

Reweaving the food security safety net: Mediating entitlement and entrepreneurship

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Abstract. The American food system has produced both abundance and food insecurity, with production and consumption dealt with as separate issues. The new approach of community food security (CFS) seeks to re-link production and consumption, with the goal of ensuring both an adequate and accessible food supply in the present and the future. In its focus on consumption, CFS has prioritized the needs of low-income people; in its focus on production, it emphasizes local and regional food systems. These objectives are not necessarily compatible and may even be contradictory. This article describes the approach of community food security and raises some questions about how the movement can meet its goals of simultaneously meeting the food needs of low-income people and developing local food systems. It explores the conceptual and political promise and pitfalls of local, community-based approaches to food security and examines alternative economic strategies such as urban agriculture and community-supported agriculture. It concludes that community food security efforts are important additions to, but not substitutes for, a nonretractable governmental safety net that protects against food insecurity.

Key words: Anti-hunger efforts, Community food security, Community supported agriculture, Localism, Participatory democracy, Urban food production

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A defining contradiction of the American food and agriculture system has been the persistence of hunger despite the world's most productive agriculture. Producers, consumers, and policymakers have assumed that maximizing agricultural production will both ensure an adequate supply of food and keep food prices sufficiently low so that all Americans can be "food secure." Where this approach has failed to provide food access for everyone, strategies such as food stamps, gleaning, food banks, and surplus commodity distribution have intervened. While the American food system has emphasized production with distribution and consumption considered separately, the new approach of community food security (CFS) seeks to re-link production and consumption with the goal of ensuring both an adequate and accessible food supply in both the present and the future. In its focus on consumption, CFS has prioritized the needs of low-income people; in its focus on production, it emphasizes local and regional food systems. Although the CFS movement is working to integrate these objectives, it is also facing the question of where

it should place its emphasis – on low-income access or on local food systems. These objectives are not necessarily compatible and may even be contradictory. This article describes the approach of community food security and raises some questions about how the movement can meet its goals of simultaneously meeting the food needs of low-income people and developing local food systems.

The context of food security and food programs

Societal efforts to achieve food security are not at all new. Busch and Lacy (1984) remind us that ancient civilizations rose and fell based upon their ability to maintain a secure, stable food supply. According to Hopkins and Puchala (1978: 3–4), "Securing adequate food is one of the oldest problems confronting political institutions." In recent times, the concept of food security came to the fore as a result of the world food crisis of the early 1970s, which saw unprecedented increases in the international trading prices of staple

foods. At the World Food Conference in 1974 the issue of food security was the dominant theme, with the result that food security became a clear and central policy goal of most developing countries (Chisholm and Tyers, 1982). Food security in this context meant the ability of a country to generate enough food to feed its population. While some countries may be unable to meet the nutrient needs of its population in an aggregate sense, this is not the case in the United States, where the sufficiency of the food supply is not in question. In the US, where food insecurity has been a persistent if less severe problem, the concept of food security replaced the medical model of hunger and malnutrition during the 1980s. The concept of food security became prevalent in US policymaking because it became clear that it was more important to define conditions that lead to hunger, since by the time clinical effects of hunger show up, the damage may be irreversible (Neuhauser et al., 1995). Prior to this time, hunger was defined in clinical terms in order to facilitate measurement that would "presumably provide the hard evidence from which to draw conclusions about the incidence of hunger" (Eisinger, 1996: 218).

Federal food assistance programs were first developed in an effort to jointly attack problems of farm surpluses and city poverty during the Depression (USDA, 1963). At this time, the emphasis was less on feeding hungry people than on disposing of surpluses purchased in order to support farm incomes (Lipsky and Thibodeau, 1990). Hunger alleviation funds were withheld when it was thought that they would disrupt agricultural markets (Andrews and Clancy, 1993). These early programs to subsidize or give away food were suspended when the war economy increased food demand and employment. Contemporary food assistance programs can be dated to the late 1960s when hunger was "discovered" in America. An anti-hunger movement rose with the tide of the powerful social movements of the 1960s, such as the civil rights, free speech, and anti-war movements. The Citizen's Crusade Against Poverty conducted an inquiry into the incidence of hunger and malnutrition in order to focus national attention on the problem of hunger (Kotz, 1969). For the first time, social programs to combat hunger directly were instituted (Fitchen, 1997). These included the food stamp program, school lunches, and supplemental food for women, infants, and children (WIC). While these programs were designed to meet the food needs of low-income people, supplementing food industry income also played a key role. For example, the USDA food stamp program was originally developed largely through the self-interested rent seeking behavior of economic agents rather than social welfare (DeLorne et al., 1992).

Regardless of their multiple motivations, these

programs made significant improvements in food security for low-income people. Eventually, however, the slowdown of the postwar economic boom, the breakdown of the political contract between capital and labor, and the upsurge in movements of the right combined to create a new food-security crisis. In the 1980s many people's economic conditions worsened; low-income people lost gains they had made and many middle-class families became newly poor. For example, wages have declined steadily since the 1970s for production and nonsupervisory workers, with average weekly earnings of \$255 in 1993 lower than those in 1960 (US Dept. of Labor, 1994). During this same period, policymakers began cutting safety-net food programs. In the early 1980s, Congress reduced food stamp benefits to levels below those considered necessary for households to obtain an adequate diet (Ohls and Beebout, 1993).

Since this time, in nearly every advanced industrialized country the state has been shedding its responsibilities for social welfare. In five of these nations – the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand – governments have been changing welfare systems while neglecting the growing issue of hunger and food insecurity (Riches, 1997). In the United States, the 1996 changes in food programs represent the largest cutbacks since they were first established. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (welfare reform) made substantial cuts to the three largest social welfare programs in the US – Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Supplemental Security Income, and the Food Stamp Program. Fully half of the projected budget savings from the 1996 welfare bill will come from reduced expenditures for the food stamp program (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1996), which has been the primary source of food assistance for the poor. Another \$2.9 billion in savings is realized by cuts to child nutrition programs. Congress has placed most of the responsibility for the social safety net onto the states through a state block grant program that includes lifetime benefit limitations and fixed funding levels regardless of need (Kramer-LeBlanc et al., 1997).

As early as 1989, food security in the US came to be defined as a problem experienced by a community rather than by an individual and one which could be solved by joint private and public sector efforts (e.g., Cohen and Burt, 1989). Policymakers have elevated the role of the private emergency food network, extolling volunteerism and charity, expecting them to fill the gaps caused by the cuts. Private sector emergency food programs such as food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens, have stepped up efforts to try to fill the increasing food needs, but are finding this difficult, since demand for their services are up,

but supplies are down due to efficiency increases in the food industry (Sarasohn, 1997).

Recognizing deteriorations in food security and the insufficiency of remaining efforts combat it, activists began to promote the approach of community food security in 1994. The Community Food Security Coalition (1994) defines food security as: "all persons obtaining at all times a culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through local non-emergency sources." The 1995 farm bill discussions brought together urban food interests, sustainable agriculture proponents, farmland preservation groups, and rural development advocates who jointly identified community food security as the conceptual basis for advocating changes in the food system. The proposed 1995 Community Food Security Empowerment Act was endorsed by more than 125 anti-hunger, sustainable agriculture, and other groups (Gottlieb and Fisher, 1996). As a result, although they were reducing funding for traditional federal food programs, policymakers established a competitive grants program for community food projects as part of the 1996 farm bill, authorizing \$16 million over seven years. The national Community Food Security Coalition was formally established in February of 1996, and by summer of 1998, the organization had more than 400 members and a newsletter mailing list of over 4000.

The community food security movement arose out of a desire for more comprehensive approaches to food security. It critiques traditional approaches to food security as being fragmented and lacking an overarching vision and coherence, asserting that these pose a major obstacle to the development of long-term food security and sustainable food systems (Fisher and Gottlieb, 1995). Differences between traditional anti-hunger and community food security approaches have been summarized by Winne et al. (1997), who are among the founders of the community food security movement (Table 1). As opposed to the concept of hunger, which measures an existing condition of unfulfilled needs and is defined in terms of an individual's food insecurity, community food security embodies a community-based and prevention-oriented framework that focuses on both immediate and long-term food security. While anti-hunger advocates have focused on the significant erosion of social programs and the measurable growth of food insecurity indicators, community food security focuses on evaluating community and personal resources in order to work toward providing food security (Gottlieb and Fisher, 1996). Community food security works to build a community-based food system grounded in regional agriculture and local decision-making. In contrast, the anti-hunger movement generally has not focused on how or where food is produced (Winne et al., 1997),

and major food program decisions have been made primarily at the federal level. Another major difference is that traditional food programs are based on the idea of food entitlements, while community food security emphasizes food self-reliance. What are the implications of these differences for meeting people's food security needs? The following sections discuss the possibilities and limitations of the community-based orientation and the economic alternatives advocated in community food security approaches.

Community decisionmaking and action

In the late twentieth century a new focus on regionalism has emerged as a social reaction against the global market expansion which took place in the 1980s (Hettne, 1995). Of the world's largest one hundred economies, fifty-one are now individual corporations (Barlow and Clarke, 1998), in which people play no role in setting priorities or making decisions outside of their choices as consumers. Transnational restructuring of the agricultural sector has blurred national and sectoral boundaries, intensified agricultural specialization for both enterprises and regions, and created large agroindustrial complexes (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989). Community food security proponents are concerned about this lack of control and the distancing of their food supply. Food in the US travels an average of 1,300 miles from the farm to the market shelf, and for most states almost 90 percent of the food supply is from non-local sources (Univ. of Mass. Extension, 1997). Localism is a form of resistance to this state of affairs, providing a defensive position against homogenizing effects of globalization. The community food security movement is part of this trend, emphasizing decentralization, community action, local decision making, and finding a sense of place. The ideas that "place matters" and "scale matters" have been crucial to the community food security approach (Gottlieb and Joseph, 1997). Traditionally, food security in the US has been defined as, "a condition in which all people have access at all times to nutritionally adequate food through normal channels" (US House of Rep., 1989). The definition of community food security substitutes the words "local, non-emergency sources" for "normal channels" in previous definitions of food security. Community food security works to empower people to improve their community food production and access systems in which self-determination becomes a key feature.

Locally based solutions are seen as essential for people to improve the conditions that will enable them to become food secure. Poppendieck (1997:

Table 1. Comparison of community food security and anti-hunger concepts

	Anti-hunger	Community food security
Model	Treatment; social welfare	Community development
Unit of analysis	Individual/household	Community
Time Frame	Shorter-term	Longer-term
Goals	Social equity	Individual empowerment
Conduit system	Emergency food, federal food programs	Marketplace, self-production, local/regional food
Actors	USDA, HHS	Community organizations
Agriculture relationship	Commodities; cheap food prices	Support local agriculture; fair prices for farmers
Policy	Sustain food resources	Community planning

Adapted from Winne et al. (1997).

175) points out, "If hunger and undernutrition are a function of people's lack of control over the food production and distribution system, then it is essential that empowerment strategies are developed in order to reassert ownership." The approach of community food security has the potential to completely revise urban planning approaches, which have never focused on food provision. While cities and counties have departments that address basic needs such as water, housing, health, and transportation, no municipality in the US has a department of food (Fisher, 1997). Community food security projects provide people with an opportunity to participate in projects in which they feel they can make a difference; to make concrete change in time and space that can be realized and seen. Projects that include community organizing and food policy councils embody a possibility for increasing self-determination in food issues, a politicization that develops into an engagement of other areas of civic life and political issues. Even projects that seem to allow the devolution of responsibility for food security from the federal to the local level can contain within them the potential for people to participate in reinventing their food system, rather than passively accepting it. "A problem or condition may never have existed before or it may always have been a feature of life, but until individuals perceive it as immediate and personal – salient – such a circumstance will rarely inspire conscious protest" (Goldberg, 1991). In one way or another, food is a salient issue for everyone and thus a potential moment of politicization even if the immediate project objective seems small.

A major innovation of the community food security movement has been its insistence on a whole-systems approach to food security. It is an integrative approach that combines community food planning, direct marketing, community gardening and urban food production, strengthening food assistance, farmland protection, food retail strategies, community and economic development (Fisher and Gottlieb, 1995).

Often a key step in a community food security project is conducting an assessment of the food system. Using a foodshed analysis approach such as that developed by Kloppenburg et al. (1996) can have profound educational as well as prescriptive value. Community food assessments of the food and agriculture system provide an opportunity for people to understand the forces that constrain or enable their access to resources in the food and agriculture system. Democratic participation is merely formal without this type of understanding. Community food security offers the possibility of developing a deep and democratic understanding of and action around issues of food access, quality, and control.

At the same time, the idea of local can be historical and romanticized. The history of US agriculture is one of a distinct and purposeful "disembeddedness" of production and consumption. The development of US agriculture depended on the mass immigration of Europeans to the US, where they evicted and exterminated the indigenous people and became farmers. From the beginning, these farmers produced, for the world market, staple products more cheaply than was possible in Europe. O'Connor (1998: 302) points out that "localities define themselves (or acquire self-definitions), both cultural and environmental" in ways that are constituted by global capitalist relations. Agrarian communities are agrarian precisely because of the global demand for grains, for example. Similarly, community is often reified rather than seen as a contingent and ideological construction that provides opportunities for some and constrains those for others. Community has no practical meaning independent of the real people who construct it and act in it. What community means is mediated by income, wealth, property ownership, occupation, gender, ethnicity, age, and many other personal characteristics. Geographical proximity does not overcome social and economic distance, and may increase it. While initially food security was defined at the national

or global scale, it soon became clear that aggregate measures missed variations in food insecurity within households, communities, and regions. According to the World Bank (1986) incomes and food consumption vary more within households and regions than among countries. The hungry are the poor, mostly women, children, ethnic minorities, and the elderly (Nestle and Guttmacher, 1992), a fact that has been reflected in federal food programs, which are directed to these vulnerable populations. Even with these programs, these vulnerable groups tend to be those most in need of emergency food services. In the Santa Cruz area, for example, seven out of 10 emergency food network clients are children, elderly or disabled (Second Harvest Food Bank, 1998).

Without attention to such conditions, localism can subordinate material and cultural differences to a mythical community interest. The notion that communities will make better decisions about food systems is based on an expectation of a fluid cooperation among groups with quite different interests. The assumption is that, if people know each other, they will make more appropriate and compassionate decisions. For example, Campbell (1997: 43) writes, "A shared commitment to place and the expectation of continuing encounters tend to check behavior that deviates from shared community interests and to subsume separate issues under a broader concern for the community's welfare." Yet it is unclear how the community decides what its priority issues are. A community can never be completely homogenous in its goals since social actors have different material and cultural interests as a result of the social spaces they occupy as producers or consumers, men or women, rich or poor. One cannot assume that these groups have the same interests, no matter how much we might wish they did. Bringing groups with different interests together in community food security coalitions can be extremely difficult. For example, Dahlberg (1994) found that local food policy councils with too much emphasis on hunger issues tended to be unsuccessful and in my experience it is difficult to involve producers and the food industry in food security coalitions. In addition, the presumption that everyone can participate (much less equally) is a magician's illusion, even if the effect of direct material power is excluded. Participation cannot simply be formally decreed. Having rights does not necessarily mean being able to exercise them (Sharp, 1995). At all scales of decision making, the audibility of people's voices is modulated by cultural relations of power. People whose perspectives, ideas, proposals get heard are often the most aggressive, loudest, and most confident, not necessarily those with the best ideas. Young (1995) points out that inequalities in decision making can arise because ideal speech situ-

ations privilege some styles of speaking over others (e.g., reasoned argumentation versus stories of situated experience).

Working only at the local level is not only insufficient to rectify power imbalances that cause material inequity, it may actually be counterproductive. The evidence is that localism is anything but liberatory for those traditionally marginalized. The disenfranchised have turned to the federal government for relief often precisely because progressive change was impossible at the local level or because local elites persisted in denying them rights. The only substantial gains achieved against hunger are the result of actions at the federal level. In the South, it took national legislation to overcome local preferences for racial segregation. Overcoming the realities of Southern power and claims to authority required intervention from the North, in addition to working at the grassroots level (Goldberg, 1991). As Lewis (1992) points out, local politics are just as likely to be dominated by "grasping oligarchies" as by "equality-minded citizens' councils." The focus on local action may also distract attention from the larger-scale dynamics of food insecurity. While problems of food insecurity are manifest at the local level, they are not necessarily caused at the local level but are rooted in larger, often global, political economic structures. Redclift (1987: 32) points out that, "The illusory pursuit of 'food security' in North America and Western Europe has helped to produce regional structures which are a major impediment to greater self-sufficiency in food production in the South." For example, prior to colonization, Africa was self-sufficient in food, often producing large surpluses, at a time when many Europeans went hungry (Rau, 1991). The most fertile land was appropriated by colonizers and became private land used for large-scale commercial farming rather than basic food production. To the extent that problems are not caused at the local scale, they cannot be completely resolved at that level. For example, as we are seeing in the case of welfare reform, decentralization can mean increased costs without increased power to change the conditions that gave rise to the problems in the first place. Poppendieck (1997: 173) critiques emergency food programs for allowing the perception that the problem of food insecurity is being taken care of and for deflecting attention away from government responsibilities, suggesting that "it is only in partnership with the community that the hunger problem can be solved." This is also a danger with community food security where the sense that problems can be solved best by those experiencing them is central. Certainly people at the local level have insights and knowledge not available to "outsiders." Yet local knowledge is not a substitute for total knowledge. It is important

to situate “situated knowledges.” As Harvey (1996: 303) states, knowledge from a small scale is “insufficient to understand broader socio-ecological processes occurring at scales that cannot be directly experience and which are therefore outside of phenomenological reach.” Even knowledge tied to a “place” is not homogenous, but differentiated by divisions of labor and power which are in turn differentiated by class, gender, and race (Feldman and Welsh, 1995).

Localism can be based on a category of “otherness” that reduces the lens of who we care about. The politics of “defensive localism” has been a key feature of the politics of race and poverty over the last 15 years (Weir, 1994). Defensive localism has been based on reducing federal spending, pushing responsibilities down to lower levels of government, and containing social problems within defined spatial and political boundaries. Anti-hunger activists have struggled against this trend by working to stop block granting of federal food programs in the 1996 welfare legislation because they believed local support food assistance would be lessened and provided more sporadically or preferentially. The politics of defensive localism makes localities responsible only for the problems that occur within them in a world that is already defined and fragmented by income and race. “Local empowerment can become a very conservative goal that allows the broader political community to concentrate social and economic problems in particular places and refuse to take responsibility for those problems” Weir, 1994: 341). In the US Secretary of Agriculture’s announcement of the Community Food Project grants, he said, “These grants will enable 13 communities to implement their own ideas for helping their neighbors.” This sounds very much like how hunger relief was supposed to happen pre-federal food assistance programs. At that time food assistance was comprised of voluntary organizations serving neighborhoods or specific religious or ethnic groups (Poppendieck, 1986). In a contemporary formulation (Clunies-Ross and Hildyard, 1992: 137), advocate the community-based connection of production and consumption because it can “put the heart back into a community, whereas the type of jobs which might be lost, such as long-distance lorry driving, tend to take people and work out of the community.” I participated in a conference session in which the leaders of a community food security project were proud of its success in reducing imports of food from outside the locality. They were uninterested, however, in the negative effect this localization might have on those who had depended on the previous arrangements (e.g., produce truck drivers or non-local small farmers). This goes against the grain for anti-hunger activists who see low-incomes, not outsourcing, as the cause of food insecurity. Localism

may bring about marginal defensive actions that can pit communities against each other. Inevitably, competition between places produces winners and losers (Harvey, 1996). American industry has long used spacial dispersal and competition between places as a major strategy for reducing labor costs and ensuring a docile, compliant work force. Local successes can lull activists into an isolationist complacency without their having accomplished anything of lasting significance or, even worse, produce unintended negative global effects of local actions, e.g., the export of garbage and toxic waste.

Globalization produces winners and losers, but along familiar lines of nationality, race, class, and gender. Rather than succumbing to the force of global capital, Koc (1994) suggests that globalization become the knowledge that we share the same world, which requires a responsible and caring relationship among the members of the world community. Friedmann (1993) characterizes the present food system as obsessed with profits, and advocates developing a food system that is “after Midas’ feast.” The basic question that must be resolved is how to create a food and agriculture system that really is *after* Midas’ feast rather than one that *re-locates* Midas’ feast. Is globalization, as a concept and practice, the problem or is the problem the specific economic forms embedded in the global economy? Is it possible to protect ourselves from food insecurity without protecting everyone? Would we want to? How can we ensure that food security problems and solutions do not become defined in terms of “only-in-my-backyard?”

More participatory democracy at local levels is absolutely necessary, but local politics must be in addition to, not instead of, national and international politics. While the appeal and promise of localism is significant for the empowerment goals of the community food security movement, there are aspects of community-based food systems that may limit their practical relevance for meeting the food needs of the poor. In working toward food security and sustainability, some analyses and actions will need to be local; others will need to be national or international. It will be important to clarify what types or levels of food security and sustainability can realistically be understood, addressed, and achieved at each level. If we make no attempts to rectify existing power and material inequities in local food systems, the “politics of place” can easily become the politics of complacency. As Harvey (1996: 353) observes, “The contemporary emphasis on the local, while it enhances certain kinds of sensitivities, totally erases others and thereby truncates rather than emancipates the field of political engagement and action.”

Reinventing production and distribution systems

Community food security projects often include the development of practical economic alternatives to the current food production and provisioning system, emphasizing entrepreneurship, protecting local agriculture, and building links between farmers and consumers. Community-based production and distribution are seen as creating “new economic spaces” that establish new kinds of alternative models to the transnational and corporate food system (Gottlieb and Fisher, 1998). These new economic forms include farmers’ markets, urban agriculture, food-based microenterprise, organic produce, and community-supported agriculture (Feenstra, 1997).

While anti-hunger programs have been necessary precisely because the market has failed to ensure food security, community security activists see the market as essential for achieving food security. An emphasis on entrepreneurship is evident in the projects funded by the recently established US Department of Agriculture Community Food Projects program (see Table 2). Most of the projects funded contain a substantial entrepreneurial development component, while working with existing federal food programs was on the agenda of only one of the projects funded. Of the four projects that focus on food policy or food-system planning, all are concentrated on local actors; none address the federal-level policies that significantly shape food security in local communities. While the projects are directed toward meeting the food needs of low-income people, they do so with the assumption that this can be achieved through local, market-based initiatives. The original Community Food Security Empowerment Act supported traditional food programs, yet they are often seen as stop-gap, failing to address the need for developing long-term approaches to food security. Part of the impetus for the focus on entrepreneurial activities is providing relief from the vagaries of food assistance programs. Rules change, funds are cut, volunteers tire. These fluctuations profoundly affect the food security of the poor, yet they have no control over the changes. Community food security activists want to reduce this vulnerability by creating opportunities for low income people to define and create food security for themselves. These opportunities include new production approaches such as urban agriculture and new distribution methods such as community supported agriculture.

Urban agriculture is an innovative approach to food production that provides a way for people to take “control of the resources that they need for their own livelihoods” (Rosset, 1996: 1) One-seventh of the world’s food supply is grown in cities by 800 million urban farmers (United Nations Development

Programme, 1986). Urban agriculture can be a form of self-provisioning, either as a matter of survival or as a source of fresh and healthy food, and can also be a means for generating income. Urban agriculture is food production within a metropolis, using residential plots, public or vacant land, balconies, or rooftops. In the US, one-third of farms are in metropolitan areas. These farms account for 16 percent of farmland and produce 25 percent of crop and livestock sales (Heimlich and Barnard, 1993). In Cuba, where 26,000 hectares are cultivated within the city, urban agriculture is credited with playing a big part in the recovery from Cuba’s food crisis brought on by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the US embargo (Rosset, 1996). Historically, urban land has been used for charity gardens for the poor and victory gardens to provide food during wartime, but most were abandoned following World War II (Hynes, 1996). The contemporary community gardening effort was started by public housing authorities and was supported by a USDA urban gardening program initiated in 1976 that has helped low-income people in cities to grow and preserve vegetables (*ibid.*) Gardening has many benefits, ranging from harvests of fresh produce to horticultural therapy. An estimated \$38 million worth of food is produced from urban plots (Sommers and Smit, 1994).

Urban agriculture is of course not a total solution to urban food security problems. The poorest residents have little access to production possibilities and urban agriculture will do little to improve income distribution (Nugent, 1997). These are the kinds of inequities that are the cause of food insecurity in the first place. Urban agriculture is an addition to, rather than a substitute for, “regular” production. Mostly fruits and vegetables can be grown on small urban plots, produce that cannot begin to meet people’s complete food needs. Yet, they can be an important source of nutrients crucial to overall health. While fruits and vegetables provide only eight percent of food energy in an American diet, they are a primary source of vitamin C and carotene (USDA, 1998a).

Community gardening provides sites for socializing and community organizing as well as access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Often community gardens have turned blighted abandoned spaces into lush spaces of relief in the harsh inner city. They can provide safe spaces and arenas for multigenerational and multicultural interactions. At the same time, community gardens can be ephemeral. The gardens are built either on land owned by the municipality or a private entity who is not using the land at the time. This land can be reclaimed at any time and on short notice. Changes in land-holding patterns will be required for community gardens to be stable sources of food

Table 2. Components of projects funded under USDA Community Food Project grants (1996–1997).

Entrepreneurial development	Planning and public education	Self-provisioning	Federal food program link
Help retailers and wholesalers learn to make money by increasing their expertise in buying and selling produce; help create linkages between urban retailers and regional farmers	Build community organizational infrastructure and leadership capacity in enhanced local families' nutritional well-being	Increase food self-reliance by providing opportunity to produce and preserve food and prepare nutritious meals	Increase summer food program sites, provide vegetable vouchers for WIC recipients
Business management and marketing skills for low-income community gardeners	Develop food policy council; educational projects	Develop community farm and neighborhood gardens; produce distributed to those in need	
CSA program, entrepreneurial program for low-income youth and homeless people; expanding community gardens	Children's garden; food-farm awareness	Develop community gardens and wild-food collecting	
Expand production and sales of food bank to local hotels and tourist resorts	Community food council	Establish community gardens	
Train tenants of public housing to produce and sell food and value-added products at local stores and restaurants	Build community support for family farming and food security	Food bank production plots and "Grow-a-Row" in home gardens for produce donations	
Develop small businesses from a farmers' market	Develop culturally-sensitive nutrition programs		
Develop farmers markets, community gardens, educational projects	Develop local capacity to respond to issues of food security		
Microenterprise development; value added processing for retail sale	Establish public education and food policy council		
Youth-run food system that creates jobs for teens and improves access to fresh produce	Children's education program about food and farming		
Train low-income people in food/plant production and business skills; revenue generated by sale of produce and ornamentals	Monitor performance of food system		
Create green market	Address welfare reform		
Provide opportunities for low-income residents to learn organic farming and business skills and gain subsequent access to land			
Support local, diversified farms; improve access to locally grown food; increase economic opportunities for low-income households			
Development of markets for traditional foods; development of agriculture-based microenterprises			
Create ways for low-income people to grow and market organic vegetables			
Marketing outlets for family farmers and low-income community development groups			
Increase use of locally grown food including by low-income people; foster start up and growth of small to medium-sized producers			
Promote community based entrepreneurship and economic opportunity through food production, processing and marketing; strengthen urban markets for farmers; expand production capacity of urban growers			
Increase use of local foods; job training and low-cost way to get started in farming			
Develop community capacity in an "Empowerment Zone's" economic sector			
Youth produce and market produce in low-income communities			
Provide a CSA farm through which low-income people can develop skills that lead to self-sufficiency and agricultural entrepreneurship			
Help families leave welfare successfully			

production. At a minimum, municipalities must make commitments to reserve land for urban agriculture. Often, however, the trend is in the other direction as many cities are opposed to the informal use of public lands for agriculture or need the economic return from the land for city budgets. In Santa Cruz, California, the city sold the land of the highly acclaimed Homeless Garden Project. The city was caught in a revenue squeeze brought on in part by reductions in local revenues caused by lowering of property taxes years earlier. The only way to ensure a community garden's survival is for it to either become a land trust (i.e., permanent open space) or receive permanent site status with the protection of the municipal parks department (Baker, 1997).

In addition to new production schemes, community

food security supports food distribution methods that shorten the distance between farmers and consumers and provide fresh, high-quality food. Farmers' markets, for example, have provided outlets for producers outside of the mass market and filled an important niche for consumers who "valued quality and variety over quantity and uniformity or who wished to support local agriculture" (Lyson et al., 1995: 108). These markets have expanded quickly in recent years, increasing by 35 percent since USDA began keeping statistics on them in 1993, and accounting for an estimated \$1.1 billion contribution to farmers' incomes. Consumers have reported that their primary reasons for going to farmers' markets are fresh food and direct contact with farmers, reflecting the desire to both improve their diets and reconnect

with their food sources. Another distribution method that meets these objectives is Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), an innovative approach that originated in the 1960s in Japan. The first CSA farm in the US was established in 1985. Since that time, the idea has grown quickly; there are now over 500 CSAs in the country and each year the number of CSA farms and participating members increases (Van En, 1995). In a CSA, consumers pay a fee to a grower and expect to receive in return a weekly share of fresh produce. The idea of Community Supported Agriculture is to “connect local farmers with local consumers; develop a regional food supply and strong local economy; maintain a sense of community; encourage land stewardship; and honor the knowledge and experience of growers and producers working with small to medium farms” (Univ. of Mass. Extension, 1997). Consumers get a wide variety of fresh produce; the producer has a ready market and cash flow.

But what about accessibility for low-income people? Although the CSA approach can help bring fresh fruits and vegetables to places where they are not usually available, there are some potential problems with the CSA arrangement for low-income people (Busch and Lacy, 1984: 2). For example, a basic tenet of CSA is that shareholders share risks with farmers. A key advantage for farmers is that they receive income at the beginning of the planting season rather than after crops are harvested. But this approach constrains the participation of the poor, who do not have the cash reserves that would enable them to make large upfront, or even monthly, payments. CSAs offer a type of futures market in which people invest based on the presumption that food will be produced and delivered, but this is not assured. In fact, CSAs are prohibited from accepting food stamps because by providing before-harvest payments to farmers, members are actually speculating on the crop rather than purchasing food.

Another goal of the CSA approach is to connect people in an immediate way with farming through the active involvement of shareholders in planning and doing the farm work (Clunies-Ross and Hilyard, 1992). This is a step toward reducing alienation and commodity fetishism, but in turn it tends to fetishize farming and elevate it over other forms of labor. One does not expect to chop vegetables prior to eating a meal at a restaurant and CSA farmers are not expected to help with the shareholders’ regular jobs. Most middle and low-income people are already overwhelmed with the demands of productive and reproductive labor in their own jobs and households, leaving precious little time for extra activities. Since people cannot get all of their food from a CSA, it means

they have additional shopping tasks. The idea of efficiently getting everything in the same place is what gave rise to the supermarket in the first place, and time has become even more scarce as many people are having to travel farther and farther to their jobs. There are also the issues of storing and preparing the items from a weekly box of fresh produce. Processing and packaging activities do not disappear, they are simply displaced to a different time, space, and labor relation. Somebody still has to do the work – it is now re-embedded in the home, the domain of women’s labor, particularly in regard to food. While CSAs can be wonderful for those who have the time and the cash flow to participate, the idea of CSA seems anachronistic for all but the most privileged. CSA shareholders do tend to be a rather select crowd. Studies have found that CSA members tend to be predominantly upper-income, highly educated, Caucasians (Cohen et al., 1997; Festing, 1997). In a 1995 survey of California CSA members, 71 percent had annual incomes of \$40,000 or more; in a 1992 study, only 10 percent of the farms had members who were people of color (constituting only five percent of the overall CSA membership) (Lawson, 1997). While there are examples of CSA efforts to provide shares or deliver produce to inner city residents (e.g., the Hartford Food System in Connecticut and Just Foods in New York), this is possible only because of external funding sources, not the free market. The fact remains that there is a contradiction between making food affordable and providing a decent return for the farm unit in the absence of public subsidy.

Reweaving the safety net

While most everyone would champion the idea of self-determination, there are reasons to be cautious about the degree to which the scope and depth of food security problems can be ameliorated through community-based, entrepreneurial efforts. Marketing strategies in community food security often are directed toward increasing demand and outlets for local produce, providing security of markets for local agricultural producers and creating product differentiation based on region of production. Local food systems projects based on provincialism may tend to serve the status needs of the privileged more than the material needs of the poor. As fresh fruits and vegetables become “branded” by place or differentiated by method of production, prices increase. For example, in the United States, organic food prices are usually higher than those for nonorganic food. With poor people already paying higher prices for their food and spending a higher percentage of their incomes on

food than do middle-income people, organic food may be beyond their reach.

Ironically, it is the industrialized food system that has reduced class differences in food consumption, a leveling that the new organic, designer foods threaten to break down. Historically, the food system was two-tiered, with cheap, mass-produced foods to meet basic needs of the masses on the one hand, and highly elaborated, individually tailored goods produced for a powerful fraction of the population on the other (Fine and Leopold, 1993). Distinctions between luxury and basic foods began to disappear as the industrialization of the food system allowed for the expansion of range of products provided and convenient packaging and transportation of those foods. The community food security movement may be unwittingly recreating a two-tiered food system differentiated by class. In Cuba's urban agriculture system, for example, prices are set by supply and demand and access is based on ability to pay (Fuster, 1998). While local production and marketing has increased the aggregate consumption of fruits and vegetables in Havana, this improvement is not equally accessible to those at all income levels. There is evidence that CSA members eat more vegetables, dark green and yellow fruits and vegetables, fiber, and vitamin A than did non-members (Cohen et al., 1997), but CSA members are not the populations with *a priori* low intakes of these nutrients. There is also the practical problem of the rapid deterioration of quality and nutritional value of fresh produce that is not refrigerated. Efforts such as local production and marketing can be at best supplements, not substitutes for state-guaranteed food security.

For anti-hunger theorists, food programs are essential for improving food security for those whose income is insufficient to allow them to meet their food needs in the market. O'Neill (1986: 107) points out, "If there are unrestricted economic rights to run life on commercial lines and accumulate private property, there cannot be rights to food or welfare." The problem is a food and agriculture system that, as puts it, "regards food – like cement, steel, ingots and everything else – as a commodity." The profit in a free market system is in expansion, accumulation, marketing, and lowering costs (O'Connor, 1988: 317). This requires the subordination of use value to exchange value, with production for profit rather than social need. This is evident in the current food and agriculture system where food is produced for profit and nutritional qualities and effects on health are either incidental or negative. Diet foods, for example, one of the fastest growing segments of the food industry in the United States, are the most paradoxical source of profits in the face of hunger (Friedmann, 1995). Organic foods are also

a rapidly growing food industry sector. The organic foods market developed by committed food producers, distributors, and consumers has become an industry much like any other, as producers and distributors must seek larger and larger market shares in order to stay in business. It is unclear how local marketing efforts can overcome this basic contradiction.

From an anti-hunger perspective, if food is a basic human right and if that right cannot be guaranteed by the market economy, it is the duty of the state to fulfill that right. Community food security proponents have often conflated emergency food sources such as food pantries and legislated food assistance programs such as food stamps, lumping them both under the category of "dependence," and finding them overly focused on the short term. "Community food security projects emphasize building individuals' abilities to provide for their own food needs rather than encouraging dependence on outside sources such as food banks or public benefits" (Fisher, 1997). Yet government food programs and private charity are very different, both in meaning and effect. Traditionally, the lack of food security has been measured by incidence of obtaining food through "abnormal" channels (e.g., emergency food programs or borrowing from friends); having a limited variety and quantity of food; worries about having sufficient food and the money to buy it; and poor diet quality (Eisinger, 1996). In a study of women at risk of food insecurity, "normal channels" for them meant food obtained through cash purchase, food stamps, WIC coupon, and school meals; the socially unacceptable channels were food pantries and the charity of friends and family (Radimer et al., 1992). The proliferation of food banks since the 1980s is an indication of the insufficiency of public assistance for food security. If public assistance benefits were sufficient or incomes were sufficiently high, there would be no need for food pantries. An individual who has lost her job and therefore needs food stamps may be experiencing a personal emergency, but the programs themselves are not emergency programs. There will always be people who need food assistance as long as there is underemployment, unemployment, poverty-level wages, and inadequate pensions and access to food is based on ability to pay.

Throughout this century, numerous public and private efforts have been undertaken to resolve the abundance and absence of food, but American society continues to lack a systemic, long-term approach to meeting the food security needs of its entire population. Community food security can be part of this approach, but it cannot be a substitute for basic food programs that provide regular food access, especially for the most vulnerable populations. The anti-hunger approach closely parallels traditional social move-

ments wherein the economy and the state are the locus of struggle for achieving social change. It is grounded in themes of economic equality, struggle, and state responsibility and is focused on meeting basic material needs as the first priority. The themes of the community food security movement are closely related to those of new social movements. Such groups are focused on issues such as collective identity, democratization of everyday life, and the self-defense of society against the state (Cohen, 1985). Both traditional food programs and community food security projects contain promise for meeting people's food security needs. Achieving food security requires both a process of developing self-reliant food systems and a political effort to achieve justice and equity. After the draconian cuts of 1996, perhaps the pendulum is beginning to swing back, recognizing the need for both public programs and community-based efforts. The Administration's proposed federal budget for fiscal year 1999 restores funding for food stamps for legal immigrants and increases funding for WIC, and at the same time authorizes funding for a new community-based gleaning program.

The comprehensive approach of community food security has potential to discursively and productively unite groups that have otherwise been separate or opposed to each other. Community food security is simultaneously a goal, an analytical framework, a movement-building a dynamic concept and strategy for movement building, and a tool for innovative policy development (Gottlieb and Joseph, 1997). The coalescence of production and consumption at the foundation of community food security is beginning to unite consumers and producers. Community food security supports small-scale farmers and organic agriculture; sustainable agriculture embraces community food security and local food system. The National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture includes community food security as a prominent part of its platform and the US Action Plan on Food Security includes a section on sustainable agriculture. Gottlieb and Fisher (1998) point to instances in which environmental justice and food security objectives have come together in projects in Los Angeles.

Community food security has produced interest in more democratic approaches and the need for more conscious social choice, including the development of practical economic alternatives to the current food production and provisioning system. In this sense, form and content are intimately connected, daily practice and political objectives coincide. Problems may be known but as long as they exist as abstractions, they are unlikely to inspire conscious resistance. New economic relations can be seen as efforts toward productive justice in an effort to circumvent the need

for distributive justice. O'Connor (1998) characterizes productive justice as that which minimizes negative externalities and maximizes positive externalities at the point of labor processes and products. Participation in everyday forms of resistance, like choosing foods grown without pesticides or refusing to buy eggs produced by hens raised in battery cages seem small, but can have significant effects. As Scott (1989: 5) points out, when everyday resistances are practiced widely, "they may have aggregate consequences out of all proportion to their banality when considered singly." Green consumption, for example, certainly has its limits, but the thought process can have a big effect on one's consciousness and that of the people around them. Changes in diets can also alter the structure of agri-food profits (Friedmann, 1995) by, for example, increasing demand for foods grown without pesticides. In addition to consumption choices, other small acts can affect consciousness about the food system. Participating in a community garden or helping out at a food bank, for example, will unavoidably change some tiny part of how one sees the dynamics of the food system, and perhaps beyond it. Building on the relative strengths of each approach, the traditional food programs and community food security projects can work together to overcome the forces that have produced food insecurity. Together these approaches can mend the tattered strands of the remaining safety net against hunger.

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