Mapping the Food Movement
Addressing Inequality and Neoliberalism

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ABSTRACT: In this article, we bring together academic literature tracing contemporary social movements centered on food, unpacking the discourses of local food, community food security, food justice, and food sovereignty. This body of literature transcends national borders and draws on a rich genealogy of studies on environmental justice, the intersections of race, class, and gender, and sustainable agro-food systems. Scholars have emphasized two key issues that persist within these movements: inequalities related to race and class that shape the production, distribution, and consumption of food, and the neoliberal constraints of market-based solutions to problems in the food system. This article claims that food movements in the United States would be strengthened through reframing their work within a paradigm of food sovereignty, an approach that would emphasize the production of local alternatives, but also enable a dismantling of the policies that ensure the dominance of the corporate food regime. The article concludes by offering a critical analysis of future research directions for scholars who are committed to understanding and strengthening more democratic and sustainable food systems.

KEYWORDS: food movements, food systems, inequality, neoliberalism, social justice

In regions across the United States, food movement activists are pursuing projects like community gardens, community-supported agriculture (CSA) projects, and farmers’ markets as promising alternatives to the industrialized food system, or what Eric Holt-Giménez (2011) terms the “corporate food regime.” Advocates comprising what Michael Pollan (2010) calls “the food movement” argue that increased production and consumption of local food is key to transforming a host of environmental problems (pesticide use, soil and water contamination, fossil fuel dependence) and social problems (increased consolidation of land ownership, corporate control of food system, high rates of diet-related health problems). In recent years, this movement has gained national attention as best-selling authors like Pollan, Marion Nestle, and Anna Lappè encourage us to connect our forks with our politics and eat close to home. Their impressive book sales signal that the idea of eating locally is no longer a fringe concept. Indeed, the word, “locavore,” meaning one who eats local foods, was chosen as the Oxford Encyclopedia Dictionary’s 2007 word of the year.

A wide range of scholarship has emerged alongside this movement, often penned by scholar-activists who are deeply engaged with on-the-ground actions, programs, and community orga-
nizations. Some of this literature is quite celebratory, trumpeting the potential for the food movement to create environmental sustainability (Altieri 2000), vibrant local communities (Andreatta 2005; Goldschmidt 1978), a connection to place (DeLind 2002, 2006; Kloppenberg et al. 1996), and a renewed civic life (Lyson 2004). Others take a more critical approach, pushing the movement to engage with two key issues. First, critics have highlighted issues of inequality, examining the social, political, and cultural processes that determine who is drawn to and has the ability to produce and consume particular kinds of food (Alkon and McCullen 2010; Allen 1999, 2008; Allen et al. 2003; Guthman 2004, 2008; Patel 2007; Slocum 2007). Second, scholars argue that the food movement is characterized by neoliberal strategies that urge consumers to choose locally based economic alternatives rather than invite citizens to reform or even transform the food system itself (Alkon 2008a; Allen 2008; Allen and Guthman 2006; Allen and Wilson 2008; Brown and Getz 2008; Guthman 2008; Mares 2010; Pudup 2008).

Throughout this article, we refer to these challenges as those of inequality and neoliberalism, but maintain that these challenges and the spaces where they unfold are deeply entangled. The food movement’s privileging of market-based strategies makes the alternatives they create and endorse less accessible to low-income communities and communities of color while conversely ignoring the ways that racial and economic privileges pervade both conventional and alternative food systems. Further, though alternative agro-food systems have been often conceptualized in oppositional terms, more contemporary investigations have problematized these binaries to reveal how the “local” or “sustainable” and the “global” or “industrial” are necessarily intertwined and not bound to concrete spatial locations. We follow this line of inquiry to argue that both localized food systems and the “corporate food regime” are complex and multidimensional social, political, and economic formations necessitating multidisciplinary and multisectoral research approaches.

As activists have reflected on these and other critiques, food movements have developed three concepts that build on the idea of local food in important ways. Community Food Security (CFS) broadens the unit of analysis from individuals to communities, inviting more structural perspectives on the need for and value of alternative food systems. In addition, it combines the local food discourse with an antihunger approach, arguing that all communities should have access to safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate, and sustainably produced diets (CFSC n.d.). Building on this framework, the concept of food justice speaks to the multiple ways that racial and economic inequalities are embedded within the production, distribution, and consumption of food. Activists working from these two perspectives often create local food system alternatives such as farmers’ markets, CSA programs, urban farms, and cooperatively owned grocery stores in low-income communities of color, though food justice activists tend to strongly emphasize the need for these projects to be created not only for, but by members of these communities.

Although the CFS and food justice perspectives directly confront the issues of inequality described above, scholars assert that their strategies are still predominantly and problematically neoliberal in that they seek transformation through changes in individualized consumption practices rather than broader and more collective efforts. In contrast, the concept of food sovereignty has developed through the struggles of farmers in the Global South and embodies an explicit opposition to neoliberalism. Food sovereignty declares the rights of local peoples to define their own agro-food systems rather than remain subject to the consequences and demands of global trade policies. It includes calls for land reform, free access to and control over seeds, and the safeguarding of water as a public good. It also pays particular attention to the needs and desires of women and indigenous peoples, who do the majority of the food cultivation in the Global South. Local food activists in the United States and other industrialized
nations have embraced food sovereignty’s emphasis on the needs of farmers and opposition to genetically modified foods, and local food organizations have even joined transnational coalitions toward these goals. CFS and food justice activists often see their own aims reflected in the food sovereignty movement’s focus on community self-sufficiency and self-determination. However, we argue that none of the US-based discourses engage with global food politics to the degree that food sovereignty activists have. Doing so may help these movements to scale up and build broad coalitions that can transform the food system in both the US and abroad.

In this article, we offer an overview of scholarship on the above-described four discourses, paying close attention to debates concerning inequality and neoliberalism. We begin by briefly reviewing studies of the local food and CFS discourses, outlining the critiques that scholars have detailed with respect to the limitations of these approaches. We then turn to the burgeoning literatures on food justice and food sovereignty to illuminate the ways that both concepts offer a deeper structural analysis of food system inequalities while highlighting food sovereignty’s opposition to neoliberalism. Our review is necessarily uneven as the concept of local food is both the most prominent and most heavily critiqued. Indeed, the other concepts we review—community food security, food justice, and food sovereignty—are often described as addressing problematic aspects of local food discourses. These later discourses have not been critiqued to the degree that local food has, but we do review existing appraisals where appropriate. We conclude by offering a critical analysis of future research directions for scholar-activists who are committed to understanding and contributing to more just and sustainable food systems. Table 1 outlines the key points of these discourses to better situate their commonalities and differences and guide the reader through our review.

### Local Food

The movement for local food is heavily guided by the philosophy and practice of “civic agriculture.” In *Civic Agriculture: Reconnecting Farm, Food and Community*, Thomas Lyson defines civic agriculture as “a locally organized system of agriculture and food production characterized by networks of producers who are bound together by place [... which] ... embodies a commit-

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<td>• Influenced by concept of civic agriculture and the notion of eating within a “foodshed”</td>
<td>• Endorses the same market strategies as local food, but also forges connections to emergency food programs, including food banks and meal programs</td>
<td>• Emphasizes the connections among structural racism, classism, and inequalities in access to food and productive land</td>
<td>• Emphasizes the impacts of neoliberal trade and agricultural policies and the monopoly of the corporate agro-food sector</td>
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<td>• Endorses market strategies including CSA projects, farmers’ markets, market gardening, and farm-to-school programs</td>
<td>• Emphasizes food systems approach and actions at the community scale, in addition to changing individual consumption practices</td>
<td>• Endorses the same market strategies as local food, but emphasizes that these solutions should be designed and managed by those bearing the brunt of food inequalities, that is low-income communities of color</td>
<td>• Frames solutions within agro-ecological production practices and redistribution of land and other natural resources</td>
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<td>• Frames solutions primarily within changing individual and familial consumption practices</td>
<td>• Frames solutions within improvements to food access and availability</td>
<td>• Draws attention to the rights and roles of women within agro-food systems</td>
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ment to developing and strengthening an economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable system of agriculture and food production that relies on local resources and serves local markets and consumers” (2004: 63). The promise of civic agriculture lies in its adherence to a democratic approach, which, according to Lyson, opens a space for people to transform from passive consumers into active “food citizens” (2004: 77).

Anthropologist Laura DeLind has claimed that the concept of civic agriculture gives “shape and legitimacy to a diverse and growing body of creative, socioeconomic relationships … [and] has the power to focus public attention on the contradictions within our industrially-modeled and corporately controlled agriculture, as well as on the potential of ‘relocalized’ food systems” (2002: 217; see also DeLind 2006). However, although DeLind finds value in civic agriculture's theoretical rejection of neoclassical economic thought and the commodification of food, she worries that, in practice, local food strategies like CSAs and farmers’ markets do not escape the realm of private ownership and accumulation. In addition to its reliance on traditional market relationships, she is also troubled by the association of “good” consumption and production with “good” citizenship.

In addition to the framework of civic agriculture, the local food discourse draws on the notion of the “foodshed.” In their defining article, “Coming in to the Foodshed,” Kloppenburg and colleagues (1996: 34) argue that the term “becomes a unifying and organizing metaphor for conceptual development that starts from a premise of the unity of place and people, of nature and society.” For these authors, relocalizing food systems offers a way to “reassemble our fragmented identities, reestablish community, and become native not only to a place but to each other” in the midst of an “unstable, post-modern world” (1996: 34). A critique of their use of the term “native” notwithstanding, these authors exalt the potential of localization and the ways that it could and should be embedded in a “moral economy.” Although they note the need for participation of marginalized and disempowered groups, Kloppenburg et al. vacillate between the paths of autonomy and reform, disengagement and radical change, with no clear analysis of how these various strategies might facilitate or impede broader participation from marginalized groups.

In their attention to systems thinking and exploring the connections between people and place, local food advocates draw attention to the fact that agricultural production is not only an economic issue, but is also socially and politically relevant. Nevertheless, Allen (2004) argues that local food advocates’ emphasis on the economic success of small farmers detracts from attention to issues of social justice such as farmworker rights and food access. For Allen, it is this attention to farm profits that orients activists toward solutions predicated on individual consumption rather than more collective change. Building on their earlier work on alternative agro-food systems, Allen (2004) and Guthman (2004) have offered extensive examinations of the connections between neoliberal economic formations and contemporary food politics. Together, they examine the growth of farm-to-school programs, showing how these initiatives are unique in that they unfold in the public realm of the educational system, yet “must work within the contemporary context of neoliberalization, in which solving social problems is seen as the domain of individuals and the market” (Allen and Guthman 2006: 402). The authors demonstrate how farm-to-school programs both “enable and reflect neoliberalization,” specifically in their funding sources, labor practices, framings of academic performance and obesity, and emphasis on consumer choice. For an extended discussion of the interconnections between sustainable consumption and neoliberalism, see Cindy Isenhour's article in this volume.

In a related article, Guthman (2008) observes that in-depth analyses of neoliberalism have been largely absent from agro-food scholarship, and that when they do appear, “there is a marked tendency to treat neoliberalism (and globalization) as a source of ‘impacts’ on national and subregional food sectors, with a particular focus on the macro effects of neoliberal trade on
Third World agriculture” (2008: 1174). This treatment fails to address how First World areas are also sites of neoliberal practices and tends to generalize all actions that respond to neoliberalism as inherently good—resulting in a romanticization of the “local” and all forms of resistance. For Guthman, four themes in food activism reflect neoliberal rationalities that revolve around a highly individualized conceptualization of politics—consumer choice, localism, entrepreneurialism, and self-improvement. She states: “For activist projects, neoliberalization limits the conceivable because it limits the arguable, the fundable, the organizable, the scale of effective action, and compels activists to focus on putting out fires. Those who theorize neoliberalism as a mode of governmentality have recognized how material neoliberalizations themselves have shaped subjectivities” (2008: 1180).

Drawing on research on community gardening, Mary Beth Pudup (2008) supports Guthman’s claims as she examines how organized community gardening projects operate as spaces of neoliberal governmentality, in that they are “spaces in which gardening puts individuals in charge of their own adjustment to economic restructuring and social dislocation through self-help technologies centered on personal contact with nature” (2008: 1228). In tracing how community gardening has been a recurring response to capital restructuring, Pudup distinguishes between community gardens that are sites of social resistance from those with an “ethos of personal responsibility.” She reveals the tension between community gardens and new urban social movements beginning in the 1990s to argue that some gardens, those she terms “organized garden projects,” are characterized by the work of “non-state and quasi-state actors who deliberately organize gardens to achieve a desired transformation of individuals in place of collective resistance and/or mobilization” (2008: 1230). More often than not, these projects are geared toward transforming the lives of poor and otherwise socially marginalized people through individualized experiences of direct contact with nature rather than explicitly challenging the systemic conditions that produce marginalization.

Another critique documenting how local food strategies articulate with neoliberalism is an analysis of how voluntary certification of sustainable foods supplants direct pressures on the state to restrict harmful production practices. Working in California and drawing on Peck and Tickell’s work on “roll out neoliberalism,” Brown and Getz (2008) argue that certification used as a means to achieve social justice is both shaped by a reaction to the material consequences of neoliberalism and reinforces neoliberal ideologies. Although they problematize the delineations that some scholars make between consumption politics and forms of organizing that seek structural change, the authors are concerned with the possibility of monitoring and labeling initiatives usurping the possibilities for collective action, especially because the voices of farmworkers have historically been absent from these initiatives. Brown and Getz conclude that “certification presents an incomplete and inadequate response to farm workers’ grave situation, including eroding wages, exploitative conditions, and treacherous journeys across a militarized border zone” (2008: 1195).

Some scholars argue that local food’s neoliberal strategies prevent it from challenging inequalities that pervade both the food system and social life more generally. Yet others argue that this discourse’s romantic conceptualization of the local can unwittingly be a form of exclusion and xenophobia. (Allen 1999; Allen et al. 2003; DuPuis and Goodman 2005). Hinrichs notes the tension that persists even within “socially embedded” agricultural markets, arguing that economic concerns are inseparable from broader social concerns: “many direct agricultural markets involve social relations where the balance of power and privilege ultimately rests with well-to-do consumers. Struggling farmers and poor consumers, in contrast, must weigh concerns with income and price against the supposed benefits of direct, social ties” (Hinrichs 2000:
Winter traces the motivations behind buying organically and locally, arguing that “the more recent turn to quality is based, to some extent on a continuation and growth of demand for such luxury and positional goods and this continuity should not be forgotten” (2003: 25). Conversely, Born and Purcell (2006) emphatically caution those in the field of planning against falling into the “local trap,” which they define as “the tendency of food activists and researchers to assume something inherent about the local scale. The local is assumed to be desirable, it is preferred a priori to larger scales” (2006: 195). Taken together, these critiques argue that local is not necessarily more sustainable, nor is it more just.

Through their work in rural Washington state, Joan Qazi and Theresa Selfa (2005) investigate how regional politics both impede and further the development of food system alternatives. They underscore that “the mapping of alternative agro-food provisioning in our central Washington case study is similarly challenged by spatial relations that do not necessarily coincide necessarily with local food networks, and by political discourse that is not necessarily progressive or transformative” (2005: 49). In a related study also based in Washington state, Lucy Jarosz (2008) demonstrates the importance of understanding both urban and rural contexts in analyzing the diversity and complexity of local, alternative food networks. She reveals how the increasing demand for seasonal, local, and organic produce in urban areas does not necessarily translate into better livelihoods for the rural farmers who attempt to meet these demands. This complicates the commonly held notion of food system localization as inherently transformational or progressive and demonstrates how local food systems “emerge from political, cultural and historical processes as they develop out of the interactions between rural restructuring and urbanization in metropolitan areas” (2008: 242).

In a similar vein, Melanie DuPuis and David Goodman (2005) call for a “reflexive politics of localism,” arguing that “unreflexive localism” can “deny the politics of the local, with potentially problematic social justice consequences” and “can lead to proposed solutions, based on alternative standards of purity and perfection, that are vulnerable to corporate cooptation” (2005: 360). They do not seek to delegitimize localism, but rather illuminate the complexity of the spatial dynamics upon which much of the alternative food movement rests, a complexity that is necessarily bound up with dynamics of race, class, and gender. Though the local food movement has largely ignored how inequalities intersect with industrial and alternative food systems, the next two discourses discussed here ground local food system work in a desire to illuminate such relationships, but with an emphasis on race and class disparities. However, they are still constrained by their largely unrecognized reproduction of neoliberal subjectivities.

**Community Food Security**

The CFS discourse brings together local food’s concern for environmentally sustainable production with the work of antihunger advocates responding to decreasing public sector support (Allen 1999; Gottlieb and Fisher 1996). The Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC; n.d.), the most prominent organization deploying this discourse, defines CFS as “a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice.” Key to this perspective is an emphasis on the community scale. The inclusion of the term community demonstrates an understanding that hunger is not an individual phenomenon, but something created by wider, systemic social forces. In her analysis of the CFS movement, Allen describes its discursive merits:
While the American food system has emphasized production with distribution and consumption considered separately, 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. (1999: 117)

Allen finds much promise in the CFS movement, but she also foreshadows recent critiques of local food. She expresses her concern about the effects of alternative economic strategies found in CSA and farmers’ markets, raising a red flag that these types of “designer” food production schemes may create a two-tiered food system built on class differences. Given this analysis, Allen (2004) highlights contradictions between the CFS movement’s twin goals of farm security and food security. She also critiques the movement’s view that using food assistance programs is “dependence,” pointing out that in anti-hunger perspectives food is viewed as a right to be fulfilled by the state if the market fails. In observing that so-called dependency programs may be part of the “normal” channels that women on assistance use, Allen asserts that “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” (1999: 126). Although CFS makes issues of food access a central part of its discourse, Allen pushes those working from this perspective to take into better account class inequalities and the material realities of those who are unlikely to benefit from the economic arrangements that are most common in today’s alternative food landscapes.

Another important critique comes from Molly Anderson and John Cook (1999) who argue that CFS lacks a uniting theoretical framework, which they believe is necessary for the movement to effectively guide policy and action. They assert that the CFS concept suffers from loose definitions and an absence of a clear theoretical basis, which could help to “improve understanding of the barriers to food security at several levels of analysis, and help policy-makers and practitioners improve food security in a given area” (1999: 142). They call for further study and evaluation of the CFS approach and a better understanding of its best practices. Anne Bellows and Michael Hamm (2003) extend these ideas, asserting that improvements in food security necessitate that the populace define and demand change rather than rely on institutional willingness to change. Bellows and Hamm see tremendous value in the community element of CFS, pushing for both national and international coalitions and mobilization. They also contend that the adoption of a human rights framework would be useful for the CFS movement as it would help to integrate an analysis of the systemic injustice that links food insecurity with other human rights concerns including housing, clean water, education, and employment with living wages.

Although issues of access are central to the CFS discourse, activists working from this perspective tend to be largely white and middle-class. Rachel Slocum (2007) investigates how whiteness is produced and embodied in practices that are framed within the CFS discourse. In her analysis, she rejects the notion that whiteness is inherently negative, but rather questions how the ethics and politics embedded within alternative food practices might move “the US, collectively, toward joy through food” (2007: 521). Slocum argues, “the desire for good and sufficient food and jobs and thriving economies is not white. It becomes white through what white bodies do in this effort” (2007: 521). Although Slocum argues that whiteness as it manifests in CFS activism is problematic, she simultaneously locates the knowledge of and commitment to “good food” primarily in white communities, and locates the possibility for transformation in how and when they might share this good food with “others.” As a reaction to the whiteness embodied in the CFS discourse, people of color who were active in these projects (and some of whom remained active) began to embrace a food justice perspective, which is grounded in the
lived experience of communities of color and foregrounds not only issues of access, but of racial and economic inequality.

**Food Justice**

The food justice discourse draws inspiration from both local food and CFS, but centralizes principles of racial and economic justice to argue that access to healthy, culturally appropriate, sustainably grown food is mediated by inequalities of race and class. More than any other strain of the food movement, US food justice activists mobilize at the grassroots level to dismantle the classist and racist structural inequalities that are manifest in the consumption, production, and distribution of food. Their dominant strategy is the creation of often-subsidized local alternative food provisioning strategies, such as farmers’ markets, CSAs, and urban farms in low-income communities of color.

Alfonso Morales (2011) examines the work of the Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative (GFJI), which seeks to use local food system work as a tool to dismantle racism. GFJI developed in association with the work of Growing Power, perhaps the most well-known food movement organization led by people of color, in response to the inadequacies of the CSFC. Morales shows that, despite the coalition’s emphasis on issues of cultural appropriateness and community responsibility, much of the early leadership was predominately white, even while the broader coalition had greater participation from people of color. He argues that the food justice movement has since been in “dynamic tension” with the CSFC, allowing for an overall productive and collaborative set of relationships.

People’s Grocery is one of the most visible actors in the US food justice movement and their work delivering local chemical-free produce to poor and working class inner-city residents through their mobile market—CSA and other programs in Oakland, California—exemplifies the goals and objectives of food justice. According to People’s Grocery (n.d.):

> Food justice asserts that no one should live without enough food because of economic constraints or social inequalities. Food justice reframes the lack of healthy food sources in poor communities as a human rights issue. Food justice also draws off of historical grassroots movements and organizing traditions such as those developed by the civil rights movement and the environmental justice movement. The food justice movement is a different approach to a community’s needs that seeks to truly advance self-reliance and social justice by placing communities in leadership of their own solutions and providing them with the tools to address the disparities within our food systems and within society at large.

This definition illustrates the movement’s emphasis on community self-reliance (particularly for the working class and communities of color), social justice, and fundamental human rights—all underdeveloped priorities in the movements for local food and CFS. Moreover, in its reference to the civil rights and environmental justice movements and its call for leadership by marginalized communities, People’s Grocery seeks to ground its work in the racialized history of the predominantly African American neighborhoods in which it works.

Like all food movements, the food justice movement is increasingly garnering the attention of scholar-activists. *Food Justice*, co-authored by Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi (2010), takes a wide-angled approach, describing injustices and activist responses in projects across the US. The authors define food justice “as ensuring that the benefits and risks of where, what, and how food is grown and produced, transported, and distributed, and accessed and eaten are shared fairly” (2010: 6). Gottlieb and Joshi argue that a number of injustices plague the indus-
trial food system, including hazardous conditions faced by farm workers and the absence of healthy food in low-income neighborhoods. They also chronicle a series of community-based responses including community gardens and farmer training, youth empowerment, farm-to-school programs, and the campaign to persuade the Obama White House (and Michelle Obama in particular) to plant an organic garden.

Gerda Wekerle (2004: 378) argues that food justice should be of particular interest to urban planners because of its attention to local organizing, community development, and engaging citizens. Wekerle describes how the food justice movement grew out of an effort to reframe the food security movement into an “explicit critique of the global food system and a theoretical framing of local initiatives as both the practice of democracy and as means of de-linking from the corporate food system” (2004: 379). Following the work of Arjun Appadurai, Wekerle claims that food justice, in its simultaneous attention to local place and transnational networks, is best understood as a translocal movement. This translocality not only changes the terrain of relationships among community members, civil society institutions, and the state, but also creates new opportunities to form alliances and coalitions across geographical boundaries. Through Wekerle’s assessment, we can clearly see the potential of food justice as an organizing tool to move beyond the neoliberal strategy of creating alternatives to argue for broader social change.

Charles Levkoe (2006) sees similar promise in the food justice movement for its potential to facilitate a shift toward more democratic food systems through transforming “consumers” into “citizens” and model a “healthy democracy” at the grassroots level. “Through food justice movements, a vision of food democracy has been adopted which directly challenges anti-democratic forces of control, exploitation, and oppression. Food democracy refers to the idea of public decision-making and increased access and collective benefit from the food system as a whole” (Levkoe 2006: 91). Levkoe believes that the benefits of developing civic virtues and critical perspectives through food justice organizing expand beyond the food system to build an overall stronger community.

Although food justice activists often foreground issues of racial inequality, these works celebrate it while eliding an explicit discussion of race. In doing so, they mirror many local food organizations’ relabeling of themselves as food justice organizations, even without leadership and direction from communities of color. We certainly applaud any integration of issues of inequality and social justice into the local food and CFS perspectives but are also concerned that as these organizations rebrand themselves as advocates of food justice, they erase the discourse’s original recognition of the need for a perspective grounded in the lived experiences of communities of color. Moreover, we fear that scholars seeking to celebrate a broad notion of food justice may be unwittingly complicit in this cooptation.

In contrast, we are both involved in the production of a new edited volume called Cultivating Food Justice (2011). This book explores the multiple ways that race and class are enmeshed in the food system, and seeks to highlight stories that might challenge or complicate the dominant narrative that has been told and retold within the food movement through examining environmental and social injustices. Citing the seminal work of Omi and Winant ([1986] 1994), the editors of the volume argue that contemporary food systems are implicated in racial projects, “political and economic undertakings through which racial hierarchies are established and racialized subjectivities created” (Alkon and Agyeman 2011: 7).

Cultivating Food Justice seeks to go beyond an examination of consumption politics to explore the structural inequalities that underlie contemporary food systems and food movements. Several chapters highlight the processes through which institutionally racist land use and agricultural policies have created widely unrecognized advantages with regard to whites’ abilities to produce food. Norgaard et al. (2011) trace how racial projects of outright genocide, lack of
recognition of land occupancy and title, and forced assimilation have resulted in a lack of access among the Karuk indigenous tribe to traditional food sources including salmon. In a parallel example, Green et al. (2011) argue that limited access to land and mistreatment on the part of federal institutions like the USDA have greatly reduced the number of African American farmers in the US. These authors argue that undermining these communities’ land tenure stripped them of a means of sustainable food production, leading to present-day food insecurity.

Like Gottlieb and Joshi’s book, *Cultivating Food Justice* also offers an array of responses, though the chapters highlight those from communities of color. For example, Mares and Peña (2011) provide an ethnographic examination of Latino/a community gardeners in Seattle and Los Angeles. The authors show how these urban farmers “weave their place-based identities into new landscapes” as they “negotiate their “social citizenship” in a “safe” and “self-made” space that can offer a buffer against elements of a nation that are increasingly hostile or ambivalent about their presence” (2011: 205). Similarly, Priscilla McCutcheon (2011) offers a fascinating analysis of the food politics of two black nationalist religious groups: the Nation of Islam and the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church, examining how both seek to address hunger and build empowerment among blacks by running organic farms in Georgia and South Carolina. These analyses open up an inquiry about the food practices of marginalized communities that operate not in opposition to, but autonomously from the mainstream alternative foods movement and demonstrate how issues of social and racial justice can be at the heart of community food work.

As is common within much of the scholarship engaging this perspective, *Cultivating Food Justice* is a largely celebratory volume aiming to give voice to and analyze this discourse. Its conclusion, however, pushes activists to acknowledge the limitations of the market-driven provision of alternatives that are at odds with this discourse’s broad structural analysis of food system inequalities. This echoes Allen’s assertion that

> effecting food justice is regularly constrained in actual practice regardless of the intentions of the actors … because of the need to work within the constraints of the current political economic system along with a push towards neoliberal forms of governance. One result is that the alternatives being developed are much more accessible to relatively more privileged people, despite intentions to the contrary. (2008: 159)

Allen’s critique signals that, despite food justice’s radical rhetoric naming food a human right, the prioritization of market-based provisioning casts food as a commodity disproportionately accessible to those who can pay. Moreover, the belief that the creation of alternatives can address the broad structural critiques identified by activists signals a lack of critical understanding of neoliberalism that can undermine efforts to create greater access to local/sustainable food. A broad understanding of and response to neoliberalism is characteristic of the food sovereignty discourse.

### The Food Sovereignty Movement

The food sovereignty discourse has developed largely through La Via Campesina, an international coalition that has devoted particular attention to the struggles and rights of Third-World peasant farmers (especially women), the impacts of neoliberal trade and agricultural policies, and the importance of working in solidarity across international borders. La Via Campesina defines food sovereignty as “the peoples’, Countries’ or State Unions’ RIGHT to define their agricultural and food policy, without any dumping vis-à-vis third countries” (2003: 1). For an
extended history of La Via Campesina and the concept of food sovereignty, see Hannah Wittman's article in this volume. As Wittman describes, food sovereignty is not necessarily "an established paradigm/concept but rather a potential new framework emerging from diverse sets of contemporary grassroots production practices and political approaches."

Food sovereignty's emphasis on rights and issues of control shifts the focus beyond the equitable provisioning of food to address more fundamental inequalities related to land distribution, resource management, and the commodification of food crops. In its engagement with global trade policy, there is a clear awareness of and direct opposition to many forms of neoliberalism, even as the buying and selling of food remains integral to the actions of food sovereignty activists. Eric Holt-Giménez argues that, "food sovereignty is a much deeper concept ... because it proposes not just guaranteed access to food, but democratic control over the food system-from production to processing, to distribution, marketing, and consumption" (2009: 246). In a related article, Holt-Giménez and Annie Shattuck (2011) outline how food sovereignty reflects a "radical" trend in food movements, as it foregrounds entitlements to resources and calls for a fundamental redistribution of wealth and power. Hence, food sovereignty activists are not mere consumers "voting with their forks," to borrow a phrase common to the local food movement, but citizens demanding that their right to food trumps the demands of the corporate food regime.

Annette Desmarais (2007) outlines the ways that La Via Campesina has placed comprehensive agrarian reform back on the table through organizing for food sovereignty. In seeking to forefront the voices and experiences of peasant farmers, Desmarais respects their desires “to establish an international space in which they can articulate their needs, interests, and demands in their own voice” (2007: 18). Although La Via Campesina has worked in opposition to the WTO and other federations like the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP), it has also “demonstrated the importance of a delegitimization that stems from disengagement—a strategy first articulated by Gandhi almost a year ago” (2007: 21). In this way, the desire for autonomy from the corporate food regime that characterizes all of the discourses described in this review is paired with direct opposition to it.

Cuba is often cast as a food sovereignty success story (Alvarez et al. 2006; Funes et al. 2002). In the late twentieth century, the collapse of the Soviet Union and tightening of the US embargo prevented Cuba from importing the inputs required by its state-owned but export-oriented agricultural system. Seeking to increase production while coping with limited inputs, the Cuban government reorganized its agricultural economy. Large portions of state-owned land were given to cooperatively organized farmers, thus increasing local control. Government research and extension focused on promoting biodiversity rather than specialized monocultures, and in developing low-cost inputs that could be produced on the farm such as compost and biological pest controls. Campesinos (farmers) who had farmed prior to the introduction of green revolution technologies played an important role in this research, as did promotores (promoters) from the Campesino a Campesino (farmer to farmer) movement. In addition, Cuba promoted urban agriculture and community gardens, and opened farmers' markets where producers could sell surplus (Alvarez et al. 2006). Yields fell initially, but recovered soon afterward and Cuba has maintained high standards of life expectancy and low rates of diet-related diseases (Amador and Peña 1991). For this reason, Rosset and Borque triumphantly describe recent Cuban history as “the overcoming of a food crisis through self-reliance, smaller farms, and agroecological technology” (2002: xv).

Given Cuba's success, it is not surprising that advocates for food sovereignty have played a leading role in analyzing and promoting solutions to the global food crisis. Analyses of the highly debated causes of this crisis include increased oil prices (Magdoff 2008), financial specu-
lation (Lappè 2009), and the increased use of crops for biofuels (Elliot 2008). The global food crisis is largely a crisis of distribution rather than production. According to Josette Sheeran, the head of the UN’s World Food Program, “There is food on shelves but people are priced out of the market” (quoted in Borger 2008: 18). Peter Rosset (2008) claims that food sovereignty is perhaps the only way out of the global food crisis. He argues that the current food crisis is the result of a systematic dismantling of the capacity of nations to produce food for themselves in the push to produce for export, a demand linked to the entry of speculative financial capital into food markets and the rise of agrofuels. According to Rosset (and other food sovereignty activists) food needs to be removed from the neoliberal trade regime imposed by the World Trade Organization and International Monetary Fund because it is not a mere commodity but necessary to human life. These trade regimes, Rosset argues, ensure that staples from wealthy countries such as the US, which are subsidized by the federal government, are exported to countries in the Global South where they bring down the prices available to farmers. Peasant farmers who can no longer feed themselves migrate to the cities, where they comprise much of the masses of urban and peri-urban poor (Davis 2006). Rosset finds promise in both the proposal of reregulating the food commodity markets that have been deregulated as a result of neoliberalism, which would allow peasants to remain in the countryside, and in applying agroecological principles so that their farming can be environmentally sustainable and independent from agribusiness inputs. Regulating these markets and promoting agroecology are two priorities of La Via Campesina.

In a similar vein, Michael Menser (2008) argues that the work of La Via Campesina and its members demonstrate the viability of transnational participatory democracy. For Menser, La Via Campesina pushes forward a framework that allows food activists to connect social and environmental issues through understanding democracy as intricately connected to self-determination and socioecological sustainable production. He shows how La Via Campesina’s structure differs from the IFAP in their “horizontality” and “transnational regionalism” and their political program of food sovereignty where agroecology is as much a political program as a model of alternative agricultural production model (see also Holt-Giménez 2006).

Philip McMichael finds extreme importance in the framework of food sovereignty as he argues that the “current agrarian question and its resolution depend on the peasantry itself, in a politicized movement on a world scale to confront the international power, and socio-ecological impact, of capital” (2006: 408). For McMichael, the demand for food sovereignty is an attempt to “respatialize” social and economic relations against the constraints of a corporate food regime. He outlines the case of maize production in Mexico to show how changes connected to the North American Free Trade Agreement resulted in commercial foods displacing both local products and local producers, resulting in peasants becoming “semi-proletarianized.” Thus, food sovereignty is part of a new campesino politics that are expressed “through reassertions of civil society through demanding territorial and/or ethnic autonomy, connecting “not simply with other agrarian and indigenous movements, but also those united with other agrarian and indigenous movements” (McMichael 2006: 414).

Although the food sovereignty movement has largely developed through the mobilization of rural peasant farmers, agro-food scholars and activists see great potential in furthering the movement in urban contexts. Raj Patel argues that the vision of food sovereignty is “important not only because it has been authored by those most directly hurt by the way contemporary agriculture is set up, but also because it offers a profound agenda for change for everyone … [as it] aims to redress the abuse of the powerless by the powerful, wherever in the food system that abuse may happen” (2007: 302).

Christina Schiavoni (2009) agrees with Patel that the US does not have the same “peasant base” as many other countries. However, she finds potential in connecting the framework of
food sovereignty to food justice activism that is already happening within urban centers across the country. Indeed, she describes several food justice activists in New York who feel the concept of food sovereignty resonates with them. For example, Yonnette Flemming of the Hattie Carthen Community Garden in Brooklyn describes food sovereignty as the overarching right of people to have “sovereign control over their own, culturally appropriate food … Most people here in New York City don’t have access to land, and lots of decisions over land use exclude the actual people most impacted by the decisions” (quoted in Schiavoni 2009: 687.). Similarly, Reverend DeVanie Jackson, whose Brooklyn Rescue Mission operates both a food pantry and an urban farm, regards the latter as “putting power in peoples’ hands” (quoted in Schiavoni 2009: 687). We certainly agree with Schiavoni that the use of a food sovereignty discourse by New York food justice activists is evidence of the increased potential to build power through the creation of broad alliances. However, we also argue that food sovereignty differs from the above-described discourses, including food justice, in several ways.

Though the previous three discourses operate primarily at the local scale, food sovereignty transcends the boundaries of the local to demand consideration of the impacts of industrialization and centralization on local food economies everywhere, forging an interdependent connection between local food systems in the United States to local food systems around the world. In this way, food sovereignty follows a transnational, or even more so, a translocal approach. The local food discourse also pays significant attention to the global food regime as it tends to advocate resistance primarily through individual consumption while food sovereignty activists directly oppose the corporate food regime. In challenging the devastating impacts of unregulated trade and agricultural policies that privilege behemoth agro-food corporations, food sovereignty seeks to fundamentally rework the politics of food and agriculture and protect the rights of those who are actually working the land.

Further, within a framework of food sovereignty, it is of central importance that food sources are consistent with cultural identities and are embedded within community networks that promote self-reliance and mutual aid. Focusing on food sovereignty allows those who are working for more sustainable food systems to move beyond questions of access to a more comprehensive focus on entitlements to land, decision making, and control over natural assets. Therefore, food becomes a right, not a commodity to be traded on the open market or dumped on the emergency food system when it no longer holds value for food retailers. Adopting these values of food sovereignty would allow US activists to go beyond the framework of “cultural appropriateness,” to really consider the cultural importance of food in sustaining social relationships and how food can be implicitly used to erode social relationships, cultural meanings, connections to place, and the exercising of rights. Further, it would allow US food activists to locate the sources of the injustices they rally against in the intersection of the corporate food regime, the transnational neoliberal policies that ensure its dominance, and the racist US policies that ensure that its harshest domestic effects are felt by communities of color. Such an analysis could guide an allied movement for food justice and food sovereignty that would not only emphasize the production of local alternatives, but also a dismantling of the policies that ensure the dominance of the corporate food regime.

Future Directions

The four reviewed bodies of literature cover a wealth of both celebratory and critical scholarship on various aspects of the food movement. Together, these pieces comprise an exciting field of research linking the production, distribution, and consumption of food to efforts for social
change. Our review has focused on how four discourses within the food movement—local food, community food security, food justice, and food sovereignty—engage with problematics of inequality and neoliberalism. We conclude by offering several directions that we believe will further these lines of inquiry and strengthen this fertile field of activist scholarship.

First, much of the scholarship we have described above has been rightly critical of the US food movement for adopting market-driven strategies that envision individual, “ethical” consumers and producers as the locus of social change. Food movement actors, however, have also turned to food policy work as a route to transform the food system and the laws that govern it. Successful policy campaigns could potentially restrict the industry’s most environmentally harmful and socially unjust practices, increase food access among marginalized communities, and mandate that all food meets higher food safety standards. The broadest of these campaigns attempts to make sweeping changes to the commodity title of the US farm bill, which subsidizes domestic staples such as corn and rice and is responsible for what food sovereignty activists call the “dumping” of cheap imports in the Global South. Changes to this bill could have sweeping effects on the corporate food regime, and are highly supported by food movement advocates around the world.

Although comprehensive changes may be far off, narrower US policy campaigns have seen recent victories. Examples include recent legislation increasing funding for school lunch and authorizing the Food and Drug Administration to demand, rather than merely request, the recall of contaminated products. Researchers following the food movement would do well to investigate campaigns such as these, offering insights on the relationship between individual, market-driven, and collective policy-oriented strategies. Questions of inequality and neoliberalism will remain paramount, as the food movement is forced to choose between competing priorities in their advocacy. For example, the increase in school lunch funding came at the expense of funds for the food stamp program, compromising the economic well-being and food decision-making power of those who qualify for these programs. Some in the food movement have also criticized the food safety legislation as placing undue burdens on mid-size businesses and small farmers, arguing that it fosters further industry consolidation. Researchers could examine the ways that various claims and counterclaims within food and agriculture policies are framed as the US food movement engages political work through the legislative process.

Attention to food policy is one way that various strains of the food movement can scale up and move beyond the local distribution of agroecologically grown food. A number of farmers who were early supporters of the local food movement have built businesses that include national, as well as local sales, and regional distribution networks are becoming increasingly common. In addition, national chains such as Whole Foods and even Walmart have signed contracts with growers to provide for particular local stores. Proponents of this trend argue that it increases food access, but we maintain that these developments call for critical assessments of the scaling up of alternative agriculture, investigating whether and how it maintains environmental sustainability and social justice. Is it possible for these networks to avoid evolving into the industrial organic sector documented by Guthman (2004)? Might this increased scale contain positive consequences for labor rights, as grocery chains are often unionized and Whole-Foods was the first national chain to sign an agreement with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers to increase farmworker pay? This is an exciting area for future work.

Another development, which exists in dynamic tension with the move toward regional and national distribution, is the embrace of a food sovereignty framework by US community activists. Researchers in the US can investigate how this framework articulates, and/or fails to articulate with US food discourses such as local food, CFS, and food justice. Local food activists often share food sovereignty’s emphasis on local peoples’ control over their food systems and the
importance of agroecological principles. CFS shares an emphasis on issues of marginalization and since 2009, the CFSC has awarded a “Food Sovereignty Prize” at their annual conference. However, neither of these US-based discourses has developed the kinds of complex formal organizational practices deployed by food sovereignty activists to ensure democratic participation within the movement. As these activists increasingly build alliances, does this engagement radicalize US actors to look at how inequalities play out within the food system they seek to change as well as the processes through which they work to change it? Moreover, do collaborations with food sovereignty activists push US actors toward dismantling the US policies described above that uphold the corporate food regime? Or, will US activists merely celebrate the focus on autonomy and sovereignty while marginalizing food sovereignty's more collective and radical goals? These questions point to ripe areas of research in which food scholars can and should engage within and across national borders.

Related to the potential for deeper articulations between food sovereignty and US-based food movements, it is essential that future research integrates a critical analysis of gendered dynamics within food movement activism. With an emphasis on the rights and roles of women at all levels of the food system, the food sovereignty paradigm offers a beginning point for research in this area and has the potential to guide studies that explore building alliances between women within and across food movements. Although the topic of gender and food activism has recently made its way into popular treatments of contemporary food politics (e.g., Costa 2010) academic research on this connection is sparse. There is clearly a need for studies that are informed by an intersectional understanding of how race, class, and gender are mutually constitutive within food systems, particularly as feminist scholars (ourselves included) are increasingly drawn to studying and participating in food politics.

Another exciting area for investigation outside of the United States is exploring how global food sovereignty activists have fared in nations that have elected left-wing leaders. Several Latin American countries, including Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador, have recently elected leaders explicitly concerned with reducing inequality and several have mentioned land reform and other issues relevant to food sovereignty activists. Of the four discourses discussed here, food sovereignty most explicitly recognizes the effects of national and global trade policy on local circumstances and is regularly invoked in these nations. These activists in the Global South seem well poised to advocate for measures that will increase their ability to feed themselves. However, even support from these national governments may not be enough to change the global political structures that favor the corporate food regime. Future research in this area could examine the specific processes by which these nations are pushing for change, the degree to which public discourses of transformation reflect on-the-ground realities, and the ways that these movements are represented in the United States and other nations central to the corporate food regime.

Finally, nearly all of the research summarized above takes the food movement itself, and its ability to create positive social change, as its object of study. Future studies may instead choose to examine the food movement as a way to speak to broader concerns about the workings of inequality and neoliberalism. In this recommendation we follow Brown and Getz who argue, “agro-food case studies can contribute to the growing body of literature exploring the unevenness and particularity of neoliberalization processes by considering how broader neoliberal technologies articulate with local circumstances” (2008: 1185). We also follow Minkoff-Zern and her coauthors (2011) who examine how policies restricting land ownership have helped to establish and reinforce racial categories and inequalities, a process they call “agricultural racial formation.” Both of these avenues of research view food movements not as an end in themselves, but as elements of broader social processes and movements for justice. Studies in this
area can ask not only whether and how food movements can be transformative, but what food movements can teach us about a host of subjects including race, neoliberalism, and the global political economy.

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