go run to the hills, I know I personally don’t want to live in a rural area personally, but I definitely do want to be able to go out there and rot, build people, so I think that’s a very necessary thing that has to happen in the near future.

Johnny: How does your organization navigate the dual concern of maintaining a functioning production farm on top of the logistical work of running a non-profit organization? (14:22-15:52)

Ibrahim: That’s why we have two directors. I have to make sure that the youth program is running effectively, and I have to make sure that all of the food and everything regarding that is running effectively, and then I share responsibility for the grants and administrative aspects of the organization. So this place runs in a dual-directorship because of that reason, although I do a lot more than I probably should be doing, but we don’t have the staff to cover everything that we need to do, so people have to do more than one aspect of things. And then we have a board, some of which are more active than others, and we’re trying to make sure that that development continues to happen, but it’s not easy to get people to join a board and we’re trying to negotiate how to get people to stay involved and still do effective work for the organization, there’s all of that.

Johnny: Who grows the food on your farm? What are their demographics? How much are they paid? How much does your farm depend on volunteer labor/internships to make their ends meet? (16:04-18:26)

Ibrahim: So my staff, and all of the youth that are in the program do all of the work that takes place here. We have a few interns, but they’re not necessarily out here growing food. We’ve only had one farm intern out here over the years and that was cool, we probably will try to get someone else soon, because we have a farm stand that is being constructed, so we have to think about how we’re going to deal with the farm stand in an effective way for the people who live
out here, so there’s that. And then we take volunteers of course, you know this is a great place to volunteer, so that’s a labor pool that we draw from, but most of the work, like I said is done by the youth. And they get a stipend, depending on their grade, it’s the amount, it’s the grade for a day’s worth of work. So if you’re in 8th grade, you do a day’s worth of work, you get $8, you’re in 12th grade you get $12, plus we double it if you do a double shift, if someone does in the morning on a Wednesday and then they come back and do a CSA delivery thing, we give them a double dip, so if it’s $10 and $10, they get $20 that day. And then there is other ways that they can do more by joining different committees, by participating in the board, or sometimes some other opportunity will come up where someone will pay them $200 to do something with their lawns, that happens, maybe not that much but, you know, it tends to very, we give them the stipend, they do get extra opportunities to gain more money based on their involvement. The longer they stay the stipend goes up, so it correlates to their improvement that way.

Johnny: Where does your funding coming from? Is it mostly from community donations, federal/state grants, or from selling produce? How much profit (if any) is generated from selling produce through farmer's markets, grocery stores, and CSA shares? (18:45-20:24)

Ibrahim: So we write grants, we’re trying to build our donor base, which is from people all over the country, but definitely there’s a big big local network that we’re cultivating to contribute to our bottom line. We’ve done city and state grants that have to a big extent but no federal grants, actually the USDA grant, so there’s one federal grant, they’re very complex, and our administrative folks that we work with, Third Sector New England based out of Boston, they’re a great help in terms of helping us manage our back end activities, accounting, lawyers, insurance, etc. etc. Working with them has been a blessing, it allows us to not have to worry about that stuff. So we get those kinds of grants. We sell our food, we don’t grow it and give it away. We do give away food to the youth that work here if they choose to take it and we’re really analyzing how much food we’re using in terms of what is being composted. We don’t waste anything, we don’t take just food and throw it in the garbage, but we do want to work on how we can be more efficient as a farm just in general, so we’re really kinda constantly thinking about that and looking at that.

Johnny: How does your organization manage outreach? What social media presence (if any) is used to spread the word about upcoming projects/events? How much advertising is done for free via word of mouth? Monthly newsletters? Etc. (20:55-22:30)

Ibrahim: So we do everything that you mentioned, newsletters, emails, social media, etc. So there’s various aspects of that depending on the area of the organization. For instance, with the young folks, we don’t really go out and recruit at high schools, it’s definitely more of a word of mouth, in the past when I have gone to a middle school to try to recruit, for lack of a better term, what happens is that we get more of a response then we can handle, so we stopped doing that maybe about 3 or 4 years ago. When it comes to promoting our markets, and stuff like that, you know, anything goes, flyer-ing, knocking on doors, trying to get news articles, trying to get on television, everything is kind of on the table. Some of the techniques we want to utilize soon would be methods that we learned, that I learned promoting in other areas, so we incorporate a lot of that stuff into what we’re doing.
Johnny: Thank you for the interview. Is there anything else you wanted to add before we close?

Ibrahim: I think that this type of work needs to be prioritized in many respects, I don’t think that young people who are in middle school need to be sitting at a desk, they need to be outdoors working toward improving their community. This is a really good model that other people should try, or should attempt to do, to get young people involved in their community. If you don’t get these young folks involved, what they do is they don’t develop any empathy for the people around them. Some of them will become productive citizens without doubt, but you’re also gonna get a percentage of people who don’t have any empathy for their community. And then we create monsters and we re-create monsters, and that’s not what this world needs anymore, we need better young men, we need better young women. This is not gonna solve problems in our community that have decades of a head start in terms of their being ingrained in what happens here on the day-to-day, but you know this type of space, this type of opportunity for young people gives them some hope, and gives them some responsibility, and gives them a sense of belonging. You’re not gonna have any kind of environment where there’s any antagonism, or putting one and one against one another, we are in this together. I can’t grow food, I could grow food by myself, but nobody wants to sit here in all this space with all these young people and just not be productive, not grow anything that tastes good, and helps us feel and think better and get more clarity in our lives. So I think this is a very, very important program. Whosever here 5, 10, 20, 30 years from now, I hope they really hold onto the ideals we’ve been trying to establish and don’t let this organization go the way that so many others have. That’s it.
Interview with Margot Wise, Nov. 28th, 2017

Johnny: What factors limit people’s access to healthy, locally grown food in the communities that you serve? (0:24-1:55, 3:00-3:35)

Margot: It’s structural, it’s systemic, I feel like it’s more than just factors, it’s the whole colonized country and world that we live in. If you really break it down you could go as far back as settlers, white people landing in America and basically pillaging and killing Native Americans and then having slaves, I mean all of that is still present in our current food system. That contributes to people’s access to healthy food. I would say that it permeates everything, it’s not really a list of factors that I can list off, it’s very much systemic. And you can see it in Holyoke, the poorest neighborhoods and the neighborhoods with the least access to food happen to have the most people of color, and that’s not an accident.

Johnny: How does your organization go about addressing these factors and why? (3:52-13:40)

Margot: Well, so right now we do classes, [one of our staff] who just dropped me off teaches gardening and culinary classes in the schools. That’s one of the biggest ways that we can have an effect is by teaching young people, I really like the way she teaches because she’s not trying to get the kids to use kale or other things that they’re not familiar with in order to eat healthy, she talks about using two ingredients that you might typically have in your house and making something out of that. And these are households that may not have a lot of food in the pantry, so she’s really forcing them to get creative. She did a class where they had a $10 challenge, in groups they had $10 that they could spend and a supermarket and then they made a meal out of it, and they made it kind of a competition. It was a really good way to get kids to think creatively about using food in different ways. So in Mason Square, which is a neighborhood in Springfield, it’s a 1 ½ mile radius area they have 10 McDonald’s so that’s a deterrent from getting people to cook, and there’s no supermarket. So it’s natural that if you live there you’re gonna do what’s easiest and buy the food that is the easiest, the cheapest, and most likely to make you sick down the line. What was the question?

Johnny: How does your organization go about addressing these factors and why?

Margot: So yeah, the classes and we also do a summer youth program. We do a lot with youth because we think that kind of getting people to know about healthier ways to know about cooking and eating when they’re younger is gonna be beneficial to them later in life. They’re more impressionable when they’re younger. The kids in general really enjoy these classes and then they go home and cook for their families, so that’s a big way that we do it. We are also… along with some other people, are trying to influence the school food contract in Holyoke that’s up for negotiation right now. They made a big step which was that they got the mayor not to sign the current contract, which is bad, it doesn’t have anything to do with local food or healthy food, and so the mayor didn’t sign that, so that was a step. Now we have to try to re-write it and get healthier food in the schools. We have a farm which is really awesome, it’s a huge asset that we have. Our farmers of course are experienced at growing Puerto Rican cultural crops and with a large Puerto Rican population these farmers not only are allowed to make some extra money and
do what they love doing but they are also serving people that want these products and people are able to get them at a reasonable price. Now, as of this summer, we have mobile SNAP equipment so at the Holyoke market we are able to accept SNAP, with HIP benefit, it’s a new program, it’s a dollar matching program, HIP is Healthy Incentives Program, in Massachusetts this year, it’s for the next two years. It’s three years total, but it was this year and for the next two years. Basically, the farmers made extra money because of it and we made extra money because of it because people are buying more vegetables than they normally would because they have this extra money to use, so it’s great for our farmers, it’s great for people. Everyone was getting super excited about being able to buy more fresh stuff. I don’t know if that’s maybe a wrong idea some people have about poor people in our communities, but the truth is that if they had the money, if they had the choice, all of the people in our community would be eating a lot more fresh stuff, they would be eating a lot more healthy, and they really really want that, and that’s what I found at the Holyoke market this summer. So, it’s not that people in Holyoke or Springfield want to be eating McDonalds and KFC all the time, I mean maybe some people but I think that’s a common misconception we can kind of put the blame on people rather than on the system. It was really cool to be seeing people being excited about that over the summer. Our farm is also a community space where people can come and get a little bit of respite from city life. It’s in the city but it’s open land with open trees and I think that it’s something really important that we provide also. Our community gardens are that also and they are scattered throughout the city. Sometimes, even in a small city, there’s people who grow up and never experience nature or feel welcome in nature, and so that’s a huge thing. Sometimes we do community classes, last year we did some cooking classes, we taught people how to can with the end of season harvest, everyone who came was really into it. We did a class where people from the community came and learned how to make Adobo. So there’s this seasoning that a lot of Latinos and Puerto Ricans use called Adobo and Sazon, and those, some of those contain a lot of MSG and salt, so we were making homemade, healthier versions of those. Last Spring, we had a Food Justice conference, that was mainly put on by Nuestra Comida, which is a part of Nuestras Raices that is dedicated to Food Justice, and the culinary classes and stuff that we do were out of Nuestra Comida as well.

Johnny: To what degree (if any) does your organization work to address systemic racism and classism in the U.S. food system? (15:00-16:40)

Margot: Well the first ever Holyoke Food Justice conference that was last May basically directly addressed that. We have a staff member who is really dedicated to that subject in particular. He was leading Nuestra Comida and he put on that conference with a lot of help. I would say the youth programs, the classes that we do for young people, [our staff] are really good at talking to kids directly about these issues. Having conversations about race, having conversations about how the food system is broken and why, and what we can do about it. I would say that talking to people, talking to kids, having conversations, the conference.

Johnny: What role do you see your organization playing in the larger food justice movement in the United States? Why? Does your organization see itself as part of a larger network/movement or is it mostly concerned with local issues? (17:07-18:43)

Margot: I don’t know if I’m the best person on our staff to be answering this. Because I know that some of the other staff have done a lot of traveling and a lot of representing Nuestras all over
the country, so in that sense yeah. We, as a non-profit are not allowed to do any lobbying. We are not specifically involved in any political campaigns or things like that. But we do a lot on the local level. I would say that we mostly focus right here in Holyoke, but we have some partners in Springfield at Gardening the Community that we’ve been cultivating a really good relationship with in the past couple of years. And so we had our youth come together a couple of times and do stuff together. Mainly Holyoke, I think that we’re known by other similar organizations from other places. When I go to conferences people know who Nuestras Raices is that are from other organizations.

Johnny: How does your organization navigate the dual concern of maintaining a functioning production farm on top of the logistical work of running a non-profit organization? (20:00-22:40)

Margot: We have different staff that do different parts of the work. So, we actually have administrative offices separate from the farm that focus more on running the organization and on different aspects of community outreach, volunteer coordination, administration book-keeping, all that stuff. That stuff mainly happens at the office. We have two full-time staff kind of running the farm, and then two part-time people helping out at the farm. Even that is not really enough. We had interns this summer that made it possible, and the youth group that we had made it possible. Just maintaining this farm is a huge expense and a huge undertaking let alone doing production and building and improving on it. As the farm manager I have to set really achievable goals. And that’s something I’ve learned in the past year of working here because it’s a lot of work and there’s always things that pop up that you don’t expect. Mainly to answer your question we just have different people that focus on doing different things. Our staff is close to 10 people right now. Everyone kind of has their own area of focus and that’s how we get it all done. I mean of course there’s always ways that you can improve the structure of an organization and I think that there’s things we could be doing to make everything we do happen more efficiently, but it definitely helps to have different staff members focusing on different areas of running the organization.

Johnny: Who grows the food on your farm? What are their demographics? How much are they paid? How much does your farm depend on volunteer labor/internships to make their ends meet? (23:00-26:45, 26:58-30:08)

Margot: So we rent out plots to farmers, they can be anyone, but typically they are Puerto Rican and typically our farmers have tended to be older men. It’s not because we sought them out but because that is the demographic that has a history of doing agriculture in Puerto Rico. When they migrated here some of them even worked in the tobacco farms nearby and I know from working with our farmers that it’s what they really love to do. We have seen that younger people in Holyoke and in this area, younger Puerto Ricans aren’t as interested in farming as the older folks, and of course with all of our youth education we are trying to shift that. Going back, I remembered another thing that our farm does for the community is this past year and next year we have a new farmer training program, Cien Finqueros, or 100 farmers, the goal is to train 100 new farmers. That’s another way that we’re trying to get younger people in. When they graduate from that program they have the opportunity or the chance to try farming here. If they want to rent a plot they can do that the next year after they take the course. One of our farmers is a young white man that graduated from Hampshire a couple of years ago who just wanted a piece of land
to farm on, which is fine with us. And he was selling the produce, which is the one criteria that separates the farms from the community gardens is that we want it to be run as a business. We want people to sell their stuff as opposed to just giving it away. There’s four of our farmers that solidly do that, and some of the others it’s just unclear but we’re gonna try to get a little bit stricter about that next year. So that’s who grows the food. This was the first year that a farm manager has done any type of major production for Nuestras Raices as Nuestras Raices, so that was me and my crew. So we grew on about an acre in addition to 12 other smaller farm plots that were run by our farmer tenants. So yeah, me and a couple of college kids, I’m white I’m female, youngish. What else was part of the question?

Johnny: So you answered demographics, there’s a question of how much are people paid, I think you answered that.

Margot: So the farmers run their own businesses. So they pay us to rent the land and it includes preparing the land, it includes irrigation, but they have to buy all their own supplies, and then they make whatever they make. So they’re not getting a paycheck or anything like that. It is part of my job to help them find markets and help them access markets if they need help with that. So I was buying stuff from them for our CSA this year and I was helping them out with the SNAP machine at the Holyoke market, helping them get more sales that way. I was selling some of our produce to Holyoke Hummus, and I also bought some stuff from the farmers to sell there, so in small ways I was helping them get access to different markets. We depended a lot on volunteers. The farmers each have at least one helper and those are almost guaranteed volunteers, they’re just like friends, they probably get vegetables, but they’re not making very much from this so they’re not able to pay people an actual wage. So we, as Nuestras, had an intern that was paid through the Cien Finqueros program and they were part time. For about a month we had a Hampshire student that was paid through Hampshire and she was full-time for that month which was super helpful, and it was really sad when she left. And then we have lots of groups of volunteers that come, which is nice for getting bigger projects done or getting large amounts of weeding done, and then the six-week long youth program. Those kids actually get paid at the end, they get a stipend at the very end of the six weeks, so they are working, they are also here to learn about agriculture. They are a huge help, I mean we were buried in weeds, we just a particularly weedy year and they pretty much were the reason that we got out from under it and had any crops at all. So yeah the youth group is always a huge help.

Johnny: Where does your funding coming from? Is it mostly from community donations, federal/state grants, or from selling produce? How much profit (if any) is generated from selling produce through farmer's markets, grocery stores, and CSA shares? (30:26-33:41)

Margot: This is where I don’t know numbers of anything, I don’t deal with the numbers. I know that we’re 100% dependent on grants, we get grants from federal sources, from the state, from MDAR, and private funders as well. So we just applied to grants that we see that are kind of in line with what we are doing, and we are pretty good at getting grants. We typically get a lot of them and that’s how this is run. My goal is to make the farm more sustainable economically and to have the markets and the CSA help pay for even some of the farm expenses. Like I said its really expensive so, and I think that might take several years before that actually happens, but the goal is to run the farm more like a business and that’s why we’re doing production know, and
that wasn’t ever a thing that we did as an organization. I can tell you that it’s very little [profit that was made from farmer’s markets]. I mean this year what we made was negligible compared to the expenses. We didn’t even break even. You know, farming is not super lucrative anyway, but we are trying to make food accessible and make the farm profitable at the same time which is a challenge and it’s gonna take some time. This year was good for me to figure out where to put my energy, which crops to focus on, which markets to focus on. I did a lot of different things this year and I learned a lot about what to do and what not to do. Hopefully next year will be better, but I’m not even confident that we’re gonna break even next year.

Johnny: How does your organization manage outreach? What social media presence (if any) is used to spread the word about upcoming projects/events? How much advertising is done for free via word of mouth? Monthly newsletters? Etc. (34:05-38:30)

Margot: We have a staff member Jerry that does community outreach and volunteer coordination, and she manages our Facebook page and our email list. I do our Instagram because I’m at the farm and so I take pictures at the farm and post them. We have quite a few followers on Facebook. Our website is under construction and so right now a lot of people find us and communicate with us through Facebook as opposed to through our website. So that’s been really helpful for us. When we do events we get a lot of people that see our events through Facebook. The Instagram is more recent so it’s not really, I mean we have maybe 300 followers or something like that so we’re building it, so that’s not a huge source of people finding us. I’d say mainly Facebook and email, and then we’re investing in a new website which is gonna be huge for us, cause our last website was really outdated.

Johnny: How much do you think people find out about Nuestras Raices through word-of-mouth? Any idea?

Margot: I think quite a few. There’s people in the summer that wander onto the farm because they heard about it from somebody. It’s a name that, because we’ve been around for 25 years and we’ve had the same name for that time, it’s a name that a lot of people know or have heard of. So often times when I tell people that I work at Nuestras it’s like, “Oh yeah, I know about that place” or they’ve been there or someone they know has been there. So yeah word-of-mouth is a way that people find out about it.

Johnny: And how about monthly newsletters?

Margot: So that’s something we’re starting right now. It hasn’t been something we’ve done in the past, I’m not sure why. We’re just getting that going to attract potential funders and just people who want to stay up-to-date on what we’re doing. With the CSA this summer I did a weekly newsletter that just had brief updates about the farm and that was really fun to write and I know that our members were reading it cause they would come back the next week and ask about whatever happened. But as for the organization having a monthly newsletter we’re about to put out our first one. And this organization has gone through a lot of different, a lot of changes in staff over the 25 years, and I’m relatively new, so there may have been a time when we had regular newsletters and I just don’t know, so we’re starting it possibly again.
Johnny: Is there anything else you wanted to add?

Margot: Um, not really. Is there anything else you want to know?

Johnny: Not really, seems like you answered everything. Thank you so much.

Margot: Of course, my pleasure.
Johnny: What factors limit people’s access to healthy, locally grown food in the communities that you serve? (0:11-2:04)

Andrew: That’s a big question. There are many. Clearly, income is one. Transportation would be another. Knowledge of where locally grown food or where locally produced food is available. Knowledge that it’s important because it has, at the margin, a lot more nutritional value, and it has other added benefits. It supports the local economy, local business people, local workers which are value-added as a dimension of the importance of access to local food, but that can come at a higher cost. Availability. Much of the food that is produced locally is seasonal so what do people do during the months when this food isn’t available to purchase? Then that comes into the question of how can you store the food during the winter months to extend the time or the period that you can access local food. A lot of people may not have the capacity to store food and the knowledge, preparation, a whole set of factors and lots more I’m sure but off the top of my head that’s what comes to mind.

Johnny: How does your organization go about addressing these factors and why? (2:09-6:20)

Andrew: Sure. Well again, I say again because we just had a conversation off the record, the role of the Food Bank is to provide healthy food for people who are either going hungry or are food insecure, those are different terms but they’re similar. Therefore, that doesn’t mean that we are providing them with access to local food ourselves directly or enabling it either. Much of the food that we receive derives from beyond our local footprint because our priority is to feed folks who are hungry now while we build long-term solutions to ending hunger. One of those solutions certainly is supporting the local food economy and increasing the accessibility of local food for food insecure families. So with respect to the question, I think the single greatest way that we’re able to increase access to local food for food insecure families is through a federally-funded and state-administered program called the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) that was piloted over several years in Hampden County, the only county in the country and has since been launched in several states, again with USDA federal funding, one of them being Massachusetts. This spring, that program was launched state-wide, not as a pilot but as a full-fledged program and it is available to SNAP recipients, people who received SNAP benefits formerly known as Food Stamps. Individuals who receive SNAP benefits are able to access the HIP program by going to a local farmer’s market, a farm stand, or by being a member of a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farm, only ones that accept SNAP benefits of course and have the technology to receive them. Through that program SNAP recipients can purchase locally-grown fresh vegetables, perhaps other types of food I’m not sure, locally raised meats I’m not sure, probably much less so, and for every dollar they spend they will receive a dollar up to various markers depending on family size, $40, $60, the maximum is $80 a month for those purchases at those designated sites. So it becomes a way to encourage people to eat fresh vegetables, locally-grown fresh vegetables, and in so doing they will actually see their food budget increase by as much as $80 a month based on the family size so it’s an added economic benefit as well.
Johnny: To what degree does your organization work to address systemic racism and classism in the U.S. food system? (6:31-11:29)

Andrew: That’s a big topic and it’s one that we are beginning to look at right now. About a year ago the Food Bank launched a Task Force to End Hunger. We brought people together from diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise and across all four counties to think about how we would go about ending hunger and what the underlying causes to hunger are and ultimately what the solutions to ending hunger would be over the long-term. Last Spring, actually in February, that task force, after meeting once a month for twelve months, issued an action plan and it has three priorities. That action plan was, as I mentioned earlier, based on this year-long discussion of hunger and its underlying causes and both class and racism were identified as underlying causes of food insecurity and hunger, as well as many other underlying causes. It’s a very complex epidemic facing the United States right now and this region so we had to prioritize and we were focusing on a couple of areas that we could talk about later if you’re interested. With respect to racism and class, we as an organization are devoting much of our staff time and board time to learning more about this topic, learning how class and race affect food insecurity, and we know that in order to do that we need to speak specifically with individuals that experience food insecurity to hear their stories, and so we’ve launched a Coalition to End Hunger, and one of the priorities and actions that we’re going to take on is to launch a marketing campaign to raise awareness around the issue of hunger as the stigma associated with it, and it will be primarily an electronic marketing campaign with a radio component as well. Less so on the print side. All traffic through electronic media will drive people to or attract people, encourage people, inspire people to go to our website, www.coalitiontoendhunger.com, it may change, we have a number of domain names, and that website will draw visitors to learn more about hunger from the perspective of individuals who live it. That website will hopefully touch on, through a very interactive way, the underlying causes, including classism and racism, so that people can understand and learn about the effect to which racism and classism influence if not determine whether an individual or a household becomes food insecure. So it’s an educational campaign, it’s a public education campaign. To expect one food bank in a country to change social values and change the institutional structures of racism and classism is, I think, a little unrealistic, and we are only one food bank of 200 across the country, and we are only one institution in Western Massachusetts of thousands, literally. So we intend to do our part and over time influence and educate the public about those issues, and hopefully as society changes we’ll be able to have more of an impact on changing the institutional structures of racism and classism that exist in the United States and in all societies.

Johnny: What role do you see your organization playing in the larger food justice/community food security movements in the United States? Why? Does your organization see itself as part of a larger network or is it mostly concerned with local issues? Why? (11:44-14:44)

Andrew: Well as I mentioned just a second ago, we are part of national association of food banks called Feeding America so we’re one of 200 food banks that operate under that umbrella, each with its own mission, philosophy, culture, and so forth. All evolving in this journey of learning how to address hunger at the moment and come up with long term solutions to end it. I would say that the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts is among a handful that are trying to address not only feeding people today but also how to come up with solutions to end hunger in the long
run but it’s not easy so we’re very much interested in partnering with lots of different
organizations. We see the value of the Food Bank as a credible organization that is well-
respected by people from across the ideological spectrum and in fact we believe that if we’re
going to end hunger we are going to have to change people’s understanding of what hunger is, of
what its underlying causes are, so we need to educate the public and that’s something that will
take time and we won’t be able to succeed at that in one generation. It’s a multi-generational
approach, so our role is to position ourselves as a respected organization that looks at issues very
carefully and will address our mission over time as we can garner more and more societal
support for making the kinds of systemic changes that we all know are needed but can’t do
without the support, broad-based support of society as a whole. So we’ll take on controversial
topics as we’re able to educate the public and garner the kind of support that we need to take
those positions and those solutions, those strategies, those actions, in a way that are going to be
sustainable and again have the support of more and more people in society.

Johnny: How does your organization navigate the dual concern of running a non-profit
organization while ensuring that you meet local food security needs? (14:56-17:15)

Andrew: Well, that’s a good question and it’s very challenging because as a non-profit
organization or any business for that matter we’re dependent on our customers or our
stakeholders and we have many different stakeholders. There’s our constituents, those who we
feed, and for whom we exist. Those who are food insecure are at one level our customers but
they don’t pay anything for our service. So we have to reach out to a different set of stakeholders
to support our organization. They are not only state and federal government, they are more
importantly, primarily individuals and businesses. 2/3rds of our funding, of our operating cash
funding, come from individuals and businesses in the community. So, in a society, and in an
economy, and in a political system that supports charitable organizations like ours it’s a bit of a
dance to be able to convince donor stakeholders to support our organization while at the same
time trying to educate them that if we’re going to end hunger we’re going to need to go beyond
simply feeding people and look at the underlying causes of hunger and what kinds of
institutional changes do we need to make over time. That’s something that we have to do very
very carefully and strategically so as not to threaten the immediate need for our service which is
to feed people who are hungry today, tomorrow while at the same time building that awareness,
that knowledge, those resources, and the transition to more long-term solutions to address
hunger.

Johnny: Where does the food for your food bank come from? How is it distributed? Who collects
it? What are your employees’ demographics? How much are they paid? How much does your
organization depend on volunteer labor/internships to make their ends meet? (17:28-22:05,

Andrew: [Laughs] That’s a really long question, I can give you the cliff-note version of it. So we
have about 46 employees right now. Demographics is probably more female than male overall, I
would say probably about one third of our employees are people of color, coming from all three
counties in the Pioneer Valley and beyond across state borders and beyond this region in fact.
Most of our, about one half of our food comes from the public sector, of that half a quarter
comes from the federal government in the form of dry good items mainly from a USDA program
called TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program.) The other quarter of the public sector food that we receive comes from funding we receive from the state government of Massachusetts through a program called Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program. Of that funding, about 9% we restrict to Massachusetts grown products or manufactured products. Most of that 9% is sourced as vegetables from the Pioneer Valley itself, which represent ½ million pounds of fresh produce a year. The other half of the food that comes into the food bank is donated from the private sector. Most of it comes from retail supermarkets (Stop and Shop, Big Y, Ocean State Job Lot, Costco, BJ’s, the list goes on and on and on). Some of it comes from wholesalers like our neighbor next door CNS wholesale grocers. Many other retailers including Walmart, the list goes on. About ½ million pounds is donated from area farmers. Another 1 million pounds we purchase from a farm broker up in Quebec, Canada. Much of that is dry goods again, and by that we mean canned items and shelf-stable box items (rice, grains, beans, things of that sort). But it also includes, as I mentioned before, a lot of fresh vegetables. We distributed in the last 12 months 3 million pounds of fresh vegetables so that’s approximately 27-28% of our total distribution. We also receive and distribute about ¼ million pounds of fresh meats that are donated to us frozen by the two largest supermarket chains, Big Y and Stop and Shop. We maintain them frozen and distribute them as such. So really about close to half of the food we distribute are perishable foods between produce, dairy products, and meats. I think that answers your question.

Johnny: Yeah it does, thank you for that. Oh one other question.

Andrew: Oh I probably should say something. Total distribution last year was 10.7 million pounds of food to approximately 223,000 people. So that’s about 1 in 4 people in Western Massachusetts. That’s a lot of food and a lot of people.

Johnny: How much does your organization depend on volunteer labor/internships to make their ends meet?

Andrew: Significantly. There was a time we calculated the actual number of volunteers that supported the food bank and it was around 750-1,000. Now we calculate it in terms of hours and in the last 12 months we know that we benefitted from, I think it’s around 1600 volunteer hours. So if you were to take that 750-1,000 head you would know how many hours per volunteer that’s about right. We couldn’t operate without volunteers, they primarily work in our warehouse helping us inspect and sort the donated food or they volunteer at our distribution points for our direct-to-client programs as we like to refer to them as, of which we have two. One is called a brown-bag, food for elder’s program through which we distribute food to 7,500 elders a month at one of 46 councils on aging or senior centers across the four counties. So at those distribution sites there are crews of volunteers who receive the food, break down the palettes of food, and put them on tables that elders walk by, kind of like an assembly line, and fill their bags of groceries. The other distribution program that we operate that relies on volunteers is called the mobile food bank. We have 20 distribution sites in neighborhoods of high food insecurity and poverty. We send trucks to those sites once or twice a month and that those sights crews of volunteers break down the palettes of food which are primarily, actually vegetables. That’s what the mobile food bank is designed to do. It’s designed to be a safety valve for us to be able to distribute produce very quickly before it spoils so we have a lot of volunteers there. (24:39)
Johnny: And how is food distributed?

Andrew: Well I just told you part of it, but actually most of our food, about ¾ of the food is distributed through a network of local feeding programs such as pantries where you can get a bag of groceries, meal sites where you can get a hot meal, shelters where you can get a roof over your head and access to food. So those 200 local feeding programs throughout all four counties, many are clustered in urban areas like Springfield, Chicopee, Holyoke, but also Northampton, Pittsfield, North Adams and Greenfield, and then there are many others that are dotted across the rural communities in Western Massachusetts. Over half are housed in homes of worship that rely on volunteers of their own, the other half are non-profit organizations in their own right and have some staff, more often than not they all rely on volunteers as well. So that becomes the three ways that we distribute food; through the existing network of member agencies as we call them, and then our brown bag food for elder’s program and the mobile food bank.

Johnny: Thank you for that, sorry that was such a long question. How does your organization manage outreach? What social media presence (if any) is used to spread the word about upcoming projects/events? How much advertising is done for free via word of mouth? Monthly newsletters? Etc. (26:26-30:11)

Andrew: Sure. Alright well we have different forms of communication for different constituencies or stakeholder groups. So for folks who are food insecure and want to access our services the type of media we use, clearly we have a website, we drive traffic to our website through all of the social media tools; Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. We run radio spots with the support of our donors. Occasionally bill-boards and TV spots although very irregularly because that’s expensive. We have flyers that we distribute on a monthly basis to all elders of the brown bag program it goes right into their bag. We have a newsletter called “News Bites” which goes to all of our member agencies, the 200 member agencies, that’s mainly for staff and volunteers at the pantries and meal sites but much of that information then is translated for the benefit of individuals who visit pantries and meal sites. We have two nutritionists who go to pantries and meal sites on a regular basis to provide nutrition education so they bring their own educational material, they conduct workshops, taste tests, shopping store tours with individuals to help, through education, help individuals to stretch their food budget dollars, how to read nutritional labels, things of that sort. We have five staff who conduct SNAP outreach enrollment. They are constantly meeting with individuals and providing them with nutritional educational information and assist people to access food distribution sites. For our donors we have a quarterly newsletter that’s intended to educate our donors about food insecurity and hunger. We have an electronic newsletter that we send out to them. We have an annual report. We have advocacy alerts that go out on a regular basis to individuals who have signed up to be on our advocacy list. We use that advocacy list to advance our public policy priorities, of which there are many that again are intended to protect federal and state nutrition programs and to support increasingly other initiatives, policies and programs that address the underlying causes of hunger.

Johnny: Is there anything else you would like to add? (30:21-38:29)

Andrew: Um, yeah I guess I would. So as I mentioned earlier, the Task Force released its action plan last February. Since then we’ve launched a Coalition to End Hunger that meets on a
quarterly basis. The three priorities that it is acting on from the task force action plan are: 1.) To reverse if not eliminate the stigma associated with hunger through a public education campaign 2.) Advance public policy because we know that public policies that address food insecurity are likely to have much greater impact than anything we could possibly do, like the SNAP program, for example and there are many other issues of course that will be coming up with respect to the Farm Bill in 2018, and that’s where we will definitely work with our local partners who have national partners of their own in the local agriculture community to wed our shared interests of supporting local agriculture that can be available for those who can afford it and those who can’t afford it 3.) The third priority is to integrate social services so that all of the social services that individuals who are food insecure can avail themselves of those services because they’re better integrated. We’ve begun to launch all these priorities through the coalition and through the teams aligned with each of these priorities. So we have a policy team, we have a service integration team, we have a communications/education team. Right now, what we’ve been focusing on is a pilot that was just completed that we call the Food Insecurity Screening and Referral Initiative. It’s a partnership with many of the partners of the coalition starting with the Holyoke Health Center which agreed to conduct food insecurity screenings of its pediatric patients. When they tested positive, they would refer them to the food bank for our nutrition services, obviously access to food in their neighborhood, obviously assistance with enrolling in food stamps and SNAP benefits, obviously access to nutrition education services. But in addition to that, in the spirit of service integration, our other partners include community action agencies, housing assistance agencies, education institutions, and what we’re doing is those very same patients’ households who were referred to us as food insecure, it turns out that 43% of the families that were screened were screened positive, almost half. Those families, in addition to accessing our services, we’re referring them to five other partners, or have referred them to five other partners over the course of the six-month pilot so that they can access other services, housing assistance being the most important, most in demand, child-care was the second, education was the third, work-force support, job support was the fifth, and after that domestic violence was an issue and some others as well. We’ve finished the pilot, it was very successful, it was evaluated by an independent evaluator. We’re taking a break and in January we’re going to, assuming we get funding from our pilot funder, we will not only continue to carry out this initiative but we will expand it to the entire Holyoke Health Center population and a large hospital in the area is interested in having us pilot it at one of their community health centers and our next goal is to pilot it in a rural setting, a rural community health center. Our ultimate goal is to have this model integrated into the public health industry, and into all the health providers whether they be hospitals or community health centers which are all undergoing a dramatic change under the Affordable Care Act to be addressing public health through preventing health problems and improving public health by addressing what they refer to as the social determinants of health, of which food insecurity is one and only one. So we’re hoping that our initiative will serve as a model for health providers to incorporate this kind of work into their system and therefore be able to address not only the social determinants of health but source access Medicaid funding to support it. So ultimately we believe that, and health providers believe that Medicaid funding and health insurance funding in general could support the type of work that we’re doing and in so doing improve public health at a lower cost to insurers and to households that pay for insurance and the federal and state governments that subsidize it. So that initially was really important to us, and the three prongs of it, and as we believe that in about three years we should have adequately demonstrated the success of this model for rural and urban health providers and then
we could turn our attention to some of the other underlying causes of hunger, which include and are pervasive across all of the other underlying causes and are all interrelated. Issues like classism, racism, lack of housing, education, and lack of sustainable incomes to support families, to sustain families are among them.

Johnny: Thank you so much.

Andrew: My pleasure.
Interview with Andy Grant, Dec. 7th, 2017

Johnny: What factors limit people’s access to healthy, locally grown food in the communities that you serve? (0:07-3:09)

Andy: Well, this question is right in our wheelhouse as they say. Over the last several months we’ve been having conversations with people who live in the affordable housing complexes that our right near our farm. So we’ve been hearing directly from people who have low or very low income and there are obvious things like transportation, many people don’t have a car and Franklin County is the only county in the Commonwealth that doesn’t have weekend bus service. So getting to the Farmer’s Market feels impossible to people who are living out on the margins. So the transportation is a big issue. Also the cost of locally-sourced food is out of reach for most people. Whereas 100 years ago everybody had a kitchen garden and what we called organic local food is what everybody ate in our day it has become an elite food source which has been mainly the domain of white, affluent homeowners, people with cars. So there’s the cost of the food and there’s also the culture related to the spaces that have been market out as places to get farm fresh food. Farmer’s markets and co-ops, while they had the origin of getting food to ordinary people like I’ve said have kind of become cheeky or elite food locations. So breaking that cultural barriers of people from all sectors of the community feeling welcomed in these spaces is also a challenge. And then there’s the disconnect between food culture, generally the knowing where food is grown, how to select it, how to store it, how to prepare it, how to make meals from scratch. Those technologies were known by our grandmothers and our great-grandmothers and are lost to the current generation. So the technology of knowing what to do with the food is also a significant barrier.

Johnny: How does your organization go about addressing these factors and why? (3:11-5:16, 5:22-6:09)

Andy: Well, we provide an accessible CSA farm share and specifically we are set up to take the SNAP card as payment for the farm shares. SNAP is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and that is a benefit that people have, it’s an asset they have that they can apply to the purchase of their farm share. And we make it even more convenient by giving the option of agreeing to have the cost of the farm share deducted automatically from the EBT card on the right day of the month, we call that Auto-SNAP. So that makes it more affordable and convenient at the same time. We’re also modeling mobile farm share where we would have probably a box truck that we fill with veggies and go out to the locations and distribute the farm shares to the people who live in these affordable housing communities as a way to further offer convenience and access. We are aware of the need for translation of our materials and to have Spanish speakers at the pick-up sites. That’s a growing edge for our organization that’s beyond our capacity for the most part but something that we’re aware of doing. And also our farmer is looking at growing some crops specifically to offer cultural diversity and culturally appropriate foods to people in the community.

Johnny: To what degree does your organization work to address systemic racism and classism in the U.S. food system? (6:18-9:42)
Andy: Let me back up and say on the previous question if I can say more about that. So this is something of a specialty for Just Roots, we are providing farm shares to people who are on low or very low income, in fact we have the largest SNAP farm share for a single farm operation in the Commonwealth.

Johnny: Do you want me to go on to Question #3?

Andy: Yes.

Johnny: To what degree does your organization work to address systemic racism and classism in the U.S. food system? (6:18-9:42)

Andy: I describe our organization as a food access organization and that’s for a reason. While Just Roots, in our name we allude to justice and by extension Food Justice, I don’t think that we’ve expressed that as fully as we might. To me Food Justice requires a thorough analysis of the systems of oppression and a dedication to dismantling or undoing those systems. And that is a level of articulation and maturity that we have not reached yet as an organization. While individual participants and staff members have strong convictions about Food Justice and about dismantling racism it hasn’t coalesced as a fundamental commitment by the organization. So I would say its within our area of concern generally, that is justice and addressing racism, and it’s a passion of individual participants but has not yet been claimed as a direction of the organization publicly. Our mission is increasing access to healthy, local food by connecting people, land, resources, and know-how. We have focused on access and community building and farming, having the farm as a hub of our activity and a training ground for future farmers and a connecting place for the whole community and a source of an abundance of nutritious food that we distribute widely. And that does mitigate against injustice, the unequal distribution of healthy food, but it doesn’t get to the root causes (pardon the pun).

Johnny: What role do you see your organization playing in the larger food justice or community food security movement in the United States? Why? Does your organization see itself as part of a larger network or is it mostly concerned with local issues? (10:11-15:05)

Andy: The avenue that we’re taking… Well first I want to say that we are highly networked. We have a reputation and a practice of connecting with other institutions, organizations, stakeholders to address these issues. For example, we’ve cooperated with the Franklin County Jail and House of Corrections, Greenfield Community College, the Community Development Corporation and their food processing center, the public schools and private schools in our area, the Mayor’s office, many people who we’re in conversation with and to one degree or another partnered with. The most recent is the Community Health Center of Franklin County. We’ve been working on a research project together to prove the health benefits of CSA farm share participation. Through these networks we are revealing inequities in the food system and we’re strategizing for ways of opening access and we’ve been highly successful with those strategies. The far reaching impact that we’re anticipating is, through this partnership with the Community Health Center, we’re doing a two-year research study on the health benefits, as I said, of CSA farm share participation. So at the conclusion of that study we expect to prove that farm shares are good for you. Not only the access to the food but also the habit forming that takes place over the course of the season,
over a period of 24 weeks and coming every week, seeing the farmer, tasting food samples, getting recipes, having the reinforcement of going there and seeing people you know and encountering the festive environment, coming out to the farm, doing the pick-your-own garden, involving kids. All of this reinforces not only that you can get an organically grown red cabbage but that you know what to do with it and you know where it came from or who grew it. All of those connections are reinforcing and 24 weeks is a long enough time to build a habit around food, a food habit. What we expect at the end of that is that it will convince the insurance industry, first insurance companies here in Massachusetts and we already have letters of interest from two major insurance companies, it will convince them that CSA farm shares are a wellness benefit that they should pay for, just like gym memberships are paid for by insurance today. So that’s something that we’re working very hard to prove scientifically. It’s axiomatic that veggies and fruit, increasing those in your diet will have positive health outcomes but we’re doing the blood screening and the subjective interviews and questionnaires and weight checks and food diaries and everything else over a two-year period to prove it scientifically. And we’re expecting that it will happen first here in Massachusetts and then spread across the country. And that is a far-reaching impact that will not only benefit the person who has the insurance and gets the farm share but also local farmers directly across the country.

Johnny: How does your organization navigate the dual concern of maintaining a functioning production farm on top of the logistical work of running a non-profit organization? (15:15-16:40, 17:05-17:40)

Andy: Well some organizations like Grow Food Northampton lease land to a farmer and there’s kind of a division between the organization and the farm operation. We have a different model. We hire a director of farm operations as a member of the Just Roots staff and that farmer then hires a crew and runs the farm operation. Early on we had the idea that the proceeds from the farm would go a long way to covering the cost of the organization. That was an unrealistic goal. So we’re largely grant funded and reliant on individual donors, some of whom give large sums of money and others give, you know the whole range of contributions. Could you focus the question for me?

Johnny: Yeah, so the question was “How does your organization navigate the dual concern of maintaining a functioning production farm on top of the logistical work of running a non-profit organization?”

Andy: Well it matters who’s selected to do the work. We have an excellent farm manager right now. And that going smoothly and producing, you know, a great array of vegetables and fruits is essential to our operation. Yeah I guess the question is kind of beyond my purview.

Johnny: Well this question is kind of connected to that, I apologize if you’ve already answered parts of this. Who grows the food on your farm? What are their demographics? How much are they paid? How much does your farm depend on volunteer labor/internships to make their ends meet? (18:12-20:15)

Andy: Their demographics meaning the demographics of the people who work on the farm?
Johnny: Yeah.

Andy: Well as I said we have a director of farm operations, her name is Meryl and she identifies as female, mid-thirties in age. We have, the crew has finished its season, so I can tell you the crew that we had in 2017. They were, we had an all-white crew, mainly in their twenties, with the exception of someone who has come to us through the Franklin County jail, who did an internship with us and then was hired to be on the crew. In terms of gender identification, we have people who are trans and cis-identified male and female. Is that what you mean by demographics?

Johnny: Yeah.

Andy: Most of the crew is college educated with a couple of exceptions.

Johnny: And then the second half of that is how much are they paid and how much does the farm depend on volunteer labor/internships?

Andy: I’m not aware of the pay rate, I think the farm crew are paid, I don’t know, I think its $15 an hour.

Johnny: Nice, a living wage. So question seven, related to that indirectly. Where does your funding coming from? Is it mostly from community donations, federal/state grants, or from selling produce? How much profit (if any) is generated from selling produce through farmer's markets, grocery stores, and CSA shares? (20:35-21:08)

Andy: Yeah, on that one if you could email Rochelle she could give you those detailed answers. That would be Rochelle@justroots.org. Or Jessica maybe would be better, Jessica@justroots.org.

Johnny: How does your organization manage outreach? What social media presence (if any) is used to spread the word about upcoming projects/events? How much advertising is done for free via word of mouth? Monthly newsletters? Etc. (21:15-23:35)

Andy: I just came from an outreach event, so that’s part of it, tabling at different opportunities in the community. We do have a website, justroots.org, and a Facebook page and a Twitter and an Instagram account. The Twitter and Instagram are mainly life on the farm, from the perspective of the people who are growing the food. Facebook we do use for promoting events like our festivals or community workshops. During the growing season we have a weekly CSA update, and I also send out a gardener update for the community gardeners. We’ve had good success with Facebook advertising, a low dollar expense like $3 per event and usually advertising to people who like our page and their friends. And for our larger events like our fall festival we have a poster made and send that out.

Johnny: And any idea how much people find out about the farm through word-of-mouth? Family friends?
Andy: I would say that that’s a large part of it. We’re well-known, we have a pretty high visibility in the community.

Johnny: Anything else you wanted to add?

Andy: Um, on the question of food justice. Three people from Just Roots recently went to a discussion at La Mariposa collective in Turners Falls where three people from Gardening the Community came up to tell about their work. And specifically how GTC has addressed racism. That was quite inspiring and I’m anticipating that Just Roots as an organization will be learning from models like that and incorporating more explicitly a concern to dismantle racism in the food system.

Johnny: Anything else?

Andy: Nope