

**Migrations of Hunger and Knowledge: Food Insecurity and California's Indigenous  
Farmworkers**

By

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores two elements of farmworker food insecurity in California, the structural conditions of food insecurity, and the use of immigrant/cross-border agricultural and culinary knowledge as coping strategies. The first component, structural and systemic causes for farmworker food insecurity, investigates how farmworker food insecurity is linked to international trade and immigration policies, as well as the historical exploitation of people of color in California's agricultural sector. Rather than simply chronicle a story of exploited laboring bodies, I expand upon on this narrative, exploring the ways that indigenous Oaxacan farmworkers, who for the most part come from a culture deeply rooted in food and agricultural practices, cope with food insecurity by utilizing their embodied agricultural and nutritional knowledge. I explore the linkages between their place in the food system as both producers and consumers, as they are simultaneously exploited for their labor, and creating coping mechanisms using their culinary and agricultural experience.

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## **DEDICATION**

This manuscript is dedicated to all the people that labor to produce the food we eat.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. STRUCTURAL FOOD INSECURITY VERSUS DAILY HUNGER	1
II. CAUSES AND EVIDENCE OF FARMWORKER FOOD INSECURITY	18
III. FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS: SUBSIDIZING FARMWORKER EXPLOITATION	30
IV. KNOWING “GOOD FOOD”: IMMIGRANT KNOWLEDGE AND THE RACIAL POLITICS OF FARMWORKER FOOD INSECURITY	47
V. THE AGRARIAN QUESTION IN CALIFORNIA: MIGRATION AND (NON) TRADITIONAL NEW FARMERS	67
VI. FARMWORKER FOOD INSECURITY AND CHANGING THE FOOD SYSTEM	89

## CHAPTER ONE

### STRUCTURAL FOOD INSECURITY VERSUS DAILY HUNGER

In March, 2010, as I was embarking upon my dissertation research, I attended a one-day symposium to address farmworker food insecurity, hosted by the National Center for Latino Research (NLRC) at California State University in San Marcos, California. The symposium was the kickoff event for a year-long research and outreach project to create a program addressing the lack of access to nutritious food and growing obesity problem in farmworker communities. The event was attended by a variety of academics, outreach groups, nonprofits, and farmworkers from throughout California. Symposium organizers called on participants to discuss the following questions: What are the barriers to food for farmworkers in local communities? What food programs are being used? And, what are the barriers to program utilization?

The city of San Marcos is in San Diego County, on the US side of the United States-Mexico border. The border region of California tends to have the most militant immigration enforcement in the country. It also has some of the worst working conditions for farmworkers in the state. One daughter of farmworkers, a first generation college student at the university, told the audience about her childhood in a farmworker family that often lacked food. They harvested food in the fields, she said, but did not have it in their homes. She grew up in the Coachella Valley of California, just outside San Diego County, where she said there were no grocery stores. There was no access to public transportation and most people did not have cars. She told participants that churches donated food to the farmworker community, but that what they gave was often about to expire or was unfamiliar. Few people signed up for Women Infant and Children (WIC) programs. They were afraid to enroll in any government programs, for fear of deportation. If they were on the path to citizenship, they were afraid of public charge, a policy that can prevent those on welfare from getting citizenship in the future.<sup>1</sup>

Other farmworkers giving testimonials said that no one speaks Spanish at the food banks in their areas, nor did those banks offer food they were accustomed to preparing and eating. There was a lack of fresh fruits and vegetables at donation sites and local markets, and farmworkers couldn't access other markets or food distribution sites for lack of transportation. They also noted that although their children were enrolled in the federal free school lunch program, the options available were often not what they considered healthy. Fear was a strong factor preventing people from accessing food and food services. Some were even afraid to go to food banks for fear that the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) would show up, as undocumented immigrants were

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<sup>1</sup> Undocumented persons in the United States can utilize WIC as their children are often born in the US, although they cannot access food stamps. Public charge can be applied to those on welfare, but does not apply to those on WIC or food stamps, but it is a common misunderstanding, preventing many immigrants from applying for services.

known to frequent the banks and other charity and food service sites. In one instance, ICE was known to circle a town's only grocery store to catch them upon entering.

Throughout the day, speakers and audience members repeatedly mentioned that the fight for farmworker food security must be linked to a larger struggle for increased wages and benefits. Additionally, in order to address food insecurity in any substantial way, farmworker rights must be linked to immigration reform. In response to a discussion about emergency food services, such as food banks, anthropologist Bonnie Boyd, a long time researcher with farmworkers in California, responded, "We need to focus on arguing for a living wage. This cannot just be about services. We need to put our focus back on industry... We can't forget the responsibility of the corporations."

In contrast with Boyd's emphasis on structural change, many farmworkers and service providers argued that the discussion should not bypass the immediate need to improve emergency food programs and other direct food security endeavors. Achieving better wages and reforming immigration policy are long-term goals. Although these were excellent working objectives, farmworkers did not want to deemphasize the fact that hunger exists on a daily basis. The director of NLR, Arcela Nunez-Alvarez, noted that a balance must be struck between solving structural issues, particularly the challenges of bi-national organizing for immigration reform in the long term, and getting malnourished people better services in the short term.

This conference provided a backdrop for my dissertation research, which I conducted in the Northern Central Coast of California, about 450 miles north of the Coachella Valley. The inherent contradiction that those who labor to produce our country's food cannot afford it themselves is equally striking in both regions. In this dissertation, I address both sides of this discussion. I investigate the ways that the global agro-food system creates and reinstitutes existing racialized and class-based health and economic inequalities, while underlining popular coping strategies, the agency of farmworkers, and the importance of cross-border knowledge. On one hand, I argue that approaches to address farmworker food security directly, such as community gardens and emergency food programs, distract from the larger goals of equality in the food system by siphoning resources from a more structural and politicized struggle. On the other hand, I make the case that such approaches must not be dismissed entirely, as they play an important role in helping farmworkers cope with food insecurity on a daily basis, highlighting farmworkers agency and resilience, and providing spaces for self-empowerment and ownership over one's life. Further, some approaches, such as home and market gardens, and small-scale immigrant-operated farms, highlight farmworker agricultural and nutritional knowledge, defying a common assumption that low-income people of color do not know how to eat well.

In this study, I explore the structural and systemic causes for farmworker food insecurity in California, looking at how food insecurity is linked to international trade and immigration policies, as well as to the exploitation of people of color in California's agricultural sector. But rather than simply tell a story of exploited laboring bodies, I push

further on this narrative, exploring the ways that farmworkers, who for the most part come from a culture deeply rooted in food and agricultural practices, cope with food insecurity by utilizing their agricultural knowledge and food practices. My work highlights the agency of farmworkers, looking at ways that they engage with food and struggle to improve their daily condition and place in the food system. I explore the linkages between their place in the food system as both producers and consumers, as they are simultaneously exploited for their labor and create their own coping mechanisms using what they know about food and agriculture. I strive to understand farmworkers as more than merely working bodies, but rather as contributors to a transnational food system, holders of knowledge, organizational actors, and dreamers for a better way of life.

Understanding how farmworkers cope with food insecurity provides an opportunity to explore the ways that systems of both food production and consumption construct food insecurity for those that are economically vulnerable. Exploring their coping strategies sheds light on the knowledge and skills that farmworkers carry across the border, providing voice and agency for those most often silenced by an unjust agro-food system. I look at three distinctly different ways that farmworkers cope with food insecurity: food assistance programs, gardens, and farming for profit. While all approaches serve to address food insecurity at different points of causation, the later two contrast strongly with the first in that food insecurity is not treated as a lack of education or knowledge. Rather, food insecurity is treated as lack of income and ability to purchase or grow foods that farmworkers know are healthy. Additionally, the third approach, farming for profit, not only acts as a way to illustrate that farmworkers are improving their consumption, but also points to how they are attempting to achieve class mobility and challenging the racial makeup of farming, despite many of the inherent challenges.

This dissertation points to the overlapping experiences of farmworkers: as low-income consumers with limited food access, exploited laborers in the realm of production, and food producers who are creating their own spaces for food production and consumption, utilizing their unique skills and knowledges. Farmworkers are often overlooked in literature concerning both production and consumption, yet are crucial actors in the global agro-food system. Goodman and Dupuis (2002) specifically make a call for more work that engages processes of production and consumption in agro-food studies, in order to move “beyond the production-consumption debate.” They argue that by addressing this divide, “the potential of new forms of progressive food politics can be engaged, ranging from diffuse, often localized, struggles over modes of social ordering, such as knowledge systems, to more formal alliances between producers and consumers” (5).

My work addresses this gap in the literature, by showing the ways that the construction of consumers and producers can occur concurrently. My research points to the ways that the social processes of production and consumption are permanently embedded within each other, highlighting the material consequences of their related inequities. I hope that underlining these relationships lays out the potential for coalition building among various

actors in the food chain, from farmworkers and labor organizers, to consumer-based food activists.

In order to approach the problem of food insecurity for California's farm labor, I engage three intersecting and overlapping analytic frameworks and literatures: Political Ecology, Critical Agro-Food Studies, and Feminist Geography. I use these frameworks to explore the balance between critiques of proposed "alternatives" to the industrial agro-food system and an approach to understanding food insecurity that highlights coping strategies and cross-border knowledge.

I use a political ecology approach, to understand the causes of farmworker food insecurity and the historical causes of this systematic injustice. Understanding how food insecurity is produced by unequal transitional food regimes, capitalist social relations of production, and racialized inequalities in the US food chain provides a starting point to investigate how people cope with these injustices. Utilizing a feminist approach to understanding the lived experiences of race and class difference, combined with training in critical agro-food studies, I question what kind of agency is possible in the context of neoliberal food movements. How do people cope regardless of structural constraints to social justice? And, ultimately, how can a broader vision of food justice be achieved, one which takes into account labor and migration as key components in the movement for a socially just food system?

### **Structural Causes of Food Insecurity: A Political Ecology Approach**

In order to understand the structural causes of food insecurity among agricultural laborers in California I take my guide from the vast literature in agrarian political ecology, which explores how power and politics mediate access to resources (Ribot and Peluso 2009; Robbins 2012). I analyze food access as inherently entrenched in struggles over land, class, and capital. The story of farmworker food insecurity begins with the dispossession of workers from their lands in Mexico. The causes of dispossession vary from US food commodity dumping of as a result of international trade agreements such as NAFTA, to violent struggles for power and land, in the case of the Oaxacan indigenous people. These causes have led to the creation of a disenfranchised and transnational agricultural working class in the United States. Immigrant farmworkers are exploited for their labor, due to their race and ethnicity, as well as their potential undocumented status. As they struggle to survive on low wages with limited means to protest, many farmworkers and their families end up with little ability to purchase or produce sufficient food to live comfortable and healthy lives.

Many immigrant farmworkers arrive in the United States after farming their own land in Mexico, where they have developed complex agricultural and nutritional knowledge. When they leave their hometowns to work in fields, in Northern Mexico, and in the United States, they lose their ability to grow food for themselves. In those locations, they have little, if any, access to land and resources for subsistence agriculture. As they enter the agricultural labor force, not only do they lose the land, resources, and networks to

grow their own food, they become workers in the global agro-food chain, often at the most lowly rungs as undocumented immigrant workers on large-scale corporate farms. Low wages and high costs of living, combined with the lack of access to space and resources to continue to grow food for themselves, creates a situation where the majority of farmworkers in the United States are food insecure.<sup>2</sup>

While some farmworkers become dependent on emergency food and other food assistance programs, others use market gardening and farming for profit as coping strategies. I investigate how the agrarian question relates to immigrant farming and land access in California today, examining how farmworkers transitioning to farming simultaneously reproduce and challenge class structures within California agribusiness. I look at why immigrants, who were dispossessed from their livelihood as peasants in Mexico, are now returning to the land as gardeners and farmers. These farmers are exploring ways to utilize their social capital and networks in order to farm in demanding new contexts, lacking capital, language skills, and other resources. Challenging some classic Marxist narrative of dispossession (Harvey 2005), I have found small groups of immigrants returning to farming for their livelihoods. Although they are no longer purely subsistence farmers, they are in some ways part of the modern process of “repeasantization” (Ploeg 2008, 6), simultaneously managing as petty commodity producers.

### **Striking the Balance: Critiques of Neoliberal Food Projects in the Context of Hunger**

My work responds to the current literature in critical studies of agro-food, whose authors urge food movement activists and scholars to address contradictions and injustices. Many scholars in this field take self-proclaimed alternative food and food justice movements to task for using neoliberal approaches to change the food system. Movements that attempt to create environmental and social change by providing market alternatives to industrial and corporate agriculture often overlook differentiated access to such “alternative” food and food spaces, including organic food, local sourcing, and farmers’ markets. Additionally, they reinforce neoliberal solutions to food injustice, depending on private funding, resisting or avoiding state-led solutions, and lacking an analysis of inherently unequal market structures (Allen 1993; Alkon and McCullen 2011; Allen and Guthman 2006; Brown and Getz 2008; Guthman 2008a). Scholars have criticized the notions of community food security (Nord and Coleman-Jensen 2011) and community gardens (Pudup 2008) as approaches which distract well meaning activists from addressing the underlying causes of food insecurity. Further, they argue that such methods divert discussions of food insecurity from including government modes of assistance. These approaches fortify systematic class-based and racial injustice in the food system, rather than challenging them.

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<sup>2</sup> I make this claim based on studies conducted throughout the United States (Borre *et al.* 2010; Moos 2008; Weigel *et al.* 2007; Wirth *et al.* 2007; Quandt *et al.* 2004;), in addition to my own research.

My research builds on work of critical agro-food scholars, demonstrating that unequal access to healthy food must be addressed at its root cause, low wages. I evaluate the ways that gardens and food assistance programs targeted at farmworkers may inadvertently reinforce structural inequalities in the food system, in part, by failing to challenge the principal causes of food access inequity. Many food assistance projects are short term and often enabled by private funds. These programs and projects will not create the needed change to address the inequalities suffered by farmworker in today's agro-industrial system.

Yet, it cannot be overlooked that providing farmworkers with needed sustenance, which workers cannot currently afford based on their wages, is a vital role to fill given the current conditions. I met many farmworkers who told me they couldn't feed their families in the winter. For many, nonprofit based solutions to food insecurity, such as a community gardens and food banks, were their only source for fresh produce and food staples. These immediate needs must be taken seriously, while at the same time, structural origins of hunger cannot not be overlooked. Although I agree with such critiques, the people who are the focus of this study are often undocumented and unable to access government programs such as welfare or food stamps. Emergency food, community gardens, and other privately funded approaches to securing food are often their only survival strategies. In this context, neoliberal coping strategies can be vital for people to survive.

### **Feminist Epistemology, Racial Formations, and Food Practice**

I approach my work using a feminist epistemology and method, in which "situated" or "embodied" knowledges are engaged as a way to reinterpret and understand the social and material world (Haraway 1988). I examine immigrants' knowledge, especially as negotiated in agricultural and dietary practices, seeing these as coping strategies. This approach, where situated knowledges are investigated in the context of cooking, gardening, and farming, contrasts with a method where immigrants are assumed to be devoid of culinary and agricultural know-how, and dependent solely upon food banks and pantries.

Scholars of black feminist thought, in particular, argue that a feminist methodology must take multiple forms of social difference, including gender, class, sexual orientation, and race, into account when trying to understand oppression, as well as when analyzing resistance (Collins 2000). I argue that causal explanations for farmworker food insecurity are not limited to class exploitation and dispossession; to fully understand farmworkers' conditions we must look more deeply at the identity politics of who is exploited and how racialized dispossession leads to new identity formations and coping strategies. I argue that how people experience their racial and ethnic identities in relation to the food system is important for understanding how they cope with their exploitation. I ask such questions as: how and why are people of color disproportionately exploited in our food system? How does this historical and systematic exploitation inform public

perceptions of what people eat what they do and why? Additionally, how are immigrants using their embodied and situated knowledges to cope with food insecurity?

Many advocates of critical agro-food studies have urged food systems scholars to engage with critical studies of race and ethnicity (Alkon 2008; Bobrow-Strain 2008; Pilcher 2008; Slocum 2007, 2010). As Slocum (2010) makes clear in her extensive literature review on “Race in the Study of Food,” exploring the spaces and practices of food production and consumption highlights race relations, as well as reflects on the ways that food can create new forms of racial identity, politics, and discrimination:

The materiality of race comes to light through agricultural decisions, methods and techniques that growers use, in addition to encounters at the market among people, space and vegetables. Looking at techniques of growing, embodied knowledge, and particular plants as well as more familiar questions (access to land, credit, labor, assistance and markets) are ways to understand the material becoming of race (Slocum 2010, 18).

In my work, I look at how racial formations (Omi and Winant 1994) apply to food and agricultural practices. In particular, how access to land, capital, and resources shaped racial identity and vice versa. In an early study of race and food, Judith Carney (2001) explores African slaves’ contributions to foodways in the Americas. She focuses on embodied knowledge and the contributions of people of color to food systems, rather than their exploitation. Building on her research, I critique food assistance programs and food movement literature that assumes that people of color, in these case immigrants of color, do not know what “good food” is (Guthman 2008b; Harper 2010). I argue that agricultural and culinary knowledge are often assumed to be absent in low-income households, especially those of immigrants and non-whites. I have found that food assistance providers often address food insecurity inaccurately, assuming education is the first step to improving nutritional intake. In contrast, in the case where a community garden is used as a coping strategy, farmworker knowledge and related racial formations, are highlighted. Knowledge, and the perception of knowledge or the lack thereof, contributes to racial formations and the ways in which social relations are formed in the US agricultural system. This study contributes to our understanding of these formations by documenting the wealth of knowledge that immigrants bring across the border, and it challenges the assumption that people of color, in particular immigrants of color, are devoid of such knowledge.

### **Food Insecurity and its Critics**

I use the standard United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) definition of food security: access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. This includes, at a minimum, the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food and an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies) (Nord and Coleman-Jensen 2011). Critiques of food security terminology (Patel 2009; Holt-Gimenez and Patel 2009; Guthman *et al.* 2006; Allen 1999) claim that recent

definitions of food security, such as those cited by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), avoid making political claims and challenging power structures that control the global food system. Failing to address power relations in its definition, food security, then, could be achieved in a prison cell or under an authoritarian regime. Food sovereignty, a concept first coined by *Via Campesina*, as a “call for peoples’ rights to shape and craft food policy” (Patel 2009, 663), is comprised of a global movement of peasant farmers and food producers. In contrast to movements and approaches to relive food security, food sovereignty challenges “deep inequalities in power,” promoting a “radical egalitarianism” (Patel 2009, 670).

Despite these critiques, I choose to start with a discussion of food (in)security, as I am addressing a basic lack of needs met, as discussed in the section on critical food studies above. Additionally, as Brown and Getz (2011) point out, the food sovereignty movement has been focused on small-farmer needs and issues, rather than addressing farm labor issues directly. Although I discuss small-scale farming as a coping strategy for farmworker food insecurity in Chapter Five, the primary focus of this work is the consequences of farmworker injustice. I consciously use the term food insecurity to demonstrate farmworkers’ lack of political power, utilizing the visceral reality and obvious irony that many are simply hungry. I start with the notion of food insecurity in order to demonstrate why food sovereignty must be ultimately worked towards and fought for.

### **Focus on Native and “Indigenous” Farmworkers**

This dissertation draws on eighteen months of ethnographic field research in the Northern Central Coast of California.<sup>3</sup> I began my dissertation fieldwork with an interest in how farmworkers in California coped with and managed structural food insecurity. I started exploring this question by meeting with people who worked in the nonprofit sector on issues of farmworker justice and agricultural sustainability. They told me that if I wanted to work with farmworkers who were food insecure, I should start by talking to *indigenous* farmworkers. I was soon led to the Indigenous Farmworker Study (IFS), the first comprehensive study of indigenous farmworkers in California.

The IFS includes indigenous Mexicans as those that come from towns in Mexico where Native American languages are still spoken, although they recognize that the indigenous identification is complex, and the definition must be up to those that identify as indigenous themselves. In the mobilization or deployment of indigeneity there lies a danger of reinforcing notions of “traditional” or static communities. In contrast to the shifting realities of the immigrants, the term indigenous often invokes a fetishized and mythologized past (Minkoff-Zern 2012). Despite these inherent contradictions, for the purposes of this study I use the term indigenous to refer to Mexican immigrants who come from families who speak their native languages, whether they were raised in native

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<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this region I identify the Northern Central Coast region as inclusive of Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito counties.

language speaking towns or elsewhere.

Indigenous Mexican immigrants have been coming to California to work in the fields in growing numbers since the early 1990s. The study (utilizing data from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS)) estimates that there are 120,000 indigenous Mexican farm workers in California today (165,000 including children), from twenty-three different linguistic groups (Mines *et al.* 2010). In this project I worked mostly with native Triqui and Mixteco speakers from Oaxaca, Mexico.<sup>4</sup> Most of these farmworkers also spoke Spanish, although at varying degrees, depending on their sex (women were less fluent in Spanish), age, and time spent in the United States.

Indigenous Mexicans are discriminated against in the United States on multiple levels, as they are not only non-white immigrants, and often treated poorly by whites, but they are also discriminated against by other Latinos. In Mexico and the United States indigenous Mexicans are commonly misunderstood and singled out for their unique cultural practices and for often being unable to communicate directly with other Mexicans (Kearney 2000, 45). Oftentimes, it is the mestizo population in the United States that discriminates most openly against the indigenous population, calling them derogatory names such as *Indios* (Indian) and *gente sin razón*, or “the people without reason.”<sup>5</sup> Oaxacans are also often called “*oaxaquitos*,” or the “little people from Oaxaca,” the diminutive suffix *-itos* supplying a derogatory dual reference to Oaxacans’ typically slight build and their alleged childlike nature (Stephen 2007).

Since the inception of Mexican nationhood, a move towards “modernity” and “progress” has meant a conscious effort to bring purportedly “backward” natives in line with mainstream Mexican culture. The government has sought to incorporate these groups into the mainstream mestizo culture, which non-mestizo groups, especially the Triqui, have resisted.<sup>6</sup> The result, instead of a full incorporation of indigenous communities as equal citizens of the nation, has been structural discrimination and marginalization (Kearney 2000).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Both Triqui and Mixteco designations encompass various subgroups. Most notably, there are highland and lowland Triquis and Mixtecos. The Mixtecos refer to themselves as Mixtecos *bajos* (lowland Mixtecs) or Mixtecos *altos* (highland Mixtecs) while the Triqui are Copala Triqui (lowland Triquis), in contrast to the Triqui Chicahuaxtla and Itunyoso (highland Triquis) (TriquiCopala.com 2010). Participants in my study are all from the lowlands, i.e., Copala Triqui and Mixtecos *bajos*.

<sup>5</sup> All of these terms are used in Mexico as well as the United States.

<sup>6</sup> Movements for indigenous autonomy and rights, especially the Zapatista Army of Liberation (ELZN Spanish acronym for Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional), have put significant pressure on the Mexican government in the last few decades. The significance of national changes in the recognition of indigenous rights, especially how such rights are recognized and expressed by law, are strongly debated (Stephen 2007).

<sup>7</sup> It should be duly noted that some state officials and institutions actively work to produce indigenous identity in order to promote neoliberal reforms, including tourism

Many Oaxacans migrate north seeking better wages, opportunities, and asylum from political violence. Racism and discrimination against indigenous Mexicans from southern Mexican states often sharpen as natives from these regions migrate to Northern Mexico and eventually to the United States. They are frequently singled out for more physically demanding and lower-paid jobs, reflecting the racialized structures of exploitation in agriculture and other industries, both in Mexico (Novo 2005; Stephen 2007) and the United States (Rivera-Salgado 1999; Stephen 2007; Zabin *et al.* 1993; Holmes 2006).

Indigenous farmworkers tend to have higher rates of food insecurity than other Latino farmworkers, especially during the winter months (Wirth *et al.* 2007; Kresge and Eastman 2010; Moos 2008).<sup>8</sup> As described above, discrimination causes indigenous immigrants to have less secure jobs and receive lower incomes, as they enter the job market at the bottom rungs. They are less likely to be documented and have a harder time accessing services due to linguistic and cultural barriers (Mines *et al.* 2010). In a 2007 study of farmworker food insecurity in Fresno County, native Mixteco speakers, as compared with native Spanish speakers, were more likely to be undocumented, have a lower level of formal education, and make significantly less money in the winter months. Although this study found them to be equally food (in)secure in the summer months, their food insecurity levels were significantly higher than native Spanish speakers during the winter (Wirth *et al.* 2007).<sup>9</sup> Another study on indigenous food insecurity, found that ninety-seven percent of indigenous farmworkers interviewed had experienced food insecurity in the past year (Moos 2008). This is extremely high, considering other studies of farmworker food insecurity show results closer to fifty or sixty percent (Kresge and Eastman 2010; Wirth *et al.* 2004)

Indigenous farmworkers' extreme vulnerability to food insecurity, along with their unique struggles in gaining food and other emergency health services, make them an important population to focus on when trying to understand how farmworkers cope with food insecurity more broadly. Due to linguistic and cultural barriers, indigenous farmworkers often have few options for coping with hunger, as they are socially isolated from other immigrants in their new California residencies. As they are less likely to be legally documented, they are less prone to access government services and programs, and are consequently more likely to find creative ways of making ends meet. Creative strategies, especially growing their own food, provide places for scholars to understand

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(Novo 2005). There is a contradiction, therefore, in that, on one hand, the state seeks to incorporate selected indigenous traditions and folklores as parts of Mexican mainstream culture, while, on the other, eliminating traits deemed un-modern within the liberal framework, such as subsistence livelihood practices.

<sup>8</sup> These studies all used the USDA definition of food insecurity, cited above.

<sup>9</sup> Although the study did not provide causation for this higher number, I would hypothesize this is due to stronger community/hometown networks and sharing of resources among community members.

how immigrants use cross-border knowledge and social networks to cope in times of dire need.

### **Coping Strategies: Food Assistance, Community Gardens, and Market Gardens**

In order to understand what coping strategies were available and how they were utilized by indigenous farmworkers struggling with food insecurity, I studied three types of programs: food assistance, community gardening, and market gardening and farming. I spent approximately a year and a half (January 2010 through May 2011) travelling between my home in Berkeley, California to various field sites throughout the Northern Central Coast, in San Benito, Monterey, and Santa Cruz counties. I interviewed farmworkers and those who work in programs that help farmworkers cope, including food assistance managers, (non-immigrant) community garden organizers, and farmer training instructors.<sup>10</sup> I also conducted participant observation at farmworker-operated community and market gardens and farms, a farmer-training program, and at quarterly meetings of a service provider collaborative.

I interviewed staff at food assistance programs that were targeted at farmworkers in the region, including food banks and pantries, a farmworker nutrition outreach program, and a Latino-centered food program, all which served indigenous and mestizo farmworker populations. I interviewed program directors about their goals, management styles, funding, and outreach to indigenous and other farmworkers. I also asked them what they thought the causes of food insecurity were and how their projects or programs dealt with these causes. I asked these questions in an effort to understand how food assistance programs addressed structural inequality in the food system and food insecurity in particular. I also conducted participant observation at the quarterly meetings of the Nutrition and Fitness Collaborative of the Central Coast (NFCCC), a group that includes various food and health professionals in the region, from both the state and nongovernmental sectors. Many of the group participants do outreach and provide services to the indigenous immigrant community. It was there that I met many of the food assistance providers whom I later interviewed individually in their places of work.

In contrast to food assistance programs, I looked at gardening and farming projects and training programs organized and/or utilized by indigenous farmworkers to understand how farmworkers were coping by making use of their own knowledge. It is important to note that this sample of workers is not representative of all farmworkers. Most of my respondents came to California directly from Oaxaca, where they had lived in rural areas with little access to processed food and were dependent on their own subsistence farming for survival. Their interest in and knowledge of agriculture and nutrition may therefore be more significant than farmworkers emigrating from other parts of Mexico and Latin America.

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<sup>10</sup> All interviews were conducted by the author. Those conducted in Spanish were translated to English by the author. Most interviews were tape recorded and transcribed.

Previous studies of California farmworkers have shown a strong interest and activity amongst farmworkers in growing their own food. In a survey of farmworkers in Salinas, California, thirty-seven percent of respondents indicated that they already grew fruits and/or vegetables for personal or family consumption. Seven percent reported raising chickens or other small animals. Seventy-one percent of respondents not already producing their own food were interested in growing fruits and/or vegetables for household consumption. Almost half of farmworkers not raising chickens or other small animals at the time of the study stated they were interested in doing so (Kresge and Eastman 2010).

The first site included in my study was a community garden project in Hyattstown, a small agricultural town in the Northern Central Coast of California.<sup>11</sup> A local community organization, the Oaxacan Cultural Project (OCP), was funded in 2009 to start a community garden in downtown Hyattstown.<sup>12</sup> *El Jardín de los Niños Oaxaqueños* (The Oaxacan Children's Garden) is a three-acre plot with one and a half acres of arable land located in the city's downtown. The participants secured the lease for the plot in exchange for labor. The terms of the lease stipulate that participants keep the gardening plot and adjacent pine tree parcel belonging to the landowner mowed for fire safety.

Fifteen families from the Oaxacan Cultural Project began the endeavor in the spring of 2009. The garden was started when Matthew Jones, a white community organizer, noted how nostalgic people would become when talking with Triquis and Mixtecos about their farms and gardens in Oaxaca. He brought up the idea of starting a garden in casual conversations with people and received an enthusiastic response. Within a few months of seeding the notion, a three-member leadership committee was formed.<sup>13</sup> Although Jones initially secured land and water, the committee and other community members have since taken the lead in organizing participants and are currently implementing the project. Resources such as seeds, plant starts, plows, and irrigation equipment are purchased or

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<sup>11</sup> Many signifiers, including some place names and names of farmworkers, have been coded to maintain privacy. Names of those working in public service positions are real.

<sup>12</sup> For the past two seasons they have been funded by grants from private foundations. They would like to become more self-sufficient and are currently strategizing ways to fundraise for themselves directly, including events and selling some of their produce. The fiscal sponsor for the Oaxacan Cultural Project is The Bi-National Center for the Development of Indigenous Oaxacans (CBDIO, the Spanish acronym, is most commonly used). The center is a nonprofit that, according to its mission statement, works to promote the "welfare, equity, and self-determination of indigenous communities" (Centro Binacional 2010), and particularly of Oaxacan immigrants to California.

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that the committee consisted of all male members, two Triqui and one Mixteco, although participants in the project were a fairly balanced mix of men and women. Jones suggested that women take roles of public leadership, but everyone declined. In many native Mexican cultures, and Triqui culture in particular, men still hold positions of public leadership in the community. This is a condition that is slowly changing as Triqui and other native people immigrate to the United States.

rented as a group. All members of OCP were invited (over 200 people) to take part and many expressed interest. By time the garden project started in the winter of 2010 about fifteen families (about 30 adults) had committed. For almost all participants, the garden is the first space available to them since leaving Oaxaca where they can grow their own food and apply their agricultural knowledge.

Most participants arrived in California within the past ten years and participating adults are mostly in their twenties and thirties. All previously farmed for subsistence (some also sold some of their produce) on their ancestral lands in Mexico, growing almost all their own food. They now work as laborers in California agriculture, either in the fields or packinghouses. Most farmworkers do not have access to land to grow their own food, as they live in marginal and crowded housing. There are many immigrant communities in urban areas that are gardening throughout the United States, but this is the only community garden I know of that is solely maintained by immigrant farmworkers.

In winter 2010 - 2011, some of the participants from the garden enrolled in a farmer training course at the Agriculture and Land Based Training Association (ALBA) training program, geared toward farmworkers and other limited resource aspiring farmers in Salinas, California.<sup>14</sup> I attended eight sessions of the six month long course, following the garden participants through the course as well as interviewing other students, current and former immigrant farmworkers who were attempting (some succeeding) to start market gardens and small farms. Most of the farmers I interviewed were just beginning to farm (as they were completing the ALBA course), although a few were more established farmers who had been farming for an average of ten years (they were Mexican-born mestizos, not indigenous). I also interviewed the staff at ALBA to get a sense of transitions that have happened over the last decade as they have been training farmworkers and others to become farmers. About a third to half of graduates go into farming right after they graduate from the program, according to an internal report conducted by the California Institute of Rural Studies (CIRS) in 2010.

As market gardeners and farmers, indigenous immigrants experience both unique challenges and advantages in the California agricultural sector. As stated above, for many Spanish is a second language and their struggle to communicate with other immigrants creates social isolation that reinforces their marginalization. Indigenous immigrants are more likely to come from rural areas of Mexico where formal education and literacy rates are lower, making it especially hard to fill out forms, respond to bureaucracy, and take part in farmer training sessions. On the other hand, many indigenous immigrants have strong hometown networks and extended family connections that they utilize to access resources and market their products, as well as a depth of

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<sup>14</sup> Half the funding for ALBA comes from federal funding, including the USDA beginning farmers master development program and program for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. The other half comes from the private sector, including about ten different foundations.

experience in organic and low input cultivation, although they might not identify it as such.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Northern Central Coast and the Distinctiveness of this Study**

I chose to conduct this study in the Northern Central Coast due to its uniqueness as an agricultural region, rather than for its replicability. Wages are generally higher in the Central Coast than in other agricultural regions in California, such as the Sacramento and Joaquin Valleys, but so are rents and the price of living. Overt discrimination and ICE raids tend to be less common and there is more support for farmworkers in terms of health-related services, as the region is further from the border. With a less fear-ridden political environment for immigrants, there is more opportunity for farmworkers to find ways to cope with food insecurity outside expected avenues, such as emergency food and other food assistance programs. From what I have found through conversations with food and immigration activists in California, farmworker operated gardens and small farms are more prevalent here. One ALBA staff member told me that as compared with the Central Valley there is more “openness to new ideas,” in regards to farming practices and who is accepted as an operator in the farming community. In terms of farmworker-operated market gardens and farms, ALBA’s presence has been very influential in setting this region apart. It is difficult, however, to state exactly how much of a difference ALBA has made in promoting immigrant and farmworker farming, in comparison to other regions of California and the rest of the country.<sup>16</sup>

Although farmworkers may come from many geographical and class backgrounds, including industrial farms and urban areas, those I interviewed for this study are migrating from rural subsistence farming backgrounds. Most of the garden participants came to Hyattstown directly from farming their own land in Oaxaca, where they were producing for personal consumption, as well as for profit. Although ALBA does not keep detailed official records on trainees’ backgrounds, one staff member estimated that three quarters of ALBA students farmed in rural parts of Mexico before coming to the

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<sup>15</sup> Although in this dissertation I focus on low input and organic practices utilized by immigrants with farming backgrounds from Mexico, that not all small-scale subsistence farmers in Mexico, or the global South in general, use strictly low input techniques (Galt 2008).

<sup>16</sup> I found it was much easier to find immigrant farmworkers turned farmers than I expected. This ease in identifying farmworker-farmers was aided by the fact that they tend to maintain strong social networks among themselves, which I discuss more in depth in Chapter Five. Additionally, once I was connected to ALBA by time as a participant observer in classes and workshops, farmworker-farmers and farmers with farmworker backgrounds were very willing to talk to me and share their connections due to their trust of the organization.

United States.<sup>17</sup> They came here to work as laborers in agribusiness and are now attempting to reclaim their farming background, combining agrarian techniques and knowledge from livelihood practices in Mexico with those learned in California.

This situation, where farmworkers are growing food for subsistence and profit, is unique. Trends of farmworkers gardening and farming in the Northern Central Coast does not mean that farming in this region is easier than in other parts of California or the country as a whole. On the contrary, farming in the region can be very challenging, even for beginning farmers who have resources and capital to start with.<sup>18</sup> In terms of succeeding at farming for profit, the competition is very difficult, with saturated markets in the cities where people can pay more for food. Although there are many organic farms in the area and an imagery surrounding the region as a haven for organic and sustainable food, most agriculture in the region consists of conventional strawberry and lettuce growing, which use highly toxic inputs. This dissertation's aim is not to look at the viability or sustainability of these farming attempts, but rather to understand farmworkers' efforts at gardening and farming as way to cope with food insecurity, as a supplement to their exploitation in the fields.

There is much variation in the region in terms of racialized agricultural labor. In Santa Cruz County, the largest strawberry growing region in the country, many Latinos have experienced class mobility in the industrial strawberry industry, some advancing from pickers to more technical and managerial positions in the field (DuPuis 2005). These families differ from the newer Oaxacan immigrants I discuss in this dissertation, as they are most likely to hail from Michoacan, Jalisco, and Guanajuato, have longer family histories in California, and engage in distinctly different social and political circles from more recent and less permanent workers.

## **Chapter Structure**

I begin by defining the problem of food insecurity for indigenous farmworkers. In Chapter Two, "Causes and Evidence of Farmworker Food Insecurity," I discuss various studies that report evidence of farmworker food insecurity as a national phenomenon. I then look at the production of farmworker food insecurity, as caused by transnational dispossession, border militarization, the construction of the racialized agricultural worker, regional expenses, and the structural inequalities reproduced by food assistance programs.

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<sup>17</sup> There are even a small group of students in the ALBA course that have come from agronomy programs in Mexico and are in California hoping to expand their skills in the management of large-scale agribusiness.

<sup>18</sup> This region is popular for aspiring and beginning farmers; especially the commonly young, white, college educated gradates of the UC Santa Cruz's apprenticeship program in Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems.

I continue by exploring the structural constraints and potential for the various coping strategies discussed above. In Chapter Three, “Food Assistance Programs: Subsidizing Farmworker Exploitation,” I criticize the ways that some food assistance programs actually work to reinforce structural food insecurity. Drawing on Marx’s theory of social reproduction, I argue that often programs such as food banks and pantries, which are often supported by agribusiness, function so that workers maintain a minimum amount of sustenance, discouraging them from stopping work and/or protesting for better wages and benefits (Polanyi [1944] 1971). Although this piece of my dissertation might be seen as overly cynical with regards to food assistance programs, I highlight an important structural contention: that many agribusinesses keep the food banks stocked in order to feed their own workers who they underpay.

In Chapter Four, “Knowing ‘Good Food’: Immigrant Knowledge and the Racial Politics of Farmworker Food Insecurity,” I evaluate the assumption made by many food assistance programs that low-income immigrants, and other low-income people of color, do not know how to choose and prepare healthy food. I argue that many food programs assume food access is related to lack of nutrition-based education or knowledge, rather than recognizing that food insecurity, at the most basic level, is caused by a lack of resources. These programs, in effect, work to mask class relations, by avoiding this fundamental fact. In contrast, I discuss the agricultural knowledge highlighted in the community garden project in Hyattstown. When given the space and resources to grow their own food, indigenous farmworkers at the garden expressed a wealth of knowledge concerning cultivation, healthy and balanced diets, and food preparation. In many cases their expertise mirrored the knowledge imparted by food assistance programs. I do not suggest then, that community gardens are the solution to food insecurity, but that a garden can act as a space where immigrant knowledge and desire for diverse and fresh food is showcased. Underlining this knowledge can act to counter such notions that farmworkers and others do not know what is healthy, and lead policy makers and food insecurity workers to focus more on the root causes, such as low wages.

In Chapter Five, “The Agrarian Question in California: Migration and (Non)traditional New Farmers,” I explore farming for profit as a coping strategy. I look at the ways indigenous immigrant farmworkers are attempting to start small-scale farming enterprises while still maintaining their day jobs in agriculture. Although this strategy may seem less overtly related to food insecurity, these farmworkers see farming for profit as a way to use the knowledge gained from farming and gardening in Oaxaca and the United States to earn more money, pulling their family out of poverty and securing their ability to buy and produce food. In this chapter I question how these practices relate to class formation in agriculture, drawing on long-standing agrarian questions concerning the supposed death of the peasantry and current movements for food sovereignty among small farmers globally.

I conclude with a discussion of food justice and workers’ movements, looking at ways to better incorporate farmworker justice as part of a larger global movement towards equality in the food system. In this section, I address the questions of labor and

immigration as part of the sustainable food movement, simultaneously addressing the problem of class relations on small immigrant-operated farms. This dissertation grapples with contradictory conditions, movements, and social relations within the food system. Throughout this work, I hope to bring light to voices too often unheard from and clarify the potential for a more just food system.

## CHAPTER TWO CAUSES AND EVIDENCE OF FARMWORKER FOOD INSECURITY

*This is the salad bowl of the nation and people are starving.*

-Joel Campos, Senior Manager of Outreach and Education at  
Second Harvest Food Bank in Santa Cruz County

*... the amazing irony of course... that the people that work growing food, don't have a place to grow food. When I say that I am starting a community garden for farmworkers that don't have a place to grow food, people are like, really? It is beyond ironic.*

-Ana Rasmussen, Director, Mesa Verde Gardens, Watsonville, CA

In order to understand the causes of farmworker food insecurity, we must look at multiple explanations at several scales. A common farmworker story in California goes as follows: a family in Mexico who owns and operates a small-scale farm producing food stuffs, and possibly some coffee for the market, is dispossessed from their own lands by international trade agreements that result in North-South food dumping and subsequently low market prices for food crops. They have no choice but to cross the border for work, finding their crossing and existence in the United States exceedingly dangerous due to increasingly militarized border security and stringent immigration policy. When and if they do succeed in crossing, and if they are lucky enough to find work in the fields of the United States, they are exposed to highly toxic agro-chemicals, and often live in isolated areas where all the food being produced is shipped to wealthier urban communities. Often their only housing options are expensive and the food available is limited and overpriced.

Many leave homes where they still grew much of their own food, to enter a place where they must rely on meager wages to feed their families. Although they come with a wealth of knowledge of how to grow and prepare food, they do not have access to healthy food, either because they cannot afford it or because it is not available in close proximity to their homes and workplaces. In this chapter, I build on the argument of Brown and Getz (2011) that farmworker food insecurity is systematically constructed on transnational, national, and regional scales. I start with primary and secondary evidence demonstrating farmworker food insecurity. I then lay out how food insecurity is produced at many levels, including locally in the Northern Central Coast of California. In this region, farmworker poverty is juxtaposed with the wealth of the San Francisco Bay Area and Silicon Valley. I argue that food assistance programs in the region often do not reach those that are most food insecure, including farmworkers and indigenous immigrants, compounding the existing uneven access to food in the region.

### **Evidence of Farmworker Food Insecurity**

Various studies of farmworker food insecurity throughout the United States have shown

that farmworkers are disproportionately suffering from food insecurity as compared to the rest of the country. Below, I discuss some surveys of farmworker food insecurity conducted in California, the Texas-Mexico borderlands, and a range of states on the east coast. All these studies included quantitative surveys (some with an additional qualitative component); all but one utilizing the standard USDA measuring tool for household food insecurity (Carlson *et al.* 1999). These studies have varied results in terms of farmworker food insecurity, ranging from one study that found ninety-eight percent food insecurity to another report that found only eight percent.

The studies most relevant to my own research are those conducted in California. In the two studies done in California, both conducted by the California Institute of Rural Studies (CIRS), the results average fifty-five percent farmworker food insecurity. One of the reports, published in 2010 and concerning farmworkers in Salinas, showed that sixty-six percent of respondents were food insecure. Fifty-three percent of participants had low food security while thirteen percent had very low food security. Only thirty-four percent of farmworkers participating in the Salinas study were actually food secure. Of the survey respondents with children younger than five years of age, seventy-eight percent participated in the federal Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), which provides nutritional supplements to pregnant women and children under five (Kresge and Eastman 2010). In another study conducted in 2005 among 454 farmworkers in Fresno County, California, forty-five percent were food insecure. Thirty-four percent of respondents were food insecure without hunger while another eleven percent were food insecure with hunger (Wirth *et al.* 2007). Additionally, in a study of food insecurity among indigenous farmworkers, the vast majority (93%) of participants reported that they experienced household food insecurity in the last year, a significantly higher percentage than among farmworkers overall (Moos 2008).

In studies of farmworker food insecurity in states outside of California, the variation is much wider. Furthermore, nearly all these studies (excluding Virginia) refer to *migratory* farmworkers, versus simply farmworkers, who could presumably be settled immigrants, as are discussed in the California studies.<sup>19</sup> In a study conducted in the US-Mexico border region of Paso Del Norte in southwestern Texas and southeastern New Mexico, eighty-two percent of border migrants and seasonal farmworkers were found to be food insecure, forty-nine percent with hunger (Weigel *et al.* 2007). In a study of seasonal farmworkers in North Carolina in 2004, 47.1 percent of the 102 sample households were classified as food insecure, including 9.8 percent with moderate hunger and 4.9 percent with severe hunger (Quandt *et al.* 2004). In a 2010 study, also conducted in North Carolina, 63.8 percent of farmworkers were food insecure, with 43.7 percent experiencing hunger (Borre *et al.* 2010). In a Pennsylvania study, only 8.2 percent of seasonal farmworkers were food insecure, and among those, only 4.5 percent were food

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<sup>19</sup> Agriculture in California has more year-round production than other regions of the United States, allowing for more workers to stay throughout the year. Also, as I discuss below, more immigrants are staying in the United States year-round as the border has becoming increasingly militarized (Nevins 2002).

insecure with hunger (Cason *et al.* 2003). In an older study from Florida (conducted in 1987-88), about one-third of migrant farmworker families reported they had either run out of food or not had enough to eat at some point during the previous year (Shotland 1989).<sup>20</sup> Another survey of farmworkers in Virginia, found ninety-eight percent of farmworkers to be food insecure, seventy-three percent of those with hunger (Essa 2001).

In comparison with the statistics from California, only fourteen point five percent of all US families experienced food insecurity in 2010, according to the USDA (Coleman-Jensen *et al.* 2011). This means that, on average, farmworkers in California are three and a half times more likely to be food insecure than the common person in the United States.

I list all of these studies to demonstrate that farmworker food insecurity is a phenomenon all too common across the United States. It is not isolated to one region, one crop, or one farm size. These studies, mostly conducted using quantitative research methods, prove the importance of a study such as my own. Although some of the studies, especially those conducted by CIRS, provide suggestions as to how to solve farmworker food insecurity, none does an in-depth qualitative analysis of the problem. Additionally, none of these studies investigates the political economy of farmworker food insecurity, a gap in this literature that my study fills.

Those unfamiliar with industrial agriculture might ask why farmworkers don't simply bring home food from the fields. They are surrounded by abundance; why can they not partake in it? Most employers do not allow farmworkers to take food home. In the Salinas farmworker study they found that only 42 percent of farmworkers reported that their employer "always" or "almost always" allowed them to take fruits and/or vegetables from the farm for personal or family consumption. Thirty-eight percent surveyed were "rarely" or "never" allowed to bring home fruits or vegetables from the farm for household use (Kresge and Eastman 2010). Yet, even in cases where a field manager or operator does allow workers to take food home, most workers are laboring in monocrop agriculture. In the region where the Salinas study and my own research takes place, most are working in lettuce, artichokes, strawberries, or garlic for months at a time. Even if they were to take home some produce each day, this would not provide sufficient balanced nutrition for their families.

Farmworker and immigrant health is a major problem in the United States. Latino immigrants have lower rates of health insurance than other groups in the United States, less time in the US correlating with an increased lack of coverage. Newly arrived low-wage workers are the least likely to have coverage from their employers. As many of these workers live in poverty and have little access to financial resources, they are likely to avoid medical care all together. Studies show that Latino immigrants overall are more likely to suffer from health problems such as diabetes, obesity, and poor oral health than other immigrant groups (Castañeda *et al.* 2011).

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<sup>20</sup> This study did not use the standard USDA food security survey tool, as the study predates the tool.

## **Farmworker Food Insecurity in the Northern Central Coast**

In the Northern Central Coast region, which is primarily agricultural, although food assistance and emergency food services were not expressly for farmworkers, service providers identified farmworkers as the primary recipients of services. The food bank director in San Benito County explained to me:

There has been a community wide effort to educate people about food and nutrition. Everything that is geared to low-income ends up in the immigrant community, even though that is not the target community, but because that is who is low-income.

Although she said immigrants, not farmworkers, in San Benito County most immigrants work in the agricultural sector. The outreach and nutrition coordinator of the Santa Cruz County food bank told me that seventy to seventy five percent of their clients are farmworkers.

Of the farmworker food security studies cited above, one of them was conducted in the Northern Central Coast (Salinas), finding sixty-six percent of farmworkers food insecure. Additionally, I conducted a basic food security survey with the participants in the community garden before the first season, and found all participants to be “food insecure with hunger.”<sup>21</sup> In discussions with some families, they contrasted their eating habits from their hometown lives in Mexico with those since they had immigrated to California, comparing their diverse and fresh diets from Mexico with the more processed and less “natural” diets they consume in the United States. Many studies show that the length of time an immigrant stays in the US correlates with a rise in obesity rates, particularly in Latino or Hispanic populations. These studies all associate this rise in obesity with the consumption of a more “American” diet (Barcenas *et al.* 2007; Himmelgreen *et al.* 2004; Kaplan *et al.* 2004; Wolin *et al.* 2008).<sup>22</sup>

### **The Production of Farmworker Food Insecurity**

Brown and Getz (2011) discuss the ways that farmworker food insecurity is “produced” through the structural inequality inherent in the global agro-food system. Rather than being a natural or inevitable consequence of farm production, it derives from the simultaneous devaluation of agrarian labor and expansion of neoliberal trade regimes. In the following section, I build on their claims, explaining the specific transnational, national, and regional conditions of farmworker food insecurity in the Northern Central Coast.

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<sup>21</sup> I used the standard USDA measuring tool for household food insecurity (Carlson *et al.* 1999).

<sup>22</sup> As Guthman (2011) points out, obesity and health do not always correlate. Obesity is often erroneously identified as a way to discriminate against low-income communities.

### *Transnational Dispossession*

Many farmworkers come to the United States after being dispossessed from their livelihoods as farmers in Mexico and other parts of Latin America. Restructuring of the global agriculture system to the benefit of agro-industry is not a new phenomenon. Yet over the past few decades the capitalist agro-food system has broadened in scale and reach. McMichael (2005) gives a particularly poignant account of how global agrarian trade agreements, North-South food dumping, and land appropriation has displaced farmers in the global South. McMichael draws on the notion of accumulation by dispossession to explain how the global liberalization of agriculture has not only displaced people from their own land and food production systems, but through the same process has produced landless workers (*i.e.*, migrants) to labor in US fields for low wages,

In the context of corporate globalization, ‘accumulation by dispossession’ operates through general mechanisms of structural adjustment, which devalue and privatize assets across the global South, as well as through particular mechanisms of displacement of peasant agriculture, as a world of agriculture emerges. Here, local provisioning is subjected to the combined pressures of dumping of Northern food surpluses, an agro-industrial supermarket revolution, and the appropriation of land for agro-exporting. That is, through economic liberalization, new food circuits relentlessly displace small farmers into an expanding circuit of casual labor, flexibly employed when employed at all. Thus, a global labor reserve, and (displaced/ released) cultures of provision, represent new opportunities for accumulation in a global project of ‘development’ (McMichael 2005, 270).

The trends outlined by McMichael above are a result of the economic liberalization and deregulation of the world food regime, which favors corporate agro-business over small-scale producers. Producers in the global South have been further entrenched in the global food regime by multilateral trade agreements, where signatories have unequal power in the decision-making process. Prices paid for food in the global marketplace are increasingly divorced from the cost of production, as food dumping and overproduction work to displace those that are not in the seats of power (Goodman and Watts 1997; McMichael 2005).

In Mexico, in particular, the passage and enforcement of North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was a blow to an economy already struggling from structural adjustment policies of the 1980s. According to the agreement, Mexico was required to allow subsidized US foodstuffs to enter the country, while it simultaneously eliminated subsidies for Mexican farmers. This was on the heels of the privatization of Mexican communal farms (*ejidos*), as part of structural adjustment policies. These lands were often sold to foreign investors. Of all the crops to displace Mexican farmers, the influx of US and Canadian mechanized corn had the most striking effect, as farmers could not compete with the lowered prices from imports of their main nutritional staple (Fernández-

Kelly and Massey 2007). While farmers were dispossessed by competing commodity prices, the predicted job gain from NAFTA was sparse. Of the jobs that were created, mostly in the *maquiladora* assembly plants, many disappeared within a decade, as companies relocated to even lower wage regions such as China and Southeast Asia. The combination of these factors led to a massive increase in migration from Mexico to the United States (Polaski 2004; Fernández-Kelly and Massey 2007; Barry 1995).

In contrast to the European Union's market integration process, NAFTA paid little attention to worker mobility, and US supporters of the agreement insisted on the ability to prevent Mexican cross-border migration. On the contrary, the United States increased border protections, trying to dissuade displaced Mexican immigrants from crossing the frontier. This contradiction of dispossession combined with increased border restrictions has accentuated the uneven development between Mexico and the US, leaving displaced migrants in a state of increased economic and political vulnerability (Fernández-Kelly and Massey 2007).

Not only was Mexico affected by a new trade regime with the United States, in recent decades Mexican farmers have experienced a more general integration into the global food market, making them more vulnerable to the ebbs and flows of world-wide commodity production and trade. In addition to a glut in food staples such as corn, luxury food commodities, especially coffee, have experienced restructuring over the past twenty years, leading to the displacement of multitudes of small-scale farmers globally. In the late 1990s through the early 2000s, global coffee prices crashed. There was a spike in global production, especially in countries where new large-scale export-oriented plantations were established, such as Vietnam and Brazil, bringing worldwide coffee prices down (Stefano 2002). The effects were the most severe for small-scale producers in countries like Mexico and Guatemala, where many farmers depended on coffee sales for their livelihoods.

In an interview with a Mixtec farmworker family, they explained to me how their previous livelihood as coffee growers was affected by the coffee crash:

Husband: [We only grew] a very small the amount of coffee.

Wife: Before, we planted a lot of this.

Husband: First the price of coffee was good and it yielded a very good [price], but there was a year when the buyers lowered the price and the coffee cultivators stopped growing coffee, because it cost them more to grow it then they would get for it.

Me: It was because many people in the world were planting coffee?

Husband: Yes, and we have coffee now [their community in Mexico], but it is for consuming, not for selling, because it is not a lot of product – like 100 or 200 pounds of coffee. You can't sell it.

In addition to economic motivations to leave Mexico, many of the Oaxacan indigenous farmworkers, who were the focus of this study, fled Oaxaca due to political violence.

The Triqui zone of Oaxaca, in particular San Juan Copala, has been experiencing a recent surge of political violence in relation to a political movement by some Triquis to establish an autonomous region. This violence has caused many Triquis to flee Oaxaca and cross the border. Some have been successful in obtaining refugee status, making them legally recognized immigrants to the United States.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Border Militarization***

In addition to motivations to leave Mexico, recent increases in militarization at the border mean that more would-be migrants are not returning home to Mexico in the winter as they once did.<sup>24</sup> They are more likely to bring families with them, as they do not know when they will return to Mexico again. It is much harder to find consistent work in the winter months, and families who stay find it more difficult to make ends meet throughout the year. As Joel Campos, the Senior Manager of Outreach and Education at the Second Harvest Food Bank in Santa Cruz County, told me, “Families are not migrating back as much. They usually save money in the summer and use it in the winter.” Many stories of farmworker families echoed this trend. But this strategy is not sufficient for them to feed their families without resorting to emergency food or other coping strategies. Campos said they see about 800 people in the summer and closer to 2,000 in the winter. The executive director of the food bank in San Benito County, Mary Anne Hughs, concurred with this assessment: “Some clients used to go home to Mexico at the end of the season, but the border situation means they stay, but can’t afford to live here. This puts more stress on services such as food banks.” Many other service providers, as well as immigrants themselves, echoed this evaluation of the migration stream and its impact on immigrant finances and food access.

### ***Construction of the Undocumented and Racialized Agricultural Worker***

The construction of dispossessed immigrants in the United States as “illegal” or undocumented persons compounds their challenges in terms of civil liberties and human rights (Nevins 2002). The total number is hard to determine, but estimates range from one-half to three-quarters of the national farmworker population that are undocumented (Bon Appetit and The United Farmworkers 2011). Indigenous farmworkers are even more likely to be undocumented (Mines *et al.* 2010). Farmworkers’ generally undocumented status limits their ability to organize for better agricultural wages and benefits without fear of being deported. In the study of farmworker food insecurity in Fresno County, researchers found that fifty-five percent of undocumented farmworkers were insecure versus thirty-four percent of documented farmworkers (Wirth *et al.* 2007).

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<sup>23</sup> I refrained from questioning research participants directly on this topic, as many still live in fear of such violence, due to their transnational family and community networks.

<sup>24</sup> Militarization at the US-Mexico border has been increasing since the 1986, when the US passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), simultaneously criminalized the hiring of undocumented workers by US employers and massively increased funding for the US Border Patrol (Nevins 2002).

As described in the discussion on coping strategies below, when farmworkers are undocumented, they not only struggle with lower wages and reduced job security, and are therefore more likely to be food insecure, but they also have less access to food assistance services, such as government programs. Not having to access services available to other workers and citizens of the US exacerbates the already existing structural condition of farmworker food insecurity.

Agricultural workers have historically been denied the rights and wages that other workers have in the US due to “agricultural exceptionalism,” or the notion that farming is culturally different from other industries. This idea is used to justify the argument that agricultural workers should not be covered by the same labor regulations as other industries (Getz, Brown, and Shreck 2008). States and the federal government have repeatedly reinforced this exceptionalism, allowing agricultural laborers to be exempt from full labor protections. The most direct case of exception is the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935, which excluded farmworkers from collective bargaining and other protections. More recently, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed SB 1121 in 2010 (Schwarzenegger 2010), a bill that would have mandated overtime pay for agricultural laborers working over eight hours a day, a regulation that most other industries already adhere to.<sup>25</sup> This systematic state reinforced mistreatment of farm labor, based on the notion that agriculture is in some way too “different” to be held to the same labor standards, fortifies the exploitation of farm labor. This is a major underpinning of widespread farmworker food insecurity in the United States.

In California, farmers have created a racialized agricultural working class, strategically employing notions of racial difference and taking advantage of xenophobia towards non-white immigrants in order to maintain lower wages. As various immigrant groups have organized and resisted, demanding better wages and working conditions, employers have effectively replaced them with newer racialized immigrant groups in order to effectively avoid increasing wages and benefits (Walker 2004; Mitchell 1996; Henderson 1998; Wells 1996; Almaguer 1994). Following African and African American slaves, Chinese and Japanese immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were the first farmworkers in the US to experience overt racial discrimination and legally prevented from owning land (Minkoff-Zern *et al.* 2011; Ngai 2005; Glenn 2002; Matsumoto 1993). The indigenous immigrant population today is the latest to experience this form of racialized exploitation, as they replace a more organized and established generation of mestizo immigrants. Additionally, legal boundaries have been put in place to prevent non-white immigrants from making progress in terms of land ownership and farm

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<sup>25</sup> The California Agricultural Relations Act (CALRA) of 1975 established collective bargaining rights for workers, similarly to the national NLRA. California also mandates overtime pay for over ten hours of work per day in agriculture, and is the only state to do so. In contrast to this veto, in October 2011 Governor Brown signed SB 126, giving farmworkers greater protections in organizing disputes with growers.

operation, supporting the maintenance of a non-white agricultural working class (Minkoff-Zern *et al.* 2011).

### ***Regional Expenses***

The proximity of the Northern Central Coast to the Bay Area brings wealth to the region, but this is not dispersed to farm labor. Although agricultural wages tend to be higher in the Central Coast than in the Central Valley, the cost of living is higher as well. With more of their income spent on high rents, farmworkers have less money to spend on food. Additionally, high rents mean that often farmworkers often live in very dense housing conditions, with multiple nuclear families living in a one to two bedroom apartments and many people sharing a single kitchen. With less space to cook, it is more difficult for families to prepare the food they can afford. They are therefore more likely to buy easy to prepare foods, such as ramen noodles and other packaged goods.

The Northern Central Coast is a highly productive region that specializes in lettuce, strawberries, garlic, artichokes and asparagus, yet food produced in the region is generally shipped to the Bay Area and the rest of the country. The food that does stay regionally is sold mostly in upscale markets in cities such as Santa Cruz and Monterey, urban centers that have pervasively white middle and upper class populations, which do not include many farmworkers. In the most rural parts of the region, where most farmworkers live, not only is there less access to fresh produce, there are fewer services for the food insecure, such as food banks and outreach programs.

### ***Food Assistance Services Don't Reach the Most Food Insecure***

Often those suffering the most from food insecurity in agricultural regions of California are indigenous farmworkers, who frequently live in the most rural parts of the state. Yet, food assistance programs, which include food banks and food pantries, often fail to assist those most in need, either due to government regulations barring undocumented persons from receiving assistance, a deficiency in resources in rural areas, or lack of language and cultural awareness. Alegría de la Cruz, an attorney who works for farmworker rights and a daughter and granddaughter of farmworkers, told me directly, “Emergency food just doesn’t work [for farmworkers]. The people that need it most, don’t have access to it,” referring to those who are undocumented and indigenous.

There is a long history of farmworkers and other immigrants being denied access to food assistance in the United States. In the 1960s in Immokalee, Florida, local officials were investigated by the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs for blocking federal surplus agricultural commodities to immigrants in a farmworker community. The officials claimed the immigrants were not entitled to food because recipients were not Collier County citizens and therefore not a local responsibility (Poppendieck 1999). More recently, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) limited undocumented citizens’ access to public aid, including food

stamps, federal welfare, and Social Security.<sup>26</sup> The act specifically excluded emergency food programs, and undocumented people's use of emergency food subsequently increased after the act was passed (Poppendieck 1999). My interviews are consistent with these trends. Emergency food providers on the Northern Central Coast repeatedly told me that farmworkers, and especially those that are undocumented, look to emergency food as their only line of defense against food insecurity.

Subsequent to PRWORA, the only federal food assistance program that undocumented families currently qualify for is WIC. Yet according to Campos, of the Santa Cruz County Food Bank, many still do not utilize it. Many immigrants are misinformed about the fact that they can access the program for their children, even if both parents are undocumented.<sup>27</sup>

Additionally, many are afraid of identifying themselves to the federal government for fear of being deported. For those that are on the path to citizenship, they fear being subjected to public charge, although it does not apply to food stamps or WIC.<sup>28</sup> Many live in fear of anyone that appears to work with the government, although those providing food assistance outreach may actually work on behalf of a nonprofit organization. Campos has a letter directly from US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) stating that immigrants should not be afraid of using food assistance programs. Nonetheless, he said, "It's really hard once they have it in their mind, that it's going to hurt them for immigration. They are not going to change their minds. It's a big barrier in their community, especially with farmworkers."

For indigenous farmworkers, and others with low literacy levels, it is difficult to receive information concerning their options. Indigenous farmworkers are especially vulnerable because there is rarely anyone who speaks their native languages at food banks or WIC offices. Cultural barriers are high, and often they are reluctant to ask for services. Campos explains the challenges for indigenous farmworkers:

People with high literacy and income do not have the same problems because they can defend themselves. But when you deal with someone from another culture, and they go to someone with a lot of authority, they listen to what they say... If they are told they are not qualified [for programs], they need advocates.

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<sup>26</sup> PRWORA also limited documented immigrants' use of federally funded assistance programs for their first five years in the United States. This included barring them from food stamp eligibility until they become citizens, excluding political asylees and refugees (Levinson 2002).

<sup>27</sup> Undocumented children are also eligible for access to free and reduced price meals under the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program.

<sup>28</sup> Public charge is a penalty low-income immigrants applying for citizenship may receive if they utilize federal welfare benefits.

Moreover, emergency food providers rarely offer culturally appropriate foods. Much of the food provided is dependent on donations and government determined food subsidy programs. Even when food bank and pantry staff are aware of cultural preferences, it is difficult to make them available. Many farmworkers expressed to me that they were not accustomed to the food from the food banks, especially canned food. They also told me that the food was often old or expired, and never fresh. One Triqui farmworker said:

LAMZ: ... Did you use WIC or food stamps or food banks? You all went to other places for food?

Farmworker: Yes, sometimes when we ran out we went to San Felipe [the street where the food bank is], to get food there, but the food was not as good [as our food].

LAMZ: The food is not good?

F: No, it was expired on the package. It wasn't good. It was expired.

LAMZ: It wasn't fresh?

F: No, it wasn't fresh.

A further challenge to getting food service programs to reach the most food insecure is that many farmworkers live in rural areas and in communities not well accounted for in the census. For many food service programs, it is difficult to reach rural populations, as they live widely dispersed and have no access to transportation. To pick up emergency food at a bank or pantry, those who live in rural areas must have access to a car, which many do not have. Moreover, undocumented people are not able to obtain drivers licenses, and when they do have access to a car it can be easily impounded.

Areas with higher undocumented, indigenous, and farmworker populations are less likely to have accurate reports of population on the census. In more remote areas with lower reported populations there is less funding allocated for services such as food banks. The food bank director in San Benito County told me that in addition to their direct food service work, they do outreach for the census, because if they don't get people counted, their programs get cut.

Other food assistance programs, such as the Latino Program of Champions for Change, which conducts health and nutrition outreach work with low-income Latino communities throughout California, also struggle getting their services to the most rural areas.<sup>29</sup> As the program director told me, getting to rural areas with lower populations is more difficult in terms of transportation and staffing. They tend to focus on areas with higher populations in order to reach more people with their limited resources. Their program targets communities based on income, not occupation, so reaching farmworkers or the rural poor

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<sup>29</sup> The California Department of Public Health sponsors the statewide Champions for Change program, whose goals include increasing fruit and vegetable consumption and encouraging exercise, specifically in low-income communities. In the Northern Central Coast, the health department has a program specifically geared for outreach to Latino communities.

is not necessarily a priority. Although they are aware of the needs of the indigenous immigrant community, they only have the resources to conduct their programs in Spanish, not indigenous languages, which limits their audience to those who already have more reasonable access to food related services.

## **Conclusion**

Farmworker food insecurity is a structural condition, caused by many interrelated forces, from the transnational to the local scale. In discussing how farmworkers cope with food insecurity, it is important to stay vigilant about the root causes of this inequity. The dispossession of farmworkers from their lands in rural Mexico and the ways they are treated as workers once they arrive in the United States are not accidental nor overlooked circumstances. They are part of an agro-food system that works to the benefit of agribusiness, that is controlled by agricultural elites, and that creates a class of agricultural laborers that is disenfranchised and disempowered. This is all in order to produce food that is deceptively cheap, creating a profit for agro-food corporations, while reinforcing the suffering of the agricultural working class. Yet, there is still reason to believe the food system could become more equitable in the future, as I discuss in following chapters. No real change can be made without recognizing the structural causes of such inequalities, lest we fall into the trap of solutions that fail to address the heart of the problem.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS: SUBSIDIZING FARMWORKER EXPLOITATION

*There are different tactics where the companies always want to seem like they are being generous- they can't give any more and yes, when it comes time to voting or getting the workers organized, you see, what they do is they start having barbeques for them. The supervisors, the foreman, start being more friendly to them, appearing more amicable, making false promises, that things are going to change now that they realize what's going on. But once the union leaves things just return to normalcy. So yes, there are definitely different tactics that the companies use to try to disuse the workers from going for union representation... or for asking for more even without union representation.*

-Jorge Valenzuela, United Farm Worker Operations Manager, Salinas, CA

In this chapter I outline how the various food assistance programs and projects available to farmworkers on the Northern Central Coast act to reinforce structural food insecurity by ensuring that workers are provided with their most basic food needs. Following Marx's theory of social reproduction, I argue that agribusiness benefits from these programs as they assist workers minimally enough to deter political action or movement and keep them working in the fields, while at the same time redistributing excess food that workers have labored over and cannot afford. Although such approaches show evidence of providing crucial food for farmworkers in times of need, these programs ultimately allow agribusiness to feed their workers via charity, while maintaining low wages.

Programs and projects that address farmworker health receive support and encouragement from agribusiness in the form of food bank donations and work site health education programs. Support for such programs and projects are evidence that the food assistance programs are far from challenging the structural food insecurity caused by the industrial agro-food system and, at the most extreme, are supplementing such exploitation.

Additionally, the donations and efforts made by agribusiness to support food security programs encourage food assistance workers to not question the low agribusiness wages of their clients. They are willing to partner with agribusiness to improve farmworker health, without contesting the system that is the cause of food insecurity itself. Oftentimes, the government and nonprofit sectors by which food assistance workers are employed are directly subsidizing workers' low wages, by taking part in employee health days and on-farm health projects.

#### **Social Reproduction and the Neoliberalization of Food**

Karl Marx ([1867] 2008) argued that in order to reproduce one's self, a worker must be able to afford, or be provided with, a basic level of subsistence. Following the

dispossession of the worker from the land (where he or she was able to subsist independently from the capitalist system), capitalism must produce the dispossessed peasant as the worker. In order to maintain this system, the capitalist must also maintain the worker's own reproduction:

... in short, the capitalist produces the worker as the wage-labourer. This incessant reproduction, this perpetuation of the worker, is the absolutely necessary condition for capitalist production... He profits not only from what he receives from the worker, but also by what he gives him. The capital given in return for labor power is converted into means of subsistence which have to be consumed to reproduce the muscles, nerves, bones, and brains of existing workers, and to bring new workers into existence (Marx [1867] 2008, 716–7).

In this chapter, I review two forms of programs/projects that are addressing farmworker food insecurity: food assistance programs, such as food banks and county health department food security programs, and farmworker gardens. Both modes of coping with food insecurity, although very different in practice, can be analyzed from the perspective of supplementing social reproduction of the worker. I argue that this process occurs both directly, as growers and others in the agribusiness industry both fund and benefit from farmworker food security programs, and indirectly, as practices such as gardening allow farmworkers to supplement their insufficient diets without improved wages.

Marx explains that the worker circulates his or her wages back into the capitalist system to purchase food and shelter, as a means to survive, reproducing him or herself at the same time as reproducing the system,

A society can no more cease to produce than it can cease to consume. When viewed, therefore, as a connected whole, and in the constant flux of its incessant renewal, every social process of production is at the same time a process of reproduction (Marx [1876] 2008, 711).

In the case of the California farmworker, the ability to purchase produce directly benefits the grower. Furthermore, programs that allow farmworkers to purchase food from the market at reduced prices or through charity food programs not only act to reproduce the worker, but also encourage farmworkers to consume more product from the growers themselves, also contributing to growers' profits.<sup>30</sup>

Marx argues that the capitalist does not care for the quality of food that the worker consumes, unless it affects the worker's capability to labor:

The fact that the worker performs acts of individual consumption in his own

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<sup>30</sup> In many cases the grower may actually be paid for the product, via USDA commodity purchases or direct purchases by food banks, or benefit from tax breaks and averting dumping costs.

interest, and not to please the capitalist, is something entirely irrelevant to the matter. The consumption of food by a beast of burden does not become any less of a necessary aspect of the production process because the beast enjoys what it eats. The maintenance and reproduction of the working class remains a necessary condition for the reproduction of capital (Marx [1876] 2008, 718).

In today's agro-food system, although workers may be able to exchange their wages for sufficient calories, the food that they purchase, especially on a limited income, may be overly plentiful in calories and fat and deficient in nutrition, leading to diet-related diseases. Health outcomes of cheap food consumption can become an obstacle to efficient farm labor. As I explain in the following sections, when farmworker health starts interfering with work, rather than providing sufficient wages and comprehensive health care, growers enlist county health department employees to encourage shifts in consumption habits, treating the problem as one of education and access to food or healthcare, (rather than income, a topic I explore further in Chapter Four).

Food security programs and projects such as these resonate with broader critiques of food and agriculture movements, as they provide a liberal solution to a structural problem. Critical scholars (Alkon 2008; Allen and Guthman 2006; Brown and Getz 2008; Guthman 2008a, b; Pudup 2008) have highlighted how alternative food projects, such as gardens, farmer's markets, and school lunch programs, fall short in providing structural change to the agro-food system, acting to reinforce "neoliberal rationalities: consumer choice, localism, entrepreneurialism, and self-improvement" (Guthman 2008a, 1171). Similarly, the examples I depict below, although they may make short-term progress in alleviating food insecurity, ultimately serve to divert resources and energy from those that are concerned for farmworkers' health and food access, while supporting the system that causes such inequities.

Pudup (2008) argues that community gardens, or as she calls them, "organized garden projects," act as spaces for neoliberal self-governance, as they produce citizen-subjects. As a response to capitalist economic restructuring in the 1980s and 90s, today's community gardens are not emerging from cohesive communities themselves, but rather are reinforcing the notion of the individual sustainable consumer or good citizen as organizers emphasize individual, not communal goals, and community affiliations are imposed. Although the gardens she reviews vary in many ways from garden formations and practices I have seen (see Chapter Four), her claims of gardens supplementing for neoliberal reforms (in this case the subsequent devaluing of labor via union busting, leading to increased food insecurity for farmworkers) resonates with farmworker gardens covered in this research.

Concerning food assistance programs, Poppendieck (1999) contends that the emergency food system is "the ultimate band-aid," which allows the state to defund public assistance, as they can be assured there is a system in place so that people will not starve. She notes that as emergency food programs relieve pressure from more fundamental or structural solutions to poverty and hunger, they serve to mitigate the guilt of the wealthy,

without challenging inequality or privilege itself. In addition to the benefits of social production, agribusiness companies benefit from making donations as they receive tax breaks, and avoiding dumping fees if they are donating food itself (Poppendieck 1999).

Poppendieck further notes that emergency food programs in the US developed as government funded assistance programs, such as food stamps and welfare, were reduced in the Reagan era and again in 1996. President Reagan encouraged Americans to focus on hunger, instead of poverty. He promoted volunteerism as a political ideology, as he decreased government-sponsored food assistance programs, such as WIC and food stamps, and encouraged volunteer programs. The defunding of government food assistance services, and concurrent promotion of volunteer and private programs in their place, Poppendieck argues, transitioned access to food assistance programs in the United States from a *right* to a *gift*.

Seemingly generous measures to help farmworkers maintain a healthy diet and access to healthcare, without actually providing such care as part of a labor agreement, provides companies with other benefits. This includes the allure of a philanthropic image. In turn, companies receive support and respect from health regulators and service providers. Although some members of management may believe their companies act altruistically, the actual effect is that such companies are seen as more progressive than others in terms of labor practices, without necessarily being so, and therefore are able to avert unionization, employees fighting for better wages, and discussions concerning terms of labor.

### **Food Banks and Emergency Food**

Food Banks are a primary source of food for those who are undocumented and food insecure on the Northern Central Coast.<sup>31</sup> Food banks and other emergency food programs in the United States have a long history of being supply driven, not need driven. Unfortunately the dependence on surplus production and focus on farm income as a determinant of government purchased food stuffs, means that the amount and type of food provided through such programs is dependent on the needs of growers, not on the needs of the poor (Winne 2008; Poppendieck 1999).

Joel Campos, the outreach coordinator at Second Harvest, the Santa Cruz County food bank in Watsonville, estimates that seventy to seventy-five percent of their clients are farmworkers. I asked Campos what role agribusiness played a role in the food bank system and he replied:

First of all, it is for their own benefit [the food banks and related programs]. The same people that work for them are the same people that are going hungry. If their employees have food security throughout the year... Their income is not that

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<sup>31</sup> As I note in Chapter Two, undocumented people are not able to apply for food stamps and therefore rely more heavily on emergency food programs such as food banks.

big – not enough to feed the whole family... they have to make choices and they tend to buy cheap food. Farmers benefit because the produce that they donate goes back to the same employees. So they are healthier to go back to work the next season. They will not get sick and be more productive.

It is clear to many who work closely with farmworker populations, as Campos does, that growers are aware of what they must do to maintain the system as it is. By providing donations, farmers are continuing a long practice in American agriculture of using and even creating an emergency food system which serves the agricultural industry's needs primarily and the needs of the hungry when convenient.<sup>32</sup>

Although food banks and other emergency food institutions, such as pantries and soup kitchens, are privately operated, the state has historically provided these programs with much of their donated food. Government supported emergency food first emerged during the Great Depression. In 1933 the Roosevelt administration established the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation (FSRC) to purchase agricultural surpluses for distribution to the unemployed, starting with a glut of pigs that would otherwise have been slaughtered and wasted. This was a short-term plan, with the goal of avoiding the public horror of wasted food. The government had initially awarded struggling farmers loans to get through the season, but when farmers defaulted and forfeited their crops, the state was forced to store the commodities, which they, in turn, donated domestically and internationally in order to prevent waste and keep prices up (USDA 2010; Poppendieck 1999).

It was not a calculated plan for helping the poor and hungry, more a matter of convenience to assist farmers with crop abundance. Alleged a writer at the time, "Last year and the year before, the government purchased apples in this state and in the state of Oregon loose in cars. From the standpoint of the growers, this was a mighty fine thing" (Poppendieck 1999, 145). The Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) and the Department of Agriculture had an interest in maintaining and growing the surplus purchasing program and used the argument that the American people would be appalled seeing good food go to waste. The name of the program was subsequently changed from the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation to the Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation, when the Department of Agriculture took over management responsibilities and the branch, "adapted to its new role as a tool for farm income maintenance" (Poppendieck 1999, 146).

The government practice of purchasing commodities for donation was solidified in Section 32 of the Agriculture Act of 1935, when money was put aside to purchase commodities for the purpose of controlling the supply of surplus food in the market. For the first time in the United States, categories were created to identify eligible people and

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<sup>32</sup> This trend is also true of the United States' international food aid practices. For more on the international food regime and food aid, see Friedmann (1982).

institutions to receive donated government purchased food, including schools, charitable institutions, and poor families (USDA 2010). When the federal government tried to shift from emergency relief to more substantial welfare services, such as employment, health care, and social security programs, the new programs that supplemented growers in order to feed the poor created a conflict between Roosevelt's administration and agricultural interests. Unfortunately, by continuing to support the commodity distribution program, the state acted to undermine Roosevelt's relief package (Poppendieck 1999). It was not until 1961, when President Kennedy made an executive order mandating that the Department of Agriculture supply a variety of foods to needy families, that the focus of Commodity Distribution Programs shifted from disposal of surplus foods to providing nutrition to poor families (USDA 2010).

Similar to the developments in emergency food following the pig glut in 1933, a weak farm economy in the 1980s created a dairy surplus, which subsequently led to the creation of the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). This programs' objective was to distribute government purchased overstock to poor families. When the dairy surplus was over, the emergency food providers demanded that the government replace the surplus with commodity purchases specifically for emergency food programs. Food providers were overwhelmed with clients due to the recession and simultaneous defunding of government welfare programs as part of Reagan's neoliberal reforms. The demand for emergency food was growing just as surplus agricultural commodities were getting back under control. Emergency food providers could no longer function while being dependent on the surpluses of the agricultural sector. In 1989, annual appropriations were designated to the emergency food sector by the government. The Temporary Food Assistance Program's name was officially changed to the Emergency Food Assistance Program (also TEFAP), as part of the 1990 Farm Bill, clearly no longer representing a temporary agenda (Poppendieck 1999; USDA 2010).

Today, the TEFAP provides a limited number of standardized food bags filled with commodities to state agencies throughout the country; the number of bags provided is dependent upon each state's low-income population. Food banks often distribute these bags to their clients. At the food banks in Santa Cruz, San Benito, and Monterey counties, families can receive bags without proving their income or documentation status, although the process for receiving a bag varies by state. Each family is allowed one bag per month, which is only sufficient to make a few meals for a small family, according to food bank staff. One food bank manager stated that she felt what they received was based on political representations and connections of various growers. She recalled that a few years ago they got a lot of dried figs; this past year frozen blueberries were a common item. She implied that the inclusion of these items was not in response to need. Currently the USDA only offers non-perishables, but she said that food banks are advocating to the USDA to provide fresh produce as well.

All of the Northern Central Coast food banks receive fresh and packaged foods from a combination of sources, including the USDA's TEFAP program, donations from local growers (large and small), manufacturers, retailers, distributors, grocers, and processors

in food industry, as well as individual donations in the form of holiday drives, food, and cash. Food banks also buy some food staples with grant money and trade with other regional banks when items are unbalanced. Local retail stores often make donations of less desirables, including dented cans and food about to expire. All food bank representatives indicated that these types of donations have dwindled with the recession, as retailers are working to find outlets for unwanted goods, such as The Dollar Store and other reduced price vendors.

Furthermore, the region's food banks receive food from organizations whose primary mission is to connect growers with food banks. Agriculture Against Hunger (AAH) is a Central Coast nonprofit whose board primarily consists of growers, bankers, and Farm Bureau members. They work to consolidate fresh food donations from local farms to distribute to food banks and pantries. The California Association of Food Banks also sponsors a program called "Farm to Family," which receives donations from California growers to share among food banks.

Historically, emergency food donations in the United States have been contingent on the needs of growers. This is the case in the Northern Central Coast as well. What is remarkable about emergency food provided by farms in this context is that the donations they provide go directly to those who grow it and whose poverty is caused by the production system itself. The benefits to the farmer are just as unmistakable as they were in the purchase of commodities during food gluts in the 1930s and 1980s, except that in this context they are concealed by the veil of benevolent charity (Polanyi [1944] 1971).

### **The Farmworker Lunch Truck Program**

The Farmworker Lunch Truck Program, which was prompted by the international agribusiness corporation, Reiter Affiliated Companies, is a healthy-eating initiative directly targeting farmworkers' diets in the field. Reiter, the "largest fresh berry supplier in North America" (Reiter Affiliated Companies 2011), approached the Monterey County Health Department about the project in early 2010. The county applied for a 25,000-dollar grant from state and committed one part time (10 hour a week) employee to work on the project. Although county employees staff the project and the funding comes from government grants, the project only serves Reiter Affiliated and only attempts to affect farmworkers' diets in their place of work.

Lunch trucks, commonly called taco trucks, include *luncheros* (larger trucks that cook on site) and *fayucas* (smaller trucks that offer pre-made foods), enter privately owned field sites during work breaks and are the only food option for farmworkers during the workday, unless they bring their own. The project enlists county employees to persuade lunch truck owners to offer healthier food options in Reiter's fields in the area.<sup>33</sup> From the perspective of the health department, encouraging healthy options in the trucks helps

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<sup>33</sup> In this project healthy was defined very basically, as "including more fruits and vegetables to the food options."

them address the obesity and diabetes epidemic among the county's immigrant population.

Of all the programs I encountered that address farmworker food security, the Farmworker Lunch Truck Program in Monterey County is the only one that seeks to affect farmworkers' food consumption in their place of work. Rather than being concerned with farmworkers having too little food, this program responds to statistics concerning obesity, diabetes, and other food related diseases in the farmworker population. As discussed in Chapter Two, those who are food insecure may actually be overweight as they tend to consume high calorie and high fat foods as they are cheapest and easiest to access, and often require less preparation. A doctor working on a similar project for Reiter in Oxnard, California, explained his perspective on the situation: "What's happening now is that the farmworker community is at risk. They're consuming more high fat, high carb food because it's cheaper. And if you're working in the fields all day you're less likely to want to come home and kick the ball around with your kids" (Hadley 2010).

A Reiter program coordinator in their philanthropy department told me:

The program developed in response to the diabetes problem... to encourage employee well being. The company has an interest in promoting our employee's health... The migrant population that works for the company fits the typical migrant profile. Their access to health care is limited; it is hard for them to understand the system. They have higher risk factors than others for health problems like diabetes and obesity.

The program encourages workers to eat healthy while helping them avoid paying workers higher wages (workers are non-unionized), while simultaneously improving the company's public image concerning labor. The Reiter employee told me, "The company is big on publicizing what we are doing." She then added, "The primary concern is for the health of the farmworkers."

Health department staff working on the project recognize that both food truck owners and farmworkers are skeptical about the project. Rather than suggesting overhauling the trucks' existing options, the project is encouraging small changes, promoting the healthy aspects of already familiar foods. According to health department employees, they are encouraging the vendors to improve what they are already doing, such as displaying photos of healthy options that they already have available, such as fruit and vegetable based dishes instead of meat, and whole beans instead of refried beans. Additionally, they are asking food truck owners to add one "healthy" meal, such as a salad or vegetarian item, if they don't have one already. According to the collaborating health department staff, they "see street vendors as agents for change."

Yet, when health department employees meet with the truck owners to discuss the project, they are often met with resistance. The lunch trucks are independently owned and operated by immigrant families who do not make much more than the farmworkers themselves. The truck owners do not want to lose profit by purchasing ingredients and products that may not be well-received by customers. Neither Reiter nor the county has implied they will provide insurance or financial compensation for the trucks should they lose business. Further, some farmworkers have expressed frustration with the project. According to one health department staff member, one woman told her, “If I want to eat fruits and vegetables, I will eat them at home.”

Reiter had already established volunteer employee health educators in the field (*promotoras/es*) and an employee advisory committee on farmworker health before this project was initiated. The health department is working with Reiter’s *promotoras/es*, training them in nutrition and to work in the community. The *promotora’s* position is to identify which healthier options farmworkers want and then act as an advisory committee, reporting back to the truck owners. Additionally, Reiter has similar programs throughout California and in Mexico promoting health and primary care for farmworkers, including a health and lifestyle program in Southern California, called *Sembrando Salud* (planting health), which the Lunch Truck Project is inspired by.

Company-motivated health projects, such as the Lunch Truck Project, affect the health department and other regional health workers’ view of the company. Health department employees present the progress of the project at the NFCCC quarterly regional health collaborative meetings where other health department employees, food bank managers, WIC and CalFresh (food stamp) program managers, and other health outreach workers learn about the program. At both of the meetings I attended, Reiter’s efforts in improving farmworker health were extolled. At one meeting, an employee reported on the project and spoke about the company: “They are a really progressive company. They sponsor clinics for their employees, wellness programs, and are just really really incredible.”

Another health department employee told me, “Reiter is a progressive company... [they are] exceptional from a worker’s perspective.” She explained that they have a clinic for their workers and was impressed that the company solicited help from the county to improve farmworker health. Yet when I asked if Reiter had offered any of their own money to support the project, another health department employee told me:

They haven’t really, but they have been very hands on. So for example, the training for the drivers they insisted be held at their corporate office in Aromas, which is awesome. That sends such a great message.

Contrary to the perception of area health workers, Reiter Affiliated does not have a good track record in terms of employee treatment. An article concerning labor practices on

organic farms published in the online publication *Grist*, describes working conditions at Reiter.<sup>34</sup>

The supervisors at her farm, Reiter Berry, were often "aggressive" and capricious. Rules were arbitrary; workers were sometimes closely monitored, but sometimes allowed to work independently. They were, said Ortiz, assigned to "better or worse rows" -- all depending on the whims of the supervisors. When organizers from the United Farm Workers encouraged the Reiter employees to form a union, the company allegedly responded with intimidation and harassment (Mark 2006).

During the most recent large-scale efforts to unionize berry workers in the Northern Central Coast region in the late nineties, Reiter was one of the companies most fervently opposed to unionization. Workers were met with aggressive intimidation tactics as they unsuccessfully tried to negotiate for over two years. Sandy Brown, a labor activist in Santa Cruz County during the berry protests, explained Reiter's stance on the unionization effort:

I know they were some of the most vehement opponents to the UFW's strawberry campaign back in the 1990s and we were always being asked to call and fax them... I imagine their growers were among those who used both carrots (bathrooms, drinking water) and sticks (plowing fields under and firing people), to fight the union.

Although Reiter opposes actual mobilization by its employees to improve their income or livelihoods, it has made strides in creating a perception of itself as a "progressive company." This type of contradictory behavior must be stringently evaluated. On one hand, they are winning the favor of health care and food security workers by making small gestures towards farmworker health, while on the other, they are preventing workers from fighting for meaningful change in their quality of life. Moreover, although they are an extremely profitable corporation, they are using the already limited resources of the state to fund their health projects, a pattern which can be observed in other programs, such as state funded health promotions and educational projects described in the section below.

### **Latino Food Program of Monterey County**

The California Department of Public Health sponsors the statewide Champions for Change program, whose goals include increasing fruit and vegetable consumption and encouraging exercise, explicitly in low-income communities. In the Northern Central Coast, the health department has a program geared for outreach to Latino communities. According to the director, Lupe Covarrubias-Martinez, the Latino program is the only "ethnic" program in the regional network of Champions for Change. Although the

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<sup>34</sup> Some of Reiter's fields are organic, but not most.

program is not explicitly focused on farmworkers, a large proportion of the people they aim to address work in the fields. The program reaches out to the low-income Latino community by promoting healthy eating at stores and markets where low-income people shop, bringing recipes and educational material as well as doing cooking demonstrations. In addition to encouraging people to increase their fruit and vegetable intake, they spread information on how to access emergency food, food stamps, and WIC. They also attend events sponsored by growers in the region, whom invite them to attend health fairs and events.

When I asked Covarrubias-Martinez how big agriculture interests in the county respond to the work that they do she said:

Generally big agriculture is agreeable... they give donations, etc. We don't ask for a lot. It is pretty peaceful. A lot of growers are pretty good employers. For example "Premium Packing" throws an end of season party. They invited us [the Latino Program] and other health services to be there... The Dirigo Brothers also have an employee fair where they invite health services... Fresh Express Packing Company, they also have a fair with health services, employee trainings, etcetera. Quite a few companies do it. It's mostly the bigger companies, not the small ones.

The Latino Program poses no threat to agribusiness; on the contrary, the program helps to keep farm laborers healthy so they can keep working. As with the Lunch Truck Project, the growers are able to siphon county and state resources onto the farm, to maintain the social reproduction of workers without investing their own funds. By inviting the program to come on-site and sponsoring health fairs, the growers are perceived as generous by the health department employees. Health department staff are therefore distracted from the low wages, real food insecurity, and lack of comprehensive benefits provided by the growers.

Promotional activities, barbeques and health fairs, as explained by Jorge Valenzuela of the UFW in the epigraph of this chapter, act to dissuade workers from organizing for better benefits and wages, "There are different tactics where the companies always want to seem like they are being generous. They can't give any more and yes, when it comes time to voting or getting the workers organized you see what they do is they start having barbeques for them." Making workers feel as though their employers care about their health is an attempt to keep workers content, without asking for more. Growers in the region have shown that they will fight against labor organizing and presumably will do what it takes to prevent such efforts from happening again.

## **Gardens**

Many authors have looked at the ways in which gardening and small scale agriculture function to subsidize the exploitation of workers (Arrighi 2007; Berry 1993; Hart 2002;

Wolpe 1972; McClintock 2010). In reference to urban agriculture practiced by low-income residents in Oakland, California, McClintock (2010) writes, "... wages can stay lower if workers are feeding themselves, ultimately facilitating the accumulation of capital." My study is unique in that not only are workers growing food for their own sustenance, but they do so after working all day in the fields, laboring to supply food that is exported to the rest of the country.

There are various farmworker gardening projects throughout the Northern Central Coast, including those organized by nonprofit organizations, in conjunction with food banks, independent backyard gardens, and gardens planted on employer land. In some cases employers may not be aware of gardening efforts by farmworkers and in others they have actually provided the space for farmworkers to garden. In either scenario, farmworkers growing food for their own consumption does not seem to threaten growers, and in cases where the land is provided, it is even encouraged.<sup>35</sup> These projects vary in their scale and capacities, as well as their stability. I will discuss gardens at more length in other chapters, but I bring them up here in an effort to highlight the fact that regardless of the projects' intent and/or benefits, they all work to enable farmworker exploitation. By providing farmworkers with subsistence they are in affect acting to sustain low wages, as workers maintain able to bodies to labor and reproduce themselves.

Campos told me about the Santa Cruz food banks' recent decision to include gardening as part of their broader vision for food security. He noted that they were inspired by community gardens at Headstart programs, educating children about gardening and healthy food, "We now see how important community gardens are." He said they have been working with other agencies to start gardening projects. One such agency is the newly established nonprofit, Mesa Verde Gardens. Partnering with the food bank, they are starting a new community garden project on church property in Watsonville.

Ana Rasmussen, a trained social worker, started the Mesa Verde project in 2010. She established the nonprofit after her experiences with community gardens in Santa Cruz, where she lives. She observed that most of the members of the three community gardens in town were neither in need of land nor the garden project for basic sustenance. Rather, "most people there just would rather not have food in their yard." With a desire to help low-income communities access local and organic food, she started her first garden

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<sup>35</sup> Two farmers I spoke with was very supportive of farmworkers and other low-income groups gardening for sustenance, but when I brought the idea of farmworkers growing for profit they immediately showed skepticism. They both argued that they couldn't possibly access the land or water that they would need. It was suggested by one farmworker activist that most farmers in this region are very competitive and especially in the realm of organics, feel the market is saturated. She suggested they might be discouraging of farmworkers growing for profit due to the fact that they feel threatened by market competition. One counter example to this argument is Isabella Rosa, who is an ALBA graduate and whose operation is discussed more fully in Chapter Five. She has been renting land to farmworkers to grow for sale for a few years.

project in Watsonville in 2010 with a Headstart preschool program, where 70 percent of the parents work in agriculture. She recently connected with Campos to start a garden that would unite the food banks' mission to feed the hungry in Santa Cruz County and her own work providing garden spaces to low-income people in the surrounding community. The garden project is in the beginning stages and the food bank and Rasmussen are currently working out how the two organizations will work together. Funding for the project is coming from a 5,000-dollar grant from the multinational agribusiness company, Driscoll. Additionally, Rasmussen received support from a local "wealthy farmer," who lent her a tractor and other equipment.

The Santa Cruz County food bank has also been partnering with a landowner in the nearby town of Calabazas, who donated land to the food bank to grow fresh produce for their clients. During the summer of 2010 the food bank took volunteers to work at the garden on a weekly basis. Volunteers, or "partners in need," were low-income, some unemployed, and were also allowed to take food home. They planted many varieties of jalapeños, corn, squash, and other vegetables, paying attention to which foods were culturally appropriate for the mostly Latin American immigrant food bank clients. Campos said they were unsure if they would continue the project this coming summer. He thought the garden would still exist and the food would still be donated to the food bank, but they might stop bringing volunteers there, since the coordination was so much work.

The garden project I have spent the most time exploring is a community garden in Oaxacan Children's' garden in Hyattstown, California. Twelve families each have plots on one and a half acres of arable city land. All of the families have at least one, and some have two, adults working in agriculture, and almost all are of Copala Triqui or Mixteco decent. The project is funded by Health Trust, a health related foundation in neighboring Silicon Valley, and the Honor The Earth Foundation, a Native American foundation based in Minnesota. During the conception of this project, the employer of two of the participants, Coke Farms, donated a tractor and seeds.

All the participating families expressed to me the enormous help that the garden has provided them with during the harvest time. They were able to increase their fruit and vegetable consumption immensely and saved money on produce at the store, allowing them to buy more protein and other foods. Most participants saved produce to help them get by after the harvest was over, by drying, canning, or freezing the food. The garden participants emphasized many times over how crucial the garden was in their family's ability to eat healthy and eat the foods they preferred, including Oaxacan varieties of corn, beans, squash, and herbs, as I discuss more in Chapter Four. The garden provides a space for community gatherings, exercise for all family members, something for them to do together, and a "place to be" after work in the fields that they felt was safe. In pre-harvest food security surveys, every involved family qualified as food insecure, and all gave the reasoning that they could not afford food, often running out of money to buy

food before their paychecks came in.<sup>36</sup> Yet, the garden also supports participating farmworkers as they continue to work for low wages, supplied with a more nutritious and complete diet than before.

All the garden projects mentioned in this section have started with the best intentions to support the low-income, mostly farmworker, population in the region. One must question why such projects are so well supported by agribusiness interests. It must be noted that instead of increasing wages, companies such as Driscoll, Reiter, and many others involved in philanthropic organizations such as Agriculture Against Hunger, are opposed to unionization and institutionalized benefits for workers, although their donations indirectly help supply the most basic needs to their employees, simultaneously improving their own public images while maintaining the status quo.

### **Can Food Assistance Providers Address Structural Solutions?**

Poppendieck (1999) argues that emergency food institutions depend on corporate donations, and are therefore unable to advocate for progressive reforms or discuss class struggle. She documents that the boards of emergency food programs are often politically conservative and discourage lobbying or political activity by the organizations. She explains that by treating hunger, which can be seen as apolitical, rather than poverty, which is more inherently political, emergency food programs can function to depoliticize the problem.

A parallel argument can be made concerning food assistance providers on the Northern Central Coast. As noted throughout this chapter, most food assistance programs are well supported by growers, a traditionally conservative interest group in California (Walker 2004). It is not in the interest of growers to challenge the class system in California agriculture or address the issue of poverty directly. Rather, as discussed in the introduction of this chapter, it is in their interest to make sure that farmworkers are fed the minimum amount to stay healthy and provide the labor needed for farm operations to function. All of the food banks I researched had large growers on their boards and received donations in food and cash from agribusiness companies. Further, interventions such as the Latino Program, although funded by the county, are working closely with growers.<sup>37</sup>

Yet despite involvement with agribusiness, many food assistance workers are active politically and, as representatives of their programs, are attempting to improve food access regionally and statewide. They were aware that they must work in solidarity with other agencies to leverage state and federal funds and to not be beholden to corporate donations. That said, in line with the politics of their funders and supporters, their

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<sup>36</sup> See introduction for method and survey details.

<sup>37</sup> It should also be pointed out that agricultural interests heavily control the region politically and that historically the counties governments in the region have been supportive of growers' interests to the detriment of farm labor.

political engagement is limited to food access issues, rather than addressing the more structural and systemic causes of food insecurity.

Some of the food assistance workers I interviewed are involved in a statewide hunger advocacy and lobbying group, the California Hunger Action Coalition (CHALK). They address the legislative side of food access, advocating for low-income communities on emergency food and food stamp funding and accessibility. They also sponsor the annual Hunger Action Day, an annual event where advocates travel to Sacramento from throughout the state and educate legislators about hunger and anti-hunger legislation. The goal of the coalition is to improve food programs and make them more accessible.

Many food assistance workers are part of statewide food access collaboratives, such as the California Food Banks Association, which brings together all forty-three nonprofit food banks in California. They are currently very active, according to Campos, advocating at state levels and “taking low-income people’s voices to the capital.” Regionally active collaborations include the Nutrition and Fitness Collaborative of the Central Coast (NFCCC), which I have already discussed; Go For Health, a collaboration sponsored by the United Way to improve child health; and Fixing Schools, a local collaborative working on a universal healthy school lunch agenda. The NFCCC also includes a subgroup specifically addressing “food access.” Some members of the NFCCC are also involved in the Central Coast Hunger Action Coalition, which works to support food access legislation. Campos called it “more radical” than the NFCCC, in that they are directly advocating for low-income people to the state government.

Campos emphasized that a lot of the work that collaboratives like CHALK or the Central Coast Hunger Action Coalition do politically is about redistributing government funds, making sure that all money meant to be allocated to food security programs are taken advantage of and that more money is prioritized for these purposes. One focus of CHALK is to make sure that all federal funds for food stamps are utilized in California. California ranks next to last in the country for states participating in the national food stamp program (now called CalFresh). This is not due to lack of need, but rather a lack of enrollment, which can be blamed on poor outreach, stigma, and the bureaucracy involved enrolling and maintaining registration. It has been argued that the lack of participation in the program not only impacts the families lacking the food, but the larger California economy, as less money is flowing into the state (Shimada 2010).<sup>38</sup>

Although food assistance providers on the Northern Central Coast may not be challenging the food system to provide better wages and benefits or addressing the root causes of hunger for their clients, many of them realize the importance of political involvement, movement building, and collaboration to continue their programs and to address the food security problem more generally. Nevertheless, a crucial political

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<sup>38</sup> If 100 percent of eligible Californians enrolled in CalFresh, the state would receive an estimated \$3.7 billion in additional federal dollars each year. Currently there are 2.9 million eligible people in California who are not enrolled (Shimada 2010).

discussion still missing from the above organizations is that if they are to truly address the needs of low-income and food secure populations in semi-rural areas such as the Northern Central Coast, most of whom are farmworkers and immigrants, they must address immigration issues.

The National Latino Research Center (NLRC) at California State University in San Marcos exemplifies the model of doing policy and outreach at once, working on immediate resource needs of farmworkers and addressing immigration policy head-on. They are a university-affiliated institute not receiving funds from agribusiness directly and therefore not constrained by agribusiness interests.<sup>39</sup>

The NLRC also works on issues of rural poverty, food insecurity, and farmworker health. One of their projects is a statewide campaign to do food stamp outreach, to help immigrants moving beyond the fear associated with using government programs. They are currently funded by the California Endowment to administer a statewide campaign addressing farmworker food health throughout the state, including community assessments to understand assets and challenges to farmworker communities. They have been finding that problems vary across communities: some have more issues with housing, some with food access, others with general health issues. They formed a “Farmworker Care Coalition” to bring resources together and do outreach to farmworker communities. The executive director, Arcela Nunez-Alvarez, says their goal is “to empower farmworker communities,” via participatory research and outreach. In contrast to the food collaboratives discussed above, NLRC has a detailed analysis of structural and labor issues concerning farmworkers and how this affects their ability to access resources, including food: “We need to build a baseline around the needs first, in order to build an advocacy framework for the future. The idea is to build a network and then bring in the United Farmworkers (UFW) and Delores Huerta,” said Nunez-Alvarez.

The NLRC contrasts with the above groups in that they are a research based institute located at a university, rather than a coalition of nonprofit and government groups. Although their positioning gives them particular privileges (and constraints), they provide an example for other collaboratives and organizations that aim to address farmworker food insecurity at its roots. By being forthright about the need to work on labor and immigration policy as part of a larger plan to address rural food security, the NLRC provides a useful example for other programs with similar goals.

## **Conclusion**

The organizations, programs, and projects discussed above that function with the aim to address farmworker food insecurity often unintentionally (and sometimes intentionally) work to maintain the structural and systemic causes of the problem. By enabling

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<sup>39</sup> This institute was discussed in the introduction. This is not to say they are not constrained by other university connections or funding streams.

agribusiness to continue business as usual, these endeavors ultimately result in supplementing farmworker exploitation.

As I discuss in the conclusion, the movement for farmworker rights is growing in conjunction with the broader food movement in the United States, providing an opportunity for such actors listed above to get involved with. Organizations such as NLRC provide an example of an institute that is simultaneously addressing the immediate needs of hunger for farmworkers while also understanding the need for more structural forms of action.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### KNOWING “GOOD FOOD”: IMMIGRANT KNOWLEDGE AND THE RACIAL POLITICS OF FARMWORKER FOOD INSECURITY

Academics and activists have long recognized the fact that low-income people of color are often marginalized from access to healthy food.<sup>40</sup> What is not commonly discussed is the ways in which people lacking access are assumed to also be devoid of nutritional and agricultural knowledge, further marginalizing them from discussions and decision-making concerning what constitutes healthy and fresh food. A common assumption made by food assistance workers and food activists is that low-income eaters need to be taught about healthy eating. This assumption can act to reinforce race and class-based notions of who produces and consumes particular kinds of food.

I argue that the programs and projects targeted at the food insecure population in California’s Northern Central Coast region, which tend to be primarily non-white immigrant farmworkers, approach food insecurity with the assumption that a lack of understanding or education is the fundamental barrier to healthy eating. Education becomes the way to tackle the problem of food insecurity, rather than addressing income inequality, systemic discrimination, immigration status, or a general lack of resources and power. My research shows that the assumption that food insecure people lack an understanding of “healthy” food choices is not accurate for many recent immigrants, and that such assumptions may actually work to undermine food assistance and food security work.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the focus on education, rather than wealth or income, as a determinant of food access masks existing class relations, distracting from the true cause of food insecurity.

In this chapter I analyze the ways in which programs working to address food insecurity can reinforce racialized notions of food consumption. I argue that food assistance workers take a “deficiency of knowledge” approach when addressing food insecurity and food related health problems for immigrants in the region. I contrast that approach with examples from immigrant gardening and farming, exploring how these practices have enabled immigrants to address their food insecurity by utilizing their own nutritional and agricultural knowledge. Although many have had experience farming and gardening in their countries of origin, when they move to the US, they depend on food assistance programs, such as Women Infants and Children (WIC), food banks, food pantries, and other non-governmental and state sponsored health and food programs.

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<sup>40</sup> It is important to recognize that descriptive terms “good” or “healthy” in reference to food are subjective ones. What counts as good or healthy food has different meanings to depending on the social context, as I discuss more below.

<sup>41</sup> This sample of workers is not representative of all farmworkers. This study group mostly came to California directly from rural Oaxaca, where they had little access to processed food and were dependent on subsistence farming. Their interest in and knowledge of agriculture and nutrition may therefore be more significant than farmworkers emigrating from other parts of Mexico and Latin America.

An emphasis on nutrition education articulates with neoliberal discourses emphasizing self-improvement as a pathway to economic prosperity. Increased access, on the other hand, is a politic of resource distribution and inherently counter to the kinds of subjectivities that seem possible or reasonable under neoliberalism. The structure of food assistance programs reflects such an approach, leaving both food assistance workers and benefit recipients with limited tools to address the structural causes of food insecurity.

### **Immigrant Food and Racial Politics**

Alternative food projects, such as gardens, often normalize and promote dominant food practices, creating hegemonic “white food spaces” (Slocum 2007). Actors in these spaces often assume a normative white culture as the way people relate to their food, without evoking critical thought about power relations in the food system (Alkon and McCullen 2011; Allen *et al.* 2003; Allen 2004; Guthman 2008a, b; Slocum 2007, 2001). In contrast, the immigrant gardens and farms described below allow for immigrants to create their own spaces, combining techniques and practices learned in California with those brought from their farming experiences in Oaxaca.

In addition, the knowledges reproduced in the garden and farm spaces work to counter notions that people of color do not know what to eat or are simply making bad choices about their food.<sup>42</sup> When farmworkers I interviewed had access to a place and resources to grow the foods they preferred, their diets reflected those encouraged by mainstream food and nutrition “experts.” There are many challenges to this approach, such as unstable funding and access to land, and ultimately the root of the problem still lies in farmworker poverty. Although gardens are not a comprehensive or long-term solution to farmworker food insecurity, these growing spaces exemplify the ways that farmworkers eat when given the resources to do so. Additionally, they act to correct assumed deficiencies of knowledge among low-income people of color and their food knowledge and practices.

The assumption that low-income people are lacking nutritional knowledge intersects with racial constructions that reinforce disparaging attitudes concerning people of color and their ways of being. Racial formations, which occur through a process of “historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized” (Omi and Winant 1994, 55–56) are imposed and reinforced via power relations within the US food and agricultural system. This notion has been discussed in the context of agricultural regulations (Minkoff-Zern *et al* 2011), labor (Mitchell 1996; Garcia 2002; Walker 2004), inclusion in and access to markets (Alkon 2008a, b, McClintock 2010, Slocum 2007), and inclusion (or the lack thereof) in alternative food movements (Alkon 2008; Allen 2004; Allen *et al.* 2003; Guthman 2008b; Harper 2010).

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<sup>42</sup> Critical food studies scholars such as Harper (2010) and Guthman (2008b) argue that there are many health food and alternative food system activists that assume people of color eat “unhealthy” diets due to a lack of knowledge about healthy food.

Exploring the spaces and practices of food production and consumption serves to highlight race relations, as well as reflects on the ways in which food can create new forms of racial identity, politics, and discrimination (Slocum 2010, 18).

Non-white immigrant food, and specifically Mexican food, has been discriminated against historically in the United States as “unsanitary” (Pilcher 2008). The American agro-food industry has embraced and promoted xenophobic fears, promoting “sanitary” and “pure” foods of European origin such as pasteurized cow’s milk and white bread, (DuPuis 2002; Bobrow-Strain 2008; Pilcher 1998), in contrast to foods consumed by immigrants of color or “contaminated” foods. In the context of this study, food assistance workers have interpreted immigrant foods as unhealthy and even unclean, reflecting the lack of understanding of immigrant foodways.

As America’s obsession with obesity develops (Guthman 2009; Biltekoff 2007), low-income people and people of color’s food habits are routinely criticized, without a thorough examination of the systemic causes of why such groups of people are disproportionately experiencing nutrition and weight related health problems (Herndon 2005), or the ways that alternative or “healthy” food spaces may reinforce racial inequalities (Alkon 2008; Slocum 2007).<sup>43</sup> Popular accounts of the American obesity epidemic often blame low-income people of color for their own bad choices, rather than developing a critical understanding of the structural injustices that lead to poor eating habits (Guthman 2009). This argument supports the ways in which food and nutrition education are promoted as the solution to health disparities, assuming it is a lack of knowledge, rather than structural race and class based inequalities which create such conditions. Ultimately, such assumptions act to reproduce inequitable racial formations, by justifying the narrative of healthy food choice, and therefore placing blame on those that are unable to afford and access healthy food.

During my research, I occasionally encountered overt discriminatory attitudes, which reinforced the notion of immigrant food as unsanitary. The most disturbing were those made by people working at food and nutrition outreach programs. The most notable example was during an NFCCC meeting, where all attendees were associated with regional health and nutrition programs. The coordinator of a public health program that works with lunch trucks in Monterrey County to provide healthier food to farmworkers (discussed in Chapter Two) was presenting her work. After she gave a short presentation on the project, one white woman, who worked with a local nutrition and health program, asked the presenter, a Latina woman, “Are those the same as roach coaches?” This comment clearly made some people in the room uncomfortable, as she was implying that the most common vendors of food to Latino immigrants in the area were unsanitary. The meeting included about thirty white women, a few Latinas, and one Latino in attendance. The comment was met with awkward responses. Following the comment another

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<sup>43</sup> Studies show that 37% of African American and 33% of Mexican American women are obese in the United States, versus 24% of white women (Herndon 2005).

attendee stated that the trucks are sanitary to eat from, although no one directly confronted the racist implications of the comment.

Ironically, as general anti-immigrant sentiment and simultaneous preoccupation with “unsanitary” food and food safety has increased in recent years, Mexican food, and Oaxacan food in particular, are being embraced by foodie culture. I was recently invited to attend an event at the Robert Mondavi Food and Wine Institute in Davis, California titled, “An Evening with Diana Kennedy: Oaxaca al Gusto.” Kennedy, touted as a Oaxacan food expert, is the white author of many well-known cookbooks on Oaxacan food. At this event the notion of the exotic and essentialized “other” was conceptually and literally consumed (hooks 2006; Heldke 2003), via the appropriation of Oaxacan food practices, with disregard to very current and proximate race relations (Slocum 2010). The event had very few people of color in audience and seemingly no natives of Oaxaca. Yet the Davis campus is located in Yolo County, in the northern part of California’s Central Valley. Oaxacans have become a significantly higher proportion of agricultural laborers in California over the past decade and there is certainly no lack of Oaxacan immigrants living in the area. The Institute itself was funded by a \$25 million dollar gift from Robert Mondavi, the owner of one of California’s most profitable vineyards and a large employer of agricultural labor, to increase the university’s food and wine programs. After the talk, which was comprised mostly of photos of food Kennedy prepared in Oaxaca, the guests were treated to appetizers from recipes in Kennedy’s cookbook and wine from local vineyards. While the food itself was happily consumed, there was no discussion of the Oaxacan people living in our midst nor the fact that Oaxacan immigrant labor may very well have been utilized in growing the ingredients of our hors d'oeuvres.

The meeting where the comment was made concerning the “roach coach” and the Kennedy event took place in the same month, both with similar white middle class attendees who are putting much of their professional and personal energy into encouraging others to consume “good food.” These examples, when looked at side by side, illustrate the ways that immigrant food is simultaneously fetishized by foodie culture and disconnected from immigrants’ bodies and labor. The immigrants themselves are thought to prepare and consume unclean food, while a white woman promoting and preparing immigrant food in its place of origin is put on a pedestal by foodie consumers.

### **Food Assistance Programs and Educating Farmworkers to Eat “Good Food”**

Despite what I argue are misguided foci of such programs, food assistance providers themselves generally understand that immigrants to the United States usually have had a healthier diet in their countries of origin. They are aware that most of their clients and target population have only recently adapted to an American diet, consuming processed food and high levels of fat and calories, that make them more prone to obesity-related disease. Unfortunately, the way that most food programs are structured does not leave space to acknowledge the nutritional knowledge low-income people already have, nor their particular dietary and income related limitations. For example, in my research I

found a substantial emphasis on cooking classes at farmers' markets, in schools, and at food banks. By focusing so strongly on what people need to be taught, via cooking and health education projects, these programs obscure uneven class relations. Such programs bypass the root of the problem: lack of ability to buy or grow foods people want to eat and, concomitantly, an ability to take part in the process of defining what constitutes a healthy meal.<sup>44</sup>

The NFCCC has a "Food Access" subcommittee that meets quarterly. At a recent meeting I attended I found that rather than discussing *access*, many of the presentations at the meeting concentrated on nutrition education. The collaborative does promote programs such as increasing food stamp usage at farmer's markets and fruit, vegetable, and water availability in schools. Yet, much of the focus of the meeting was on how to get people to think differently about what they eat, through school education, foster parent education, and farmer's market education programs, rather than how to increase food access.

Many food assistance workers I interviewed, attendees of the Food Access subcommittee as well as the general NFCCC meetings, exhibited ignorance of the nutritional needs and daily limitations of low-income and farmworker clients. At one NFCCC meeting in Watsonville, California, it was mentioned that one of the food bank managers, who could not attend, needed suggestions for healthier options to give people that requested Ramen Noodles. This request sparked a heated debate among the members of the group. At first, many of the (mostly white) women in the room were appalled. They argued that Ramen Noodles are undoubtedly unhealthy, filled with sodium and full of fat. They were clearly disgusted that any food program could distribute such food to their clients. A woman representing the United Way interrupted the upheaval to bring attention to the fact that her homeless clients have different nutritional needs and abilities to prepare food than might be expected by assistance providers. She noted:

I sit on the United Way board for basic needs representing homeless people, and sometimes we have to be really careful about the nutritional level that we may want compared to homeless people who probably don't have a high sodium diet. They probably don't have a high fat diet. They need calories and they need food, so we need to be really careful not to be too much of a zealot on the nutritional aspect of it because their systems right now are different and they need different things than we who have meals all the time. I just want to point that out to be a little cautious to what we think nutrition is. Is it better to have a cup o noodle soup or have nothing?

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<sup>44</sup> For certain populations, such as those that are US- born and raised during the shift away from whole foods and to prepackaged and processed food in the 80's, this type of education may be the most important intervention to addressing food related illnesses.

She also pointed out that most clients don't have access to a kitchen or a way to heat food or even to open cans, something the other food assistance providers in the room had seemingly not thought of. One food bank manager echoed this disconnect in an interview, "We don't follow their day, we just give emergency food." Other food bank managers seemed more aware of the needs of their immigrant clients, recognizing that many of the foods they provide were not familiar, offering recipes for those foods, and attempting to provide culturally appropriate options. Yet no matter how aware the managers are, donation-based operations such as food banks and pantries are structurally limited in their options and their ability to address the daily needs of low-income and farmworker communities, as they are dependent on mostly private funding streams.

In my experience in farmworker homes, Ramen Noodle and similar products are often readily consumed as inexpensive, fast, and hot meals. Although they are usually not homeless, many farmworkers live in very crowded living situations and some do not have regular access to a kitchen. High fat, calorie, and sodium products that are easy to prepare often seem like a good deal to those struggling to feed a family on less than a living wage. In order to address the food insecurity of farmworkers and other low-income people, more people that work in food assistance programs must realize their clients' daily constraints to eating a healthy, balanced diet and critically think through the variety of ways that healthy food is made available and/or restricted.

Other regional programs, like the Latino Program of Champions for Change, discussed in Chapter Two, also emphasize education. The California Department of Public Health sponsors the statewide Champions for Change program, whose goals include increasing fruit and vegetable consumption and encouraging exercise, especially in low-income communities. In the Northern Central Coast, the health department has a program expressly geared for outreach to Latino communities. According to the director, Lupe Covarrubias-Martinez, the Latino program is the only "ethnic" program in the regional network of Champions for Change. Although the program is not explicitly focused on farmworkers, a large proportion of the people they aim to address work in the fields.

Covarrubias-Martinez discussed with me the promotions they do to educate low-income consumers about eating more fruits and vegetables and exercising. The program encourages branding, in the form of small gifts with their logo, which according to Covarrubias-Martinez, will help people to remember the message of healthy eating and living. They bring promotional gifts and signage to retail stores, festivals, and markets where they expect low-income families to shop.<sup>45</sup>

Covarrubias-Martinez also participates in a Farm Day through the regional Education through Agriculture Group, where they teach fifth graders about how fruits and

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<sup>45</sup> They sign she uses for the Latino Program shows a Latino family. Covarrubias-Martinez told me they also have a sign with a photo of an African American family, and one of a white family, that they use depending on the local population.

vegetables are grown and how far the produce travels to market.<sup>46</sup> The program is meant to encourage students' engagement with agriculture. Another program targeting children includes the Harvest of the Month program of California Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF), where agricultural educators go to classrooms to teach children about what is being harvested monthly in the region. The students can taste the produce and learn about how it is grown and the history of the crop.

These programs are intended to prevent the growing obesity epidemic among children, especially those who come from low-income families, as well as reconnect children with local agriculture and seasonal food. The assumption is that more kids are growing up without exposure to what grows seasonally in their region and that they must learn such information in order to make healthy food choices in the future.

Although the program assumes a lack of consumer knowledge, when I asked her if she thought the people that her program targeted know what's healthy to eat, she replied:

Most know what's healthy to eat. When they immigrate they try to assimilate. Here it's easier to access food that's high in fat, like sausage and bacon. It's harder to get and more expensive in Mexico. It's like they forget what's healthy. It depends, if both parents are working, there is not as much time to be preparing foods. With a stay-at-home mom, there is more time to prep, and more time to plan what's going to be in a meal.

There are many programs, including the Latino Program, that educate children about eating local and healthy food. Many of these programs target schools where the majority of students' parents are immigrants and work in the fields. Other food and nutrition education programs targeted towards children take place directly at farmer's markets in low-income areas. Everyone's Harvest, a nonprofit that organizes many of the regional farmers' markets in conjunction with the Latino Program, has a nutrition education program called Edible Education for Healthy Youth, which they operate at Monterey County farmers' markets. They teach children how to shop for and prepare foods from the market. If farmworkers are the primary low-income populations in these regions and the assumed target populations are primarily Latino immigrants, one must ask: is teaching them how to shop at a market really addressing the needs of such consumers? In Mexico, the primary way most rural people purchase food is in open-air markets, similar in structure to the farmer's markets that Everyone's Harvest organizes. Shopping at such markets is not a new practice to recently arrived immigrants, yet they do not commonly attend the farmer's markets in California as a primary source of food. Income restrictions are often compounded with unwelcoming racial politics of farmers' markets (Alkon 2008; Slocum 2007). Such efforts to educate low-income consumers at markets, which

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<sup>46</sup> According to Covarrubias-Martinez, these activities are sponsored by seed companies, The Department of Agriculture, agricultural shipping companies, farm and dairy owners, and others involved in the industry, with the intent to encourage involvement in the Future Farmers of America (FFA) and 4H groups.

disregard the real causes of food insecurity and racial exclusions in food spaces such as farmers markets, may actually compound racial exclusions in market places, as farmworkers and others who have vast nutritional and culinary knowledge do not feel their expertise is acknowledged.

I do not mean to argue that there is something inherently wrong with teaching children about their local agriculture and food systems, but to highlight the fact that these programs, which are largely run by white women and funded by white farmers, are working to educate the children of farmworkers, many of whom are from agricultural backgrounds themselves. In these cases, their parents work daily in the fields and rather than lacking an education on what is available in their region they are lacking access to such foods, as their parents' wages cannot purchase the diversity of produce they are learning about. More important than teaching students and low-income people in these counties what is growing around them, energy and resources spent in these programs could be more wisely re-focused to address why these families cannot afford to purchase these products.

### **New Places, New Foods**

Research shows that it is only after living in the United States that Latino immigrants are prone to develop obesity and other diet-related health problems (Himmelgreen *et al.* 2004; Kaplan *et al.* 2004; Wolin *et al.* 2008). All farmworkers I interviewed only started consuming meat, soda, and processed foods regularly after they arrived in California.<sup>47</sup> They all expressed a desire for fresher, more natural and organic foods, which they associated with their growing and eating practices from Mexico. Yet, even those who work on organic farms cannot afford to buy organic produce or free range meats. Below, I explore the ways that immigration has affected farmworkers' eating habits and how these changes may lead to the perceptions of food assistance workers that immigrants lack healthy food knowledge.

In many instances immigrants, especially those from highland Oaxaca and other rural areas, have not been exposed to much high fat and calorie processed food before coming to the United States.<sup>48</sup> Many of the farmworkers who participate in the garden noted the changes in their diet after they moved to the United States. Overall, they correlated their diet in Oaxaca as more "natural" and containing less chemicals or additives. As one farmworker explains, in Mexico they had little income in the form of money, but they did grow their own food and therefore had access to natural and organic foods,

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<sup>47</sup> I mentioned previously, I am not stating here that all farmworkers or immigrants are in this position, but that I am making a claim with particular reference to recent indigenous Oaxacan immigrants.

<sup>48</sup> It is important to note here that as some immigrants are exposed to unhealthy foods for the first time, such as sodas and other highly processed products, they are unaware of the nutritional content, or lack thereof. In such instances nutritional education can be very useful, especially for those that are encountering new food options in a new environment.

In Mexico there is almost no work, but here we work a lot and we want to be thinner, but we get fat, sometimes from the food, because it is changing a lot. For example, in Mexico one might not have work so they eat purely natural food. Here much of the food has a lot of fat. Many foods, like the chicken, has many chemicals. It has been in the store many days.

For many immigrants, their arrival to the United States is the first time they have been able to afford meat on a regular basis, due to the heavily subsidized meat available here.<sup>49</sup> Those from rural parts of Mexico did not consume meat except for on special occasions, and oftentimes only animals they had raised and slaughtered themselves. Although many of them consume higher rates of meat now that they find it available, almost everyone I met with complained of the quality and the fact that it was not natural or organic. Even though they ate meat very infrequently in Mexico, they were used to animals raised on their own farms, free-range and fed a diversity of food scraps, rather than grains. Since they can't afford high-quality meat here, they find the meat they buy in the store unsatisfactory, as one farmworker explains:

I don't buy much meat here. Sometimes people come here and they eat only meat. In Oaxaca we ate different wild herbs and such ... Meats were natural as well. They weren't fed animal feed.

Another couple discussed their diet in Oaxaca with me. They stated that all they ate in Mexico was what they grew and the only meat they ate was chicken from their own yard:

Husband: Salt was the only thing we didn't have. Everything there, we planted.

Wife: In Mexico? There were ate only vegetables. Only vegetables; we didn't eat much meat or soda.

Husband: We also ate chicken there.

Wife: There we had chicken on the ranch. It was much better.

There is social pressure on immigrants to adapt to new foods when they immigrate, especially with their children in school and many women working outside the home for the first time. One day, after a visit to a farmworker home, the female head of household insisted that I eat. She gave me a dish of pinto beans and cilantro. She also had some hand made tortillas that she was about to serve me. When her husband saw that I was eating he brought out store bought flour tortillas, and offered them to me before she could give me the corn ones. The wife sat eating her corn tortillas while I ate the flour ones. I had expressed to the family in many previous visits that I enjoyed their home cooked

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<sup>49</sup> The subsidies I am referring to are for the grain that animals are fed on.

food and the wife had shown me approval and pride in response. Yet, there was still pressure on the family to show their ability to adapt culturally and economically.<sup>50</sup>

On one hand, immigrants have a history of a healthy diet and extensive knowledge of preparing a low fat and vegetable based foods. On the other hand, they are in a new place, which for many of them means foreign food that they have never been exposed to before. The fact that immigrants are being exposed to new “unhealthy” foods is a definite barrier in addressing the healthy needs of farmworkers, but this must be understood as part of the disenfranchisement that farmworkers are experiencing via immigration and incorporation in the labor market. Rather than focusing on education as the primary way to address farmworker food insecurity, the focus must be on the ways in which farmworkers are exploited as workers and consumers, while emphasizing their historical consumption and understanding of healthy diets. In the section below, I describe the ways that farmworkers themselves identify healthy foods.

### **An Alternative: The Lunch Truck Program**

An alternate to the model of assumed knowledge deficit in food assistance programs is the Lunch Truck Program of Monterey County, California, and its predecessor, the Taquería Project. Although the program has its structural flaws, as I discussed in Chapter Two, one of the program’s strong points is their approach in highlighting the strengths of Mexican cuisine in general and the lunch trucks specifically. Before implementing the Taquería Project, the health department did a study that showed that taquerías (a Mexican version of fast food restaurants) were generally offering healthier options than typical American-style fast food restaurants in Salinas, a small city in Monterey County. The health department then worked with taquería owners to increase these options based on an “asset-based community development approach,” where they encouraged the owners to address the well-being of Latinos by emphasizing the healthy elements of the Mexican diet (Hanni *et al.* 2009).<sup>51</sup>

Elan Garcia, an employee of the Monterey Health Department, started her conversations with taquería owners by showing them a recent newspaper article that stated that Mexican food was unhealthy. She discussed with them the ways that Mexican food has been adapted to US diets, using high fat ingredients, such as dairy and meat. She looked at what healthy options the restaurants were already offering, such as whole beans (versus refried), corn tortillas (versus wheat), *agua frescas* or fresh fruit drinks (versus soda), vegetable dishes, and vegetarian options. Garcia then helped the restaurant owners advertise their healthy options with glossy photos and healthy eating pamphlets, after

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<sup>50</sup> There has been pressure on people native to the Americas to consume white bread rather than corn tortillas since colonial times, as evidence of their transition to a modern and European way of life (Pilcher 1998).

<sup>51</sup> The project implementers and authors of the study concerning the project describe “asset-based community development” as an approach that “sees community members as active change agents rather than passive beneficiaries or clients” (Hanni et al. 2009, 928).

finding out what they were interested in promoting. Although these projects still operate using the neoliberal discourse of choice and treat the problem of unhealthy eating as consumer based, they contrast with other outreach programs in that they acknowledge immigrant knowledge and a culinary tradition of healthy eating.

The Lunch Truck Program follows up on the work of the Taquería Project. The health department organizers have been attempting to start a dialogue with both the truck owners and farmworkers, via employee advisory committees, about what healthier options they want, if any. The idea of the project is ultimately to create a policy for truck owners in conjunction with Reiter Affiliated, the company that is sponsoring the project in their fields. The health department is finding the trucks to be less regulated by the company than expected, making any type of company-mandated policy seemingly impossible. This leaves the program's success in changing diets mostly reliant on consumer choice.<sup>52</sup>

Although there are no official nutritional requirements for the program, the project coordinators would like each truck to offer at least one more healthy option, which they define as adding basic fruits and vegetables to some dishes. One county employee said of the project:

People just really love a lot of the food that's there and we're not trying to get rid of that food so we have been pretty up front about that - that its not about changing the food entirely, its really just about offering some healthy foods, but so people have a choice.

Although the Lunch Truck program organizers emphasize the healthy elements of Mexican diets, when the program was presented to the NFCCC Food Access subcommittee, other health and food assistance employees still focused on farmworkers' lack of nutritional knowledge or desire to eat healthy food. Citing examples that people who work in the fields do not want to see the crops again after work, one woman commented that, "People won't eat what they grow." Another woman cited people's work in the fields, a "problematic disconnect," that led to farmworkers' lack of interest in local produce. Rather than making the connection that farmworkers and immigrants have a history of eating fresh, diverse, and overall healthy diets, the members of the group chose to focus on the need for nutrition education.

Although low income was mentioned, it was referenced to imply that farmworkers had the wrong idea about the cost of healthy food. Multiple food assistance workers at this meeting insisted that the farmworkers just don't seem to get it, that healthy food is not

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<sup>52</sup> Contradictory to the narrative of choice, there is a focus on limiting or providing alternatives to sugar sweetened beverages, such as caffeinated energy drinks, and adding healthier options, as described above. According to one Monterey Health Department, Reiter has already banned trucks that don't have healthy options and are looking into banning high-sugar caffeine drinks, such as Monster and Red Bull.

more expensive. One woman gave the example that no matter what you do, “they’re going to argue hand over fist, time and time again that a bag of chips is always going to be cheaper than a head of lettuce or whatever the example is.” In this instance, the health food worker assumes that farmworkers are buying frivolous junk food rather than vegetables. In my interviews with farmworkers I have found that rather than bags of chips, the workers were buying calorie-dense foods to keep their families from being hungry, rather than vegetables, which provide fewer calories for the money. It is often a strategic financial choice they make when buying food at the store, not a haphazard decision. In the next section I provide evidence of farmworkers’ desire to eat fresh and organic produce. The reason that they consistently cite for not purchasing more produce was the high price point for such products, rather than a lack of desire and knowledge of how to shop for or prepare healthy foods.

### **Defining and Knowing “Healthy” Food in The Garden**

#### *The Desire for Fresh and Natural Food*

The garden provides the participants a space where they can utilize their agricultural and nutritional knowledge to improve their diet, in comparison to the education-focused programs described above. In the garden, participants feel they are able to eat the food they deem healthy, which they define based on its freshness and lack of chemical additives. For most participants, the fact that the garden provided them with a way to eat such food was one of most important qualities of the produce they grew, as this otherwise privileged food was prohibitively expensive for them.

Eating food that was freshly harvested was the main way that participants connected their diets from the garden to their diets in Oaxaca. Although few use the word “organic,” they often discussed food as “more natural” in Mexico, as discussed above. When I asked them what they liked about eating from the garden, they explained that the food was grown without chemicals and was fresher than what they would buy in the stores. When I asked how the garden changed their diets and lives, they responded with the fact that they could eat natural food, food more like what they ate in Oaxaca. For the garden participants, eating produce that is freshly harvested is what they are accustomed to and anything otherwise is simply less satisfying. One participant noted that the garden let him harvest the food when he wanted to eat it, so he could trust in the freshness of the food, unlike when he went to the store:

We have everything, cilantro and radishes. We go and cut the bunches when we need them and they are fresh. Sometimes the food in the store has been there for many days, and we bring it to the house and after three or four days the produce is yellow. I don’t know how many days it has been in the store.

Another participant noted that the freshly harvested food tasted different to her; more like what she was accustomed to:

I like the garden that is there. [The produce we grow] there has different flavors than all the fruits [produce] that are in the store, because it's natural and we don't put anything, like fertilizer in it. It has nothing of this and it has another flavor. The cilantro and the papalo<sup>53</sup> have another flavor. It's like Oaxaca and it has another flavor, different. I like it to plant -- its purely natural.

Another woman made a similar comment:

The harvest and all of that, it is much better [in Oaxaca] because it does not have chemicals; it doesn't have this. [The garden] is more like there, like my land. I think it is the same, these vegetables as those from there [Oaxaca].

This preference became especially clear after a canning seminar I helped organize. I introduced them to a Oaxacan friend, who has a Mexican food catering business in Oakland, to teach the participants food storage techniques. Many of the families learned to can peppers, onions, garlic, and carrots in vinegar and oil. Canning was not something they did in rural parts of Oaxaca. It was a new practice and everyone who attended the workshop had canned food throughout the next winter. Although everyone reported that they were pleased that the food had lasted so long, one woman commented that she still preferred the taste of the fresh salsa:

It started out tasty but after we processed it, it lost its flavor. The flavor changed a lot after the processing, cooking, and putting them in bottles. Afterwards, it lost a lot of flavor and wasn't spicy. It lowered the spice a lot.

One family noted that the garden made organic produce accessible to them. The husband in this family is a field manager at an area organic farm, yet it was not until they started the garden that he was able to enjoy produce grown without added pesticides and non-organic fertilizer:

Wife: Yes, it changed our lives, because it gave us many fruits and more healthy food and the children all liked the fruits, cilantro, carrots, and other things.

Husband: Yes, it changed our lives. Before no, we ate purely lettuce with chemicals, but now we have a lot of food and only organic, we have more vitamins and it is healthier.

It is important to note that the participants' desire for fresh and natural or organic food is precisely the message of many current education and outreach programs regarding healthy eating, including those programs described above. The garden participants do not need to be taught about local and whole foods, as this is what they were accustomed to from their lives before migration. On the contrary, their standards for what counts as fresh and healthy may be higher than that of the average eater in the US, as produce in the

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<sup>53</sup> A Mexican herb, with a pungent garlic-like flavor and smell.

stores was sub-par according to many of the participants. As I describe below, the participants also include crop and diet diversity in their definition of healthy food, another important element of their agricultural and culinary practices.

### *Crop and Diet Diversity*

In addition to freshness and lack of chemical additives, some families noted that they were able to eat particular foods that were part of their diet in Oaxaca, a diet that was rich in its diversity of vegetables, fruits, and herbs. Nutrition specialists and food activists alike often herald crop and diet diversity for its importance in healthful eating and environmental sustainability. Participants planted a large variety of crops that were part of their diet in Mexico. Crops that were the most significant to them were ones that they could not find easily available in California.

The most popular Mexican crop variety, which every garden participant grew, was *papalo*, or *papaloquelite* (also called Bolivian coriander, although it is native to Mexico), an herb that is commonly eaten raw to add flavor to tacos, salsas and other dishes. Many garden participants would snack on it plain while harvesting in the garden. Mexican herbs and greens grown at the garden included two varieties of *papalo*, regular *papalo* and *papalo morado*, which is a smaller plant and less pungent in smell and flavor, as well as *quintonil* (a variety of amaranth greens), *verdolagas* (also known as purslane or Mexican parsley), *herba mora*, and other greens (called *quelites*, the Spanish word for uncultivated herbs). Such plants are often found in the wild in Mexico, and sometimes friends or family brought or sent seeds across the border for planting in the garden.

Although garden participants did not speak in specific terms about nutritional content, they mentioned that these plants were good for their bodily health and the health of the garden, listing specific herbs and their uses, such as to alleviate stomach pains or keep away pests. All participants were excited to have these crops, which had been lacking in their diet since immigration. These greens provide garden participants with high amounts of important nutrients, such as vitamin A and C, magnesium, potassium, calcium, fiber, niacin, ascorbic acid, protein, and iron. At one home garden plot that I visited, a family was growing food next to the trailer they lived in, located on the farm where they worked. One man was growing *epazote*, an herb that is commonly used to increase digestion and reduce gas, and is therefore added to bean dishes. It is also used to ward off intestinal worms. These are all crops that are rarely found in stores or even Mexican markets in California, although garden participants had found some herbs, such as *papalo*, in other neighbors' home garden plots, and had therefore been able to access seeds for the community garden.

In addition to the specific herbs and greens discussed above, garden participants grew other crops that are more familiar to California, such as cilantro, tomatillos, tomatoes, corn, beans, summer squash, peppers, carrots, green beans, onions, and garlic. Most of these seeds or plant starts were bought in local garden and farm supply stores, but a few varieties of beans, corn, and squash were brought from Mexico. Other than the herbs, greens and a few corn varieties, most of the seeds brought from Mexico did not do well in

the California climate, which is colder than the seeds' indigenous lowland areas in Mexico. A few of the gardeners told me that many of the bean and squash varieties would flower profusely and then not produce fruit. Of the ones that did produce well, the participants saved the seeds for the next year.

*Ability to Make Oaxacan Foods and Dishes*

Along with growing and consuming a diversity of foods, families said that they were able to make specific meals and dishes from the crops that were not possible before the garden. One couple mentioned that with the corn from the garden, they could make their corn flour (*masa*) for tortillas from scratch again. This was something they had been missing from Oaxaca:

Wife: I miss my garden because I see it here. (She points to the photos of the garden I gave her.) And I hope we do it again. I miss the *milpa*. I used the corn ears for making tortillas, like I did in Oaxaca. I used the *milpa* for *masa*.<sup>54</sup>

LAMZ: Are they better than the ones in the store?

Wife: Ah – yes, much better. You can't buy them here.

Husband: There we ate tortillas of only corn, and here they are made of wheat flour. We didn't like them, so we planted some ears of corn here. Yes, there [in Mexico] we ate purely good corncobs, tortillas made of corn. It was very good.

LAMZ: So when you came here there weren't many tortillas made from corn, there wasn't the food from Mexico?

Wife: So we started to plant...

Another participant noted that in the United States the corn is sweeter, and not ideal for making *masa*. Since they had no corn to make *masa* here from scratch, they would buy *masa* in the store, which many families noted was not as good as the *masa* they made from their corn in Mexico. In contrast, with the garden, they were able to make their *masa* again, free of any additives, purely from corn:

P: They are softer, the tortillas from corn, because they are from corn. When you buy *masa*, it is not very good. [Tortillas] from corn are very good because it is purely corn, they don't have anything else. We don't put anything but corn. One hundred percent corn, and the tortilla is better.

LAMZ: The corn is different than corn you can buy here?

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<sup>54</sup> *Milpa* technically means “field” in Mexican Spanish, yet most use it to refer to a field of corn, or the popular combination of corn, beans, and squash.

P: Yes, because the corn here – there are some that are sweet, others that are not, and there [in Mexico], they are all normal. They aren't sweet; they are normal. Much of the corn is good to eat they are dry. There are other corn [varieties] that we grow for the ears. When they are dry they are not good, then you can use them to make tortillas.

A home gardener I visited with noted that he likes his corn varieties from Oaxaca better than those he can find here, as it is less sweet than the corn from seeds he bought. He also told me that the corn varieties he has from Mexico are best for making *totopo*, a flat dry tortilla often made for Day of the Dead festivities. Oaxacans generally prefer non-sweet corn because it is higher in starch and therefore better to make specialties, such as fresh tortillas and *totopos*. It is generally hard to find in US stores and markets because corn that is sold on the cob is bred for its sweetness in the United States (Martínez and Mendelson 1997).<sup>55</sup>

Ultimately, what the garden shows us is that when given the resources and opportunity, immigrant farmworkers such as these were able and more than willing to eat what would be considered healthy food. Rather than making incorrect choices or not having the knowledge or preferences for healthy food, participants knew exactly what they wanted to eat and their food preferences for freshly harvested, organic, and diverse produce were in line with what the food assistance providers discuss in terms of how to educate people to eat better foods. One woman explains:

It [the garden] gave everything we wanted. We had everything we needed. We didn't need to buy anything, we had our own fruits for ourselves, because in the store you need to have money and if you don't have money you can't buy anything. In the garden we planted everything and we ate everything.

At the garden, participants were not only able to access the foods they desired, they were also able to save money for other purposes:

It help us a lot to plant, and this year we didn't have to buy anything at the store... cilantro, radishes, corn, squash. It's all that we planted. They all came up. It was a year where we bought nothing at the store.

Another woman agrees:

We hardly had to spend any money in the store, before we had to buy everything and now, now are saving a lot of food until now. I still have my tomatoes in the freezer. We still have them... We don't have to buy much in the store. The store is very expensive. It helps us a lot to save them – until now it has been very

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<sup>55</sup> I am referring to corn that has been bred for fresh human consumption, not for processing or animal feed.

good... Yes, we ate more vegetables [with the garden]. Before we didn't have the money to buy any vegetables or anything.

Every garden participant told a similar story. They saved money and were able to eat more fresh and organic produce. By spending less at the store for food, they were able to save money, which they could put towards other purposes, such as rent and health care. Ultimately, the garden enabled the participants to access the food they desired and to reconnect to Oaxacan diets, culture, and livelihoods.

### **Challenges and Structural Constraints for the Garden**

While the garden provides an important space for the participants to utilize and build on their own knowledge and skills, ultimately the community garden model, funded by foundation money and operating on temporarily rented property, is not a sustainable solution to food insecurity.

#### *Funding*

The garden received very generous funding its first year, with \$14,000 total from two different organizations. The gardeners did not use the whole budget they were afforded. In their second year they were able to carry some unused money over from the previous year and apply for more from the same funders. Financially, the project seems to be going well. Yet, in the current austere economic climate, foundation money can easily come and go. There is a danger in relying on foundation money, an unstable resource, for a project that so many depend on for their food source. Funders have their own agendas and demands, which may not match up with the desires of those in the garden (Minkoff-Zern 2012).

Additionally, Jones, the white activist who helped the group establish the garden, has been doing the majority of the work of applying for funding, managing the money, and writing reports to maintain the funding. Although some foundations are willing to accept grants in Spanish, a language barrier exists for gaining long term funding and for the group to be independent from outside help. As many of the members are undocumented, managing certain elements, such as starting their own 501C3 nonprofit and taking out any loans for the project to be more self-sufficient, could be a challenge. As farming and gardening are dependent on seasonality and timeliness, any glitch in the system, such as not having funds when they are needed to pay water bills or to buy seeds, could be disastrous. As I discuss in Chapter Five, some of the participants are planning to grow for profit on separate garden plots this coming year. Additionally, they are looking into selling some produce from the garden to the local farmers market.<sup>56</sup>

#### *Land Tenure*

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<sup>56</sup> I am not implying here that selling on the market is necessarily stable or dependable, but pointing out that as long as they are beholden to outside funders they may have to meet certain expectations to maintain the projects.

The garden plot is owned by a small-scale entrepreneur, who has many land holdings in the area. He is originally from Hyattstown, but now lives about an hour away. He has owned the land for ten years and originally planned it for a redevelopment project, but it has lain fallow because the city wouldn't support the plan. He benefits from the lease, as the city requires that landowners keep weeds and overgrowth maintained for fire safety and garden participants keep the plot managed during a few workdays per year in exchange for the garden's use. He is supportive of their profiting from the garden as long as they maintain their agreement. In an interview he told me he sees, "synergies between land owners and urban farmers. If they [landowners] could keep their cost down, without the liability." He also expressed personal interest in sustainable agriculture and urban agriculture in particular.

Although he is supportive of the project, he still is planning to build apartment complexes on the property, which is zoned to allow the highest density development. He even joked that, "the scary thing would be if people liked it [the garden] so much that I had to keep it that way." Insecure land tenure leading to subsequent dramatic land conflict is too familiar a story among community gardens, as has become clear through the high profile cases of South Central Farm in Los Angeles and The Bed-Stuy Farm in Brooklyn, New York.

The garden is located in a corner of downtown that the landowner says the city currently wants to ignore. It has been neglected for many years, predating the development of the city and county's boundaries. The plot lacks infrastructure, including roads, sewer system, water valves, and the like, despite its prime location in the small city center. The lack of facilities limits the landowner's ability to develop the area, which is his ultimate goal. He aims to keep the land for ten to twenty years, if he can keep the property at a minimum holding cost, and plans to wait out the city to install the infrastructure for development.

One benefit of the garden for participants with one or no car per family is that it is walking distance from their homes in downtown Hyattstown. Yet its proximity to the downtown means that they are using city water, as the area is zoned for apartments, not agriculture. As city water costs substantially more than agricultural water, this is a significant additional cost for the group. In fact, according to the landowner, the city refused to install a water valve on the property, as part of their attempt to keep the land undeveloped. The group currently uses water from the residential neighbors of the garden. In order to do so, they must pay the neighbors entire water bill each month, averaging about three-hundred dollars per month. Without the grants, this would be a high fee for the group to get together, assuming the garden was not making a profit on its own. This is an issue currently explored by many proponents and scholars of urban agriculture, and one of many obstacles that needs to be addressed for projects such as this one to be sustainable for the long term.

The ultimate challenge for the garden project, and others like it, to be a sustainable endeavor is the groups' own self-sufficiency. The garden as it is currently exists,

dependent on grants and the favor of the landowner, is not a secure solution to farmworker food insecurity.

## **Conclusion**

When food security is framed in terms of education, it places the burden of choice onto those that are food insecure. What the experiences of garden participants demonstrate is that when money was not the limiting factor, they were able to reclaim their agricultural and nutritional practices and knowledge and consume the foods they preferred. This strongly contrasts with the narratives of the food assistance workers and the common line of thinking among food activists, that low-income people of color do not know how to make good food choices. Rather, what this case study shows us is that when given the space and opportunity to do so, farmworkers are very competent to make “good” food choices. In the past, it has been the financial and spatial constraints that kept them from doing so. Every single participant in the garden said he or she had never had a place to grow food in California before. They all expressed a desire to grow in the garden again, and some are even renting their own plots to farm for profit this coming year. Even those that have not shown interest in growing for sale have stated that they would grow on more land if it were available.

I do not mean to argue here that gardens are the answer to food insecurity. My evidence shows that food insecurity is not a matter of education or choice. I argue that reducing food insecurity requires increasing food access in a sustainable way where garden participants and others are not dependent on grants and donations. The structural conditions that lead to food insecurity for farmworkers and other low-income people of color are at the root of the problem. Yet, while we approach the solutions to farmworker food insecurity structurally, we must also look at those that suffer from food insecurity as actors and holders of knowledge that have been dispossessed from the ability to feed themselves in a healthful manner. Solutions must revolve around them as leaders and actors in the system, rather than simply those that are acted upon.

Furthermore, from this example we see the way that the intersections between food and racial politics work to underpin unjust racial formations based on inaccurate assumptions concerning race, class, and knowledge. In this case study, immigrants of color’s limited food access, which has been defined by systematic dispossession from the land and exploitation of their labor, is reinforced by lack of recognition of their food knowledge and skills. By not recognizing the structural causes of food insecurity, food assistance providers work to reinforce racialized inequalities to food access.

The purpose of this chapter is to show that people such as farmworkers, who are regularly assumed to be devoid of nutritional knowledge, are often very knowledgeable about agriculture, food, and health in general. Gardens can be a great way to enable low-income people of color to improve their food sources. That said, not all people who are food insecure are interested in gardening and ultimately gardens must be thought of as a part of a larger solution to food insecurity. Recognizing racial injustice in food access

while raising incomes and barriers to access are the most important steps in improving farmworker food insecurity in the long run.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**THE AGRARIAN QUESTION IN CALIFORNIA: MIGRATION AND (NON) TRADITIONAL**  
**NEW FARMERS**

*...Converting farm workers to farmers. That transition process.... that was the critical part and still is. I mean you look at all the programs that are ongoing and you use all these names like sustainable agriculture and justice and food. All of the rhetoric behind it. When it comes down to it, it's farm workers becoming farmers or laborers becoming entrepreneurs.*

—Alfred Navarro, ALBA co-founder and current interim director

My goal in conducting research for this dissertation was to understand the ways that immigrant farmworkers utilized their agricultural and culinary knowledge to cope with food insecurity, in their condition as low wage workers. In the quest to document and analyze worker coping strategies, I found that many of the same workers that were growing food in home and community gardens were attempting to grow food for sale, albeit on a very small scale. I followed three indigenous families from the community garden discussed in the previous chapters through their experience in ALBA's six month Farmer Education Program (*Programa Educativo Para Agricultores*, PEPA is the Spanish acronym). I conducted participant observation during their classes, visited their small farm plots, and discussed these endeavors with them in structured and semi-structured interviews. Additionally, through the PEPA class I met and interviewed other students, all of whom were Mexican-born farmworkers, although these other students were meztizo, not indigenous.

In this chapter, I look at the question of agrarian transition: What does it mean for those who are food insecure to become semi-proletarian farmers and aspiring petty-commodity producers? Moreover, what questions do immigrant farmworkers-turned-farmers raise in the context of the agrarian question and the literature on "new" peasant movements? Although my sample size is small, I believe that my observations of indigenous immigrants leads to an important critique of the current oversimplifications concerning peasant and small farmer conditions and movements in agrarian studies scholarship today.

In comparison to global questions of agrarian transition (See Goodman and Watts 1997), agricultural development in the US, and especially in California, has been based on a capitalist, rather than peasant form, of agricultural production (MacLennan and Walker 1980; Walker 2004; Post 1982). Capital accumulation has always been the driving force of agriculture in the United States, rather than the maintenance of a landed peasant class. Still, some form of the "family farm," where most of the labor is still conducted by family members, rather than wage labor, has been a main feature of US agriculture and still persists in some places. On these farms, which are usually small to middle sized, farmers are often semi-proletarians, maintaining their land and production while at least

one family member works off the farm to make ends meet (MacLennan and Walker 1980).

Today, new immigrants are entering this class of family farmers, aspiring to join the owner classes, while constantly struggling to maintain sustenance as workers. According to the 2007 Agricultural Census, Hispanic farmers are the fastest growing group of new farmers. They grew fourteen percent from 2002 to 2007, as compared with a seven percent overall increase in farm operators (United States Department of Agriculture 2009). Many of these aspiring immigrant farmers are part of a great migration of farmers from Latin America who have been dispossessed from their land by food dumping and agricultural trade policies, as well as political violence, as discussed in Chapter Two. These immigrants often come to the United States with experience from farming their own land in Mexico and other parts of Latin America and are using this experience, and what they have learned working on California farms, to make fresh attempts at agrarian livelihoods in a new place and culture.

Including immigrants in our understanding of agrarian questions of transition and restructuring provides an opportunity to look at how ethnicity, race, class and other forms of difference affect change in today's agricultural systems. Rather than succumbing to describing global trends in the restructuring of agriculture by disregarding national and regional differences and specificities, Goodman and Watts (1994, 16) argue that, "such anomalies and tensions, and their implications for the specificities of transition in rural areas, should be at the center of an agrarian political economy which seeks to engage with mainstream social theory." In this context, place (and movement between places) is essential to understanding the current formation of agrarian restructuring.

Immigrant farmworkers-turned-farmers challenge the classical Marxian primitive accumulation, which predicts that dispossessed peasant farmers simply become industrial laborers. After laboring on industrial farms, they now wish to return to the land as farmers once again. These farmers, who were previously peasants, and are now aspiring capitalist farmers, certainly do not constitute a barrier to capitalist development, as original claims concerning the agrarian question would suggest (Kautsky 1988 [1899]). In fact, Mexican immigrant producers in California provide a surprising and noteworthy example of how agriculture adapts to flows of capital and how agricultural and capitalist relations take multiple and unexpected forms when observed closely (Henderson 1998; Wells 1996).

I argue that modern day agrarian questions, particularly those concerning the restructuring of agriculture in the United States, need to be rethought in terms of race, ethnicity, and documentation status. The case study I explore in my research, of indigenous farmworkers turned aspiring farmers, is unique in that they are not simply part of the "new peasantry," nor are they simply petty commodity producers. Due to limitations of race, ethnicity, and immigration status, they are limited in scale and scope and without access to larger markets. They have no choice but to utilize social networks for resources (land and other inputs) and informal markets, meaning they are not

dependent on mainstream markets for their production. On one hand, their social difference from white US-born white farmers in California causes these “new” agriculturalists to farm in ways that are somewhat independent from mainstream agricultural production, as resonates with the new peasantry literature (McMichael 2006, 1997; Ploeg *et al.* 2008; Ploeg 2010). On the other, they are simultaneously aspiring to become capitalist farmers, stuck in the condition of petty commodity producers.

### **Agrarian Questions: New Peasantry or Petty Commodity Producers?**

Kautsky (1988 [1899]) defined the classic agrarian question, asking: where do peasants fit into Marx’s picture of the capitalist mode of production and progression to socialism? Kautsky asserts that the small farm is not only an impediment to the development of a fully capitalist system, but that it behooves government and industry leaders to maintain small farms, as struggling peasants provide industry with a proletariat that will not revolt. The farmers discussed in this research were originally dispossessed peasants from the global South, and are now struggling as immigrant agricultural laborers in the global North. Instead of presenting a barrier to the development of capitalist agriculture, they have been victims of such development. As these farmers reclaim their agricultural experience and shift roles within capitalist agriculture from laborer to small-scale farmer, scholars of the agrarian question must grapple with this challenge to our notions of agrarian structure.

Since Kautsky first made his claim concerning small-scale producers, many scholars have taken up his challenge to understand these contradictions in Marx’s original conception of the peasantry (Chayanov *et al.* 1966; Bernstein 2004, 2006; Bernstein *et al.* 1996; Byres 1977, 1986; Goodman and Watts 1997; Henderson 1998; Mann 1990). Bernstein (2006) argues that the agrarian question, in particular the agrarian question of capital, is no longer relevant, as the majority of the global peasantry has disappeared. He claims that an agrarian question is no longer related to a question of the peasantry and is separate from its historic connotation with capital. He makes the case that small farmers today are not peasants, but instead petty commodity producers, and should be termed as such. Goodman and Redclift (1985) insightfully argue that Marxist theorists must recognize the grey areas and limitations when making claims concerning agrarian petty commodity production. For example, they point to the role that off-farm labor must play when family labor cannot suffice, highlighting the slippery slope of shifting class relations in agriculture, which complicate categorizations such as peasantry, petty commodity producer, and industrial or capitalist farmer (De Janvry 1981).

In contrast to claims that the agrarian question of capital has been resolved, other scholars argue that the peasantry is not disappearing, but is in fact, reappearing and remaking itself in striking ways (Ploeg 2010; Ploeg *et al.* 2008; Goodman and Watts 1997; McMichael 1997, 2006). Against historical notions of linear capitalist development, McMichael (2006) argues that the peasantry today “rejects the temporality of capitalist modernity that regards peasants as pre-modern, and the spatiality that removes and divides humans from nature” (478). These are not merely academic debates: recent global shifts in power over

land and other resources make clear that farming in today's world is more complex and uneven than ever before (Borras, *et al.* 2010). Agrarian questions, including those of land, labor, and capital, are therefore continually important for those who wish to understand the future of agriculture as a food producing practice and social livelihood.

Ploeg (2008, 2010) responds to the emergence of what he terms the “new peasantry:” small-scale producers returning to farming as part of a burgeoning agriculture movement. He makes the claim that the peasantry is very much alive in both the developed (Europe) and developing (Latin America) worlds and that the resurgence of peasant-like agrarian practice on a global scale is evidence of the multi-faceted nature of peasant farming. He writes:

Repeasantization is, in essence, a modern expression of the fight for autonomy and survival in a context of deprivation and dependency. The peasant condition is definitively not static. It represents a flow through time, with upward as well as downward movements. Just as corporate farming is continuously evolving (expanding and simultaneously changing in a qualitative sense – that is, through a further industrialization of the processes of production and labour), so peasant farming is also changing. And one of the many changes is repeasantization (7, 2008).

Ploeg calls for a more nuanced understanding of today's farmers, arguing that not all can be categorized as either peasant or capitalist, since many overlap those two designations. His work urges scholars of peasant studies to understand how modernization processes have reshaped agriculture and to look at the resurgence of peasant farming as a form of resistance against the agro-food industrial “empire.”

Curiously, while Ploeg notes the similarities between the process of repeasantization in developed and developing countries, he barely recognizes migration between or within these two spaces. Although he briefly recognizes migration as an outfall from the global “agrarian crisis,” acknowledging the dispossession of peasants from land in the developing world and their subsequent migration to developed countries for employment, he focuses on remittances to the home country to support farming. Thus, Ploeg overlooks the fact that many immigrants are actually starting to farm again in their new homes. Because he makes a clear divide between European farming and farming in the developing world, Ploeg's theoretical project lacks a nuanced understanding of the co-production and overlap of these categories. My study shows how complicating the divisions between the “developed” and “developing” world force us to further unpack current discussions of the agrarian question and conceptions of peasantry.

The indigenous immigrants I work with use similar approaches to those identified with the new peasant movement: small-scale and low-input farming, alternative and direct marketing practices, traditional forms of knowledge, and prioritizing feeding their families and communities before meeting market demands. These practices are often representative of agricultural norms from immigrants' former lives as subsistence farmers

in Mexico. Many of these immigrant farmers are adverse to synthetic pesticides and other off-farm additives, given their experience being exposed to toxins while working in the fields.<sup>57</sup>

Yet, compared with more overtly political peasant movements discussed in the literature, the immigrant farmers in my study are not explicitly resisting capitalist agriculture or current land tenure structures as a whole. Rather, they endeavor to use their agrarian experience and knowledge to escape their position as agricultural laborers and reclaim food production on their own terms. Although they struggle to attain autonomy from the global agro-industrial complex as do others from new peasantry movements, immigrant farmers often do so because they are forced to go off the radar, be it explicit, due to their citizenship status, or implicit, due to more subtle forms of racialized and ethnic-based marginalization from mainstream US farming. Though they mirror the practices of the so-called new peasantry in various ways, this group is using small-scale farming to escape their dependency on agribusiness wages rather than because they associate with an anti-capitalist farming and land acquisition practices.

In many ways, then, the immigrant farmers I describe are transitional petty commodity producers, with wage labor supporting their petty commodity production. Most of their ability to socially reproduce comes from wage labor, instead of wage labor supplementing the family farm. Additionally, they produce commodities without producing surplus value; for the time being they are only able to utilize family labor, a form of self-exploitation, as Kautsky pointed out.<sup>58</sup>

Although it is tempting to claim that these new farmers are simply part of the new peasantry or petty commodity producers, the idea that agriculture in the United States must either be peasants or capitalist/ industrial denies the complex history of agrarian development in the United States, which includes sharecropping, cooperative marketing, and semi-proletariat farming. These kinds of arguments oversimplify pre and post industrial agrarian development, lacking an attention to localized differences, especially as they play out in the US context (Goodman and Watts 1994).<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Yet, as I discuss more below, often the same regulatory structures that keep immigrant farmers from being integrated into mainstream modes of farming can work to marginalize them from institutional organics, as well. In their case, being “alternative” farmers may not just mean being an alternate to industrial agriculture, but also to mainstreamed sustainable agriculture.

<sup>58</sup> There is a begging question of gender and family politics here. In the indigenous farmer cases the male is the lead farmer and the one who took the ALBA course. In some other cases I describe in this chapter, women are the lead farmers. Women, and especially immigrant women, have additional challenges as farmers in the United States, as is briefly mentioned below.

<sup>59</sup> These ideas resonate similarly to the Fordist arguments concerning agrarian restructuring post-WWII (Goodman and Watts 1994).

As Wells' (1996) classic study demonstrates, the strawberry industry on California's central coast actually reversed the typical Marxian trajectory, shifting in the 1970s and 80s towards sharecropping, a purportedly pre-capitalist mode of production. My research supports Wells' conclusion that local political pressures, class struggle, and the role of the state shape economic relations and class structures, particularly in the ways that agricultural, labor, immigration policies affect farmworker's ability to farm. Dupuis' (2005) more recent research shows that Latino strawberry pickers in Santa Cruz County see technical and managerial positions in industrial agriculture as a way into the American middle class. Dupuis' and Wells' work highlight the available paths for established Latino (meztizo) farmworkers, whereas my own research shows the differences between more mobile meztizos and newer indigenous farmworkers. These studies also beg question of the reproduction of the worker class and the contradictions that arise when looking to aspiring farmers to promote some form of social justice in the food system, a topic I will return to in the concluding chapter. I have found that local conditions are especially relevant in understanding how race, ethnicity, and citizenship status affects immigrants' ability to farm in a new place. In this context, the "local organization of production" (Wells 1996, 16) is much more varied than might be expected.

### **Citizenship, Race, and California's New Peasantry**

The United States has a long history of constituting citizenship (and related rights to land and resources) with whiteness. The earliest colonists utilized social constructions of race to justify the taking of native lands and exploitation of native labor in the founding and expansion of the country. In California, successive groups of non-white immigrants have long been depended upon to compose the majority of the agrarian labor force. Farmers and landowners have taken advantage of racialized immigrants' politically vulnerable citizenship status, be it as documented temporary workers, undocumented workers, or even documented workers with relationships in the undocumented worker community, in order to deny workers human rights and a living wage. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Asian immigrants were allowed entry to the US so they could be utilized for labor in California agriculture, while full citizenship and land rights were denied on the basis of their race. Today, the majority laborers in California agriculture are undocumented Latino and indigenous immigrants from Mexico and other parts of Latin America (Garcia 2002; Mitchell 1996; Minkoff-Zern *et al.* 2011; Ngai 2005; Zabin *et al.* 1993; Glenn 2002).

While US farm ownership remains majority white and US farm labor majority Latino, Black, and indigenous, the growing presence of immigrant and other farmers of color forces us to take a step back to question whether farming must always reaffirm historical race and citizenship relations. As non-white immigrants become more financially and socially stable, some of these groups have transitioned to become landowners and farm

operators.<sup>60</sup> This progression of social mobility, though, does not occur without struggle.<sup>61</sup> Due to a compounded marginalization by racialized and classist legal structures, non-white immigrant farmers of color have fewer financial resources and less access to land, inputs, and capital than their white counterparts. In many cases, non-white immigrant farmers have been explicitly dispossessed of land and resources, due to their status as non-white immigrants (Minkoff-Zern *et al* 2011; Matsumoto 1993; Chan 1989; Wells 1991,1996).

Regardless of these limitations, many non-white immigrants are still likely to choose entrepreneurship as a way to class mobility. Complementary research in urban areas has shown the ways that immigrants (in comparison with native born residents in the United States) tend towards self-employment when the option is available (Borjas 1986; Price and Chacko 2009). Further, such research shows that immigrants are often more likely to turn to self-employment due to a lack of opportunities, or blocked mobility, “if an immigrant’s credentials are not recognized, language skills are limited, or if racial/ethnic prejudices negatively influence job opportunities” (Price and Chacko 2009, 220). Such research on immigrant entrepreneurs exhibits the variety of industries and geographic localities of immigrant businesses, showing common trends in the ways immigrants are utilizing their social networks and resources and responding to a lack of access to the same forms of social mobility as non-immigrants (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990; Light and Bonacich 1991; Li 2001; Zhou 2004; Wang and Li 2007).

What these studies show, both in terms of immigrants in agriculture and immigrant entrepreneurs more generally, is that the combination of race, ethnicity, and class based segregation and marginalization combined with immigrants’ distinctive skills, knowledges, and networks leads to immigrants finding a unique niche in their fields. Below, I first describe some of the challenges faced by indigenous and some non-indigenous Mexican immigrant farmers, which add to their marginalization as growers. I

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<sup>60</sup> The number of principal farm operators who identified as “Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin” in the United States grew from 50,592 in 2002 to 55,5570 in 2007. These numbers do not tell us how many are first generation immigrants. This number is out of 2,204,792 total principal operators (USDA 2007).

<sup>61</sup> Immigrant farmers may actually experience more racism within the sustainable agriculture world, in comparison to the more industrial or “traditional” American agriculture system, where Latinos have gained more of a presence in management over the past few decades. Since the sustainable agriculture world is a smaller and more homogenous group of actors, it can be harder for immigrants to break in socially and professionally. As the director of the Agriculture and Land-Based training Association (ALBA) told me, “In the sustainable agriculture world, I mean, people are definitely open but I think there is structural racism, you know, it’s unconscious.” This observation broadens the frame of racism in agriculture. Although sustainable agriculture practitioners are often thought of as more politically progressive, this does not necessarily transfer into their perceptions of race and class.

then follow with an explanation of the ways they compensate for this marginalization, utilizing non-mainstream resources to fulfill their goals as small-scale farmers.

### **Limitations to Capital Accumulation**

In the case of undocumented immigrant farmworkers who wish to start farming, their citizenship status, in addition to their linguistic, literary and educational limitations, can strongly inhibit their ability to farm. As discussed in the introductory chapter, indigenous immigrants are especially likely to be undocumented, as they enter with less financial security and fewer middle class networks. US immigration policy makes it nearly impossible for most farmworkers to enter the United States legally. Additionally, as I discussed in Chapter Two, increased militarization at the US- Mexico border, and the resulting danger and cost of crossing the border, discourages seasonal migrations and encourages people to develop stronger communities and livelihoods on one side. This increases their desire to find a way to subsist in the US permanently, which for many means using their skills as farmers to move up the social food chain from farmworker to farm operator.

Although regulations for farming, especially those regarding chemical use and labor, are important in maintaining humane and environmentally sound conditions for workers and consumers, some have been unjustly applied to the detriment of non-white immigrant farmers (Minkoff-Zern *et al.* 2011). In order to transition from laborer to grower, an aspiring farmer must go through a lengthy process of registering their business with the state. For undocumented farmers, these processes may be more than merely intimidating; they may be impossible, as their status may prohibit them from officially registering their operation. If they want to register to sell their product as organic in the state of California, they must have an organic registration from the agriculture commissioner's office. In order to sell at certified farmers markets, they must also get a Certified Producer's Certificate through the commissioner. For most of these permits you must present your personal ID, tax ID, and/ or social security number. There are several layers added to these basic requirements, such as liability insurance, organic certification (through a third party), an operator ID through which all farm inputs get recorded (also acquired through the agriculture commissioner), and worker's compensation/OSHA registrations. In order to buy land one must also purchase a property title. All of these formal registrations require precisely the type of documentation an undocumented person lacks.

The majority of students attending ALBA are documented, but every year there are some who are not. Andy Rea is the instructor of the ALBA farmer-training course. He was trained in biology, but worked for many years at a seed company and irrigation company. He is also the son of a farmworker. In reference to undocumented immigrants and the possibility of farming, he said, "One of the farmers mentioned it's a glass ceiling. 'I can do this much: I can grow the product, I can sell the product, but can my operation grow beyond that?'"

In addition to registering to be a farmer under the most standard conditions, if one wants to obtain organic certification, as many ALBA graduates and other immigrant farmers do, there are lengthy processes to go through, including forms, fees and tests. This can be particularly hard for an under-resourced farmer who may not own his or her land, as they have to prove the land has not had synthetic additives for three years. Also, as one immigrant farmer who is certified organic explained, organic is supposedly supported by government grants, but these do not apply if you are undocumented:

They [government agencies] say... organic farmers... there are resources for them, but if you are illegal you don't have access to these federal funds... The rules are always changing, but yes, it is quite a process. Every day it is a process to be an organic farmer.

Brett Melone, the former executive director of ALBA<sup>62</sup> told me, "People with inequities in the system, basically Hispanic farm workers who rely on their peers, they don't trust government. They don't have access to the government programs." For undocumented Latino immigrants, their condition as both immigrants of color and without citizenship papers makes it doubly challenging for them to access resources as they are prohibited from legally utilizing opportunities such as government grants and are unable to put property and business titles in their name. As I describe below, they are also challenged by the fact that they may not speak English (or even Spanish) very well, and have had little access to the formal education or literacy skills required to navigate the agricultural regulatory process.

### **Language, Literacy, and Lack of Formal Education**

Not being able to read, write, or understand the required forms necessary to become established farmers in the United States can prove quite challenging for immigrants. Among immigrants that wish to farm, their language skills, literacy, and education level varies. For some, Spanish is a second language and they have had very little, if any, formal education. Others have completed elementary school, or even high school, and speak some English. Often immigrants that wish to transition from farm labor to farm operator have limited reading, writing and business skills and struggle to navigate the bureaucracy of the US agriculture system. As Isabella Rosa, an established Mestiza farmer told me:

If you go an agency and you are a Latina person and you are a woman and you don't speak the language, and you don't have money, and you are going to an agency of the federal government and you want to find someone to speak your language, how do you say this? ... The government doesn't want to help you. They don't want to have a person that speaks your language.

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<sup>62</sup> Melone was the practicing executive director during the period of my fieldwork.

As she explains, immigrants are made to feel their place is working in the fields, not in the offices of the government or in the management positions on a farm. Although undocumented mestizo and indigenous immigrants comprise the majority of the workforce on US farms, there is little support from the US or state government for them to transition to a better paying or more reputable position in agriculture.

Even within the confines of the ALBA class some immigrants struggled with language and literacy barriers, native Triqui and Mixteco speakers more than others. There are a series of written exams in the course, which they have to pass in order to graduate. At the end of the first section, or module, of the class students had to take an open note “exam” evaluating the module. I was observing the class one day and sitting next to a Triqui student, who had told me he could read, but not write. After about ten minutes, I looked over and saw that he had not filled out anything on the exam. I gestured to him to see if he needed help filling out the form. He nodded yes and we went outside the room. I wrote down the answers that he verbalized to me in Spanish. He kept telling me, “I am not good at this, I can’t think like this.” In addition to his lack of formal schooling (he did not complete elementary school), the language barrier was creating a challenge. Although he speaks Spanish decently, he told me, “It’s hard to think like this [in Spanish].”

Although he repeatedly expressed his insecurity about the class and assignments, he also expressed confidence in conducting manual labor on a farm. He has been a field manager at an organic farm in California for about ten years and is very competent in performing and managing fieldwork, “ I know everything about the field, how to plant, the crops, the pests, the machinery, but I don’t know this [gesturing to the paper and the classroom].” He told me he has no experience in a classroom setting, yet he knows the fieldwork well. In an interview a few weeks later, the same student told me:

My head doesn’t help me much. Yes, I know a lot about a ranch, how to use a tractor, to kill the pests. I have experience cultivating. I know how to plant, how many meters, how many inches, twelve inches, [between planting] broccoli, cauliflower, red chard, green chard, radish.<sup>63</sup> All of this. All of this I know but no more than that. But I am not equipped.<sup>64</sup> But there I do everything and yes, if the boss says to do something I can do everything. I can plant, I can lay the hoses, tape, to fix things, to know how many days until we water, and to do everything. ... But to use my head, no, it’s a lot [too much], and I cannot write also.

For this student, these barriers to learning about and feeling comfortable as an institutionalized organic farmer in the US were extreme. He is a middle aged Triqui man

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<sup>63</sup> He said all the plant names in English. This is the only English he has used in the year I have known him. Working as a farmworker he has learned the English words for the crops he grows at work.

<sup>64</sup> Here I assume he means he is not equipped intellectually.

who came to the US in his thirties, older than many immigrant farmworkers. For others, who have come to the US at younger ages, even those whose first language is Triqui or Mixteco, rather than Spanish, they are often more literate in Spanish and English, and are less intimidated by such challenges. Still, the bureaucratic nature of US farming, and organic farming in particular, is a large adjustment for any immigrant coming from Mexico. Rules and regulations are more defined and require a familiarity with a culture of government mandated management and paperwork as well as English literacy.

In addition to these challenges, many low resource immigrants who wish to farm for themselves must work double duty in the fields, laboring in others' fields during the day and then in their own plots at night. For immigrants who are undocumented and have low levels of formal education and English language skills, farm labor may be their only opportunity to save money to start their own farm, leaving them in the situation of working both day and night to get their farm started. They are tired from physical labor and must find spare time to cultivate their own field after their day job ends. One farmer describes this condition:

Yes, it is a little bit difficult to do all of this [start a farm business], because I have double work. I have work during the day and then in the afternoon I go to my own ranch... Yes, it is tiring, but I want to do it, I will work hard... Sometimes one has to work many hours at one's job, and all day you are in your work and then at your land. This changes, sometimes you have to go at night and you can't see there. It changes the work, it is not very difficult, but yes, it is not easy either.

The particular constraints experienced by non-white immigrant farmers in California create unique circumstances for these growers to farm in the same ways that Ploeg describes new peasantry farming practices, yet for different reasons. Rather than political motivations to create an independent farming movement, immigrants are finding independent ways to survive as farmers, as a result of their marginal position to the US agriculture system. The limitations described here are linked to the ways that they are utilizing their marginal position and working independently from mainstream agriculture, as I discuss in the next section.

### **Utilizing Unique Conditions as Non-white Immigrant Farmers**

In contrast to their lack of financial resources, indigenous immigrant farmers tend to have a wealth of social networks and unique farming knowledge. They are using these resources and knowledge to find ways to farm independently from mainstream US agriculture, including cooperative resource use, practicing organic and low input agriculture, and accessing alternative markets and marginal land.

#### *Cooperative Resource Use*

Sharing of machinery and other inputs is one of the key ways Ploeg identifies farmers as reducing commodity relations in production, thus terming them peasant producers due to

their lack of interaction with the market to access the means of production. This is especially prevalent in immigrant gardening, as many farmers I interviewed told me they were sharing both land and equipment with other immigrants. Although farmers of all races and ethnicities may share resources, in these cases immigrants are more likely to depend on their internal community of immigrants, due to their lack of access to other forms of assistance.

In one case two indigenous immigrant farmers, one Triqui and one Mixteco, were farming together on a rented plot of land. They were renting a tractor from another immigrant (Mestizo) farmer who had a plot near theirs. They were pooling what they had as start up capital. Since they could not apply for government loans as other farmers do, they had no choice but to depend on other farmers they knew. They were limited to working with other immigrants in similar conditions and limited in their language skills.

Rea, the course instructor at ALBA, told me he has seen many immigrants come into ALBA looking to farm cooperatively. He told me:

The thing is, you know, that together, they can form a better vision. Of what they want to do, of what they want to accomplish together. You know, because they are all here for the same thing and they are all understanding it personally. The thing is when you combine that, you know, it's a stronger picture.

Rosa, the Mestiza farmer quoted above, has been farming for about fifteen years. She has made a commitment to help new, mostly Latino/a immigrant farmers, get their businesses started. She told me that after many years of supporting other immigrant farmers she needed to find a way to manage her outreach work and find resources so other small farmers could do it on their own. "I did it for many years but now I can't," she said. She has burned out on running her own farm and putting her resources into supporting other farmers at the same time.

In order to create a way for other beginning immigrant farmers like herself to learn to be independent and find more ways to support each other, she started an organization called the Small Farmers of California (*Pequeno Agricultores de California*, or PAC). The principal goal of PAC is to help future small farmers develop their businesses, particularly those who do not speak English. She told me, "The idea is to give the support to others, Mexicans who want to be farmers in this country." The organization also has the broader goal, she said, "of making the social and political changes that are necessary to secure their respect and human rights." They are currently working on securing more funding and resources to establish the organization.

In contrast to some of the positive reflections on sharing resources, some cooperative projects have not done as well as communal ventures. One Mestizo immigrant farmer, an ALBA graduate from ten years ago, described his negative experience creating a 100-acre farming collective with ten other ALBA graduates:

I got tired of all the problems and everything. So it didn't work, I guess most of the members, they were just trying to get benefits from the co-op and not helping much, and when it was their turn to help they left, they left me alone with a lot of expenditures from the co-op... At least for the time being I don't need a partner for farming. I had a very bad experience with other friends so I decided, oh, whatever I do by myself, I'll do it.

Conversely, he told me when he has a friend is in need of equipment he is always willing to lend what he has, as long as he trusts he will get it back when he needs it. Whether immigrant farmers choose to actually start farms together or are just sharing tools and equipment, they have fewer options to access resources, leading to more sharing of possessions and assets, and avoiding the market for farming inputs.

### *Low Input and Organic Farming*

Many indigenous immigrant farmers are coming from backgrounds of subsistence farming, from some of the most rural parts of Mexico, where they used minimal off-farm inputs and often saved seeds each year.<sup>65</sup> They often grew organically because they could not afford synthetic inputs, but were not certified as organic. Moreover, for the immigrant farmers who previously or concurrently work as farm labor in conventional agriculture, they have first hand experience of the toxicity of non-organic growing and do not want to expose themselves or their children to the chemical inputs. Using fewer off-farm inputs also supports the notion that they farm in a more peasant-like manner, being more independent from market exchanges. Conversely, they are not completely independent from the market, as they buy basic tools and materials, such as drip tape, organic fertilizers, and some seeds from area farm supply stores.<sup>66</sup>

Their previous experience as low-input peasant farmers in Mexico gives them the knowledge to begin as organic farmers, by default. As one Mestizo immigrant farmer, told me:

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<sup>65</sup> This is not universally true. Galt's (2008) study in Costa Rica shows that Latin American small-scale farmers have varied pesticide use.

<sup>66</sup> In terms of farming practices, the primary overlap from their farming in Mexico and cultivation at the garden was reflected in low input techniques and crop diversity. In the majority of their sustenance farming in Mexico they used swidden agriculture, or slash and burn techniques, which would not go over very well in California. Additionally, in Mexico, they did most cultivation and plowing by hand or with animals, such as bulls if they had them -- very labor intensive practices. The climate and terrain was often different in Mexico, where many were planting on steep hillsides, unlike their flat plots in California. In Mexico, they would build canals to catch the rain and guide it into their farming plots, a technique that would not work where they currently farm. When rain did not fill the canals they would water by hand, lifting heavy pails of water to their fields. Immigrant farmers I spoke with were content to take advantage of techniques such as tractors and drip irrigation, which saved time and physical energy.

Its funny, I am telling people all the time that my parents and my brothers -- I have six brothers in Mexico -- they are organic too, but they don't know that. They are organic because they don't have resources to buy fertilizers and all that.

Rosa graduated ALBA about sixteen years ago, when the program was first beginning. She told me she realized in the classes that she already knew how to grow organically:

I learned about plagues, sicknesses of plants, about the basics of organic agriculture that in reality was not anything different than traditional agriculture for us. We are traditional farmers – my grandparents were farmers in Mexico. My parents came in the sixties to Texas to work in the fields. But my grandparents were farmers in Mexico. So they were traditional farmers, this is what it is to us. Only here the system changes the name and the regulations and there is a process to be a certified organic farmer.

One beginning farmer, a recent ALBA graduate and Triqui man, completed his second year farming his own plot while also maintaining his day job as a laborer on a larger organic farm. He told me he combines techniques from Mexico with those he has learned in California:

Sometimes I use techniques from Mexico also, like when I plant beans from Oaxaca, I tie them up on sticks or wood, like guide for them to grow on, also the green beans, many times, sometimes... I plant cilantro, beets, everything... green beans. Often I use techniques from Mexico and California, I use both to plant. I mix them both.

Rea pointed out that immigrant farmers come with an advantage to the class, which focuses on organic farming. Since they often already know how to farm with low off-farm inputs from their experience in Mexico, they are able to transition more easily to organic farming in the US:

I like to reassure them when they come into the class that they've got a leg up on others. They have the practical experience. They've worked without chemicals. They know, because they couldn't afford them.

Brett Melone, the director of ALBA, also told me that they encourage their students to “acknowledge the knowledge and skills that they have and build on that.” But he pointed out that when farmworkers are at their jobs on conventional or large farms they often aren't thinking about whole farm systems:

What we've heard from people that have worked in conventional agriculture or industrial agriculture for a long time, they become very specialized and clearly

haven't had a chance to think about how to farm and manage... They're just doing one thing over and over and over again like a robot.

He noted that when students start to farm on their own they are able to incorporate more knowledge from their previous cultivation experience:

They have the chance to kind of step back and remember how, if they grew up on a farm, or how things work, so it's sort of remembering or unlearning... I guess it gives people a lot of hope and self-worth because they realize that they do have a lot of knowledge.

Saving and replanting seeds is another way that immigrant farmers avoid off-farm inputs from the market. Many immigrant farmers I met with were saving seeds, especially Mexican varieties that are hard to find in the United States. One immigrant farmer, who has been successfully farming for over fifteen years, told me, "We try to save the seeds. We try to integrate the gains of agriculture with the circle of the complete system." Another Triqui farmer told me he saves seeds since organic seed is so expensive and he is still working with very little capital input.

A Mixteco couple told me that although what they are growing to sell on the market included mostly store bought varieties, they are also planting Mexican herb varieties that they saved from last year, "*Quintonil, verdolagas, herba mora*, and this year we will return and save more... These are the ones we saved. We don't have other seeds. The vegetables that came from Mexico. The *papalo* is one that we cultivate in Mexico, not in huge quantities, but one that we are saving." They previously harvested most of these crops wild in Mexico. After arriving in the US they cultivated them for the first time.

Low-resource immigrants, particularly indigenous people, are likely to have a sort of advantage over other beginning organic and low input farmers, in that not only do they know how to farm on a small scale, they learned to farm without synthetic and off-farm inputs. In this way, their social disadvantage includes a small benefit in the context of organic farming in the US.

#### *Alternative Markets*

Immigrant farmers are often producing at too small of a scale to compete in the bigger markets, and/or do not have the connections to buyers, which can be made worse by language barriers. As a result, many of them are selling their products within their own communities or finding other outlets through immigrant social networks. With limited English skills and business contacts, selling to local stores and through community contacts is the most practical way for immigrant farmers to get an "in" to the marketplace.

As some immigrant farmers have a hard time getting and paying for certifications, be it business licenses, land titles, or organic certification, they may prefer to sell off the radar. This can include direct markets that are less regulated than farmers' markets, such as flea

markets, and directly to people they know through their hometown networks. This way they are able to take advantage of their social networks as well as avoid bureaucracy and regulation. As Melone told me of ALBA graduates, “A lot of produce gets sold at flea markets. You know that's where a lot of the low-income people shop and there's an issue between how farmers' markets are managed and requirements that they have versus the flea markets.” ALBA grads are also able to sell directly through ALBA's distribution branch, ALBA Organics. The branch was established to help ALBA grads that were growing a small scale and struggling to get into larger markets. With ALBA they know they are getting an honest price, since many distributor/ shippers will take advantage of immigrant and marginalized farmers.<sup>67</sup>

In the beginning of their first season, a Mixtco couple told me they are planning on selling to small local stores, especially crop varieties that immigrants will buy. The larger markets, the husband pointed out, already have contracts with larger growers. He said:

Yes, it is difficult... to find clients to sell vegetables to. But we are only going to plant one acre. If there aren't clients, we only have this much product. There is risk, but we need to move, ask questions... If you don't ask questions in the stores, and you don't go to them no one is going to buy your product. Ask them, say I have products, will you buy my products. If they say yes, it could be that easy.

They are planting strategically, as it is their first year growing with the intent to sell their product. In the previous year they were part of the community garden discussed in previous chapters, where they grew enough excess produce that they started gauging interest from local stores and selling a small amount. Garden participants have been successful the past two years making some local connections and are hoping to make more contacts next year to sell produce from the three acres they now have in production.

Isabella Rosa, the Mestiza farmer mentioned above who rents out some of her land to beginning immigrant farmers, including a few Triqui farmers, gives her renters the option to sell their product to her.<sup>68</sup> She then sells the produce for a marked up price at farmer's markets in the Bay area. With limited Spanish and English skills and without the

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<sup>67</sup>One immigrant farmer told me an example of a produce broker taking advantage of his lack of language skills to cheat him out of his profit. Without the English skills and procedural know-how in the market, immigrant farmers can often be charged more by middlemen selling their produce than is customary.

<sup>68</sup>Unlike sharecropping, where a tenant is obligated to trade a percentage, or their entire product to the landowner, in exchange for rent, in this case renters pay a fee to rent the land and then have the option to sell their product to the landowner if they choose. This is not to say an uneven relationship does not exist. The landowner still is setting the price and making more profit off the produce. One farmer in this situation expressed to me he is working on making direct connections to retailers himself, as he feels he does not get the best price selling to the landowner.

contacts or skills in marketing, this is a way to help these beginning farmers get their businesses started and have a guaranteed market for their produce. One of the men I spoke with, a recent Triqui immigrant from Oaxaca, said he was selling to this farmer as well to ALBA Organics this coming year: “The most difficult thing is to get the clients, those to buy from you... I think I could do it because I have Isabella and ALBA.” He was also thinking about going to target the Triqui immigrant community directly where he lives and in nearby towns:

I have also looked into selling to my community, going house to house to sell. Sometimes I have also gone to Greenfield to sell... I have gone to the houses to sell, I see if they want to buy cilantro, tomatoes, peppers... Then that way little by little also I can know what they want. They can come to me and I can bring cilantro, radishes. [I know then] what they want and I go and leave it.<sup>69</sup>

He learned about the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model in the ALBA class and is thinking about trying a delivery box model with the Triqui community as well, since they are a group that are often isolated socially and linguistically from local food movement. As a producer, he sees them as an untapped market, especially for special Mexican varieties and crops:

I can make a few bunches of radish, of cilantro, of papalo. They [at ALBA] told me another time I can sell per box, each box I can put a small squash, three baskets of strawberries, some of everything in the box. People can buy the box and get it very fresh and have these things to eat... Because they [white farmers] sell for the majority and they can't sell to minorities, and a person can only buy a little, like in the market.

Melone explained that many ALBA grads work at farmers markets in low-income areas. Some immigrant ALBA grads have also been especially active with getting EBT and WIC accepted at the farmers' markets where they sell. He noted that some ALBA grads that sell in low-income markets are actively working on improving accessibility to their produce as they feel “solidarity” with low-income consumers. Of course, efforts to sell in low-income communities are not purely altruistic. Melone commented that these markets are the easiest ones for new farmers to access, “In terms of starting, I mean, the farmers markets that are available to beginning farmers are often the ones that aren't that lucrative, you know, so they have to be willing to work them.”

Even Rosa, who has been farming for more than a decade, said that she utilizes alternative markets due to discrimination from mainstream markets:

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<sup>69</sup> Greenfield is a town where there is a large Triqui immigrant community in California.

[We are] collaborating with different agencies, organizations and schools because it is the only way we know how to distribute our products and to find our place in the market system because the market system of the United States is formed and structured for big corporations and not for us, the small growers.

There are some examples of using immigrants and farmers of color as part of an image to sell produce; buyers who wish to support disadvantaged farmers are creating an emerging niche market for non-white immigrants and other farmers of color. One example is in Oakland California, where the organization, Phat Beets Produce, “a food justice collective” has created farmers’ markets specifically to support farmers like ALBA graduates and to be able to connect low-income consumers with low-income producers. Another example is ALBA Organics, which, as I mentioned above, enables small producers to sell to a larger market base, such as institutions. The staff at ALBA believes that most purchasers of ALBA produce, which includes internet monster Google, advertise that they buy their product from ALBA and that they are supporting “socially disadvantaged farmers.” As Melone told me:

In fact that's a huge market advantage to organics and the story is half the fact that it's organic and half that it comes from family farmers that are socially disadvantaged.

For non-white immigrant farmers, the marketplace to sell their produce may be limited, increasing their need to use their own social networks and creativity to find places to sell, working outside of the mainstream market place. Furthermore, as “food justice” grows as a movement, more consumers are becoming aware of farmers of color and preferring to buy from them when possible. Although the marketing of immigrant and racialized identities is an overtly neoliberal approach open to critique in terms of utilizing racialized marketing, it may make farming more financially viable for struggling immigrant farmers.

### *Alternative Land Use*

One of the largest struggles for non-white immigrant farmers in establishing a productive farm is gaining stable access to good quality agriculturally zoned land with ample water.<sup>70</sup> Almost all of the immigrant farmers I interviewed were renting land, either individually or as a group, from an independent landowner, employer, or as part of the ALBA incubator program. As mentioned above, purchasing land is especially challenging for immigrants, many of who are undocumented. For these reasons, many immigrants look for alternative or non-traditional options to lease land.

One of the key challenges for immigrant farmworkers looking for a small plot of agriculturally zoned land to rent is that even if a landowner has extra land available, water is sparse and most agricultural landowners use all of their property’s available

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<sup>70</sup> The cost of water in agriculturally zoned areas of California is much lower than residential or commercial zones, a key factor for affordable irrigation.

water. One white farmer even told me that although he would be interested in leasing land to aspiring immigrant farmers (including his workers), but that he simply doesn't have enough water. He has even purchased more land in order to have extra water rights for his existing crops, while leaving those areas fallow. Water access varies depending on the region and microclimate. One farm on the coast in Santa Cruz County, where drought is less of a limiting factor than for inland farms, allows their workers to grow produce on their property, using their water. In this case, though, the produce grown is for home consumption, not for sale.

In the past few years land has become more available in suburban and marginal agricultural areas due to the economic crisis. Land prices in areas such as the larger Silicon Valley region (which borders the Central Coast) have fallen extremely low and residential development has halted. In my research I observed some indigenous and other immigrant farmers taking advantage of the crisis, and renting undeveloped plots in the middle of unfinished suburban housing projects. There is a current trend of mostly white urban farmers reclaiming abandoned urban and peri-urban land in cities like San Francisco, Oakland, Detroit, and Seattle. In contrast to such activities, where gardeners and farmers have an overt mission for food justice or to re-convert agricultural production in peri-urban spaces (McClintock 2010), migrants are re-claiming recently converted agricultural areas because these marginal spaces are where they live and work and are some of the only places available for them to rent.

Two indigenous families I interviewed were cooperatively renting four acres for 800 dollars per year, a relatively inexpensive price for the region. The plot is in the middle of an upscale suburban development that was built in the height of the housing boom. Their plot is a vacant area being rented from the adjacent homeowner. The area is still zoned as agricultural land, with agricultural water prices. The development is still surrounded by other farmland, and is located on the outskirts of a small Central Coast city. The plot is still valuable as a future home site, but since the economic downturn the landowner has made it available for small-scale agriculture. There is another vacant plot across the street in the same housing development being rented and farmed, although not by immigrant farmers.

One of the Mixteco farmers cultivating this plot told me he sees other vacant plots in the neighborhood he would like to rent. He has a vision of finding more small plots of land to rent in the area, while slowly building up to a larger farm business. Failed or temporarily stalled residential development projects in peri-urban areas are prime opportunities for immigrant farmers to get in the rental market at a low price on land. The parcels have already been divided from their previous large agricultural holdings, yet are still in agriculturally zoned areas.

There is potential for immigrant farmers and other farmers of color to access land and water in the wake of the housing crash. Of course, the availability of such land depends on the economic climate, which can change rapidly. Any rental situation for farming is unstable and especially difficult if one wants to get certified as organic, as this process

takes three years on the same plot. Yet, for the farmers I interviewed, renting in such areas seemed like a good option in terms of building their business and customer base and experimenting with little access to capital. Abandoned housing projects are one of the few creative options for immigrant farmers who wish to start their own business outside of incubator programs and community garden sites.

### **Feeding Families First**

One of the most significant ways that indigenous and other immigrant farmers do not fit the petty commodity producer mold is that they prioritize producing food for consumption over food for the market and profit. This priority stems from their peasant background as well as their desire to provide healthy and diverse diets for their families and communities, something often missing from their lives post migration. The farmers I interviewed stated that feeding their families the produce they grew was their priority over selling on the market. Many beginning ALBA graduates that were starting to rent land were unsure how much of their product they even wanted to sell. They would first make sure their families were fed and then see what was left for the market. When I asked a farmer completing the ALBA program if he was growing to sell or eat the produce from his newly rented plot he said, “I sell a little, but the majority we eat. A lot comes up, and we can’t eat it all, so we sell a little.” Another farmer said, “For me, we eat it because we have a lot of products. It is for eating, and if it is really good, then we can sell them.” A third farmer, who was growing a mix of Mexican herbs and other crops common to the Mexican diet told me:

First to eat and we can see, if people want these plants [Mexican varieties], we can sell or teach them how to cook them, if Americans want to eat them too.

Even the more established Mestizo immigrant farmers I met with said making sure their family was well fed was their primary motivation for farming, while selling in the market came second. Rosa told me:

In reality if we are to conserve our health, our body and our children so they don’t have obesity, when they are young, is to return to cooking, return again to our diet, to eat greens, squash, corn, seasonal fruits. I feel that it is time for change, time to do this.

She told me her farm was the first to collaborate with the WIC program in California. This provided her with a way to give back to marginalized communities:

We were the first in collaborating with WIC. Yes, we have done this for many years. We are working with different organizations, we volunteer for various organizations and schools. We collaborate with projects with the universities and high schools, middle schools. The idea is, my personal challenge is, that I am the kind of person that always is educating my community on how to be healthier.

That has been my personal challenge for many years. And I am always trying to educate.

She also told me that growing food was about creating an alternative nutritionally as well. Recognizing that agribusiness does not care about the health and well-being of poor and immigrant families, she saw small-scale immigrant farming as part of growing a larger movement for food sovereignty and justice:

They [big agro-business] aren't going to the school and speaking with the kids, speaking with mothers about nutrition, about the problems of obesity, about the environment, they aren't going to go. But we can, yes, we can go. And here is our advantage. Here is where our power is. Including the community in our movement. To be a part of organic agriculture movement and the community. That is what remains.

Feeding their own communities is their primary reason that many immigrants grow food, and guides many of their choices in production and distribution. As Ploeg observes in his work on the new peasantry, feeding one's community is a key aspect of maintaining agricultural sovereignty from agribusiness and a way that farmers can maintain their own cultural and nutritional traditions.

Conversely, Rosa told me that although her mission is to help those that cannot afford access, she admits that finding alternative markets has been part of her survival strategy as a Latina farmer. As previously discussed, feeding low-income communities, which often are their own communities, is a great benefit of small-scale immigrant agriculture. Yet, most farmers, in order to survive economically, must look for more profitable markets. In this way, these small farming operations cannot be looked to as a way to provide secure food security within the current capitalist system. Eventually, if these small-scale farmers continue to advance and quit their jobs as laborers, they will need to find larger and more profitable markets and, under pressure to profit as capitalist farmers, will risk de-prioritizing their own communities' food security. I will explore this contradiction more in the final chapter.

## **Conclusion**

The case of farmworkers-turned-farmers fits no model currently discussed in literature on critical agrarian studies, and it cannot be understood without paying particular attention to race, ethnicity, and documentation status. Race and documentation status keep indigenous immigrants in limbo as "farmers," and while they may struggle to become petty commodity producers, they are stuck somewhere between the worker and grower class.

By necessity, indigenous and other immigrant farmers are limited in scale and scope, and therefore not able to participate in larger markets. As they do not have access to mainstream resources and markets due to language and financial barriers, they are more

likely to utilize family and hometown networks for resources, grow on marginalized land, use organic techniques, and sell in alternative markets. In contrast to the new peasantry literature, immigrant farmers' relative independence from agribusiness is more a matter of survival than conscious resistance, as they are marginal to many mainstream resources and networks due to their citizenship status, race, and ethnicity. In their transition from farmworkers to farmers they are drawing on their own social networks, shared resources, and knowledge sets.

Immigrant farmers complicate agrarian questions concerning the "new" peasantry and the petty commodity producer. We must rethink how to define the global peasantry as well as the global capitalist farmer, how inclusions or exclusions are framed, and what this means for action and solidarity between local movements for small farmer and immigrant rights and viability. Immigrant farmers in the United States do not fit the mold of the current literature in that their reason for farming is not necessarily to build a political movement, but to join the owner class. For immigrant farmers, establishing a farm is a survival strategy and a way to in some way recreate life as they knew it before becoming laborers in the global migrant stream. They are peasants who have left their home and are trying to reconstruct a new agrarian life. As laborers transitioning back to growing, these small-scale immigrant farmers complicate theoretical boundaries in definitions of food producers. They represent the resilience of peasant agrarian producers and their ability to remake themselves in new contexts. They point to the need for agrarian researchers and activists to think about transnational people, as well as transnational politics, if power dynamics in global agriculture are to be shifted.

## CONCLUSION

### FARMWORKER FOOD INSECURITY AND CHANGING THE FOOD SYSTEM

*The fight is never about grapes or lettuce. It is always about people.*

- Cesar Chavez

If those interested in sustainable food systems and food justice are to truly address the deep roots of farmworker food insecurity, we must look at transnational dispossession, low wages, and class and race-based discrimination in food access. We must recognize that changing the food system is inherently connected to challenging larger inequalities in global capitalism and accumulation. Currently, there is a surge in alternative food movements throughout the United States. These movements are addressing diverse issues across the food chain. Some are emphasizing the sustainability of production practices, while others are fighting for more equality in food access. Questions of rights to land and the democratization of the food system have become a central issue for many food activists, especially for those that align themselves with the food justice and food sovereignty. However, the issue of labor has yet to become a central issue.

For many in the United States that consider themselves conscious consumers, there is a strategic avoidance of class and race relations. For others, particularly those that identify as part of more progressive and radical food movements, the issue of labor is at the periphery of their food consciousness. I confront these differing elements of the often contradictory US alternative food movements, highlighting both the constraints and potential for making labor a central concern.

In this dissertation, I have investigated the structural causes of food insecurity on various scales, transnational, national, and regional. I examined the ways that farmworkers, and indigenous farmworkers in particular, cope with food insecurity in California. I found that contrary to common approaches to food insecurity, which treat immigrants and other people of color as knowledge deficient, many farmworkers are knowledgeable about how to eat well and have strong preferences for fresh foods grown without agrochemicals. Furthermore, some have started small gardens and farms, feeding their families by growing their own food. Some aim to escape their farmworker status. Ultimately, the problem of farmworker food insecurity is rooted in low wages, as well as lacking access to resources such as land, water, and equipment to grow their own food. In this conclusion, I look more closely at how popular food movements can help farmworkers achieve better wages and access to resources.

Goodman *et al.* (2011) call for a “reflexive food justice,” or a food movement that “responds to changing circumstances, imperfectly, but with an awareness of the contradictions of the movement” (2011, 30). Building on the notion of a reflexive food movement, I encourage more food movement actors and organizations to directly address such contradictions and work towards achieving labor justice in the food system. How

can farmworker rights become a more fundamental part of these food movements? Can the power of food movements be brought to the farm labor movement and the politics of farm labor be brought to the food movement? And, what are activists and others in the alternative food movement already doing to engage with labor injustices in the food system?

Although completely reversing the exploitation of workers inherent the capitalist mode of production will take radical reforms, more than are possibly imaginable by most food activists today, I argue that today's food movements have the potential to directly improve agricultural workers' conditions and wages in the current system. Supporting farmworker movements and stronger regulations regarding farm labor can result in radical changes in the everyday lives of workers in the fields and can only be a positive move towards more comprehensive worker justice. In order to make steps towards challenging the structural inequalities in the food system, there must be more cooperation among food and labor movements, workers' rights must become central to food movement discourses, and false conceptions of rural and urban divides must dissolve.

### **Knowing Your Farmer... and Farmworker**

Today's alternative food movement in the United States is diverse and complex, yet there is common rhetoric among all food activists to "know where your food comes from." This call to look down the food chain appeals to popular consumer interests in environmental, community, and personal health.<sup>71</sup> This rallying cry brings together a broad based coalition of foodie actors, from those that believe the market will solve the problems of unsustainable production if we all purchase organic food, to food justice and food sovereignty activists that call for radical food system reforms, so all people have access to so called "good" food. However, among all these actors, attention to where food comes from consistently lacks an awareness of those who pick and pack our food.

Places where alternative food is sold and promoted, such as farmers' markets, where you can literally "get to know your farmer," or grocery stores, such as Whole Foods and community food cooperatives, where they commonly post large glossy photographs of local growers, allow consumers to meet farm owners, not farmworkers. Supporting local and organic food typically centers on supporting mostly white small-scale family farmers, disregarding farm labor practices. Such agrarian narratives and imagery must be pushed further, for people to ask not only, where does my food come from, but also, who performs the labor to grow this food?

Jorge Antonio Valenzuela, Deputy Operations Manager of the United Farmworkers (UFW) in Salinas, California utilized this popular notion with regards to farm labor. In

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<sup>71</sup> Since the advent of the sustainable food movement in the United States, the focus has been primarily on environmental resource protection and profitability as the main elements of sustainability (Allen *et al.* 1991).

an interview, he reiterated the notion that “if people only knew where their food came from,” things would be different:

I think that people do not know where their food comes from. They don't know. It's not important to them. I think that finally that the people have interest in organic food also have interest in where their food comes from and finally the people that want to eat organically and are into food – we are interested in – I think that many people in for example, Santa Cruz, they are interested in things like civil rights. And when they begin to think where their food comes from, the rights of the workers will improve – when they make the big connection. And I think also, they could be our supporters. There needs to be a change for them, and of course, for the workers. But I think that the majority of people don't think about where their food comes from.

Valenzuela is not simply arguing that if people knew where their food came from, then they would make more environmentally and socially just consumer choices and therefore food system would be improved, but rather, that if people knew more about agricultural labor conditions, they would become supporters of farmworker movements. He takes a common foodie notion, to know where one's food comes from, and suggests that we must include labor as part this quest for food-related knowledge.

The idea of knowing our farmer, and where food comes from, appeals to organizers and activists that want eaters to think critically about food production. It seems to be is a small step, then, to include farm labor in this thought process. Yet, there is a consistent agrarian imaginary that works to disconnect the agrarian ideal from the messiness of real agriculture practice and its inherent injustices (Guthman 2004; Getz 2011; Getz *et al.* 2008; Allen 1993, 2008). Consumers that identify with the local and organic movements tend to enlist a certain level of trust in local and other sustainable-minded food initiatives, without questioning farmer practices and values (DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Goodman *et al.* 2011). Additionally, critics of localism point to the urban bias historically inherent in local food initiatives- reinforcing a disciplinary split in rural and urban studies (Goodman *et al.* 2011), which I argue, creates the conditions for labor to be sidelined in localism and other alternative food movements.

In organic production, agrarian idealism as it relates to labor has been proven to be false imagery. Organic entry-level farmworkers in California only make twenty-nine cents more per hour than non-organic workers (less than a living wage), and are *less* likely to have paid time off, health insurance for themselves and their families, and retirement, or pension funds. Further, certified organic farmers have proven resistant to including labor standards in organic certification (Strochlic *et al.* 2008).

Improving labor conditions, even on farms that fall under the categorization of “alternative” agriculture, will only come from an organized movement that questions idealized alternative farming imagery. As discussed below, there are various starting points for this movement, and many consumers, organizers, activists, and farmworkers

themselves are working to raise awareness of these contradictions and take action against labor injustices.

### **Laboring for Food Justice?**

The food justice movement is a direct response to the elitism and classism inherent in consumer-based movements. Born from many of the ideals and actions of the environmental justice movement, food justice actors work with the goal of directly addressing food access and structural racism and classism, focusing on human rights in the food system (Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Holt-Giménez and Wang 2011). Yet, as Allen (2008) argues, that there is often a “gap between intent and outcome in food justice.” Although the idea of creating a more just food system is a valiant one, many food justice organizations lack attention to workers’ rights, continuing to focus on growers as the primary producers of food, rather than farmworkers.<sup>72</sup>

Though actors in the food justice movement often critique the structural inequality inherent in our domestic food system, they tend to have an urban-bias, challenging inequality in urban spaces of food consumption, while still fetishizing the production of food and the rural farmer.<sup>73</sup> Solutions for a more just food system tend to revolve around equitable access regarding consumption, not equitable production practices, reinforcing the notion of a rural-urban divide in our food system. Many food justice organizations work on initiatives to enable and popularize urban gardening and increasing farmers markets and fresh food availability in poor urban neighborhoods. Although these are important efforts to increase the quality of health and well being of often under served urban residents, they tend to limit the conversation of food injustice to the urban core.

This urban bias may be due to the fact that many food justice organizations and movements are largely based in urban spaces and coordinated and staffed by young people in their twenties and thirties, for whom the city is more exciting place to live and work. If the growing food justice movement is to truly confront injustice in the food system, it must address the rural poor as well as the urban poor, as the majority of people that produce this country’s food reside in rural and semi-rural areas. Specifically, they must address the contradictions of a food justice movement that promotes equal access to

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<sup>72</sup> The emphasis, though, often shifts to supporting farmers of color, rather than only white ones.

<sup>73</sup> This claim is made based on observations of various national food justice organizations, conferences, and events. In one particular instance, I was asked to moderate a farm labor panel at a food themed conference. At the same time that our panel was scheduled, another panel, focused on “food justice” was occurring, as a completely separate discussion. While our panel focused on rural issues, the other panel discussed strictly urban ones. This example illustrates the way that food justice and farm labor conversations are often happening in isolation, yet in very close proximity from one another.

sustainable and healthy food, while ignoring the unjust practices utilized in producing such food.

### **Can You “Vote With Your Fork” for Labor?**

Those who associate with alternative food movements often promote the mantra of “vote with your fork.” Following the notion of “vote with your dollar,” and harnessing the potential power of the consumer in the marketplace, the (in)famous author and local and organic food proponent Michael Pollan, argues that, “You can simply stop participating in a system that abuses animals or poisons the water or squanders jet fuel flying asparagus around the world. You can vote with your fork, in other words, and you can do it three times a day” (Pollan 2006). Consumer-based movements utilize an approach where buyers are the actors. The logic goes that if shoppers make the “right” choices, they will be able to change the food system.

Critics of movements dependent on consumer based approaches conclude that they remain limited to middle-upper class, mostly white consumers, excluding those that don’t have the ability to pay more for good food. They do not encourage consumers and supporters to question the accessibility of such foods, and the privilege inherent in making “conscious” food decisions. Additionally, they follow a neoliberal model, dependent on the market and non-governmental actors for creating environmental and social change, rather than applying pressure on the state to address structural inequities (Holt-Giménez and Wang 2011; Guthman 2008a; Allen 1993, 2004b, 2008; Alkon 2008; Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Lo and Jacobson 2011). Neoliberal approaches to food activism are particularly problematic for addressing working conditions, such as pesticide drift. Although consumer movements have resulted in increased organic production, they have failed to cope with the most toxic use of pesticides, privileging the bodies of organic consumers, while abandoning those of residents of agricultural communities (Harrison 2008).

However, some consumer activists and foodie leaders are starting to utilize consumer support for food labor organizing and action. Slow Food USA president Josh Viertel recently spoke at a march organized by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and the Student Farmworker Alliance in Boston, planned to pressure major supermarket chains to pay a penny more per pound of tomatoes.<sup>74</sup> Viertel told the audience, “I am

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<sup>74</sup> Slow Food USA is a popular anchor for food consumer movements in the United States, followed by other national and regional organizations and campaigns such as Buy Fresh, Buy Local; the Food Alliance; and Local Harvest, among many others. Slow Food was founded to “counter the rise of fast food and fast life, the disappearance of local food traditions and people’s dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, how it tastes and how our food choices affect the rest of the world” (Anon. 2012).<sup>74</sup> This movement, which encourages consumers to make particular types of informed food choices, has gained speed in the United States in the past decade, promoted as a way for consumers to improve their own health and that of the environment.

here today because the food movement cannot be separate from the farmworkers movement” (Viertel 2011). His impassioned speech, and follow-up publication in *The Atlantic Monthly*, resonates with many that identify as part of the Slow Food or foodie movement. Slow Food USA has recently taken a turn towards addressing more policy initiatives, including workers’ rights, while other local and organic food activists are raising questions as to the role of labor practices in sustainable food, student groups especially.<sup>75</sup>

Consumer activists have made inroads in advocating for farm labor, not by utilizing their purchasing power directly, but for their influence in boycotts, protests, and media campaigns. By refusing to purchase certain products they have successfully pressured producers and large-scale purchasers to improve labor conditions. Consumers have been crucial in farmworker unions and coalitions actions, such as UFW and CIW campaigns, which have employed consumer pressure to encourage restaurants, wholesalers, grocery stores, and other large buyers of produce to pay higher prices for agricultural products. Such campaigns are unique in the context of consumer food activism, in that they have been motivated and organized by farmworkers themselves, with specific demands regarding labor.

Farmworker motivated consumer activism in the United States can be traced to the iconic grape boycotts of the late 1960s, an action that many food activists still reminisce about today. In 1965, Filipino grape workers and members of the AFL-CIO-affiliated Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) in Delano, California started striking against low wages and dreadful working and living conditions. They soon asked the newly formed union, the National Farmworkers Association (NFWA), now the United Farmworkers, to join them. To support the strike, Cesar Chavez and other organizers orchestrated a march to the California capital to gain more national attention. For the following four years, the UFW and collaborators organized the largest food boycott in United States history. Although the strike and march had gained national attention, it was the large-scale boycott that ultimately caused the growers to sign contracts that ensured higher wages and benefits (Ganz 2009).

In contrast to emphasizing the power of the individual consumer, the CIW’s current Fair Food Campaign has focused on large-scale buyers of produce, such as Taco Bell, McDonalds, and Burger King, Tedesco, and Whole Foods, among others. In addition to consumer boycotts, they have enacted letter writing campaigns, petitions, protests, and days of action at national corporate headquarters. The Campaign for Fair Food identifies points of power in the food chain and applies pressure, making demands for improving labor standards and practices. Large-scale buyers of produce are able to apply downward pressure on growers to produce food cheaply. The campaign is working to harness this

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<sup>75</sup> This progress is debated by others in the foodie movement, those that argue that organizations such as Slow Food should be focusing on preserving traditional foodways, rather than getting involved in “political” debates or policy based initiatives (Greenaway 2012).

power and reverse this trend. Companies that sign on to the campaign have agreed to use their market power to force producers to increase wages to farmworkers, enforce a Code of Conduct for agricultural suppliers, where ethics standards are regulated by worker groups, and provide transparency for their tomato purchases in Florida. Despite threats from The Florida Tomato Growers Exchange after their first successful agreements with Taco Bell and McDonalds, the campaign has continued to grow, including more restaurants and grocers on a national scale. Most recently, they included the chain grocer Trader Joes to their list of contracted companies.

Max Perez, a former farmworker in Immokalee and organizer with the CIW, explains the success of their campaign:

We have basically made an agreement, and so now, all of our workers are focused on getting the buyers to agree, and so that we can implement the system where farmworkres have control of the oversight of the conditions and the wages and, I mean, that's what's needed. What was need this whole time is for farmworkers, growers, and the big buyers to come together for a solution to this problem, whereas before, they didn't... We made it a problem for them. We are making it so the consumers know about this and the consumers are becoming against them. Through the boycotts, they're feeling that pressure.

Perez suggests that the campaign challenges the power structure of the food system. Through these campaigns, farmworkers collectively fostered and galvanized consumer support. They are successfully forcing large buyers of produce to agree to labor contracts, which in turn, forces suppliers to pay workers more and provide better work conditions. The farm owners are beholden to the buyers who have a contract with the farmworkers.

Lucas Benitez, also an organizer with CIW, stated at a recent conference on Labor Across the Food System, "For the first time, we are using the power of the market to get rid of the bad weeds and clean the industry up."<sup>76</sup> Contrary to most consumer-based food activism, where the consumer uses their privilege to makes choices based on their own health and desires, both Perez and Benitez highlight the ways that farmworkers are utilizing consumer power for worker needs, confronting structurally created inequities.

The Campaign for Fair Food does not empower consumers as individuals, by their purchases. Rather, they feel part of a larger movement working in solidarity with workers. These actions not only affect wages directly, but also help to spread awareness to those physically detached from rural areas and to the struggles in the field, providing potential support for future policy changes and more stringent labor regulations.

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<sup>76</sup> This conference took place February 2-3, 2012 at The University of California, Santa Cruz.

Also contrary to most consumer based food initiatives, CIW's actions do not focus solely on the "foodie" or privileged consumer. The campaign's first target was Taco Bell, a fast food chain that targets low-income consumers such as farmworkers. By not limiting their base of consumer "activists" to the white middle-upper class, the CIW's movement has more growing power. Through appealing to the large mass of consumers and producers involved in purchasing industrial agriculture, rather than the small number of those involved in the small scale specialty food industry, they are aiming at a larger target of producers, those which employ more workers, and those that often labor under the worst working conditions.

Sandy Brown, a labor activist and geographer at the University of California, Berkeley, noted that, "Consumer-based initiatives can work when they are creating real solidarities between consumer and producers."<sup>77</sup> In other words, the power of these actions is that consumers recognize their influence is not only in their conscious consumption, or voting with their dollar or fork, but in identifying ways to partner with, support, and advocate for farmworker groups. Solving labor injustices will not stem from consumers simply making more educated food choices. Rather, as people want to include labor practices as part of their sustainable food ideals, they must also demand that farm employers, large-scale food purchasers, politicians, and regulators improve field labor conditions and wages through changing policy and regulations.

Some food justice activists are starting to work more broadly on issues of farm and food system labor, coordinating with farm, food processing, and restaurant worker unions, and building new coalitions, such as The Food Chain Workers Alliance, The US Food Sovereignty Alliance, The Rural Coalition, and The Student Farmworker Coalition. Working in coalition, many groups are finding more power to motivate policy change and raise working standards, bringing worker struggles closer to the center of the food movement (Lo and Jacobson 2011). Coalition building is an important step for bringing together the growing food justice movement in rallying political pressure on the issue of farm labor. The Student Farmworker Coalition has played a major role in the CIW protests and boycotts, bringing farmworker injustice into central view on college campuses. The Food Chain Workers Alliance is working directly with urban as well as rural food justice groups, bringing labor rights across the food system into the food movement conversation. Founded by regionally diverse groups, such as the Restaurant Opportunities Center United (ROC) in New York City, and The Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center (NWAJWC), the coalition organizes to improve wages and working conditions for those that, "plant, harvest, process, pack, transport, prepare, serve, and sell food... all workers along the food chain" (Food Chain Workers Alliance). By working in coalition, food justice activists and organizers with an urban focus are beginning to learn from rural activists, as well as the reverse.

These coalitions are a good step for urban-based food justice organizations to start working with rural organizations, farmworker groups, and unions. Although many of the

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<sup>77</sup> She made this comment at the Food Labor Conference at UCSC February 4th.

solutions to food injustice promoted by the movement focus on improving food access in poor and mostly urban areas, the analysis of many food justice organizers and activists include critiques of injustice throughout the food system. If we are to truly see the creation of a more just food system, organizations, actors, and communities that claim food justice ideals, must also start acting on these politically, pushing for revised agricultural trade and immigration policy, including increasing labor regulations and minimum wages.

## **Farm Labor Unions**

Although there is a striking history of farmworker unionization in the United States, agricultural worker organizing has been systematically undermined by violent anti-union tactics as well as the introduction of new ethnic labor forces throughout US history. As various immigrant groups have organized and resisted, demanding better wages and working conditions, employers have effectively replaced them with newer racialized immigrant groups in order to effectively avoid collective mobilizing and protesting for better wages and conditions (Walker 2004; Mitchell 1996; Henderson 1998; Wells 1996; Almaguer 1994; Ganz 2009). As discussed in Chapter Two, farmers in the United States have continuously utilized the most vulnerable and impoverished groups. This process continues today, as farmworkers often labor in fear of deportation if they so much hint to a complaint about their working conditions. Farm labor is currently one of the least unionized industries in the United States, with under two percent of farmworkers organized (Mayer 2004).

Yet, farmworker unions have made some strides in obtaining improved wages and rights, forcing farms to sign labor contracts with workers. The first successful farmworker union drive in US history was in 1966, when the newly formed UFW signed a contract with Schenley Industries, a national liquor distributor and large grape growers in California's Central Valley. Following this initial win, and after an extended fight, all table grape workers were under union contract by 1970. By 1977, the UFW had secured over 100 union contracts. These contracts guaranteed higher wages, benefits, and working conditions for farm labor (Ganz 2009). Farmworker unions have also been crucial to getting specific legislation passed to protect farmworker rights, particularly in California, such as the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act and the establishment of California's Agricultural Relations Board in 1975 (Martin 2003). More recent successes include labor contracts with cattle feeders in Oregon and Washington States, as well as Dole strawberry growers in California (United Farmworkers 2012).

Unfortunately, the UFW and workers' rights in California agriculture have waned in recent years. There are many explanations for why farmworker unions failed to grow in power and popularity after the 1970s. Some believe that although Cesar Chavez was a charismatic leader, the UFW lacked the practical organizing tactics to respond to the practical demands of union members, leading to decreasing support from members. Others point to the growing numbers of documented and undocumented immigrants and demands on the agricultural labor market. Another explanation has to do with the shift

from direct hiring to contractors as middlemen, a hiring structure that took power away from workers (Martin 2003). Whatever the reason for the decline in unionization, the affect has been less collective power of workers to bargain for better wages, benefits, and conditions.

One way for unions to build a powerful presence in agriculture today could be to mobilizing some of the popular media and consumer power that the food movement has garnered. The food movement, in turn, must start addressing labor as a key sustainable food movement issue and fight for legislation that protects workers' right to collective bargaining and protest. Alienating with the food movement will not, of course, simply undo the political power of agribusiness and other growers, who fight unionization on national and local scales. Rather, forming stronger alliances, as discussed above in the section on food justice coalitions, could increase awareness of food labor abuses, creating more popular support for union tactics, such as bargaining, strikes and boycotts.

In my interviews with UFW organizers, one with organizers from central California, and one with an organizer from Southern California, I heard mixed views on collaborating with the food movement. Although one organizer said she was trying to encourage more core UFW staff to think about collaborations with student and consumer groups, she expressed that often there was resistance from the established long-term organizers. Their experience does not include working with urban-based groups and were resistant to change within the organization. Another organizer told me he simply had not thought about such collaborations, his statements representative of the other organizers' critique that many in the UFW are disconnected from other types of food movements, outside of labor.

Although many labor supporters and activists see unions as the most direct way to improve working conditions and harness a movement around labor, it is important to note geographic differences in terms of union success. Most success in farmworker organizing in the United States has occurred in California, and as discussed above, triumph has still been limited. In states like Florida, for example, the labor market is structured differently than in California. There are more day laborers and fewer stable jobs.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, outside California, workers are excluded from the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), which provides workers the right to form a union.<sup>79</sup> Benitez, from the CIW, explains, "In Immokalee we needed to look for an alternative to a union system... Unions don't work there because people go farm to farm, there are no worker contracts." In the CIW's case, a traditional union approach had not proved to be the best

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<sup>78</sup> Agricultural workers in California tend to be hired by the season, rather than by the day. Although they are hired at will, and have no job security season to season, this is relatively more stable than the daily hiring system in Florida.

<sup>79</sup> The California Agricultural Labor Relations Act (CALRA), which establishes collective bargaining rights for farmworkers, is similar to the NLRA. It was passed in California in 1975.

strategy, so they decided on another alternatives to address labor inequalities in Florida's fields, such as galvanizing consumer support, as discussed above.

### **Food Sovereignty: Pro Farmer and Pro Worker?**

The notion of food sovereignty more directly addresses control over the means of production, and focuses on not only access to food, but also access to land and water as human rights, arguing for a full democratization of the food system (Holt-Gimenez and Patel 2009; Patel 2009; Holt-Giménez and Wang 2011). Yet, even the most radical claims for food sovereignty focus more on the rights of small farmers and peasants than farmworkers (Brown and Getz 2011). Promoting small farms over large-scale agribusiness still denies that the deepest injustices in our current system are caused by the current agrarian class system, and that we are a long way from most workers becoming owners. And even for those that do achieve this goal, we must still address that they too will eventually hire workers and continue the capitalist system of exploitation.

None of these movements should stop raising awareness at the level of the farmer, yet all must start to address farmworker rights as part of an agenda to change the food system. The food sovereignty movement, with a deep analysis of agrarian power relations, and the struggles for control over land and livelihood, as well as food itself, is primed to take this step. It will take raising a critique of small-scale farmers, as well as large-scale ones, in order make farmworker rights a central part of this movement.

### **Conclusion**

Popular interest in food movements must be harnessed to include inequality in a broad sense, looking to the root causes of injustice, not only in the food system, but society at large. Including worker and immigrant rights in these movements is a way to start to make these inroads for creating structural change. Achieving social and farmworker justice cannot be based in one strategy. All forms of social action are necessary, as conditions differ regionally, and what may work in one part of the country may not in another. Although consumer-based initiatives alone will not solve the problem of farmworker exploitation, they help in raising awareness, and in some circumstances function to achieve improved labor standards. Consumer pressure must be utilized beyond purchasing power and encourage state policy that supports unionizing, reinforces existing labor laws, and amends laws that reinforce structural injustice. Alliances to address farm labor are growing with increased awareness of labor conditions in the food system. More alliances must form across the food chain to include not only farmworkers, but those in distribution and service as well.

Farmworker food insecurity, as a glaring contradiction and example of inequality in the food system, is a condition that can be leveraged to highlight the pitfalls in isolated consumer-based approaches to changing the food system. The coping strategies described in this dissertation provide examples of ways that indigenous and other immigrant farmworkers manage in a structurally unequal food system. Highlighting

these strategies, and the knowledge that exists in immigrant communities, sheds light on the potential of such communities to utilize their social and cultural, cultural, and individual strengths to make their circumstances more livable. In order to create real change in the food system, to make it a fair system, which functions for all people, we must emphasize these strengths, not ignore them because we are so overwhelmed by the system at large. The knowledge and skills that exist in farmworker communities are a starting place for making structural changes. They must be included as part of these movements, not only as subjects of discussion, but as participants in creating change and a force to be respected and reckoned with. For movements such as those described above to creating a global and national food system that is truly just, workers' knowledge and skills must be highlighted, along with their exploitation. I hope this dissertation has offered examples of the potential worker and immigrant abilities to create life and prosperity, in spaces where it seems only injustice exists. It is these dreams and visions that will create change in the food system.

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## **APPENDICES**

- I. Food Security Survey: Pre Garden
- II. Food Security Survey: Post Garden
- III. Questionnaire 1: Food Service Providers
- IV. Questionnaire 2: Garden Participants
- V. Questionnaire 3: Garden Landowner
- VI. Questionnaire 4: Regional (White) Farmers
- VII. Questionnaire 5: Regional Farmers' Market Managers
- VIII. Questionnaire 6: ALBA Staff
- IX. Questionnaire 7: ALBA Participants and Graduates
- X. Questionnaire 8: UFW/ CIW Organizer
- XI. Questionnaire 9: Local Food Movement Activists

**Jardín de los Niños Oaxaqueños 1  
(Food Security Survey: Pre Garden)**

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_

*Hemos hablado acerca de porque son importantes estas preguntas. Si no quiere contestar, está bien, no sienta pena. Estas preguntas nada mas son importantes para nosotros para el reporte de la beca.*

1. Cuantos anos tiene?
2. Que tipo de trabajo haces?
3. Cuantos adultos hay en su casa: \_\_\_\_\_ y niños \_\_\_\_\_
4. La comida que compré no nos alcanzó y no tuve dinero para comprar más.

Muchas veces                      a veces                      nunca

5. No pudimos comer comida balanceada (carne, verdura, frutas, cereales)

Muchas veces                      a veces                      nunca

6. En los últimos meses usted o cualquier adulto en su familia tuvo que comer menos en algún tiempo de comida porque no había suficiente dinero para comida.

Muchas veces                      a veces                      nunca

7. En los últimos meses tuvo usted hambre y no pudo comer porque no tenía suficiente dinero para comprar comida.

Muchas veces                      a veces                      nunca

8. ¿Te ha cultivar su propia comida en Oaxaca? ¿Qué clase de comida?

9. Que sembran en este jardin? Porque?

10. Porque estas trabajando en este jardin?

11. La cantidad de dinero que entra en su familia al mes está entre

\$100 a \$500                      \$500 a %1,000                      \$1,000 o más.

12. Usa usted alguna forma de ayuda como

Food stamps                      WIC                      Food Bank                      Pantry

9. ¿En veces buscan quelites del campo en la sierra para comer?

10. ¿Con qué frecuencia comen ustedes ...

Frijol nunca	todos los días	a veces	pocas veces
Arroz nunca	todos los días	a veces	pocas veces
Tortillas nunca	todos los días	a veces	pocas veces
Verduras/quiletes nunca	todos los días	a veces	pocas veces
Fruta nunca	todos los días	a veces	pocas veces
Carne nunca	todos los días	a veces	pocas veces
Pollo nunca	todos los días	a veces	pocas veces
Pescado nunca	todos los días	a veces	pocas veces
Refrescos nunca	todos los días	a veces	pocas veces

11. ¿Cuáles verduras come su familia a diario?

12. ¿Comía más o menos verduras y frutas en Oaxaca que aquí?

13. ¿Cuánto dinero gasta Ud. en comida en la tienda cada semana?

14. ¿Cuánto de este dinero se gasta en verduras/frutas?

15. ¿Hay veces que Ud. no compra verduras/frutas que Ud. o su familia quisieran comer? Por qué?

16. ¿Cuando no hay trabajo compra menos comida?
17. Para Ud., ¿que es la comida orgánica?
18. ¿Compra usted comida orgánica siempre, algunas veces o nunca?
19. ¿Quisiera comprar comida orgánica?
20. A sus hijos les gusta comer verduras/quelites/frutas? ¿Cuales les gustan más?
21. Muchos papás se quejan que sus hijos no quieren comer verduras/frutas. ¿Tiene Ud. alguna idea de cómo los papás pueden hacer que sus hijos coman mas verdura/fruta?

**Jardín de los Niños Oaxaqueños 2**  
**(Food Security Survey: Post Garden)**

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_

*Hemos hablado acerca de porque son importantes estas preguntas. Si no quiere contestar, está bien, no sienta pena. Estas preguntas nada mas son importantes para nosotros para el reporte de la beca.*

13. Cuantos anos tiene?

14. Que tipo de trabajo haces?

15. Cuantos adultos hay en su casa: \_\_\_\_\_ y niños \_\_\_\_\_

16. La comida que compré no nos alcanzó y no tuve dinero para comprar más.

Muchas veces

a veces

nunca

17. No pudimos comer comida balanceada (carne, verdura, frutas, cereales)

Muchas veces

a veces

nunca

18. En los últimos meses usted o cualquier adulto en su familia tuvo que comer menos en algún tiempo de comida porque no había suficiente dinero para comida.

Muchas veces

a veces

nunca

19. En los últimos meses tuvo usted hambre y no pudo comer porque no tenía suficiente dinero para comprar comida.

Muchas veces

a veces

nunca

20. ¿Te ha cultivar su propia comida en Oaxaca? ¿Qué clase de comida?

21. Que sembran en este jardin? Porque?

22. Porque estas trabajando en este jardin?

23. La cantidad de dinero que entra en su familia al mes está entre

\$100 a \$500

\$500 a %1,000

\$1,000 o más.

24. Usa usted alguna forma de ayuda como

Food stamps

WIC

Food Bank

Pantry

9. ¿En veces buscan quelites del campo en la sierra para comer?

10. ¿Con qué frecuencia comen ustedes ...

Frijol nunca	todos los días	a veces	pocas veces
Arroz nunca	todos los días	a veces	pocas veces
Tortillas nunca	todos los días	a veces	pocas veces
Verduras/quiletes nunca	todos los días	a veces	pocas veces
Fruta nunca	todos los días	a veces	pocas veces
Carne nunca	todos los días	a veces	pocas veces
Pollo nunca	todos los días	a veces	pocas veces
Pescado nunca	todos los días	a veces	pocas veces
Refrescos nunca	todos los días	a veces	pocas veces

11. ¿Cuáles verduras come su familia a diario?

12. ¿Comía más o menos verduras y frutas en Oaxaca que aquí?

13. ¿Cuánto dinero gasta Ud. en comida en la tienda cada semana?

14. ¿Cuánto de este dinero se gasta en verduras/frutas?

15. ¿Hay veces que Ud. no compra verduras/frutas que Ud. o su familia quisieran comer? Por qué?

16. ¿Cuando no hay trabajo compra menos comida?
17. Para Ud., ¿que es la comida orgánica?
18. ¿Compra usted comida orgánica siempre, algunas veces o nunca?
19. ¿Quisiera comprar comida orgánica?
20. A sus hijos les gusta comer verduras/quelites/frutas? ¿Cuales les gustan más?
21. Muchos papás se quejan que sus hijos no quieren comer verduras/frutas. ¿Tiene Ud. alguna idea de cómo los papás pueden hacer que sus hijos coman mas verdura/fruta?

## Questionnaire 1: Food Service Providers

1. What is your position in the food assistance world?
2. What does your institution do on a daily basis?
3. How would you describe food security?
4. What do you think are the causes of food insecurity? For farmworkers specifically?
5. What do you think are solutions to food insecurity in the region?
6. How does this food bank/ agency's work contribute to this solution?
7. What are ways that the food bank/ agency etc is linking with local or alternative food movements?
8. Is the food bank/ agency involved with any broader strategies to alleviate food insecurity?
9. Do you commonly assist immigrants? Indigenous immigrants?
10. What is their food/ nutrition situation?
11. Are there differences among farmworkers in term of food access (class, race, gender?)
12. What do you think could be done to more directly target farmworkers? Indigenous farmworkers?
13. What services are place for them specifically, if any?
14. What options do you think they have for accessing more or healthier food?
15. Have you witnessed any projects/ programs that are working (to help farm workers with food access)?
16. What is not working?
17. Do you think gardening or farming is an option for farmworkers?
18. Do you think farmworker justice fits into larger notions of alternative food?
19. How does your work fit into the bigger picture of CA food security?

For those that work with farmer's markets programs/ initiatives:

1. Why don't people use food stamps, WIC/EBT at famer's markets?

## Questionnaire 2: Garden Participants

1. Why did you get involved in the garden?
2. During the harvest, did the garden change how you eat? What/how did you eat differently?
3. During the harvest, how many times per week did your family eat produce from the garden?
4. Where do you shop for food? What stores? Do you go to the farmer's market?
5. Did that change during the garden's harvest?
6. Do you use food stamps? WIC? Food banks? Pantry? Has this changed since you started growing at the garden?
7. Has your diet changed since you migrated to the US? How so? Why do you think it has changed?
8. Did you grow food in Oaxaca? For only consumption or market as well?
9. In the garden did you use techniques that you knew from growing food your own food from Oaxaca? Which ones?
10. Did you use techniques that you knew from working on other people's farms in California? Which ones?
11. Where did your seeds come from? Did you get seeds from Oaxaca (friends)? Which ones?
12. Are you saving seeds? Which ones? Why some and not others?
13. What will you do with them? Plant or sell?
  
14. Did you ever grow food at home (home garden in the US) before this garden or now?
15. Are you growing food anywhere besides the garden?
16. Would you like to grow food for profit (farming)?
17. Are you thinking about pursuing it? If so, then how?
18. What do you think will be the biggest challenges?
19. How will it be different from gardening? Different from growing for market in Oaxaca?
  
20. Do you work in the field or in a packing house? If not, where do you work?
21. How has growing food in this garden been different then working in the field?

### **Questionnaire 3: Garden Landowner**

1. How long have you owned the land?
2. Who owned it before?
3. What did they use it for?
4. Why did you buy it?
5. How much did the land cost?
6. What are your future plans/ goals for the land?
7. Is it true it has been a problem to develop the land? Conflicts with the city council?
8. What are the pine trees for? Sale?
9. How did you meet the garden community?
10. What are the conditions to let them stay and for how long?
11. What made you feel renting to them would be a good idea?
12. What is your agreement with them?
13. What do you see as the future for the garden?
14. Would you rent if it was individuals for profit, not a community garden?

#### **Questionnaire 4: Regional (White) Farmers**

1. Where do you think most of the food produced in the region is sold
2. What stays here?
3. Where is local food sold and how ca people access it?
4. Including those that are low income?
5. Do you think there are opportunities for farmworkers to become farmers?
6. What are the barriers?
7. How can farm workers access healthy and local food?
8. How can they also become part of the local and organic food movement?

### **Questionnaire 5: Regional Farmers' Market Managers**

1. Who are the farmers? Where do they come from and what do they sell? Organic?
2. Why do you think the vendors come? Do most make money? Or because they want to support market?
3. Do most sell locally usually or go to Bay Area for markets?
4. Who comes to the market?
5. Low income? Do you have a record of how much food stamps? WIC?
6. What are events or other actions you have taken to educate people about WIC/ food stamp acceptance? And/or to draw more of those recipients in?
7. What are the other markets or places for people to get local or organic food in the area?

## Questionnaire 6: ALBA Staff

1. What is your position at ALBA?
2. What do you think are the causes of food insecurity for farmworkers?
3. What do you think are solutions to food insecurity (for farm workers) in the region?
4. How does ALBA do contribute to this solution?
5. What about the fundamentally fresh program?
6. What do members from ALBA typically do after the program? Do they start their own farm?
7. What are their chances of success? What are the factors that make them likely to be successful?
8. What is the ethnic composition of people that go through the program?
9. How to connect the energy in urban food movements to farmworker justice/ food access issues?
10. How does ALAB help in politicizing farmers or not?
11. What are the biggest challenges for participants?
12. What happened to the dream of cooperative growers? Why has it changed to individual business?
13. What does Alba do other than the PEPA class?
14. Do you think that increasing regulations for small farms will be make starting a business much harder for immigrants? What about undocumented people?
15. ALBA's history comes from very strong political stance and action, what does alba do politically today to carry on that legacy? (rephrase)
16. Does ALBA have a stance on immigration/ reform?
17. What is the reaction to ALBA at Ecofarm? How welcoming do you think the organic farming movement is to immigrant farmers? What about to discussions of labor?
18. Is part of the mission of alba to "change the face of organic farming?" and how do you think white farmers respond to that? In spaces like Ecofarm, etc

## Questionnaire 7: ALBA Participants and Graduates

If farming now:

1. How long have you had your farm? How many acres? Where do you sell?
2. Did you grow food in Mexico? For sale or for profit?
3. Did you work as a farmworker before having your own farm? Here or in Mexico?
4. In your business, how much of growing technique/ knowledge do you use from Mexico/ experience and how much from what you learned from ALBA? From working in CA farms?
5. How did you decide to start your own farm? How did you hear about ALBA?
6. Was it difficult to do it as a woman?
7. Has farming changed the way you feel about yourself? More independent, etc?
8. Does your own family eat a lot of the produce you grow?
9. Do you think other immigrants would want to have a garden or ranch if they could?
10. Do you think that since you started farming more immigrants have started farming as well?
11. Do you ever experience racism from white farmers or others?
12. Do you think it would help them eat healthier foods?
13. How did ALBA help you? Could you have done it without ALBA?
14. What kinds of barriers did you face to farming on your own, regulations and otherwise? Has language been hard for you? Or understanding American culture?
15. How do you think this is different or harder for undocumented immigrants?
16. Do you think that there are increasing regulations for farming? Has that made it harder for you or do you think that will make it harder for immigrant farmers to get started?

For Maria:

1. How did you decide to rent to the Triqui and other farmers? Can you tell me about renting to them and how they sell to your CSA?
2. How has it worked for you?
3. Do you have a hard time with enough land or water for renting?
4. How do you think more opportunities can become available for immigrants or farmworkers that want to farm?

### **Questionnaire 8: UFW/ CIW Organizer**

1. Tell me little bit but your history/ the work you do with farmworkers.
2. What is the food/ nutrition situation for the workers you organize with?
3. Are there differences among farm workers in term of food access (class, race, gender?)
4. Are there any indigenous immigrant organizers involved at UFW/ CIW?
5. What options do you think they have for accessing more or healthier food?
6. Have you witnessed any projects/ programs that are working (to help farm workers with food access)?
7. What is not working?
8. Do you think gardening or farming is an option for farmworkers?
9. What is the UFW/ CIW doing about food insecurity for farmworkers?
10. Is it a matter of wages or food access or both?
11. What are the politics or political struggles you are dealing with today?
12. What do you think is the potential for farmworkers/ the labor movement to be incorporated or work with the emerging foodie or food justice movement?
13. What is your organization doing to make that happen?
14. What is the state of farmworker organizing today?

### **Questionnaire 9: Local Food Movement Activists**

1. What is your role in the local food movement? (farm to school or community gardens)
2. How did your project start?
3. How do immigrants and farm workers (esp indigenous) fit into that project/ larger plan/ local food movement?
4. What allows these spaces like the garden?
5. What policies, regulations, political economy affect the garden and other options for immigrants growing food?
6. How did the local town politics affect access to space for gardening? What do you think are future options for accessing space- will the city support or not?

### **Community Garden Organizers:**

1. How far along is the project? How many years, etc?
2. How is the project funded?
3. Who owns the land?
4. How is the project divided- plots, etc?
5. Are many of the garden participants farmworkers? What percentage?
6. Of the farmworkers involved- how many of them are women? Indigenous?
7. How have you made contacts with farmworkers/ engaged them in the garden project?
8. Do you give them any training or do they use their own knowledge in the garden? Or a combination?
9. Are they growing mostly for consumption or also for sale?
10. Do you monitor how they use the produce?
11. Are they also thinking about getting their own land?
12. Are they thinking about growing for profit?
13. Are they saving seeds for next year?
14. Do you think the project is replicable? How so?