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Growing Food *and* Justice

Dismantling Racism through Sustainable Food Systems

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Awareness of food and nutrition problems facing Americans has grown rapidly over the past five years, fueled by the writings of many including Michael Pollan and Barbara Kingsolver, the wide release of films like *Super Size Me* and *Fast Food Nation*, and the contributions of celebrity chefs such as Alice Waters and Odessa Piper who focus our attention on food-related inequalities and local foods. Paradoxically, many Americans, particularly low-income people and people of color, are overweight yet malnourished. They face an overwhelming variety of processed foods, but are unable to procure a well-balanced diet from the liquor stores and mini-marts that dominate their neighborhoods.

These groups are food insecure, but furthermore, they are victims of food injustice. The early-twentieth-century wave of work represented by Ebenezer Howard's *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (1902) and Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) helped foster the Food and Drug act of 1906, but not since then has food been the subject of so much popular attention. However, for the last twenty years there has been a kind of "call and response" that has produced a web of relationships among government, scholars, nonprofit organizations, and foundations all interested in understanding food insecurity and food injustice. Definitions of important concepts like food security have been developed, organizations like the Community Food Security Coalition have grown up, foundations, universities, and government have developed programs to fund food research and practice, and nascent food justice organizations have emerged and are now populating communities around the country.

In this chapter I describe one of the newest threads in this web of activity, that of the Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative (GFJI), a loose coalition of organizations developed under the auspices of Growing Power, Inc., a food justice organization based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, with offices in Chicago, Illinois, and a loose coalition of

regional affiliates. Food justice organizations borrow from most every strand in the web of interrelated organizations and ideas, but they focus on issues of racial inequality in the food system by incorporating explicit antiracist messages and strategies into their work. This chapter chronicles in part how GFJI developed in response to the relative absence of people of color in the food system (Slocum 2006). Further, using three case studies I show how food justice organizations have responded to GFJI in different ways and how they are weaving together various threads from the larger web into their own activities and toward their own goals as they develop their own approaches to food justice.

Food Justice in Historical and Contemporary Economic Context

Over the last century or so food security (and its consequences) has ebbed and flowed in local and national consciousness. Nineteenth-century proponents of "social medicine" exposed the relationships among health, housing, sanitation, nutrition, and work conditions endured by new immigrants and the poor. Social justice was at the root of social medicine (Krieger and Birn 1998), and public health was created as an organized government response to the health-related consequences of urbanization and industrialization.[1] Part of this web was the budding urban planning movement and its work designing cities for self-sustainability, including food security. The intersection of economic, health, and food concerns prompted cities to establish local public markets, like Chicago's Maxwell Street Market, promoting food regulation and security, incorporating new immigrants, and providing employment opportunities (Morales 2000).[2] Likewise, the community gardening movement played an important role in food security until mid-century (Lawson 2005). The Great Depression produced local programs, like Detroit's Capuchin Soup Kitchen (founded in 1929) and federal policies (notably the Food Stamp program created in 1939), addressing food-related problems. In the absence of a consistent food policy, these various programs and policies developed in many directions throughout the mid-twentieth century, eventually producing some contradictory results (Amenta 2000).

Through midcentury self-provisioning decreased, population increased and the "industrialization" of food took center stage. During the 1960s and 1970s two important groups rediscovered the political economy of food. The one we know about includes the middle class and other white populations seeking to regain control over elements of the food system (Allen 2004; Slocum 2006). Indeed the work of growing, processing, and

selling food began to change when they recognized "industrial" food for its effect on human health and the environment. Their critical engagement with food (re)opened niches in the food system for historical practices like community gardens and marketplaces and new practices like community supported agriculture (CSA), but it also made food more expensive just as industrial food was becoming more inexpensive and convenient. However, the very changes that made food inexpensive and convenient also put an important population, residents of the inner cities, in food jeopardy. Without the intellectual, organizational, and financial resources of the white middle class, this population was largely without the power to carve suitable niches from the food system. Instead, in the midst of plentiful and inexpensive food, this population lost access and developed food-related health problems.

How? The answer is well known to few and lies with market-driven decision making by large grocery store retailers. The transformation of the retail food sector is largely overlooked in this literature but bears significantly on the food security and health concerns of racial minority and poor populations. During the 1960s and 1970s, large retailers made decisions that helped create food access problems and have, unwittingly, helped produce the food justice movement. One recent report, *Access to Affordable and Nutritious Food: Measuring and Understanding Food Deserts and Their Consequences* (USDA 2009; see also Raja, Ma, and Yadev 2008) describes the phenomenon of food deserts and elaborates how inadequate or nonexistent transportation and limited proximity to grocery stores create the conditions for food deserts and subsequent health problems. But the report does not explicitly connect how suburbanization and decreasing profit margins prompted decisions to relocate grocery stores from inner cities to the suburbs. Some reference to history will make this clear.

Eisenhauer (2001) and Wrigley (2002) indicate how economic decisions made in corporate headquarters impact local food context. Over the last fifty years major grocery chains have sought suburban locations to accommodate larger stores, more parking spaces, and higher profits (USDA 2009). Eisenhauer (2001) refers to this trend as "supermarket redlining," or the process by which corporations avoid low-profit areas. Consider the impact on food access of such decision making. In 1914 American cities had fifty neighborhood grocery stores per square mile, an average of one for every street corner (Zelchenko 2006). Mayo (1993) documents store design and industry changes that transformed groceries from small neighborhood operations to large chains. Just as some were

rediscovering healthy food in the 1960s, grocers began following the migration of the middle class from the city to the suburbs. The Business Enterprise Trust indicated the attitude, "It makes no sense to serve distressed areas when profits in the serene suburbs come so easily" (qtd. in Eisenhauer 2001). For instance, between 1968 and 1984, Hartford, Connecticut, lost eleven out of its thirteen grocery chains, and between 1978 and 1984 Safeway closed more than 600 inner city stores around the country (Eisenhauer 2001).

This mass departure reduced food access for low-income and minority people. Morland's multistate study (2002) found four times as many grocery stores in predominantly white neighborhoods as predominantly black ones, and other studies have noted that inner-city supermarkets have higher prices and a smaller selection of the fresh, wholegrain, nutritious foods (Sloane 2004). When taken with a general retreat from "hunger" by the USDA,[3] the market-driven relocation of groceries to the suburbs left behind the conditions for a public health disaster.

Food, and poor nutrition in particular, is a risk factor in four of the six leading causes of death in the United States—heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer (Pollan 2008). We know that race and class inequalities produce insufficient nutrition and increase food-related disease. We know that what people eat and how they eat contributes significantly to mortality, morbidity, and increasing health care costs. By contrast, we know how food relates to good health (Institute of Medicine 2002). And when we think of access to fresh, whole foods we typically think it is dependent on income and on where one lives. Thus, decision making on locating grocery stores created "food deserts," and public health problems, but also germinated a new food coalition: the Community Food Security Coalition.

Food Security and the Community Food Security Coalition

The 1995 Community Food Security Empowerment Act document proposed community food security as the conceptual basis for evaluating and addressing food system problems. Endorsed by more than 125 organizations, the act defined *community food security* (CFS) as "all persons obtaining at all times a culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through local non-emergency sources."[4] The Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) is the dominant private, nonprofit organization in the field of CFS. The CFSC engaged the public to create locally based alternatives and framed hunger and malnutrition as prob-

lems that should be addressed by c*ommunities* not just by individuals, cities, or by national policy (Anderson and Cook 1999; Gottlieb and Fisher 1996). This represents a return to community context emphasized by public health, social medicine, and early public-sector planning efforts.

According to Gottlieb and Fisher (1996), environmental justice and civil rights provided important ideas for the CFS ethos. Here we stress how CFS describes food security in ways particularly germane to communities of color. These include the emphases on culturally acceptable diets and on community responsibility, not individual blame, for food security and healthy eating. Further, CFS thinking explicitly incorporated social justice as a key goal. The CFSC publishes materials in Spanish and has had notable people of color on its board of directors, including MacArthur Genius award winner Will Allen; Young Kim, executive director of Milwaukee's Fondy Farmers Market; Cynthia Torres of the Boulder County Farmers Market Association; and Demalda Newsome of Newsome Family Farms. By configuring and using the concept of Community Food Security, the CFSC has altered the discussion of food systems in the United States, particularly in federal government policy toward food security, and in how community-based organizations perceive and respond to food security problems.

While most U.S. government funding targeted food security through emergency food programs, the CFS framework was adopted in some federal agencies. Since 1996 the USDA has funded the Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program (CFPCGP) in an effort to reduce food insecurity and boost the self-sufficiency of low-income communities. Community Food Projects (CFPs) are "designed to increase food security in communities by bringing the whole food system together to assess strengths, establish linkages, and create systems that improve the self-reliance of community members over their food needs" (USDA 2010). CFS works with individuals in the context of their community and thus is identified as a "capacity building" approach to communities, empowering communities to find healthy food solutions. This approach stands distinct to "medical" approaches toward problems of food access, hunger, and so on (Gottlieb and Fisher 1996).

Since its inception in 1996, the Competitive Grant Program has funded more than 240 projects in forty-five different states, the District of Columbia, and a U.S. territory with grants ranging from $10,400 to $300,000. Recent projects include the Tohono O'odham Community Action's "Traditional Food Project" in Sells, Arizona; the Lower East

Side Girls Club of New York's "Growing Girls, Growing Communities" project in Manhattan; Green Bay, Wisconsin's Brown County Task Force on Hunger's "Community Garden Outreach Program"; and the Friends of Bowdoinham Public Library's "Food Freaks" project in Bowdoinham, Maine (USDA 2007). This financial support has encouraged new ideas about food security, many of which were fostered by the Community Food Security Coalition.

In addition to capacity building, CFSC helped establish and promulgate the most popular definition of community food security: "Community food security is 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" (Hamm and Bellows 2003). The general impulse of the CFSC community-based systems approach recovers and incorporates the "social" medicine, planning, and public health emphases by focusing on the community but understanding the individual's importance therein. Winne (n.d.) articulates the system-level approach: "in contrast to anti-hunger approaches that primarily focus on federal food assistance programs or emergency food distribution, CFS encourages progressive planning that addresses the underlying causes of hunger and food insecurity. Planning itself encourages community-based problem-solving strategies and promotes collaborative, multi-sector processes (Raja, Born, and Russell 2008). . . . While CFS embraces all approaches, even if they only provide short-term hunger relief, it places special emphasis on finding long-term, system-based solutions." This kind of systems-focused thinking means that Community Food Projects seek to improve low-income communities' access to healthy food as well as local farmers' ability to legally and competitively produce and market that food. In short, CFS has merged issues of food insecurity with local and sustainable agriculture.

The CFS movement has successfully increased the visibility of the food system through outreach and community organizing around food. This frames food as a compelling rural and urban issue, motivates policy forums for food, and impels the creation of new food research tools that, taken together, help *reconstruct* the place of food on the urban policy agenda.[5] However, despite the agenda setting and policy-making successes, food insecurity is growing in the United States. According to the USDA, in 2007 36.2 million Americans lived in food-insecure households, including 12.4 million children. Approximately 22 percent of black households and 20 percent of Hispanic households are considered

food insecure, compared with 8 percent of white households (USDA n.d.). In this context it would be no surprise for organizations to emerge with an explicit interest in ameliorating food security problems of people of color in the United States.

Food Justice and the Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative

The effort to reconstruct the foodscape for people of color has augmented the discussion of food security with organizing around the concept of food justice. This idea grew from racial inequality in food access and its accompanying public health problems. In the same way that the civil rights movement grew from racial inequalities in housing, voting, transportation, and the like, new voices are naming the racism in food, but they are not alone. Tom Vilsack expressed these racial inequalities, in his first major speech as the U.S. secretary of agriculture under President Obama. Vilsack wondered aloud what the founder of the USDA, Abraham Lincoln, would find if he walked into the USDA building today and asked, "How are we doing?" "And he'd be told," said Vilsack, "'Mr. President, some folks refer to the USDA as the last plantation.' And he'd say, 'What do you mean by that?' 'Well it's got a pretty poor history when it comes to taking care of folks of color. It's discriminated against them in programming and it's made it somewhat more difficult for some people of color to be hired and promoted. It's not a very good history, Mr. President" (Federation of Southern Cooperatives 2009).

Although the CFS framework was explicitly dedicated to social justice, the early CFSC leadership was predominantly white while a number of coalition members were people of color. The justice orientation of the CFSC combined with demands from its membership led to incorporating people of color into the board and committees. But some people of color working within the CFSC expressed frustration that many white members were unwilling to examine issues of racial privilege within the organization (Slocum 2006).[6]

Erika Allen, a person of biracial decent, recalled the initial disjunction and how the CFSC responded: "Initially, people of color were not well represented on CFSC committees, many people of color attended the conferences, but we were not represented on board. Slowly the membership pressed the organization, but some of us were frustrated by the slow movement of the CFSC on those problems associated with communities of color." Aware of the food access problems in their communities and

discerning the linkages between race and food, Allen and others sharing her views began to couch food security problems as problems of *food justice*. For these leaders food justice is on par with food security. They recognize CFSC success with food security and with identifying problems in communities of color, but, according to Allen, "the results of CFSC policies, helpful though they are, are not reflected in those communities' particular context."

Impelled by slow movement they perceived on their issues in the CFSC, and desiring a more complete translation of their issues to their communities, a small group of like-minded people, mostly of color, decided to sidestep the CFSC and move on to do the hard work of growing an initiative (the GFJI). They did not seek a new organization per se; rather, according to Allen, "we decided to do it ourselves, create a system that works for us, something we do together, we learn from each other. We have not created a new organization but we are teaching each other to see and dismantle food injustice and use our organizations to reconstruct parts of the food system without destroying the CFSC and the good work they do." In this view, the food justice movement is more about complementing food security, not supplanting it, creating working relationships between organizations, and embracing what Allen calls "the dynamic tension" between CFSC and the emergent food justice movement. The GFJI works to promote individual and organizational empowerment through training, networking, and creating a supportive community. Erika Allen points to the fact that many people keep their feet in both worlds, and contribute to both communities as a hopeful sign of how they can work together.

While racially motivated food justice has scant and scattered organizational infrastructure, its current manifestation does have a name and a place of origin.[7] The GFJI was established under the auspices of Growing Power, Inc., the Milwaukee-based organization founded by MacArthur Award winner Will Allen, Erika Allen's father. Since 1993, Will, Erika, and Growing Power staff have worked with diverse local communities to develop community food systems responsive to the circumstances of people of color. At about the same time as the USDA and CFSC initiatives began, Will Allen started a two-acre urban farm in a food-insecure Milwaukee community. The produce is sold in the community at affordable prices. But Growing Power is much more than an urban farm: it sponsors national and international workshops on food security, maintains flourishing aquaponics and vermicomposting programs, helps teach leadership skills, and provides on-site training in

sustainable food production. The organization embodies the community-based, systemic approach of CFS by reconnecting vulnerable populations to healthy food and by developing empowered individuals in economically and socially marginalized communities.

Erika Allen has played a key role in establishing the Growing Food and Justice Initiative, which promises to expand Will Allen's vision (Allen n.d.). The GFJI has its roots in the critique of the CFSC, but came to fruition as part of Growing Power's 2006 strategic planning process. Erika Allen pushed hard to add "dismantling racism" to other, more mundane and typical organizational goals found in a strategic planning process. Jerry Kaufman, emeritus professor of planning at the University of Wisconsin and president of the board supported her goal, but also described it as "close to the foul line." He argued, "Not many nonprofit organizations would seek such a broad goal." Will Allen was also initially reluctant, as he was burdened with day-to-day organizational operations, but Erika Allen insisted on amending the plan to include "dismantling racism." Kaufman refers to her as "a real driver" in dismantling racism throughout organizational processes, but also in seeking that goal in the larger community and society. She "set that issue on a pedestal" and increased awareness in an organization already dedicated to inclusivity, he said. However, the Growing Power board recognized that the additional activity accompanying this expanded mission might overwhelm the organization, so instead of internalizing the initiative they decided to support the creation of the GFJI, which would focus most explicitly on using the food system as a means to dismantle racism.

Growing Power diverted some resources to the GFJI, and over many months Erika Allen and her colleagues developed the vision for the first GFJI conference in September 2008. Supported by the Noyes Foundation of Milwaukee and the USDA Risk Management Agency, the first GFJI conference attracted more than four hundred people. The conference was designed to bring people together to network, learn from each other, and forge new partnerships around food system self-determination for low-income communities and communities of color. Following the first conference Allen couched her reminiscences in civil rights language: "Food is the next frontier of the civil rights movement. As a child of that movement, I think about it a lot." Indeed we can see how her less prominent but vital efforts behind the scenes recall the role of women of color in earlier civil rights movements.[8] In fact, were it not for her efforts GFJI and the first gathering would not have come to be.

By choosing to focus explicitly on racism and sustainable food systems, GFJI created space for a diverse community to join together and support one another in the eradication of racism and the growth of sustainable food systems. As Pothukuchi points out, "in the 1990s, the community food security concept was devised as a framework for integrating solutions to the problems faced by poor households (such as hunger, limited access to healthy food, and obesity), and those faced by farmers (such as low farm-gate prices, pressures toward consolidation, and competition from overseas)" (2007, 7). By adding the additional concern of racism, GFJI has effectively tightened the connections already implicit in the concept of community food security: racially diverse households and farmers are some of the most at-risk groups in the communities targeted by USDA Community Food Projects. GFJI demonstrates the widespread appeal of an organization that combines the challenging topics of racism, sustainable agriculture, and community food security. But as Will Allen points out, these problems cannot be untangled, and must be tackled simultaneously. He notes, "We are all responsible for dismantling racism and ensuring more sustainable communities, which is impossible without food security."

For its member organizations, GFJI acts as a coordinating body, a source of emotional and spiritual sustenance, and a site for germinating and sharing fresh ideas. Each month one or more "germinators" convene a conference call, on a subject of interest to member organizations. Topics range widely, from the impact of the Obama administration on food-related problems to power sharing; and from developing effective multicultural leadership to sharing strategies for getting food to low-income communities. These monthly calls, which sustain the initiative without having to support an organizational infrastructure, are an important and ongoing source of ideas and support for these organizations.[9]

Often led by people of color, food justice organizations see dismantling racism as part of food security. By taking an explicitly racialized approach, the food justice movement moves away from the colorblind perspective described by Julie Guthman in chapter 12 of this book. The food justice approach aligns movement organizations explicitly with the interests of communities and organizations whose leaders have felt marginalized by white-dominated organizations and communities. By creating a space explicitly intended for the exploration of the particular challenges facing communities of color, the food justice movement has encouraged these communities to get the help and the support that they

require to continue their work. The GFJI provides some logistical support, an annual conference, and networking opportunities, but perhaps most important, a sense of community, continuity, and connection among colorful communities working to improve their food security.

By bringing the individual organizations together in a cohesive body, GFJI relates racial social critique to antiracist tools of sustainable agriculture in the service of creating a nationwide network dedicated to implementing food justice strategies. In addition, GFJI provides its members with the important sense of belonging to an organization whose goals are directly aligned with their own: although many sustainable agriculture and CFS organizations have fostered the ambitions of people and communities of color over the years, they have not always shared the antiracist agenda. GFJI places racism front and center in the context of food and agriculture, allowing its members to feel confident that they are engaged in a community that shares their ideals and aspirations, and creating an infrastructure through which these organizations can support each other. This is a particularly important point in light of the overwhelming challenges involved in challenging the deeply entrenched and richly funded agribusiness industry, in addition to government agencies with deeply racist histories, such as the USDA. In the first coalition conference—GFJI I—organizations from around the country presented their work across race and the food system, and not surprisingly responded to the agenda in different ways, making clear two things: first, the variety of approaches and practices there are among antiracist food system organizations; and second, how the GFJI fulfilled its purpose by becoming an opportunity for each organization to articulate its unique approach, learn from the nuances others described, and even find that the GFJI might not be what they need.

Growing Food and Justice for All—The First Conference

The first GFJI conference, GFJI I, held September 18–21, 2008, was significant work, yet demonstrated that a light infrastructural touch could create a national forum for hearing from and supporting food justice organizations from around the country. At GFJI I people would hear their stories of particular struggles and successes, have their identity reinforced, and their practices celebrated and even reconstructed with support from like-minded organizations. Broadly speaking, attendees presented three types of work at the conference: identifying and combating racism; describing political efforts on behalf of immigrant workers

or other disenfranchised communities of color; and reimagining the participation of immigrants, indigenous peoples and other communities of color within the food system. In the remainder of this chapter I offer three case studies of projects that comprise this final category of work.[10]

Case Study 1: Creating Opportunities for Hmong Farmers

Young Kim is the executive director of the Fondy Food Center in Milwaukee Wisconsin—a nonprofit "farm to fork" food system agency working to bring locally grown produce into Milwaukee's inner city. A second-generation Korean American, he was born in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and raised in Louisiana and North Carolina. Bridging traditions was not easy, but became useful: "Growing up in a traditional Korean household in the Deep South was weird," he says, "I learned to have two identities—at home I was a good Korean boy and at school I was a good ol' boy. The whole time I hated myself for doing it, but now I realize that learning to navigate between the two cultures is what I had to do to fit in and survive." Young's experience is similar to that of many professionals of color traversing relationships and experiences as they create rich identities capable of interfacing with various stakeholders. This interpersonal capacity has served him well as a board member of the CFSC.

When Young took the reins of the Fondy Food Center in 2003, he found an organization incompletely filling its mission to create family-sustaining jobs and increase the number of healthy and affordable food options in the inner city. The Center relied on a Milwaukee food assessment to legitimize efforts to increase employment and access to healthy food, but was not systematically incorporating the elements available to fulfill its mission. In assessing the situation, Young was drawn to the agency's thirty Hmong-American farmers and their struggle to find an economic niche and make a profit. He visited their operations and found disturbing trends. Almost all Hmong immigrants rented land using only oral agreements, often paying up to $450 per acre per season—four times the going market rate for white farmers. The Hmong farmers also made do without amenities such as tractors, irrigation, cold storage, and greenhouse access that other more traditional American farmers in the region take for granted.

Young immediately implemented a systems-level approach to addressing these problems facing this immigrant population. He began orchestrating three elements: his staff, his time and role, and his vision for a way to link farm to inner-city consumer. First, he directed his staff to

coordinate training for these farmers in the off season on topics such as marketing, crop insurance, and record keeping. Second, he focused the Fondy Farmers Market to simultaneously improve access to consumers and provide consumers with healthy produce choices. Third, he began to establish relationships with the local philanthropic community to secure resources and further legitimize his efforts. He then prepared a talk for GFJI I.

While Young is a veteran of the Community Food Security Coalition, a member of their board of directors, and a longtime supporter of CFS, he was cautiously hopeful about presenting at GFJI I. But he was disappointed by the first conference: "To be quite frank, the presentation that we did at GFJI left a lot to be desired. I think we had one person from the conference attend our workshop on Hmong immigrant farmers, and there were no relationships or networks that emerged from the GFJI conference." No conference is perfect for every participant and though disappointed by the turnout at his session Young was happy he attended GFJI I because on further reflection, he noted one potentially useful relationship. "We did co-present with a Minnesota farming organization, and while that interaction was useful, follow up networking has been minimal." For Young Kim, GFJI is still a work in progress, something he would admit is a two-way street and his current CFSC and Fondy commitments limit the amount of time he can devote to GFJI. However, his work with Fondy and the CFSC represent the spirit of GFJI, in the same way that GFJI is in some ways an echo of the CFSC.

Young is clearly concerned with antiracism and justice in the food system. His most prominent contribution to antiracism is helping the Hmong establish their reputation as hard-working new immigrants contributing to the community. But he has worked hard to secure equitable access to resources so that food security is better realized. His most prominent success in that area was during the summer of 2009, when a leading Milwaukee philanthropist allocated forty acres from her family farm for Fondy farmers to rent at reasonable rates starting in 2011. Thus, in orchestrating his and his organization's efforts Young promotes food justice and food security in various ways. He is hopeful, but he also recognizes the explicitly racialized process facing new immigrants when he contemplates the future for Hmong farmers in Wisconsin. "The Hmong are some of the most talented farmers because I've seen them grow things that aren't supposed to grow in Wisconsin," he goes on, "and if we can guide them through this uniquely American immigrant process where they go through the wringer and emerge as Hmong

Americans with their farming traditions intact, our country will be stronger for it. But in the meantime, it is a real struggle" (emphasis in original). Clearly Young's commitment to food justice is related to his commitment to food security and the broader relationship between agricultural practices and community identity.

Like the examples that follow, Young's analysis of the Hmong farmers' circumstances and his actions on their behalf demonstrates the interconnectedness of food, agriculture, community, health, and employment—in other words, an expansive constellation of ideas and behaviors in practice. This recalls the early historical work of planning, social medicine, and public health that understood communities as independent in some ways, but interrelated as well. Young's work relies on relationships that he creates and fosters, but it is also anchored in, and legitimized by, the ongoing work of Milwaukee's government—in providing assessments and other tools for him to do his work. At one and the same time, Young and others like him are replicating and updating the historical planning efforts that linked food, cities, and employment.

Case Study 2: Indigenous Farming Traditions

While the Hmong are among the newest Americans facing challenges to their food security, Native Americans have been struggling with this issue for centuries. Ben Yahola is co-director of the Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative & Earthkeepers Voices for Native America. For him, co-director Vicky Karhu, and their organization in Oklahoma, the challenge is to reintroduce farming and food preparation methods that are more culturally and ecologically appropriate and contribute to building a sense of community and a healthier lifestyle. Yahola and Karhu feel that the community they build is explicitly political, economic, social, and spiritual.

Yahola represented the organization at GFJI I. He directed his first thoughts to the political history of food and the environment. "The indigenous in America embraced the early immigrants. As Europeans exported back to their homelands metals, herbs and spices, they also took with them democracy, the power of the people," he said. "This people power we had was based on nature and the spiritual relationship to the ecology and the food system, and both of these continue in the indigenous communities today." Yahola, like other indigenous or "first peoples" displaced from their original homes, embodies a curious interweaving of person and place, having both a specific and a more generalized respect for the land, but moreover, an intense connection to the

systemic interrelationships binding together people, place, and process. At the same time his language indicates how this interwoven reality is readily adaptable to new concepts such as the "food system."

His political view extends to a critique of the early European immigrants and ties institutional racism to democracy of food and environment: "The newcomers have for centuries been unable to exercise the true meaning of democracy in food and environment so the authorities opted to establish in federal law the Christian Doctrine of Discovery, a philosophy legalizing the removal of indigenous people from their homelands. It is currently the foundation of the American Indian Policy and Law." Again, this direct linkage of racial critique to democratic processes to food and environment, and to institutional racism, is at the heart of food justice thinking. Yahola focused on the political component of the extraordinary disconnection between food and politics, economics, and ecology, a disconnection with real and severe consequences for indigenous communities, as is described in chapter 2 in this book.

For Yahola, participating in GFJI was another step toward reclaiming native food and cultural traditions through the decolonizing process of truth telling. As he put it, "With allies we are now reconnecting with the land both experientially and ideologically. The indigenous of the Americas are improving the health and food/cultural sovereignty of their communities." Food and culture are strictly woven together in many indigenous traditions. Absent one means erosion of the other, and Yahola understands well how closely articulated food and cultural practices can help empower individual identity and increase community political power. Further, recovering farming practices implies a close connection to context. The truth of contextualized experience is important to indigenous people who for centuries have honed plant species to fit particular growing conditions, and have developed culinary methods suited to what is grown and when.

As described in chapter 2, Native Americans experience extremely high rates of diabetes. Yahola recognizes the food-related roots of this disease in his own work: "The metabolic disorders have caused our cultural wisdom keepers to die in the early stages of their life. Now the youth are affected by the dominant society's corporate influences promoting unhealthy foods and lifestyles. At times we feel powerless, but I found new ways of changing our internalized oppression into physical action, ways that awaken the spirit to do something positive to improve our health." The challenge for Yahola and his organization was to find

a tool to help critique this oppression and develop the knowledge and practices to replace it with more healthy expression.

At GFJI I, he found his tool. He attended the Theater of the Oppressed workshop, which is dedicated to the mission of using theater to help people understand, critique, and transform their context (Boal 1985). From participating in the workshop he says, "I discovered an alternative method of physical expression related to our current cultural conditions." Recently the Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative has incorporated the Theater of the Oppressed methods in its annual Mvskoke Creek Nation Diabetes Summit. Doing so helps members form a critique of oppression by establishing a critical distance through analysis and representation of their circumstances and their goals.

Yahola's presentation and his work reflect both antiracism and a community food-security perspective. His work against racism also emphasizes self-determination and cultural sovereignty. Though the ideas are allied, he deploys them with different emphases contingent on his purpose. He uses the ideas together to make a political critique, one that is both antiracist and community empowering. His work on food security embraces the CFS perspective and is reflected in his ongoing work on food sovereignty and the linkage of food security to health. This food/health connection is important to the tribe because the relationship between food and health is central to maintaining the strength of the tribe, the culture-keepers, and others who help preserve the tribe and whose wisdom helps it adapt to changing circumstances. Like Young, Yahola mobilizes elements of both the CFS and the GFJI perspective, but unlike Young, his experience at GFJI bore immediate fruit, useful to the goals he has for his tribe.

Case Study 3: The Rural Enterprise Center

Between the experience of the most recent group (the Hmong) and the oldest group (the Mvskoke) lies the Latino experience, one constantly renewed by new immigrants even as some Latinos can trace their history in North America for hundreds of years. GFJI I helped organizations that are reconfiguring the Latino immigrant experience. Many farm- and food-related organizations around the country recognize that immigrant farmers face the same challenges that all small farmers do, but have additional burdens of cultural, racial, and social barriers, together with limited experience and knowledge of the agricultural system and farming methods in America. Likewise, these groups have group-relevant resources they can draw upon in reconfiguring their experience. Thus,

while carving a niche for themselves, these groups are also exploiting new production practices and models of organization that specifically draw on ethnic resources, constituting in effect a new hybrid organization.

In Northfield, Minnesota, a Guatemalan immigrant named Regi Haslett-Marroquin is organizing a largely Mexican group of immigrants in adopting their agriculture experience to the growing conditions of the upper Midwest. To better understand his work, we can review how most people start a farm. Typically, they follow one or a combination of the following paths: marry into a farming operation, inherit a farm, or purchase a farm. None of these options is particularly viable for new immigrant families in Minnesota. Consider first the case of Latino/Hispanic families marrying into a farming operation. This uncommon occurrence does not constitute a systematic option for creating new agricultural enterprises. Second, inheriting a farm requires preexisting farmers and children who desire to inherit the farm. Even if there would be willing children, there are virtually no farmers of color in Minnesota, and fewer new immigrant families or Latino/Hispanic families who have established farms that they might eventually leave behind. Finally, in terms of purchasing a farm, one must have access to credit, which is not the case for the largest percentage of the Latino population that also has a farming vocation. Most immigrants flock to the perceived opportunities of cities, seeking escape from the perceived disadvantages and inconveniences and the diminished status associated with agriculture.

On top of all of these issues, Latinos (and Young could echo this for Hmong farmers) often face the same crude racism and discrimination in rural areas where land is still affordable. A well-meaning network of farmers and a supporting community can surround a Latino family, but it takes only one or two individuals who are racist or discriminatory to turn the situation into a nightmare. Regi's own story, narrated on American Public Media's *The Story* radio program[11] reveals the bigotry he experienced while founding a sustainable farm in rural Minnesota. On the basis of his work with immigrant farmers, he knows about how immigrants new to a community are pestered by prejudiced neighbors whose complaints might include calls to county officials reporting anything from a dog barking too much, to roosters making noise too early, to where cars are parked, to unfounded claims that there are "illegal" people living on the farm, and so on. Reflecting on his experience and learning the stories of other immigrants prompted Regi to initiate the Latino Enterprise Center, now the Rural Enterprise Center (REC), a

program of the Mainstreet Initiative, which is a rural downtown development program in Minnesota.

Regi's impulse was both social and economic. He recognized that the immigrants laboring on farms and in processing facilities would produce more economic value if they owned their own operations. Once these operations were established, the economic benefits produced by the new farmers would reverberate though the community. Furthermore, Regi reasoned that a new and better social place in society could follow the farmers' economic success. Instead of being castigated for not contributing to society, immigrants establishing their own ventures could gain praise in learning to play useful roles in the community. The REC model assumes the immigrant is willing to take on risky business ventures, and that the immigrant's experience is valuable to the success of that venture. Many immigrants reject agriculture because it provided no opportunities for mobility in their country of origin. But Regi and the REC want to help immigrants to reframe their role as not only a source of labor, but as potential contributors to many important parts of economic and social life.

At GFJI I Regi shared the REC model he developed for establishing new farmers and for improving the prospects for new immigrants in rural Minnesota. The key to the REC strategy is building relationships: between people, between immigrants and their experience, their new circumstances, and between organizations. An infrastructure of supportive relationships reduces the risks and barriers to farmers entering the food and agriculture sector. The following review of the overall strategy details the four phases from REC documents,[12] and shows how each phase helps transform the immigrant's economic identity and how they view their experiences.

In phase I immigrants from a community are gathered together, and their history and knowledge are assessed as well as their interest in farming or processing agricultural products. This reconfigures the immigrant experience in an important way. Previously immigrants were sought solely for labor, not for their unique entrepreneurial contributions, but in phase I they are encouraged, even expected, to trade their identity as labor for an entrepreneurial identity. Phase I creates relationships among immigrant families and identifies or establishes networks among them. In this way the REC discovers who is serious about farming. Potential leaders are identified among the beginning farmers in each community, and the REC maps other assets and the power structure in the community. Using this information leaders reach out to potential farmers stuck,

for instance, in factory jobs that prevent them from flourishing and engaging their skills and assets associated with their potential farming vocation.

Phase II is an extensive screening process, which incorporates the potential farmer into large community garden plots, market gardening plots (up to one acre in size), or existing poultry production in association with other immigrant families. After a season the potential farmer is familiar with seasonal growing patterns , the rigorous planning needed in the northern climate to avoid natural risks and crop failures, and so on. In phase II the transformation process picks up speed as promising participants are filtered from those who lose interest or choose other paths. Over the course of a growing season these potential farmers are provided with concrete experience to reestablish their skills in this new context. But no farmer goes it alone: the immigrants work together and support each other and at the end of the season evaluate their experience (see figure 7.1).

Formal training in phase III then begins. This training is year-round, hands-on work in an ongoing enterprise. Here the immigrants learn the tools of the trade, as well as the variety of roles associated with different enterprises. In this way their transformation from laborer to farmer is almost complete in that they are enabled to think and speak like existing farm/food processing operators about the same problems of credit and management that all farmers face. But the big difference is that they have

Figure 7.1
Through the Minnesota Project, immigrant farmers work together in small operations to raise chickens

their own experiences to reflect on and use to reconfigure operations in light of their unique resources and knowledge. Phase III is the formal training and technical assistance stage. The REC is engaging this stage by launching an Agripreneur Training Center, where up to twelve specialized prototype enterprises are developed for training purposes. Each training enterprise unit is designed with real farming conditions in mind, an incubator site compatible with the economic and social conditions of Latino families and with finance, farm management, and long-term farm planning components necessary to graduate farmers compatible with the existing farmland ownership, financing, and management systems.

Finally, in phase IV new farms or processing operations are launched. By this time a large supportive infrastructure of relationships are in place. Farmers also have significant knowledge of what they will grow or process and how to market it. In short, by phase IV recent immigrants will be well along the process of reconstructing their economic identity, from laborer, to entrepreneur, whose pre-migration experience is no longer a stigma, but is instead an important resource, relevant in their new business activities. Here, new farms/farmers are launched. In this phase the large support infrastructure described will engage financing, technical assistance, continued training, family support, transition counseling, product marketing, cooperative organization and networking services, product distribution and value added, product branding, financing, growth planning and management, and other ongoing support needed to keep farmers engaged and innovating their way into the future.

This process is still incomplete. The REC will be working with phase III participants starting in winter 2009–2010.[13] By 2011 new businesses will be launched. However, the incremental approach of this process makes the realistic assumption that identity (re)formation and business incubation are not overnight processes, but demand time for reflection and interaction with others in order to assimilate new roles, to test new ideas and practices, and to launch new businesses.

In one sense, the antiracism of the REC approach assumes a good offense is the best defense. In other words, bigotry and prejudice are harder to practice as immigrants accommodate themselves across a variety of roles in economic, social, and political life. Thus, the REC strategy is to tie food security and its economic elements in a reciprocal relationship to GFJI and its antiracism, successes in each feeding back to reinforce the other.

In terms of the GFJI conference, Regi believes that "engaging the Growing Food and Justice Initiative was a critical step in building a

regional support infrastructure for our organization and farmers." Furthermore, he has used the tools GFJI is developing, such as a listserv and monthly phone conferences on minority farm/food related topics. Regi observed,

> Since we participated in the 2008 conference in Milwaukee, we have engaged the listserv, individuals and organizations. We have learned about Chuck Weibel's operation in Milan, MN, and a lot about Will Allen's operation in Milwaukee. What our friends are doing in urban areas is absolutely inspiring and more than anything else, I personally feel free to speak out about racism and discrimination because of the broad support and accompaniment that I have received from some many hundreds of individuals and organizations.

It is this power to speak and the power to farm that REC seeks in fostering new farmers.

Concluding Thoughts and New Research Opportunities

The emergence of GFJI is the culmination of a long process in which like-minded people disagreed about process and priority in the CFSC, disagreements that led Growing Power to create the GFJI and to support it, not solely as an organization per se but as a coalition of like-minded organizations seeking food security and food justice in diverse communities. Food system problems are simultaneously local and global: solutions for production agriculture that work one place can be adopted to work in other places; organizational designs that work in some conditions can be adopted to other circumstances. Yes, each social, environmental, ecological, economic, and political matrix of race and food is unique. But food security and food justice are woven together by individuals and organizations who recognize a problem, reconstruct it as an opportunity, and organize around it while at the same time empowering communities in agricultural production, healthier consumption, local politics, and economic self-determination. A vision of self-sustaining, independent, yet interdependent community and local economic activity etches itself in different ways in distinct communities, not so much as resistance to industrial agriculture, but more toward establishing resilient and sustainable communities.

Though this vision may be clear to some, to make it actionable and understand how it can be successfully operationalized requires further research and experimentation. Federal level policy *may* support such a vision, yet it may not. What is clear to me is that a robust system is like a robust ecology it should have many niches. It may appear disorganized,

or perhaps economically inefficient, but investigation can reveal dimensions of the "social" infrastructure that nourishes organizations and can also comprehend how economic goals fit with other noneconomic goals and benefits. I would suggest that research proceed in three avenues: food production and distribution; the GFJI and its prospects; and the articulation and use of these distinct frameworks—CFS and GFJI—by different organizations for various purposes. I offer the following research questions for other investigators engaging this process.

First, further historical and contemporary research should be conducted on production and distribution systems; here I have in mind three kinds of work, on the immigrant farmer/processor, the food distribution system, and the small grocery and corner store. We need more actionable knowledge about all three in different contexts. Immigrant farmers range broadly, from berry growers in Michigan (Santos 2009), to produce production in the northwest (O'Hagan 2009), and more. Some people of color (my family, for instance) have farmed and ranched in the United States for more than a hundred years. I can say that the practices of "colorful" farmers, especially when part of the industrial food system, are not always distinct from those of majority farmers. Yet there are still interesting questions about internal household relationships and organization, as well as questions about the relationships between farmers of color and their larger socioeconomic and political settings.

Without access to markets, farmers are out of business. Small farmers often face particular difficulty accessing markets, and alternative distribution arrangements are developing to create access to markets for farmers of color.[14] Corner stores are rightfully castigated for the product mix they provide, but they too are caught in the logic of profit optimization with limited choices of suppliers. There are initiatives underway to reconstruct the corner store as a source of healthy food, reasonably priced. Small groceries initiatives are also ongoing around the country. We need more historical and contemporary research to understand the immigrant farmer, the limited-resource farmer (who is typically a person of color), the role of the small grocery or corner store, and how these are all tied into the food system in distinct and often marginal ways.[15] Furthermore, we need applied research to discover and advance policy objectives related to the antiracist and economic objectives espoused by GFJI and its participant organizations.

Second, like any organization, we should be interested in and understand the organizational and institutional elements of the GFJI. How knowledge diffuses in the organization, how growth and change occur in

the initiative and influence it, and how the GFJI members and the initiative itself pursue antiracism, are all very important questions. Though the GFJI is more a loose coalition than a full-fledged organization, it does produce a conference, monthly calls, and support for organizations; therefore how it is organized, and how that organization changes over time is important as an alternative approach to weaving together and multiplying the influence of a variety of existing organizations.

Third, how does the antiracist agenda of the GFJI articulate with other kinds of food-systems thinking, and with what implications for various demographic groups and the places where they live? Here I have in mind a set of general questions about the relationship between the CFSC and the GFJI, but I am also thinking about those organizations and their relationship to how we think about food in society. "Industrial" food, urban agriculture, sustainable and local food, community gardens—each has its history, ideas, and particular practices. Each is also associated with values we often think of as incommensurate, but I would argue for research that uncovers comparability in these practices and fosters dialogue among the practitioners.

However, today we recognize that these various food-system activities and how they are organized have significant implications for places.[16] Thus I would argue for more research on the integument of place and person. Beyond the significant work on food deserts are many research questions about community formation, political activism, and approaches to leveraging food-based economic development in marginalized communities. Many GFJI organizations are pointing in this direction; we need to tell their stories.

One path to a resilient and sustainable food system lies in the work promoted by the GJFI and in the GFJI itself. The GFJI did not invent the ideas of cultural and political-economic autonomy that it espouses, but it recognizes these are central components of viable communities of color. It also acknowledges the importance of sharing across distinct local practices, celebrating success, commiserating in struggle, and envisioning a more just future. The multiple forms this struggle takes should not confuse us; rather, we should take heart in how organizations like those discussed here are pursuing self-determination, food security, and food justice. Furthermore, these multiple models are an invitation to the academic and policy-making communities to understand the variety of activities taking place and to shape policy to enhance the chances for economic, political, and social success. The emerging strategy to build local, cultural, economic, and political assets in support of indigenous or ethnic farms

is historic. It is a path inspired by local culture to confront and overcome the political economic force of capital that has torn the commons asunder. As such, these organizations and indeed the GFJI represent important examples of dialogue between the localized and situated, and the national and overarching, while indicating the importance of both.

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Notes

1. Rudolf Virchow ([1848] 1985), a German physician and the "Father of Modern Pathology" wrote: "Public health and medicine is a social science, and politics is nothing else but medicine on a large scale. . . . If medicine is to fulfill her great task, then she must enter the political and social life. Do we not always find the diseases of the populace traceable to defects in society?"

2. Tangires (2003) writes of the longer history of marketplaces in the United States.

3. Allen (2007) notes this significant change in the rhetoric of food security "was eliminating the word *hunger* from its official assessment of food security in America and replacing it with the term *very low food security*" (19).

4. CFSC 1994.

5. However, Kami Pothukuchi (2007) argues it was never there. I would suggest that food access was important to early city government, but its importance has changed over time.

6. Though this history is not the direct concern of this chapter, I suggest that researchers interested in the subject focus on both individual and organizational elements of the CFSC, as well as contextual elements of its time and place. Organizational factors include the difference between named and funded CFSC priorities, committee and board memberships and how board and committee mandates or pronouncements were received and prioritized, and what resources were allocated to various priorities. Individual factors include interpersonal relationships, but with a focus on how the CFSC prioritized individual training and professional development needs of leaders and community members.

7. Religiously motivated food justice intersects with racially motivations and has a deep history in the United States. See, for instance, the work of Catholic Relief Services, <http://crs.org/about/history/> (accessed May 20, 2011).

8. See, for instance, Pardo 1990 and Barnett 1993.

9. These monthly calls attract from twelve to thirty people at a time, and more than fifty organizations have been represented. A list of call topics is available from the author, Alfonso Morales (morales1@wisc.edu).

10. More men than women made presentations at GFJI I. And many more men than women made presentations on the subjects of this chapter. Still, women were prominent in a number of other sessions; see the notes from the conference (GFJI 2008).

11. See <http://thestory.org/archive/the_story_824_The_Fight_To_Farm.mp3/view> (accessed October 4, 2009); see also the news article on immigrants' rights at <http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/news/2009/09/14/immigrants-rights-activists-vie-attention> (accessed October 4, 2009).

12. For details, see the pages at <http://www.ruralec.com/ (accessed June 14, 2009).

13. Ibid. Some sixty people representing more than twenty households are creating new businesses. Enterprises involved meat poultry, poultry processing, grain processing, grain production (as in small grains), vegetable production (garlic), and black beans (as in edible dry beans).

14. Particularly useful in this regard is the report "Satiating the Demand" found at <http://urpl.wisc.edu/extension/reports.php> (accessed June 1, 2009) and the report "Supply Chain Basics" found at <http://www.agmrc.org/markets__industries/supply_chain/> (accessed June 1, 2009).

15. For examples, see <http://www.foodsecurity.org/LRPreport.pdf> (accessed June 1, 2009); <http://www.thefoodtrust.org/php/programs/store.network.php> (accessed June 1, 2009); and <http://www.policylink.org/site/c.lkIXLbMNJrE/b.5136687/k.61DA/Healthy_Food_Retailing.htm> (accessed June 1, 2009).

16. See, for instance, the report "Why Place Matters: Building the Movement for Healthy Communities" at <http://www.policylink.org/site/c.lkIXLbMNJrE/b.5137443/apps/s/content.asp?ct=6997411> (accessed June 14, 2009).

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