

CHAPTER 6

LOCAL FOOD MOVEMENTS

Differing Conceptions of Food, People, and Change

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INTRODUCTION

THE “local food” movement has been growing since at least the mid-twentieth century with the founding of the Rodale Institute. Since then, local food has increasingly become a goal of food systems. Today, books and articles on local food have become commonplace, with popular authors such as Barbara Kingsolver¹ and Michael Pollan² espousing the virtues of eating locally. Additionally, local food initiatives, such as the “farm-to-fork,” “Buying Local,” and “Slow Food” have gained a strong international following with clearly visible impacts on the food industry and policy. The numbers of local farmers’ markets, community-supported agriculture projects, and community gardens have been on the rise steadily since 1994.³

Local food is viewed by some as providing an alternative and challenge to the corporate-led, industrialized, global food system by reconnecting food with environmental health and sustainability, social justice concerns, and the importance of place.⁴ Proponents of local food often argue that people in industrial agriculture systems

¹ Barbara Kingsolver, Camille Kingsolver, and Scott Hopp, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* (New York: Harper, 2008).

² Michael Pollan, *A Defense of Food: An Eater’s Manifesto* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009).

³ Lacey Arneson McCormack, Melissa Nelson Laska, Nicole Larson, and Mary Story, “Review of the Nutritional Implications of Farmers’ Markets and Community Gardens: A Call for Evaluation and Research Efforts,” *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 110, no. 3 (2010): 399–408; “Farmers Market Growth: 1992–2012.” United States Department of Agriculture, 2012. <https://www.ams.usda.gov/?template=templates&leftnav=wholesaleandfarmersmarkets&page=wfmfarmersmarketgrowth&description=farmers%20market%20growth>.

⁴ Charles Levkoe, “Towards a Transformative Food Politics,” *Local Environment* 16, no. 7 (2011): 687–705.

(systems that produce food on a large scale for global distribution with the labor of a minimum number of workers) lose control over what they eat to governmental agencies and large corporations.⁵ The wide range of food choices that individuals could potentially make are effectively reduced to shallow choices concerning brands in a supermarket. Buying food in this type of food system ensures that people lose knowledge of the community and daily aspects of food, such as how to produce and process it and what the ingredients are.⁶ One way that has been suggested to address these issues is creating alternative food systems, such as those that focus on local production and distribution, those that utilize a shorter supply chain, or those that emphasize community control.⁷ Many see this as a valuable strategy that could help individuals and communities regain their ability to better understand and have power over the food they eat and the systems that produce it.⁸ Additionally, some local food supporters argue that creating and supporting local food production systems is a step toward cultivating something larger—a “regenerative food system”⁹ of vibrant local communities and ethical relationships between people and the environment, and local and global communities. Local food systems of this sort—“multidisciplinary, multisectoral and intergenerational, and address[ing] social, political, economic and environmental factors”¹⁰—are envisioned as being a central part of radical social transformation generally.

Some critics, on the other hand, are much less hopeful about the local food movement’s progressive possibilities.¹¹ One set of critiques finds local food unable to seriously

⁵ Laura B. DeLind and Jim Bingen, “Place and Civic Culture: Re-Thinking the Context for Local Agriculture,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 21, no. 2 (January 2008): 127–151; Julie Guthman, “Bringing Good Food to Others: Investigating the Subjects of Alternative Food Practice,” *Cultural Geographies* 15, no. 4 (January 2008): 431–447; Julie Guthman, *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004); John H. Vandermeer and Ivette Perfecto, *Breakfast of Biodiversity: The Political Ecology of Rain Forest Destruction* (Oakland, CA: Food First Books, 2005).

⁶ Nancy J. Turner and Katherine L. Turner, “‘Where Our Women Used to Get the Food’: Cumulative Effects and Loss of Ethnobotanical Knowledge and Practice,” *Botany* 86, no. 2 (2008): 103–115.

⁷ Kenneth Dahlberg, “Regenerative Food Systems: Broadening the Scope and Agenda of Sustainability,” in *Food for the Future: Conditions and Contradictions of Sustainability*, ed. Patricia Allen (New York: Wiley, 1993), 75–103; Laura B. DeLind, “Place, Work, and Civic Agriculture: Common Fields for Cultivation,” *Agriculture and Human Values* 19, no. 3 (2002): 227–224; Melanie Dupuis and David Goodman, “Should We Go ‘Home’ to Eat?: Toward a Reflexive Politics of Localism,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 21, no. 3 (2005): 359–371.

⁸ DeLind and Bingen, “Place and Civic Culture”; Phil Mount, “Growing Local Food: Scale and Local Food Systems Governance,” *Agriculture and Human Values* 29, no. 1 (2011): 107–121.

⁹ Dahlberg, “Regenerative Food Systems.”

¹⁰ Alethea Harper, Annie Shattuck, Eric Holt-Gimenez, Alison Alkon, and Frances Lambick, *Food Policy Councils: Lessons Learned* (Oakland, CA: Food First, 2009), 9.

¹¹ Julian Agyeman and Jesse McEntee, “Moving the Field of Food Justice Forward through the Lens of Urban Political Ecology,” *Geography Compass* 8, no. 3 (2014): 211–220; Laura B. DeLind, “Are Local Food and the Local Food Movement Taking Us Where We Want to Go? Or Are We Hitching Our Wagons to the Wrong Stars?” *Agriculture and Human Values* 28, no. 2 (2010): 273–283; Levkoe, “Towards a Transformative Food Politics”; Nathan McClintock, “Radical, Reformist, and Garden-Variety Neoliberal: Coming to Terms with Urban Agriculture’s Contradictions,” *Local Environment* 19, no. 2 (October 2013): 147–171.

challenge or build an alternative to the dominant industrial, capitalist food system. Instead, local food emphasizes individualist and consumerist solutions to problems in the food system.¹² As corporations like Walmart embrace “local” as a desirable label, and one that is significantly easier to achieve than “organic,” the local food movement ends up supporting the industrial, capitalist status quo.¹³ To the extent that local food projects operate outside of the market as charity, such as free food hubs or free community gardens, local food projects can be viewed as being complicit in the erosion of the social contract and safety net, “neoliberal in their outcomes or reformist at best.”¹⁴ While liberalism will be discussed in detail later, here “neoliberalism” should be understood as a smaller subset of liberalism that primarily accepts the position that an unregulated market system is the best way to distribute goods.¹⁵

Another set of critiques finds local food unable to reform society to be more just or sustainable, as some supporters claim as a goal. If local food activists are working to reform the global food system along lines of social justice, they might actually make international problems of development, poverty, and equity worse by redirecting money and support to local producers at the expense of desperately poor international producers.¹⁶ If local food activists are trying to reform the food system to be more environmentally sustainable, there are significant questions about whether “food miles” are the best measure of environmental impact, either because food production can be more ecologically sustainable in a global system, or because the money saved from efficiencies of scale and comparative production advantage would free up more money that could be better spent in addressing environmental problems.¹⁷ In these critiques, local food advocates are portrayed as misguided, well meaning, but ultimately selfish consumers who are purchasing the identity of environmental and social justice.

This disagreement about the potential of local food movements is an important one to address as those interested in food justice decide how best to be effective given few resources and working against such a deeply entrenched system. As Laura DeLind asks, “Are local food and the local food movement taking us where we want to go? Or are we hitching our wagons to the wrong stars?”¹⁸ In this essay, we argue that both advocates and critics of local food are partially correct because while local food is often understood as a unified trend, it is more accurate to see the term signifying various sub-movements: the

¹² DeLind, “Local Food and the Local Food Movement”; Levkoe, “Towards a Transformative Food Politics”

¹³ Agyeman and McEntee, “Moving the Field of Food Justice.”

¹⁴ McClintock, “Radical, Reformist, and Garden-Variety Neoliberal,” 1.

¹⁵ See Vandermeer and Perfecto’s 2005 book titled *Nature’s Matrix: Linking Agriculture, Conservation and Food Sovereignty* for a detailed critique of neoliberal impacts to food systems. Additionally, “reformist” here should be understood as the support of gradual reform rather than abolition or revolution.

¹⁶ Mark Navin, “Local Food and International Ethics,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 27, no. 3 (2014): 349–368.

¹⁷ Edward L. Glaeser, *Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011).

¹⁸ DeLind, “Local Food and the Local Food Movement.”

individual-focused sub-movement or IF, the systems-focused sub-movement or SF, and the food community-focused sub-movement or CF. These movements can be characterized in part by their disparate food-related goals, including supporting local farmers, providing access to fresh food in urban areas, or supporting democratic ideals in food and food systems. In addition to these goals, people supporting local food movements often hold rich, and differing, conceptualizations of what local food is.¹⁹ Many actors within this large umbrella see food as a diet, an economic strategy, a social movement, a fashionable solution to the problems in the industrial food system, or some combination of these and other conceptions of food and locality besides. These different understandings lead to a different understanding of the purpose of local food, different goals, and different values.

In this essay, we will explore these sub-movements and argue that they can be analyzed by the different ways in which members understand people and food. For each sub-movement, we pay particular attention to connections between conceptions of the self, political structures, and definitions of food, as each of these impact the structure and goals of sub-movements. Food is intimately bound up in our lives and different sub-movements highlight or downplay various connections between self, society, and environment. We also discuss the political implications of each sub-movement, and then discuss critiques that have been levelled against local food, which we see as best being understood as a critique of one or another of the sub-movements rather than the movement as a whole. Our hope is that this strategy will help readers better understand the local food movement as a whole and illustrate the individual sub-movements' strengths and weaknesses.

INDIVIDUAL-FOCUSED SUB-MOVEMENT

The individual-focused sub-movement, or IF, is the most well-known sub-movement under the umbrella of “local food.”²⁰ Indeed, this sub-movement is well-represented in public discourse and is often considered the “face” of local food. DeLind captures this point eloquently when she states the following concerning the “locavore” phenomenon, which is part of IF:

Locavores and would-be locavores (theoretically the public-at-large) are told repeatedly through popular films (e.g., *Supersize Me*, *Fast Food Nation*, *King Corn*, *Fresh*, *Food, Inc.*), and books (e.g., *Omnivore's Dilemma*, *In Defense of Food*, *Animal*,

¹⁹ Ibid.; Paul B. Thompson, *From Field to Fork: Food Ethics for Everyone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

²⁰ Ian Werkheiser and Samantha Noll, “From Food Justice to a Tool of the Status Quo: Three Sub-Movements within Local Food,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 27, no. 2 (2014): 201–210.

Vegetable, Miracle) and media features (e.g., PBS, NYT, Yes!, Mother Jones, Business Week) that they—as individuals—can effect change one vegetable, one meal, and one family at a time. It suggests that what is wrong with the world (from monocultural practices, to obesity, to global warming) can be addressed through altered personal behavior.²¹

What sets IF apart from other sub-movements are a few key concepts. In the IF discourse: (1) food is a product that is purchased; (2) people are individual consumers of food; and (3) change happens when food purchases as individual choices have cumulative impacts on health, lifestyle, environment, animal welfare, farmworkers, the local community, and so on.²² When looked at through the lens of IF, individual food purchasing choices directly translate into the enjoyment of organically raised and freshly picked food, health benefits for family, interactions with farmers and other community members dedicated to local food production and consumption, and a greater understanding of the local environment and seasons. IF is an intersection of local food and “lifestyle” politics, such as the “green living” movement or recycling, as it is built on the shared assumption that the best way to bring about positive change is through economic processes driven by individual consumer choices.²³

According to advocates of IF, this sub-movement has far-reaching effects, in addition to personal benefits.²⁴ For example, proponents of IF have argued that buying locally can help stem environmental damage, as local food is shipped shorter distances and often grown using less and fewer petrochemicals (if the crops are organic). From an economic standpoint, local food supports smaller, local businesses and growers rather than large corporations, and therefore builds more resilient local economies.²⁵ Socially, local food builds relationships with neighbors through community-supported agriculture projects and farmers’ markets.²⁶ From the perspective of public health, eating a local diet reduces the amount of processed food eaten and helps people become more mindful of their food choices.²⁷ Consumer choices also impact large retailers, as companies, such as Wal-Mart, increasingly find it in their best interest to market and sell local produce in their stores.²⁸ IF’s emphasis on the power of consumer choice to be manifested at a local,

²¹ DeLind, “Local Food and the Local Food Movement,” 276.

²² Ibid.; Pollan, *A Defense of Food: An Eater’s Manifesto*.

²³ Werkheiser and Noll, “From Food Justice to a Tool of the Status Quo.”

²⁴ Kingsolver, Kingsolver, and Hopp, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*; Pollan, *A Defense of Food*; Thompson, *From Field to Fork*.

²⁵ DeLind, “Local Food and the Local Food Movement.”

²⁶ DeLind, “Place, Work, and Civic Agriculture”; Thomas A. Lyson, *Civic Agriculture: Reconnecting Farm, Food, and Community* (Medford, MA: Tufts University Press, 2004).

²⁷ Judith V. Anderson, Deborah I. Bybee, Randi M. Brown, Donna F. McLean, Erika M. Garcia, M. Lynn Breer, and Barbara A. Schillo. “5 a Day Fruit and Vegetable Intervention Improves Consumption in a Low Income Population,” *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 101, no. 2 (2001): 195–202. McCormack et al., “Review of the Nutritional Implications of Farmers’ Markets and Community Gardens,” 399–408.

²⁸ Pollan, *A Defense of Food*.

national, or more global level, allows efforts to be felt at multiple scales. Thus, one can be concerned with self-interested small choices and at the same time have confidence that there are larger benefits of one's actions.

CASE STUDY IN THE INDIVIDUAL-FOCUSED SUB-MOVEMENT

A common example of the IF sub-movement is the farm-to-table (or farm-to-fork) phenomenon, as it primarily focuses on bringing about change by “voting with your fork,” or through consumer choice, and thus shares some of the key commitments of IF. Farm-to-table refers to a trend in local food where individuals are ideally concerned with all stages of food production, such as harvesting, processing, packaging, storage, sales, and consumption. Proponents argue that fresh, local food is healthier, better for the environment, and more economically sustainable than food shipped from thousands of miles away. Farm-to-table usually manifests itself on the ground in the form of restaurants catering to the demand for local food by purchasing, processing, and delivering local food products to consumers. Such restaurants will often have seasonal menus that showcase crops currently being harvested in the area. They also may be attached to an individual farm or provide customers with a list of the farms they purchase food products from, or host dinners on the farm itself. In this way, the farm-to-table trend can be seen as an extension of the local food movement into the food service industry. Indeed, some of the most vocal supporters of the farm-to-table phenomena are restaurateurs and chefs, such as Alice Waters, Stephanie Izard, David Kinch, and others.²⁹

This trend can be understood as part of the IF movement in part because advocates of the farm-to-table phenomena often cite the works of prominent voices in IF, such as Michael Pollan, when defending their desire to showcase local crops. In addition, this trend accepts the key conceptions of people, food, and change built into the IF. Indeed, the farm-to-table trend can be understood as making it easier for people to adopt an IF lifestyle, as the labor-intensive activities of purchasing, processing, preparing, storing, and serving local produce is now largely performed by the food service industry. In addition, it can be understood as the manifestation of the impact that IF has had on the food industry, as farm-to-table chefs have moved away from the “food as art” trend, to instead embrace the philosophy that the flavors of local ingredients should be center stage.³⁰ Generally, farm-to-table chefs showcase traditional farmhouse cooking, emphasizing seasonality, the freshness of ingredients, and simple preparations.³¹

²⁹ “Chef’s Weigh in on Farm to Table,” *Fine Dining Lovers*, July 21, 2014, <https://www.finedininglovers.com/stories/farm-to-table-chefs-roundup/>.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Carlo Petrini, *Slow Food: The Case for Taste* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

POLITICS IN THE INDIVIDUAL-FOCUSED SUB-MOVEMENT

In addition to farm-to-table's advocacy of IF, an important reason why this sub-movement has been successful has to do with its compatibility with liberalism—a compatibility largely due to shared commitments and conceptions concerning food, purchasing decisions, and the people making those decisions. Liberal philosophers, such as John Rawls³² and Ronald Dworkin,³³ argue that the locus or the appropriate place of justice is the social institution or structure of society. The central questions for liberalism concern whether or not a law or other political authority is justified in limiting a citizen's personal liberty³⁴ and whether or not goods are being justly distributed.³⁵ Key commitments include the conception of individual people as rational agents³⁶ and the understanding of goods like food as products to be justly distributed.³⁷ It should also be noted that several liberal philosophers accept what is called “the principle of neutrality”—a principle that mandates that the just distribution of goods needs to be independent from any conception of a good life, such as living a religious life or other lifestyle. Like the IF movement, most liberal political philosophies would conceptualize food as a product and food purchases as individual choices made by autonomous rational agents operating in a market.³⁸ In a liberal framework, the local food movement could be seen as a lifestyle or conception of the good life.³⁹

This compatibility has far-reaching implications for IF, as liberal ideals form the bedrock of political life in the West, as foundational rights, such as freedom of religion, freedom of the press, free speech, free trade, and private property rights are all supported by liberal ideals.⁴⁰ This philosophy continues to permeate political life, as fundamental liberal tenets are embedded in Western political structures and debates often

³² John Rawls and Erin Kelly, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

³³ Ronald Dworkin, “Do Liberty and Equality Conflict?” in *Living as Equals*, ed. Paul Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 39–59.

³⁴ Gerald Gaus, Shane Courtland, and David Schmidt, “Liberalism,” Stanford University, 1996, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/liberalism/>.

³⁵ Rawls and Kelly, *Justice as Fairness*.

³⁶ Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

³⁷ Samantha Noll, “Liberalism and the Two Directions of the Local Food Movement,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 27, no. 2 (2013): 211–224.

³⁸ Rawls and Kelly, *Justice as Fairness*; Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*.

³⁹ DeLind, “Local Food and the Local Food Movement”; Noll, “Liberalism and the Two Directions of the Local Food Movement.”

⁴⁰ Kathleen G. Donohue, *Freedom from Want: American Liberalism and the Idea of the Consumer* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

focus on (directly or indirectly) answering the central questions posed by liberalism. IF's compatibility then can at least partially explain why this sub-movement has been so successful, as initiatives stemming from this movement (such as trade agreements, policy changes, certifications, standards, and the distribution of goods) can be relatively easily incorporated into a political and economic structure that accepts liberal ideals.⁴¹

When IF is conceptualized as part of lifestyle politics, this sub-movement can be understood as one that advocates another conception of the good life that people can choose (or not choose) to live. If they do so, then they need resources (such as food) to realize this vision and thus need a liberal state to ensure that they can obtain these resources.⁴² For example, if Mary wants to know her farmer, eat only locally produced food, and support community-supported agriculture projects, then she could be justified in using her money to purchase the resources necessary to live this lifestyle.⁴³ Here, if Mary adopts the local food lifestyle for personal or health reasons, she may not necessarily hold a position that criticizes others for living other lifestyles that support industrial food systems. Having the freedom to choose between lifestyles is part of what it means to live in a state that accepts liberal tenets, such as the principle of neutrality.⁴⁴ IF's conception of local food as one lifestyle among many and other shared commitments help to incorporate this sub-movement into extant political structures.⁴⁵

IF's vision of local food is also compatible with extant economic structures, leading to large companies catering to this new consumer base, happy to provide the product of local food, often using labels (such as local, natural, organic, sustainable, etc.) as product attributes. Companies like Stonyfield Organic, Ben and Jerry's, and Chipotle have used large distribution chains to make their initially locally produced products available to a larger market. IF initiatives thus often use current supply chains, policy structures, and social avenues to advance local food and incorporate it into extant institutions.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Noll, "Liberalism and the Two Directions of the Local Food Movement."

⁴² Will Kymlicka, "Liberal Individualism and Liberal Neutrality," *Ethics* 99, no. 4 (1989): 883–905.

⁴³ Noll, "Liberalism and the Two Directions of the Local Food Movement."

⁴⁴ However, the argument primarily focuses on IF as a lifestyle political choice. Other IF supporters could very well hold a more critical view of liberalism, as one could question whether the industrial food system violates tenets of liberal philosophy other than the principle of neutrality and whether effects of the industrial food system, such as environmental impacts, should be addressed prior to questions of just distribution. Mark Michael addresses this latter point concerning environmental impacts in the article "Liberalism, Environmentalism, and the Principle of Neutrality," *Public Affairs Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (2000): 39–56, where he explores whether environmental philosophy is compatible with liberalism and, specifically, the principle of neutrality.

⁴⁵ However, it should be noted here that compatibility with liberalism does not guarantee that initiatives will be successful, as there are many reasons why movements fail. Compatibility here should be understood as simply one factor that could increase the odds of success.

⁴⁶ Werkheiser and Noll, "From Food Justice to a Tool of the Status Quo."

CRITIQUES OF THE INDIVIDUAL-FOCUSED SUB-MOVEMENT

This sub-movement is not without its critics. Prominent concerns stem from IF's implied conceptualization of people, food, and the roles that individuals, communities, and political institutions play when trying to bring about change. For example, the conception of people as individual purchase decision-makers has both positive and negative consequences. As already discussed, the definition has potentially positive consequences, as it helps the IF sub-movement integrate into existing political structures. However, it can also have the effect of limiting our identities and our options for enacting change. DeLind argues that this definition of people as consumers who want to “vote with their dollars” and who value “choice” does not reflect the robust range of personal identities as “residents, poets, bus-drivers, grandmothers, and neighborhood activists.”⁴⁷ Derrick Jensen, writing about a similar sub-movement within environmentalism, says that a focus on individual choices of what to consume is problematic because it “fundamentally accepts capitalism's redefinition of us from citizens to consumers, such that the ‘political acts’ of the simple living ‘activists’ are not the acts of citizens, with all the responsibilities citizenship implies, but are explicitly the acts of consumers.” This redefinition, Jensen argues, “Gravely reduces our range of possible forms of resistance.”⁴⁸ In other words, the myopic definition of people as individual consumers closes off potential avenues of change that would be made available if we accepted a more robust definition of the self—a definition that made room for the multifaceted identities of people as neighbors, citizens, and residents of various communities. In addition to limiting our sense of selves, this has the effect of “letting us off the hook” from the difficult work of addressing problems at the system-wide level, while feeling good that we are changing things literally one meal at a time.

These conceptions can be inadequate when addressing some food system issues. For example, lack of access to fresh foods in urban areas, or what is commonly (if inaccurately) known as “food deserts,” could be understood as a consequence of personal choice. Specifically, if people in urban areas do not buy particular items (such as fresh fruit and vegetables), then stores will no longer stock these items. This will result in the lack of these items in the area, and the solution would be consuming better food-stuffs. However, this would be a profoundly inaccurate analysis,

⁴⁷ DeLind, “Local Food and the Local Food Movement,” 276.

⁴⁸ Derrick Jensen, “Forget Shorter Showers: Why Personal Change Does Not Equal Political Change,” in *The Derrick Jensen Reader: Writings on Environmental Revolution*, ed. K. Lierre (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012), 426.

as it overlooks injustices along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines. In actuality, structural obstacles, such as the lack of supermarkets in areas are “practical impediment[s] to healthful food purchase[s] and a symbol of . . . neighborhoods’ social and economic struggles.”⁴⁹ Wealthier neighborhoods in urban areas have three times more supermarkets than poorer areas and residents without reliable access to transportation are often forced to shop at small stores with limited selections and higher prices.⁵⁰

In addition to IF’s problematic conceptualization of people as individual consumers, the sub-movement’s definition of food as a product or commodity to be distributed has also garnered critique.⁵¹ While the conception of food as a commodity contributes to the success of IF, critics argue that this definition misses other key aspects of food, such as the role that food plays in building community and strengthening ties between people.⁵² In addition, “food-as-product” can be more easily co-opted by dominant groups in the business of distribution and production when labels such as “locally grown,” “natural,” “organic,” and “sustainable” are reduced to selling points.⁵³ This is what DeLind labels the “Walmart Trend,” as large companies use their massive purchasing power to provide “local” produce to their significant consumer base. DeLind⁵⁴ and other critics argue that this trend is problematic, as it makes local farmers dependent on regional chains, fixes prices that may not be sustainable at the local level, and potentially co-opts labels. For instance, what does the term “local” signify? Is a local product one that was produced 50 miles away or one produced 250 miles away? Is it one produced in the state where it is being sold, in the region, or in the country? The Walmart trend potentially reduces these labels to commodity attributes, or features used by multinational companies to increase the price of products, and not as designations of particular qualities. The distorting effects of the large purchasers, critics argue, can actually harm local food systems and small-scale farmers.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Carolyn C. Cannuscio, Eve E. Weiss, and David A. Asch, “The Contribution of Urban Foodways to Health Disparities,” *Journal of Urban Health* 87, no. 3 (2010): 381–393.

⁵⁰ Kimberly Morland, Steve Wing, Ana Diez Roux, and Charles Poole, “Neighborhood Characteristics Associated with the Location of Food Stores and Food Service Places,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 22, no. 1 (2002): 23–29.

⁵¹ DeLind, “Local Food and the Local Food Movement,” 276.

⁵² Here it should be noted here that DeLind makes a distinction between what she calls the “Pollan trend” and the “Walmart trend” when making this critique. While proponents of IF, such as Pollan, often hold the view that food is something that can bring people together, the Walmart trend includes the critique concerning how local food is being commoditized with the express purpose of selling more products. While food “experts” may hold a wide range of views, their popularity increases the demand for “local” products and thus contributes to the rise of the second trend, as locavores looking to eat locally may look for these items in their local grocery store.

⁵³ Werkheiser and Noll, “From Food Justice to a Tool of the Status Quo.”

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ DeLind, “Local Food and the Local Food Movement.”

THE SYSTEMS-FOCUSED SUB-MOVEMENT

The systems-focused sub-movement (SF) is best captured by those discourses on local food that occur at policy levels, particularly at international organizations such as the FAO and the World Bank. While SF initiatives often focus on a wide range of food-related goals, these movements largely focus on bringing about change at the level of policy, rather than the level of the individual. In this discourse, bolstering local food systems are seen as a policy option with many advantages, both by policymakers and activists. The United States has a long history of using policy to support both small-scale and large-scale food systems. Various policy tools, such as the US Farm Bill, have historically been justified with the argument that such bolstering will provide local and national benefits, such as providing national food security and economically supporting local farming communities.⁵⁶ Today, policy and funding priorities include a wide range of goals, such as increasing yield, improving sustainability, combatting climate change, protecting biodiversity, and so on. While all of these priorities are not focused solely on local food systems, many do, and these policies illustrate how change at the policy level is an effective tool to impact food systems. For this reason, SF movements largely focus on working within existing systems to bring about change at the level of policy.

Thus, while IF could be understood as the overlap of local food with lifestyle politics, SF can be seen as the overlap of local food initiatives with movements to improve food policy. Some of the most prominent of these campaigns are those that accept the shared goal of increasing food security—defined as “a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”⁵⁷ For many policymakers and large organizations working on food security, it is considered vital for achieving food security that people be integrated via trade to a global food system because this allows local areas to compensate for local problems such as crop failure or drought. At the same time, local food is also important for food security because it economically supports local farming communities, provides an easily accessed source of culturally appropriate food, and potentially allows local areas to compensate for problems in international trade, such as exchange rate fluctuations or changing markets for cash crops. Note that this can only be achieved (SF proponents would argue) by pursuing policy changes that support and protect local systems of production.

Another of the advantages to local food in an SF framework is that it can be a way to get people engaged with food policies and other important political and economic institutions affecting them. Engaging in local food may lead to conversations with the

⁵⁶ Charles Rosenberg, *No Other Gods: On Science and American Social Thought* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

⁵⁷ “Trade Reforms and Food Security,” Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2003, 28, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-y4671e/y4671e00.htm>.

producer about costs and benefits of the federal organic certification procedure, or to a new concern for the quality of food being served to students in schools, or to an interest in the costs and benefits of trading food between countries, or to activism around environmental damage to the land, or a host of other issues. Thus, for SF, local food both helps to address some of the problems in our food system directly and acts as a kind of boundary object bringing together a host of wider justice concerns that can lead to activism.⁵⁸ SF, then, is built on the following key conceptions: (1) food is a necessary good produced, distributed, and otherwise impacted by large systems; (2) people are citizens or at least important stakeholders of those systems; and (3) change happens at the level of those systems through political and macroeconomic action around the issues of food. The main differences between SF and IF rest on SF's definition of food as always embedded in institutions, and the subsequent strategies for handling food-related issues, as IF largely focuses on change at the individual level and SF focuses on bringing about change at the level of policy.

SYSTEMS-FOCUSED SUB-MOVEMENT CASE STUDIES

While perhaps not as prevalent in the popular imagination as IF, SF has had profound impacts on food policies within and between many countries. For example, J. I. Rodale (1898–1971) is commonly considered to be one of the founders of both the local food and the organic farming movements.⁵⁹ Since the 1940s, the Rodale Institute has provided scientific information used to support the local food movement's proposals for adopting “non-chemical” farming methods and resources. In addition, this research was instrumental for SF and organic food advocates to successfully lobby for the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) in 1990. The OFPA authorizes the USDA to administer a National Organic Program that now makes it possible for local growers and producers to obtain organic certification and adhere to crop production, livestock, processing, and packaging standards. While these standards (and Rodale's research) can be applied to both small-scale and large-scale production, they provided the political and economic foundation necessary for local food production to increase. Here we see that several important goals for these actors, such as the environmental impacts of organic farming or the increased economic sustainability of farming communities, are pursued by a national policy to promote local food and thereby to change the system.

⁵⁸ Ian Werkheiser, “Individual and Community Identity in Food Sovereignty: The Possibilities and Pitfalls of Translating a Rural Social Movement,” in *Routledge Handbook on Food Ethics*, ed. M. Rawlinson (New York: Routledge, 2017).

⁵⁹ “History of Organic Farming in the United States,” Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education, 2012, <http://www.sare.org/learning-center/bulletins/transitioning-to-organic-production/text-version/history-of-organic-farming-in-the-united-states>.

In an international context, the FAO (Food and Agriculture Association of the United Nations) supports local food systems as a useful component in achieving the goal of food security in various contexts. The FAO does not stress the resiliency and insulation to trade as much as the “wealth multiplier” of investing in agriculture: “The multiplier is most significant where any incremental income generated is spent on labour-intensive, locally produced non-tradable goods and services, (for example, where basic food is the main consumer expenditure item) and where production in the commodity generating the increase in income is labour-intensive.”⁶⁰ Both the FAO and Rodale examples stress how the SF sub-movement conceptualizes food as a product that can be bought and sold in a market or distributed by organizations such as the FAO (which engages in famine relief). Either way, food is something always embedded in and impacted by larger institutions.⁶¹ For people working in an SF frame, the complexity of institutions makes it difficult to make change unless institutions, policy, and infrastructure are also changed, necessitating an emphasis on advocacy and policy.

POLITICS IN THE SYSTEMS-FOCUSED SUB-MOVEMENT

Like IF, one could argue that an important reason why this sub-movement has been so successful has to do with its compatibility with dominant political philosophies, such as liberalism, and with the larger political structure influenced by these philosophies. It would certainly be possible to promote local food using SF’s assumptions about food as public good and people as active members of society while disagreeing with their assumptions about change (Marxism springs to mind as amenable to this approach). However, SF as currently practiced comes from much more mainstream politics; indeed, as pointed out, the primary supporters of this sub-movement are the large international institutions of the current political structure. Typical goals of local food movement activists include the institution of certification policies (organic, non-GMO, etc.), farm-to-institution programs that bring local food into schools and other large institutional actors, food hubs, and so on. These are often characterized as reforms aimed at improving the current system.

Before discussing common critiques of SF, it is important to note that SF is not vulnerable to some of the critiques leveled at IF. This is because as SF promotes advocacy and policy changes, it promotes engagement in political structures rather than simply making better “choices.” As Ian Werkheiser and Samantha Noll argue, “when food is defined as being inherently institutional rather than as a product, companies have

⁶⁰ “Trade Reforms and Food Security,” Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2003, section 6.3, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-y4671e/y4671e00.htm>.

⁶¹ Werkheiser and Noll, “From Food Justice to a Tool of the Status Quo.”

a harder time co-opting the movement. If the intention is to pass laws to make the practices of megamarts illegal, it's difficult for that to be offered in Wal-Mart's grocery aisles."⁶² At the same time, a common goal in SF local food movements is to use policy and regulation changes to guard against co-opting. For example, Rodale Institute has been instrumental in creating specific organic standards that now help to ensure that products labeled "organic" in supermarkets are indeed organically grown.

CRITIQUES OF THE SYSTEMS-FOCUSED SUB-MOVEMENT

Like IF, the SF movement is not without its critics. Given that we are taking SF to be the overlap of local food with reforms to the food system, it is not surprising that most of these critiques argue that one of these two elements is a poor addition to the other. Some people working on local food (particularly from a CF framework, as will be discussed) are concerned with SF's focus on extant policies and institutions. These critics argue that the strategy of using international institutions and political systems as vehicles for change leads SF advocates of local food to be committed to those systems, and often far too optimistic about reforming their problematic commitments and assumptions. Many of these critics, such as William Schanbacher⁶³ and Hannah Whittman et al.,⁶⁴ argue that the commitments built into institutions devoted to promoting food security and SF may necessarily undermine actions aimed at alleviating the global food crisis, as well as undermining actions aimed at improving the lives of poor food producers and their communities.

Relatedly, if local food initiatives are bound to institutions with the ultimate aim of maximizing food production, as was historically one of the main goals of US food policy and agricultural research, there is also the possible consequence of environmental degradation in addition to the social degradation just discussed. For example, a large-scale approach to achieving food security that utilizes local food initiatives to stabilize shortages during market fluctuations may include GMOs, intensive use of chemical fertilizers, and Green Revolution technological developments.⁶⁵ In this context, even if the quantity of food is increased locally, the overall productivity of land and ecosystems in that context may be harmed. Food policy is only one factor influencing how food is produced and applied in specific contexts. As such, particular policy changes may have unintended environmental consequences. Whether food systems can be

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ William D. Schanbacher, *Politics of Food: The Global Conflict between Food Security and Food Sovereignty* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010).

⁶⁴ Hannah Whittman, Annette Desmarais, and Nette Wiebe, *Food Sovereignty: Reconnecting Food, Nature and Community* (Oakland, CA: Food First Books, 2010).

⁶⁵ Werkheiser and Noll, "From Food Justice to a Tool of the Status Quo."

reformed from within by incorporating local food, or will instead blunt or pervert the goals of SF, as critics contend, is an open question. It is at least possible that the larger systems, such as those supporting globalization, may be seen by SF as the means to support local food while at the same time they are erasing local food systems already in place.⁶⁶

On the other side of this overlay of local food and institutional reform, some people who are motivated to reform the food system through policy changes to make it more just, efficient, environmentally friendly, and so on think that local food is at least insufficient to this task, and perhaps actively harmful. For example, writers like Peter Singer, Jim Mason, and Mark Navin critique local food initiatives for opting out of the international trade that many export food producers in Third World countries now depend on to survive.⁶⁷ One kind of policy Navin addresses is the promotion of local food via trade barriers and agricultural subsidies. Navin argues that these policies must be constrained by “three duties of international ethics—beneficence, repair and fairness”⁶⁸ and that on these grounds developed nations should not limit the importation of food from less developed countries (with the converse not being true).⁶⁹ For Navin, food policies can promote development of poor rural societies and thereby improve the lives of people in those countries, and we have several duties to aid them. Thus, efforts to promote local food are permissible only to the extent that they support or at least do not interfere with those duties, something that he believes at least some local food efforts (such as trade embargoes or tariffs) do not meet.

COMMUNITY-FOCUSED SUB-MOVEMENT

The final sub-movement discussed in this essay is the community-focused sub-movement (or CF). While CF can be firmly placed under the umbrella of local food, it is markedly distinct from either of the preceding sub-movements, as CF employs definitions of “food” and “people” that diverge farther from either of the previous sub-movements than those do from each other.⁷⁰ In some ways, IF and SF hold similar definitions of these two key concepts. Both accept the view that food is some kind of interchangeable commodity, and people are autonomous individuals acting in a way that is concomitant with liberal political ideals, whether as consumers or citizens. In contrast, CF movements are often directly critical of liberal political theory,

⁶⁶ Navin, “Local Food and International Ethics”; Peter Singer and Jim Mason, *The Ethics of What We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter* (Kutztown, PA: Rodale Books, 2007).

⁶⁷ Navin, “Local Food and International Ethics”; Singer and Mason, *The Ethics of What We Eat*.

⁶⁸ Navin, “Local Food and International Ethics,” 350.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 359–361.

⁷⁰ Werkheiser and Noll. “From Food Justice to a Tool of the Status Quo.”

and their conceptions of food and people reflect this. CF uses the following conceptions: (1) food is an essential part of culture and is co-constitutive of community and personal identity; (2) people are members of their community, co-constituted with their community and its practices, particularly those around food; and (3) change happens when communities resist larger institutions oppressing them and build alternatives to those institutions through solidarity and mutual aid with other individuals and communities.⁷¹ Where IF can be seen as the overlap of local food with lifestyle politics, and SF can be seen as the overlap of local food with mainstream food system reform campaigns (such as food security initiatives), it is possible to see CF as an overlap of local food with community-based food justice movements, such as food sovereignty. That term will be discussed more later, but for now it is enough to know that food sovereignty values communities having meaningful control over the food systems that affect them. In this context, food should be understood as a touchstone or rallying point for communities that perceive larger food systems as a threat to cultural identity, traditional practices, and local systems of production and distribution.⁷² Indeed, this final point is not surprising, as food sovereignty historically grew out of “peasant movements” in South Asian and South American contexts, with the shared aim of protecting local foodways. Given these assumptions, the value of local food is that locality allows communities to have meaningful control over their food practices in a way that strengthens and preserves their community and individual identities.

CF movements often grow out of critiques of industrial food production methods, market-based initiatives, and food security programs. As such, political action, culture, and food are intertwined. Annette Desmarais captures this key aspect:

This place-bound identity, that of “people of the land,” reflects the belief that they have the right to be on the land. They have the right and obligation to produce food. They have the right to be seen as fulfilling an important function in society at large. They have the right to live in viable communities and the obligation to build community. All of the above form essential parts of their distinct identity as peasants.⁷³

CF movements challenge the definitions at the heart of IF and SF and actively create new food systems, such as indigenous rights movements, farming collectives, or small-scale guerilla gardening campaigns.⁷⁴

⁷¹ It should be noted here that proponents of IF, such as Kingsolver and Pollan, endorse some CF rhetoric around food. However, their strategies and underlying assumptions differ. For example, Pollan argues that consumers can “vote with their forks” and Kingsolver argues that we should move away from an industrial model of food production, but this is viewed as a choice made by many individuals. Werkheiser, “Individual and Community Identity in Food Sovereignty.”

⁷² Michel Pimbert, *Toward Food Sovereignty* (London: National Resources Group, 2008).

⁷³ Annette Aurélie Desmarais, “The Power of Peasants: Reflections on the Meanings of La Vía Campesina,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 24, no. 2 (2008): 139.

⁷⁴ Schanbacher, *Politics of Food*.

COMMUNITY-FOCUSED SUB-MOVEMENT CASE STUDY

Although perhaps the least-well-known sub-movement, CF initiatives are part of the food landscape around the world, and CF has had a profound influence on oppressed and marginalized communities of subsistence food producers and transnational organizations of those communities. For example, Amerindian tribes' response to the contamination of salmon in the Columbia River is an excellent illustration of how different definitions of food and people can lead to markedly different responses to food-related issues. For thousands of years, tribes living around the Celilo Falls maintained a special relationship with the salmon in the Columbia River and harvested them for ceremonial, commercial, and subsistence purposes.⁷⁵ While today tribes in this region continue these practices, the salmon are contaminated by pollutants in the water. According to a study by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the fish contain high levels of dichlorodiphenyldichloroethylene (DDE), polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and mercury and are thus unsafe to eat, as consuming them will greatly increase a person's chance of developing cancer.⁷⁶ Despite these health risks, tribal members have resisted the push to replace the contaminated salmon with processed foods, including canned fish, and many still harvest salmon from the river. If one accepts IF and SF's commitments concerning food and people, then the substitution of one food commodity with another food commodity of equal nutritional values (wild caught salmon for canned salmon, for example) could be an acceptable way to mitigate the contamination issue. However, the contamination of the Columbia River salmon is more complicated, as humans in this region have a historical relationship to the salmon that cannot be replaced. In this context, the salmon is not simply a commodity but has personal and cultural significance.⁷⁷ As Catherine O'Neil says:

Fish, especially salmon, are necessary for the survival of the native peoples of the Pacific Northwest, both as individuals and as a people. Fish are crucial for native peoples' sustenance, in the sense of a way to feed oneself and one's family. Fish are also crucial for subsistence, in the sense of a culture or way of life with economic, spiritual, social, and physical dimensions—a way to *be* Yakama, or to *be* Tulalip.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Lori Lambert, "Salmon and Contamination in the Columbia River," *Enduring Legacies: Native Case Studies* (Olympia, WA: Evergreen State College, 2008), https://www.evergreen.edu/tribal/docs/salmon_and_contamination_oct_2009.doc; Esme Murdock and Samantha Noll, "Beyond Access: Integrating Food Security and Food Sovereignty Models for Justice," in *Know Your Food: Food Ethics and Innovation*, ed. Helena Rocklinsberg and Per Sandin (Wageningen, The Netherlands: Wageningen Academic Publishers, 2015).

⁷⁶ Lambert, "Salmon and Contamination in the Columbia River."

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Catherine O'Neil, "Variable Justice: Environmental Standards, Contaminated Fish, and 'Acceptable' Risk to Native Peoples," *Stanford Environmental Law Journal* 19, no. 3 (2000): 5.

This is a clear example of how CF’s commitments concerning food transcend the simple characterization of food as product and people as consumers, as, in the case of the Columbia River salmon, personal and cultural identity are intertwined with the processes of harvesting and consuming food. When viewed from this position, the tribal member’s refusal to replace the contaminated fish with canned foods becomes clear. Although they may physically survive (though perhaps with worse nutrition) given the substitute, it would do profound damage to their individual and community identities. At worst, such substitutes risk the survival of the individual but the death of the community, something which many people who value their communities understandably reject as an option.⁷⁹

In addition, this case study illustrates how the CF sub-movement addresses food-related issues from a holistic perspective, as solutions proposed by the tribes included strategies to mitigate the source of the contamination for the health of the people, river, larger ecosystem, and economic viability of the fisheries. This reinforces William Schanbacher’s claim that food sovereignty movements and thus CF “considers human relationships in terms of mutual dependence, cultural diversity, and respect for the environment” and is, therefore, a key component of these initiatives.⁸⁰ When faced with food-related issues, the strategy for CF is strengthening relationships within and between communities and ecosystems by building alternative food systems, rather than changing consumer behavior or working within existing institutional frameworks.

POLITICS IN THE COMMUNITY-FOCUSED SUB-MOVEMENT

As the case study illustrates, CF largely does not share IF and SF’s commitments concerning food and people. For CF, food is not a product, and people are not atomistic individual consumers. Food (and especially food practices) is deeply intertwined with personal, spiritual, and community identity. In addition, while political action can happen at the level of the individual, for CF, change happens at both the community level when a community decides to adopt new practices and at the intra-community level when oppressive systems are resisted by the creation of new, alternative ones. Thus, CF is the most radical of the local food sub-movements, as it does not simply want to change individual’s buying habits or the internal workings of governmental institutions and policy tools, but challenges the status quo itself. This radicalism and CF’s commitment to more robust definitions of food and people are two reasons why such initiatives may be incompatible with existing political structures, as their mandates cannot be easily

⁷⁹ Ian Werkheiser, “Food Sovereignty, Health Sovereignty, and Self-Organised Community Viability,” *Interdisciplinary Environmental Review* 15, no. 2/3 (2014): 134.

⁸⁰ Schanbacher, *Politics of Food*, 11.

fit into the very structures they hope to dismantle, such as the industrial food system and the trade policy and food certifications that make this system possible. This has led to the creation of alternative food systems as an act of political resistance. Much more natural fits for CF than liberalism are subaltern politics such as anti-colonialism and communal anarchism.

CRITIQUES OF THE COMMUNITY-FOCUSED SUB-MOVEMENT

Due to the incompatibility with mainstream political discourse, CF has the potential to bring about the most change but has also had the least impact on the dominant food system. In addition, recommendations coming from CF initiatives are more holistic and thus have a tendency to be (1) vaguer than those coming out of IF and SF, (2) ask more of those involved, and (3) more difficult to achieve, as personal and cultural identity are bound up with food.⁸¹ For example, let us look at an accepted definition of “food sovereignty” from the Declaration of Nyéléni. In this document, food sovereignty is defined as follows:

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. . . . It ensures that the rights to use and manage our lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations.⁸²

This definition of food sovereignty clearly includes a wide array of social justice issues in the broader discussion of food-related changes and thus asks more of participants and seeks wide-reaching changes. As Cornelia Flora claims, food sovereignty mandates include a plethora of social justice movements “From the Zapatistas to the women’s movement.”⁸³ Including such a wide array of issues under the umbrella of food sovereignty often make it difficult to determine exactly what specific changes need to be

⁸¹ Werkheiser and Noll, “From Food Justice to a Tool of the Status Quo.”

⁸² “Declaration of Nyéléni,” Forum for a New World Governance, 2007, <http://www.world-governance.org/article72.html?lang=en>.

⁸³ Cornelia Butler Flora, “Schanbacher, William D: The Politics of Food: The Global Conflict between Food Security and Food Sovereignty,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 24, no. 5 (June 2010): 545.

made to the existing food structure beyond its dismantling. However, these issues may be inevitable, as culture, personal identity, and food practices are intertwined. For this reason, it is difficult if not impossible to separate food issues from wider social justice issues.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, while these restructurings may be necessary, such sweeping changes could be difficult to bring about, as food systems, trade policy, food-related practices, and various political structures are complicated. For example, the process of changing certification practices, such as those aimed at ensuring that food production is more environmentally friendly or sustainable, is often arduous and time-consuming. These changes coupled with the lofty goal of bringing about “new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations” would be even more difficult to achieve. This is especially the case when CF focuses on creating new structures rather than adopting SF’s strategy of working to bring about change from within institutions. Thus, these wide-ranging goals coupled with CF’s incompatibility with existing political structures limits the effectiveness of these initiatives to bring about change on the large scale.

As CF sub-movements primarily focus on bringing about just structures at the level of communities, one might think that this problem can be avoided, as change at the local level could eventually impact larger structures. However, to the extent that CF is right about the co-constituted nature of community and individual identity with food practices, and the concomitant importance of those practices for those communities and individuals, CF’s proposed changes face a sharp hurdle in convincing communities that are not already practicing the goals of food sovereignty to change. As Derrick Jensen says, “If your experience—far deeper than belief or perception—is that your food comes from the grocery store (and your water from the tap), from the economic system, from the social system we call civilization, it is to this you will pledge back your life. . . . You will defend this social system to your very death.”⁸⁵ The same energy that motivates Amerindians along the Columbia River to defend the salmon may motivate their neighbors to defend the industrial agriculture poisoning the river, absent a difficult change to the latter’s community and individual food practices.

CONCLUSION

Local food movements have increasingly become a part of urban and suburban landscapes since at least the mid-twentieth century and greatly impacted how we produce, process, and consume food today. Organic certification programs, the farm-to-table movement, and an increase in urban agriculture hubs are just some of the changes that

⁸⁴ Werkheiser and Noll, “From Food Justice to a Tool of the Status Quo.”

⁸⁵ Derrick Jensen, *Endgame*, vol. 2: *Resistance* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006).

we have seen to US food systems within the last twenty years. However, all local food movements are not the same. “Local food” should be understood as an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of social and political initiatives. In this essay, we provided a general analysis of local food movements, specifically separating this complex phenomenon into three distinct sub-movements. Additionally, we have highlighted how different conceptions of food and people, and the different values of locality and strategies that follow from these conceptions for these sub-movements. These definitions along with various commitments often determine whether the sub-movements are compatible with existing political structures and thus their overall impact on both domestic and international food systems. Our hope was not to conclusively argue for one sub-movement over another, but rather to help readers better understand local food as a whole and illustrate the individual sub-movements’ strengths and weaknesses. This understanding is important if participants in the broader local food movement are to work together across sub-movements without, on the one hand, obscuring differences that might lead to confusion, wasted energy, or conflict, or, on the other hand, missing similarities and shared goals that can be pursued in cooperation. None of the sub-movements within the sprawling local food movement are going away anytime soon. It is imperative for anyone passionate about food systems, their community, and eating to better understand the unique commitments and concepts employed by other people who share their passions.

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