

2018

Volunteering for Vegetables: Community Agriculture and the Prospects for Building a More Democratic Food System

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VOLUNTEERING FOR VEGETABLES: COMMUNITY AGRICULTURE AND THE
PROSPECTS FOR BUILDING A MORE DEMOCRATIC FOOD SYSTEM

By

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Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Science
in Environmental Studies

The University of Montana
Missoula, MT

May 2018

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Volunteering for Vegetables: Community Agriculture and the Prospects for Building a More Democratic Food System

Chairperson: Neva Hassanein

Scholars and activists hold varied ideas about what a more just and equitable food system might look like. Food democracy, one of these alternative food system theories, centers around the idea that all people should have equal opportunity to meaningfully contribute to the shaping of their food systems. Community farms, due to their socially-oriented qualities, present one possibility for people to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to function as food citizens and build food democracy.

This research explores and seeks to inform food democracy theory through case studies of two urban community farms – one in Missoula, Montana, and one in San Francisco, California – and their respective volunteer programs that provide produce to volunteers. It also outlines the purpose, governance, and function of these farms, their volunteer programs, and their parent organizations. Case studies were built through in-depth interviews, and supplemented with participant observation and document review.

The volunteers' experiences suggest that, for most of them, their engagement with their respective community farm has helped develop the knowledge and skills necessary in moving toward food democracy. Volunteers at both farms demonstrated knowledge of the food system, skills in food production, the ability to work and problem solve collectively, an orientation toward the commons and community good, and, for some, a sense of efficacy within the food system. Volunteers also described dimensions of broader democratic theory, like community building and citizenship skills, which allowed for the extension of existing food democracy framework. While volunteers' experiences suggest they are participating in some level of food democracy, the depth of this participation varied among volunteers. As others have found in similar food justice and food sovereignty research, however, people living near the farm did not necessarily experience the same impacts.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would not have been possible without the support, love, and encouragement of countless people. My family, friends, Environmental Studies graduate cohort, thesis committee, professors, and colleagues have all been invaluable to me during this process. I would like to call some of them out, in particular:

Thank you, Neva, for advising me through graduate school, teaching me how to do qualitative research, and for always pushing me to think more critically about and ask more questions of my own work; thank you, too, for your patience.

Thank you, Laurie and Daniel, for your guidance on my thesis, your insightful feedback, and for lending me your ears when I needed them.

Thank you, Josh, for so many beautiful farm days in Missoula and Thailand, and for thoughtful conversations about the merits of community agriculture. Our conversations formed much of the inspiration for this research.

Thank you, Gretchen, for being a constant and steady presence for me while I wrote my thesis. The accountability and encouragement you provided me helped me finish this project.

Thank you, Elias, for making me breakfast every morning, taking on a lion's share of the chores, and helping me talk through the ups and downs of graduate school and the research process. You are incredible.

Thank you, roommates – Jess, Scout, and Petes – for living with me during the crazy time that is finishing a thesis. I know I wasn't always pleasant to be around, so thank you for being kind to me anyway.

Thank you, Ethan, Caroline, Mel, and Micah, for believing in me, saying kind words in moments of despair, and sharing pro tips on how to finish a thesis.

Finally, and most importantly, thank you to the amazing people at River Road Farm and Alemany Farm who truly made this research happen. Thank you for your generosity, for your thoughtfulness, and for your willing to dig deep with me.

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The dominant food system—characterized by industrial practices and consolidated, corporate control—does not work favorably for most people or the natural environment we inhabit. Despite living in an era of more food production than ever, a quarter of the global population is still either acutely hungry or suffering from micronutrient deficiencies (IPES-Food 2016). Simultaneously and seemingly contradictory, more people than ever suffer from diet-related illness, like diabetes, due to overnutrition. The world grows more food than is necessary to feed its entire population, and yet two billion people suffer from micronutrient deficiencies and hunger, while another 1.9 billion are either overweight or obese (IPES-Food 2016). The environmental impacts are equally problematic: the current food system, from petrochemical inputs to food production to food packaging, is responsible for about a quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions, making a significant contribution to global climate change and all its adverse effects (IPES-Food 2016). Climate change, in turn, impacts agriculture with erratic and extreme weather, increased pests, and shifting growing seasons (Lengnick 2015). In other words, “modern agriculture is failing to sustain the people and resources on which it relies, and has come to represent an existential threat to itself” (IPES-Food 2016:9).

Scholars and activists hold varied ideas about what a different, more just and equitable, food system might look like. Food democracy, one of these alternative food system theories, centers around the idea that all people should have equal opportunity to meaningfully contribute to the shaping of their food system (Hassanein 2003). The theory’s key dimensions include: (1) people having knowledge about the food system, (2) a sense of empowerment in their ability to

make social and food system change, (3) an inclination to work collectively to define and solve problems, and (4) an interest in working for the common good (Hassanein 2008; Renting, Schermer, and Rossi 2012; McIvor and Hale 2015).

One practical strategy toward operationalizing the theory of food democracy and change in our food system is through urban agriculture projects. A sizable body of literature exists about urban agriculture (UA), which I review in detail below. Additionally, food democracy theory has been developed by several scholars (Hassanein 2003, 2008; Renting, Schermer, and Rossi 2012; McIvor and Hale 2015); yet, the potential for extension remains through further investigation of both democratic theory and what food democracy might look like in practice.

Accordingly, my research explores how to make change toward a more just and equitable food system by extending the theory of food democracy. The project centers around the question: To what extent do established urban agriculture volunteer programs exemplify food democracy and inform food democracy theory? To help answer the primary question, I also attempt to answer a secondary question: What is the purpose, structure, and function of these volunteer programs on urban community farms, and their parent organizations?

Through a comparative case study of two urban farms—River Road Farm in Missoula, Montana, and Alemany Farm in San Francisco, California—and their volunteer programs, through which people participate in farm work and receive produce in exchange, I identify, describe, and analyze the extent to which components of these UA projects align with principles of food democracy and extend that theory through empirical observations. Building on several previous studies (Hassanein 2008; Block, Chavez, Allen, and Ramirez 2012; Figueroa 2015; McIvor and Hale 2015), my research aims to identify dimensions—specifically those focused on

building elements of democratic citizenship—that may be creating the small-scale, incremental change that can build toward food system transformation.

In this paper, I further explore and outline the dominant food system, how food democracy presents an alternative to the status quo, themes that arise in the body of literature that examines food system change within the frame of urban agriculture, and democratic theory as it relates to the food system. In chapter two, I detail my research methods, illustrating the rationale behind my research approach and describing how I collected and analyzed data. Chapters three and four present the results of the River Road Farm and Alemany Farm case studies, respectively. For each, I present their history, their organizational structure and governance, their land ownership, where their food goes, how their volunteer program functions, and who participates. I conclude, in chapter five, by comparing the two cases and their contributions to food democracy and food system change more broadly.

Literature Review

The Current Global Food System

The term “food system” refers to all the processes and infrastructure involved in feeding a population. This includes growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consuming, and disposing food and food-related items. It also includes the inputs required for and outputs generated at each step, as well as the social, political, economic, and environmental contexts that influence each step.

The current global food system is characterized by a capitalist-industrial mode of food production and distribution. The dominant agricultural landscape is mechanized, large-scale, and efficient, at least in terms of reducing the need for human labor and maximizing productivity

(Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe 2010). Industrial agriculture relies on chemical fertilizers and pesticides, as well as technological fixes (IPES-Food 2016). The food it produces is subject to long supply chains. The primary goal in this system is to buy and sell large quantities of cheap food through agricultural free trade (McMichael 2014).

While this dominant food system succeeds in that it produces a large volume of commodities for the global marketplace, it too often leaves the people and the health of the planet behind in favor of economic and political gains for a few. The list of its negative outcomes is long and their effects are persistent: land, water, and ecosystem degradation; significant greenhouse gas contributions to global climate change; declining biodiversity; displacement of rural people; food waste; hunger and micro-nutrient deficiencies; and obesity and diet-related diseases (Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck 2011; IPES-Food 2016).

In addition, the dominant food system and corporate food regime (McMichael 2009) foster the consolidation of economic and political power into the hands of a few, often corporate, actors. This power consolidation increases the actors' abilities to influence food system governance—thus creating a self-perpetuating cycle (Carolan 2012; IPES-Food 2016). Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and banks, too, play a large role in shaping the food system (Carolan 2012). Through various projects, these non-governmental bodies may or may not have well-meaning ideas of improvement or development, and they may even create the illusion of community control through campaigns like consumer choice and “voting with your dollar.” Yet, rarely are the problems in the food system—or a widespread strategy to approach those problems—defined by communities or through a democratic process. In response, activists and academics alike have been thinking about what a more successful alternative food system might.

Food Democracy

Many concepts address alternatives to the dominant food system. Food security, food justice, food sovereignty, and food democracy are the most commonly explored alternatives, and vary in their potential to affect meaningful food system change (see Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck 2011 for a detailed analysis of each of the former three concepts). While I see value in each of these concepts, I focus on food democracy in this research due to its emphasis on process and participation.

Food democracy, which “is about citizens having the power to determine agro-food policies and practices” at multiple scales, is founded on principles of democracy (Hassanein 2003:79). The democracy I refer to here is not limited to the majority-rules system of government; democracy, as I use it here, refers to a participatory system of governance that offers opportunity and access to all people (McIvor and Hale 2015). A citizen, then, is simply one who participates, rather than a legally recognized subject of somewhere. Its political foundation makes food democracy inherently process- and participation-oriented, and well-positioned to be a framework from which to affect change in the food system. By claiming “the rights and responsibilities of citizens to participate in decision making” in the food system, food democracy “expose[s] and challenge[s] the anti-democratic forces of control” in the dominant food system (Hassanein 2003:83).

As stated earlier, food democracy consists of numerous dimensions, including people having knowledge about the food system, a sense of efficacy in their ability to make social and food system change, an inclination to work collectively to define and solve problems, and an interest in working for a common good (Hassanein 2008; Renting et al. 2012; McIvor and Hale 2015). Knowledge about the food system prepares people to take informed individual and/or

collective action. A sense of efficacy in one's ability to affect food system change allows people to move beyond a consumer mentality and into a sense of citizenship. Working together to define and solve problems in the food system can help people better understand diverse perspectives, and democratically moves the source of governance on a certain issue to the people who are affected by that issue. Interest in working toward a common good broadens the citizen's perspective from the individual to the general, and seeks a better food system for all.

Alternative Food Systems in Practice

Urban Agriculture and Food System Transformation. The movement for food system democratization occurs across a multitude of landscapes. With the rise of urban agriculture in recent decades, some researchers have pointed to its democratic potential, and view UA as a way to address food system inequities and injustices. While the scholars included in the following section do not necessarily specifically address food democracy, they examine urban agriculture and its transformative potential, particularly in respect to qualities that are included in food democracy's dimensions.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) defines urban agriculture as the growing of plants and the raising of animals within and around cities (FAO 2015). Urban agriculture exists in many forms, including farms, backyard gardens, balcony and container gardens, community gardens, guerilla gardens, rooftop gardens, and the raising and grazing of livestock. Urban and peri-urban agriculture provide food products, from vegetables and fruit to mushrooms to meat and dairy, as well as non-food products like medicinal herbs and wood for fuel (FAO 2015). Other urban agriculture projects focus less on these material products of agriculture, and more on creating opportunities for personal and community benefits that may arise from urban agriculture.

With increasing urbanization over the last century, examples of urban agriculture have grown substantially (Mougeot 1994). More than half of the world's population now lives in urban areas, and more than 80 percent of the population of the United States is urban (United Nations 2014). By 2011, over 800 million people, or almost 11% of the global population, practiced urban agriculture in some form, and these practices were responsible for 15-20% of global food production (Worldwatch Institute 2011). In the United States, urban agriculture's popularity and occurrence has grown in recent years (Smith, Greene, and Silbernagel 2013).

As explored below, at least three major themes exist in the scholarship on urban agriculture in the United States and other countries in the Global North. The first, a celebratory approach to urban agriculture, lauds the benefits of UA to individuals and communities. The second, a critical approach, examines and critiques urban agriculture and its transformative potential. The third, an action-oriented approach, more explicitly wrestles with the question of how urban agriculture might be changing the food system, and how it might do so more effectively.

The Celebratory Approach. Some academics extol the benefits of urban agriculture for the individual and community. On an individual level, for instance, practices like community gardening can provide people with experiences that develop skills in leadership, landscape design, and organizing (Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004). Growing food in the city can create public gathering spaces in which people congregate as a community and celebrate cultural heritage (Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004). Membership in community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, too, can build a sense of community among members (Sumner, Mair, and Nelson 2010). Community gardens can increase the livability of the neighborhoods that support them, fostering self-sufficiency among their participants, and improving participants' access to

healthy food and increasing community food security (Smith et al. 2013). Often, community gardens also encourage gardening and farming practices that build soil health and contribute to environmental sustainability (Mendes et al. 2008). While this scholarship illuminates some of the very real benefits of urban agriculture, it often misses potential constraints to food system change, and how and why urban agriculture may (or may not) be contributing to food system transformation.

The Critical Approach. On the other side of the pendulum, numerous scholars take a more critical approach to urban agriculture projects, identifying important pitfalls that UA projects can fall into. Knowing what an ideal food system does not look like can be helpful, because, to use Figueroa's words, "we must be clear about what we are against before we can proclaim what we are for" (2015:510). While researchers cite many flaws in existing food projects, two primary concerns stand out in the literature. The first critique of UA is that projects often use market-based solutions to solve food system problems. Many authors argue that such a market focus reinforces neoliberalization, which acts as a constraining force in the US alternative food movement (Guthman 2006; Alkon and Mares 2012; Sharzer 2012; Clendenning, Dressler, and Richards 2016). In a study of food system projects in Oakland and Seattle, for example, Alkon and Mares express that while they both began their field work believing in the "potential for low-income communities of color to improve their circumstances by working towards greater autonomy and control over their roles as growers and eaters" in the food system, they began to see "the efforts of food activists and organizations were constrained by the broader forces of neoliberalism, which limit the possibilities of food system transformation" (2012:352). The article's Oakland case study about a farmers market, Alkon and Mares point out, particularly demonstrates a focus on personal transformation of participants through markets, which didn't

foster a sense of citizenship but rather the possibility of entrepreneurialism. The authors view this emphasis as reinforcing elements of neoliberal capitalist society and, thus, our corporate food regime. While the two authors call for a food sovereignty framework in these types of projects to help them move away from market solutions and toward more inclusive projects, and ultimately seek radical transformation and collective governance of the food system, they do not really provide thoughts on practical steps toward such a goal.

The second common critique concerns who controls urban agriculture projects, and who is benefitting—or is supposed to be benefitting—from it. Li (2005) points out that development projects broadly, and conceivably including UA projects, tend to function with a “missionary mentality.” This mode of functioning occurs when concerned parties—instead of following Alinsky’s advice to “never go outside the experience of the community” (1971:127)—identify a problem in a community, enter that community with a specific means of “fixing” that problem, and then proceed without much, if any, input from the community itself. Urban agriculture projects in the United States are often championed by white, middle-class activists, who conflate these projects with inclusion (H. Lyson 2014). Hoover, who uses critical race theory to examine urban agriculture projects in the US, finds that urban agriculture “unintentionally creates an exclusive environment where people of color are excluded, and where white privilege results in the control of land, food production, and any stream of financial capital” (2013:110).

This perpetuation of social power structures in UA manifests in multiple forms (Mares and Pena 2011; Alkon and Mares 2012; Kato 2013; Smith, Greene, and Silbernagel 2013; H. Lyson 2014; M. Lyson 2014; Passidomo 2014; Reynolds 2015). In Madison, Wisconsin, for example, community gardens in low-income neighborhoods had often been closed or relocated due to lack of participation, often because the organizations that built them did not gauge

community support prior to construction (Smith et al. 2013). One of the case studies in Alkon and Mares' research, mentioned above, involved urban garden project in Seattle, Washington, which sought to improve access to local land and food for Latino/a immigrants (2012). The authors found that this project effectively marginalized the participants' vast agroecological knowledge and thus missed an opportunity to meaningfully include this group of people (Alkon and Mares 2012). In another instance, white activists in post-Katrina New Orleans attempted to bring healthy food to a poor, primarily African American neighborhood (Passidomo 2014), where they viewed the residents as not having access to good food, and built a farm and market to alleviate that problem. Over time, the white activists were able to support other local urban and rural farmers, but their customer base became primarily wealthy white people from outside the neighborhood. While each of these projects is different in scope and objectives, they all consist of exogenous, privileged groups working on behalf of others.

While these criticisms and the questions they raise are incredibly important, and indeed should continue to be asked, they often lack any practical solutions. They also often ignore what *is* or *may be* working in spite of structures in which we are embedded, like capitalism. And, despite their focus on problems in food system projects, many of these critical articles call for transformational change in the food system. Hassanein noticed in 2003 that “calls for fundamental change and complete transformation of the agro-food system are rarely—if ever—accompanied by specific suggestions on how to achieve such a total makeover” (p. 84), and that tendency still regularly appears in food system literature. If, as academics, we illuminate the inequities of the current food system and idealize ways in which our food system could be more equitable and just, we must also take some responsibility in presenting possible solutions of how to achieve such a state. Critical social scientists can both highlight the positive elements in

existing projects that are or may be contributing to food system change and identify potential flaws in those projects that may be perpetuating injustices.

The Action-Oriented Approach. Another group of academics takes a more action-focused approach in grappling with the question of how urban agriculture projects might play—or are playing—a role in working toward food system transformation. Some of these scholars take a particularly nuanced approach to food system transformation, attempting to bridge the previous two approaches and change the way we look at food systems. They concede that UA can simultaneously benefit individuals and communities—and potentially work to transform the food system—while also reinforcing the current food regime (Block et al. 2012; Bradley and Galt 2014; McClintock 2014; Sbicca 2014; Classens 2015). Contrary to the above critical scholars, these critical-realist scholars view urban agriculture projects as often “radical and neoliberal at once,” not just one or the other (McClintock 2014:157). The persistent radical-or-neoliberal mentality proves unnecessarily dualistic, and can result, respectively, in disappointment on one end and “throwing out the baby with the bathwater while failing to address the pressing needs on the ground or offer insights into how to overcome contradictions” (McClintock 2014:165).

Other action-oriented scholars attempt to expand our understanding of how food system transformation might take place, especially in relation to some specific food system theories. To do so, some of these scholars demonstrate how theories might look in practice through empirical studies (Hassanein 2008; Bradley and Galt 2014; McClintock 2014; McIvor and Hale 2015; Slocum and Cadieux 2015; Carolan 2016). These scholars have elucidated important lessons from programs that are working, at least in part, to create food system transformation. First, UA programs must take local knowledge, context, and values seriously (Bradley and Galt 2014).

These projects must seek input and participation from their expected benefactors (H. Lyson 2014), “starting and embracing where people are” (Bradley and Galt 2014:184).

The second lesson is that urban agriculture may provide the backdrop for participants to develop a democratic set of skills necessary to make change (Hassanein 2008; Travaline and Hunold 2010; McIvor and Hale 2015; Carolan 2016). Developing a sense of efficacy within the food system, is critical to affecting change within that system. Hassanein recognizes the importance of providing opportunities for meaningful participation within the food system as an important stepping stone toward efficacy, and, as Carolan notes, in order to build a more democratic food system, we need “citizens who feel like citizens” (2016:2). How to help people develop capacity as citizens, though, is a question in itself. Travaline and Hunold found that for the people they interviewed, participation in “environmental civic associations cultivates the political and social skills necessary for effective citizenship, building community and transforming some residents into urban ecological citizens,” though they neglect to give specific qualities of the “environmental civic associations” that may have cultivated that sense of efficacy (2010:588). Carolan, on the other hand, finds more specific evidence that “actors of citizenship are, or at least can be, forged in practices that engender commitments to, and empathy for, others. In other words, there is something to be said about the ‘value’ of these spaces for the practices and understandings they provoke, which goes beyond the economic resources they generate” (2016:25). Emphasizing the processes of deep democracy and the citizenship-based skills associated with it—building civic skills and enduring relationships, developing familiarity with diversity and power dynamics, and fostering an orientation toward the commons and common good (the commons being a shared resource and the common good being an

orientation)—might further facilitate urban agriculture projects’ work toward food sovereignty, food security, and food democracy (McIvor and Hale 2015).

Finally, these scholars often acknowledge that change does not usually happen overnight. This is especially true for the kind that involves changing identities, whether of the self, perhaps toward self-determination, or at the community level, perhaps toward an alternative food system, and challenging convention so that it may be built on by future projects (Hassanein 2003; Bradley and Galt 2014; Carolan 2016). Additionally, it is unlikely that social change of this scale, and the development of citizenship or civic culture, comes from any one place on its own, but instead is a result of many factors (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987). The impacts of UA projects on their participants may be one of many factors that can contribute to food system change.

Community Agriculture: A New Model. When we look away from scholarship about urban agriculture to UA practices themselves, we see that a relatively unstudied model exists that seems to embody many of these “lessons” from action-oriented scholarship. Most scholarship focuses on community gardens, community supported agriculture programs, and farmers’ markets. This excludes a wide variety of UA practices and experiences, including those of volunteers on community or neighborhood farms, where people of various skill levels, life experiences, and cultural backgrounds work together, in community.

In this latter model of urban agriculture, called community agriculture, the food grown matters, but “is not culturally as important as the experience of growing food together” (Slotnick 2016:78). Community agriculture is what happens at the PEAS Farm, the subject of Hassanein’s 2008 article, where college students work alongside experienced farmers and underprivileged youth to grow food for CSA members and the local food bank. Community agriculture is also what happens at D-Town Farm, the subject of White’s research, where the leaders and

participants, who are predominantly African-American and many of whom are low-income, have “created a sustainable community food system that fosters a sense of self-determination and self-sufficiency” and their “engagement in urban farming is only part of their much larger mission to end relationships of dependency and educate the community about the importance of providing for themselves” (White 2011:415-16). While few academics have published research explicitly investigating this topic, many touch on the subject in their studies—particularly in terms of building community and other forms of social relationships (Lyson 2004; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004; White 2011; Block et al. 2012; Bradley and Galt 2014).

Because the goal of community agriculture explicitly points to community and personal development, it presents an excellent starting point for the exploration of food democracy in action. The goals of community agriculture extend deep into transforming the way we interact with one another, with our food, and with our place. Democratic theorist and former elected official Daniel Kemmis argues that placelessness around food—and the production of food that “can be replicated, in the same form, anywhere”—“weakens both our sense of food and of place” (1990:7). He extends this idea of placelessness to political thought and our sense of politics and place, and to culture more broadly: “No real culture—whether we speak of food or of politics or of anything else—can exist in abstraction from place” (1990:7).

Philosopher-farmer Josh Slotnick makes a similar point when he connects industrial agriculture with industrial culture, arguing that “we have an industrial food system because we have an industrial culture. The industrial food system has successfully resisted large-scale, justice-oriented changes, because those changes do not fit smoothly in an industrial culture” (2016:71). Both argue for the need to bring a sense of *place*, at the human scale, back into our culture, and the importance of the context of place in human experience. Slotnick (2016) in

particular sees community agriculture as one way to rebuild culture in a way that is not industrial, thus working to build something different than both industrial culture and industrial agriculture. The dearth of research in this area, however, forces this to be merely speculation.

Volunteering for Vegetables as Public Work and Civic Engagement: Connecting Democracy, Food Democracy, and Community Agriculture

Another compelling component of community agriculture is that, by definition, participation is usually voluntarily, rather than being paid, and the volunteers are working for the benefit of the community, rather than only for the benefit of themselves. This distinction presents an interesting narrative, full of possibilities for building a more democratic food system. The two narratives I discuss here are volunteering as civic engagement and volunteering at a community farm as public work, both of which make volunteers on community farms an excellent potential population in which to investigate food democracy.

Civic engagement refers to how “citizens participate in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community’s future” (Adler and Goggin 2005:236). The term has many definitions, some of which emphasize participation in organizations that serve the participant’s local community (Boyte 1997; Adler and Goggin 2005). Jones sees volunteering as embedded in civic life: “Volunteering reflects direct engagement in community life and an active community-based civil society” (2006:250). “Civil society” refers to relationships and institutions that generate “social trust, networks of dense relationships (sometimes called ‘social capital’), and civic virtue, or commitment to the common good” (Boyte 1997:3). The extent of a community’s civic engagement has been linked to positive community outcomes, such as public health and effective representative governments, and “members of associations are much more likely than nonmembers to participate in politics,

to spend time with neighbors, to express social trust” (Putnam 1995:73). Civic engagement is also sometimes referred to as “active citizenship,” which is a key component to a functioning democracy (Adler and Goggin 2005) and a food democracy (Hassanein 2008). The active citizenship component of volunteering suggests that community agriculture volunteers may also be oriented toward the common good.

Volunteers who participate in community agriculture projects are arguably also doing “public work.” Public work “consists of visible effort by a mix of people who produce things of lasting importance to our communities and society,” which includes activities like farming that produce food, something deeply important and necessary to our communities and society (Boyte 1997:4). Public work is meaningful and significant, not just a means to an end, and it recognizes the relationship between citizenship and work (Boyte 1997). Agents of public work are efficacious, its workers “bold creators of democracy and public things” (Boyte 1997:6). As with the concept of volunteering as civic engagement connecting to food democracy, with the concept of community agriculture as public work, too, we see food democracy connections: community agriculture as public work implies citizenship and the development of a sense of efficacy.

These connections – volunteering to civic engagement to food democracy, and community agriculture to public work to food democracy – come full-circle, for public work is also seen as a form of civic engagement (Boyte 1997). Volunteering on a community farm, which is a form of civic engagement both through its volunteerism and through its public work, therefore, has the potential to be a locus of the development of food democracy. And yet, few have researched this population of volunteers.

Researching Food Democracy in Volunteer Programs on Community Farms

Many gaps exist in the literature around urban agriculture and food system transformation, particularly in the realm of a nuanced analysis into how community agriculture might be playing a role in the transformation from the corporate food regime to a more democratic food system. Scholars and activists have ideas about what we want our food system to become, but these ideas are often nebulous and idealistic. We need to better develop an understanding of how to work toward such a food system—what transformative measures individuals, communities, organizations, and political bodies can take—and how to recognize operationalized versions of our food system theories when we see them.

In an attempt to explore how to make change toward a more equitable and just food system, my research centers around the question: To what extent do established volunteer programs on urban community farms exemplify one or more dimensions of food democracy and, thereby, extend our theoretical understanding? To help answer this primary question, I also investigate the purpose, structure, and function of these volunteer programs on urban community farms, and their parent organizations.

METHODS

I conducted field research during the summer of 2017 at River Road Farm in Missoula, Montana, and Alemany Farm in San Francisco, California. I approached my qualitative research with case studies, so that I might achieve a more holistic understanding of established volunteer programs and their contributions to food democracy. The case study approach allowed me to investigate my questions from multiple angles and with multiple methods, deepening my understanding of each case “within its social context” and allowing me to build a nuanced understanding of the programs in question (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011:256). In each case study, I employed in-depth interviews, participant observation, and a review of publicly available documents. Exploring food democracy theory in different contexts created the opportunity for useful comparisons.

My Approach

The methodology behind this research was inspired by several other researchers, and stemmed from my desire to understand people’s diverse perspectives as deeply and accurately as possible, while being able to place those perspectives in the context in which they were formed. Burawoy’s extended case method (1998) and Figueroa’s people-centered approach to food systems research (2015), as well as Bradley and Herrera’s approach to “decolonizing” food systems research (2015) formed the basis of my approach.

While each of the above scientists approaches their research differently, they hold two important values in common: context and the lived experience. Burawoy’s extended case method provides an excellent framework for highlighting context of place, culture, and economics in

research. In the extended case method, the researcher investigates life at the human-scale, and then telescopes out to larger theory. Burawoy's extended case method "applies reflexive science to ethnography in order to extract the general from the unique, to move from the "micro" to the "macro," and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on preexisting theory" (1998:5). He opts to recognize his positionality as a researcher, and highlights dialogue and intersubjectivity in his research. Furthermore, the extended case method provides an opportunity to highlight "the ethnographic worlds of the local," which in turn "challenges the postulated omnipotence of the global, whether it be international capital, neoliberal politics, space of flows, or mass culture" (Burawoy 1998:30).

Figueroa's people-centered methodology emphasizes context as well, focusing on people's day-to-day lives and lived experience (2015). She, however, specifically calls for this approach as a new way to research food systems. Her approach highlights relationships, recognizing individuals and communities as agents instead of simply places on which global processes are imposed, and the connections between food and issues like racism.

Bradley and Herrera (2015) also focus on food systems research, though they speak more explicitly to "decolonizing" this field of research. Their primary suggestion for research is to "embrace what we don't already know or understand" (2015:14). This involves pushing back against certain aspects of academic culture—particularly the valuation of "expertise" and the separation of researcher and research "subjects"—and welcoming the discomfort of the unknown. The decolonization methodology also involves building trusting relationships with the people involved in the research, and maintaining a "reflective and personal agenda for food justice research" (2015:15).

Conducting two case studies inspired by the above approaches allowed me to learn about two distinct but connected food projects in depth. By drawing on Burawoy (1998) in my case study, I maintained a focus on particulars, while still speaking back to more general theory (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). Figueroa's people-centered methodology (2015) and Bradley and Herrera's decolonization approach (2015) helped influence my interview guide, interactions with program participants during participant observation interviews, data analysis, and presentation of my findings.

Study Sites

For the purpose of this research, I conducted a comparative case study of two similar urban farms, which I selected based on specific criteria. First, both are urban farms with established volunteer programs. Each has at least a 10-year history, giving them a record of impact in their respective communities.

The second site-selection criterion was that each farm had a group of regular volunteers, as opposed to volunteers who only drop in occasionally. Because I knew my primary method of data collection would be in-depth interviews, and because I was interested in learning about volunteers' experiences in these types of programs, it was critical that I study a program that involved enough informants who might agree to an interview with me and have a depth of experience to share. Additionally, I imagined that a successful volunteer program—one that provided an experience that motivated at least a core group of volunteers to return—would be most likely to contribute to food democracy in some way.

The final site-selection criterion was that each farm's volunteer program offer the opportunity for volunteers to take free produce, effectively in exchange for their labor. This

divergence from normal wage labor goes outside the economic norm in at least two ways: (1) participants act as co-producers of their food instead of simply as passive consumers (Renting et al. 2012), and (2) participants work outside the typical wage-labor system by working for various other reasons, including receiving food. From the outside, this form of agricultural volunteerism appears to fulfill more needs than other types of volunteer programs, and thus I thought this element might attract a more diverse group of participants. I also thought it had the potential to facilitate a culture in which participants might build the skills and qualities associated with food democracy. Additionally, I wondered if it might be challenging neoliberalism through a practice of non- or post-capitalism (Galt 2013) and a potentially culturally diverse space.

While the programs I studied exemplify these criteria, I intentionally chose ones that were also distinct from one another. The two cases were established more than 10 years ago, have volunteers who volunteer regularly, and offer produce in exchange for volunteering. While not intentional on my part, the farms are also of similar size and employ similar agricultural practices. They are different, however, in two primary ways: (1) one is located in a mid-size town, while the other is in the middle of a large city; and (2) one is managed by paid staff, while the other is almost entirely volunteer-run. The sites are briefly described below, and explored in more depth in their respective discussion chapters.

River Road Farm

River Road Farm (River Road) was established in 1996 in Missoula, Montana. The farm is one of four similar farms in the area managed by Garden City Harvest (GCH), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. River Road employs a full-time farm manager, a full-time farm assistant, and a seasonal part-time farm apprentice.

The volunteer program at River Road, called Volunteer for Veggies, began shortly after the farm's establishment. Participation has fluctuated since its inception; in the summer of 2017, when this research was conducted, approximately 10 people volunteered on a regular basis (at least once or twice a month), and a dozen or so volunteered infrequently. Of the regular volunteers, only seven were return volunteers who had worked at least one previous summer on the farm. Volunteers track their hours and receive produce based on the number of hours they have accrued.

In addition to the Volunteer for Veggies program, River Road offers volunteer opportunities for groups, mainly corporate or other work-related teams, called Grow Team. These volunteers do not receive produce in exchange for their labor. Because of my interest in volunteer programs that provide produce in exchange for volunteer labor, I did not include participants of the Grow Team program in this research.

I first learned about River Road and GCH when I moved to Missoula in 2015. Since then, I have participated with GCH on multiple occasions and at various levels, including farming for two summers at one of their other community farms, working in the office for a year, and conducting research about community perceptions of River Road Farm. Needless to say, I started this research already very familiar with River Road, its staff, and its volunteer program. I share more later in this chapter about my reflexivity in building this case study in 'Research Strengths, Limitations, and Considerations.'

Alemaný Farm

Unlike GCH, I had not interacted with Alemaný Farm (Alemaný) prior to this research. Alemaný's current iteration was established in 2005 in San Francisco, California, and is managed by multiple, mainly volunteer, groups. The primary group responsible for food

production on the farm is the volunteer-run nonprofit organization, Friends of Alemany Farm (FoAF). FoAF is managed by a group of volunteers who refer to themselves as the “co-managers” or “core group;” the co-managers make decisions about the farm through a modified consensus process. In spring 2017, FoAF hired its first paid staff member in many years to manage the farm part-time, with assistance from a college intern.

Because FoAF is volunteer-run, its volunteer program has existed since the farm’s inception. Volunteers come to the farm during designated work days, and often come in school, business, or social groups. In the summer of 2017, at least 23 people volunteered regularly.¹ Of these, at least 21 were return volunteers from the previous year. The last 30 to 60 minutes of each work day involves harvesting produce, and all volunteers are encouraged to take produce with them when they leave, regardless of how long they volunteered that day. Hours worked and produce taken by each volunteer are not specifically tracked.

Data Collection and Analysis

I built each case study through a combination of qualitative research methods to develop understanding about each program. My primary method of collecting information was through face-to-face, in-depth interviews with program volunteers and administrators at each site. Participant observation and a review of publicly available documents supplemented the interviews with social and historical context, as well as on-the-ground experience. By drawing on multiple sources of data, or using triangulation, I was able to check insights from various informants and gain a clearer understanding of each program and its participants (Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault 2016).

¹ While Alemany’s co-managers ask that volunteers sign in for work days, it is not required, and there seems to be no formal way of tracking regular volunteers.

In-depth Interviews

I conducted 31 in-depth interviews, 14 at River Road and 17 at Alemany. All were in person and one-on-one. I recorded all interviews, with permission, for accuracy and later transcription. Interviews help elucidate diverse insights into people's individual experiences (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). In-depth, qualitative interviews helped me learn about the lived experiences of people involved with each community farm's volunteer program, and the meaning each of those people made of their experiences with the program (Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault 2016). All interviews were semi-structured, using an interview guide for consistent lines of inquiry and then probing interviewees' responses for more detail. The interview guide helped my conversations remain mostly on topic, while the semi-structured nature of these interviews created space for the interviewees to bring up issues of importance to them. Allowing for this space provided rich, often relevant, information that I could not have known to ask otherwise (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011).

Because I wanted to hear multiple perspectives about both programs, I interviewed volunteers who regularly participated in them, as well as the staff, volunteers, and board members who ran, oversaw, or otherwise participated in the programs. Interview questions for volunteers addressed personal and community benefits and challenges participants had experienced from volunteering on the farm, with specific attention to those that might be associated with the dimensions of food democracy. Interview questions for administrators addressed their perceptions of how the volunteer program impacts participants, as well as its goals and function. For interviewees who represented both volunteers and administrators, as in the cases of the GCH board member and all the FoAF co-managers, I used a blended interview guide. (For complete interview guides, see Appendix A.)

Almost all of the volunteers I interviewed were current, consistent volunteers who had participated for more than one season. Only two interviewees at River Road were not participating in their farm's volunteer program's current season, due to various circumstances described below, in 'Interviews at River Road.' Most interviewees worked on the farm at least once a month and had volunteered for more than one season. I chose to interview volunteers with this level of farm engagement because I thought they would likely have a better idea of the impacts of the program than somebody who had participated for a shorter duration. While a group of people who participate regularly and over more than one season is clearly not representative of all volunteer experiences, my goal was to identify how these projects are affecting their participants and how the farms might be affecting food system change and building food democracy incrementally and at a small scale for the people directly impacted by those programs.

To account for the above criteria, I identified interviewees through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. At River Road, I spoke with the farm manager, whom I knew, and together we looked through volunteer logs to identify regular volunteers who had participated for more than one season. I also spoke with the Executive Director, whom I knew as well, about which board member would have at least some knowledge about the Volunteer for Veggies program.

At Alemany, I communicated with one of the co-managers who gave me a list of people who had agreed to speak with me, along with their contact information. This list included its one staff member and most of its regular volunteers – current co-managers, current auxiliary co-managers, and former co-managers. Once on site, I asked many of these people about whether they knew of other regular, seasoned volunteers with whom I might also get in touch.

Interviews at River Road Farm. I interviewed 14 people involved with River Road’s Volunteer for Veggies program. Interviews lasted an average of one hour. Of the 14 interviewees, 10 were volunteers and four were administrators. The 10 volunteers included all seven of the current volunteers who farmed regularly and had been volunteering for more than one season. While some volunteers were at the farm for their second season, others had been volunteering for up to ten years. Two of the volunteers I interviewed had formerly volunteered regularly, and both had volunteered for more than two seasons. They were not currently volunteering because one was ill and the other’s work schedule had changed in a way uncondutive to volunteering at River Road. One volunteer I interviewed was also a GCH board member, who was new to the board as of 2017, and was the only member of the GCH Board of Directors who had recently volunteered at River Road Farm. The lack of regular, experienced volunteers naturally limited the number of people I could interview who fit my selection criteria.

I also interviewed all three River Road staff member and the GCH Executive Director. At the time this research was conducted, the farm manager had been with the farm for 15 years, the farm assistant was in her second year, and the farm apprentice was in her first year. The Executive Director had been in her position for six years.

Table 1. Number of Interviews Conducted at Each Site

	Interviewee	River Road Farm	Aleman Farm
Paid Staff	<i>Administrative Staff</i>	1 of 3	N/A
	<i>Farm Staff</i>	3 of 3	1 of 1
Volunteers	<i>Board Members</i>	1 of 11	N/A
	<i>Co-Managers</i>	0 of 0	8 of 9
	<i>Auxiliary Co-Managers</i>	0 of 0	6 of 10
	<i>Other Regular Volunteers</i>	9 of 9	2 of 3
Total Interviewed		14	17

Interviews at Alemany Farm. I interviewed 17 people involved with Alemany's volunteer program. Interviews generally lasted just over an hour. Of the 17 interviewees, all were volunteers with the exception of the one paid staff. I interviewed eight of the nine volunteers who are part of the FoAF Co-Managers group, who manage the farm. The ninth was asked to participate, but declined an interview. Six of the 10 FoAF Auxiliary Co-Managers, or regular volunteers who take on added responsibility during volunteer work days but don't have voting or decision-making power, agreed to be interviewed. All the Co-Managers and Auxiliary Co-Managers interviewed were also regular volunteers who had been involved with Alemany for more than one season, and one was a founding member who had thus been involved since 2005. As mentioned above, it is unclear how many people volunteer regularly at Alemany, but of the three regular, seasoned volunteers I asked, two agreed to an interview. One of these was a former Co-Manager. The staff member had been involved with Alemany since the spring of 2017, and was the first paid farm manager FoAF had hired.

Participant Observation

I spent 30 hours as a participant observer at River Road and Alemany. Twelve of these were spent at River Road, and 18 were at Alemany. The 18 hours at Alemany were condensed into two weeks, while the 12 at River Road occurred over the course of the summer. I spent fewer hours at River Road because I was more familiar with the site and the program than I was with Alemany. I therefore required less time at River Road than at Alemany to build a comparable depth of understanding of their respective volunteer programs.

During my participant observation, I volunteered on the farms alongside staff, regular volunteers, and drop-in volunteers, and disclosed my identity as a researcher to all of these people. When I had the opportunity, I worked with volunteers with whom I had not yet interacted

so that I could observe a variety of perspectives (Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault 2016). Participant observation gave me the opportunity to experience the volunteer programs first hand, while witnessing, and often participating in, the activities, conversations, and social dynamics at each farm. This method also allowed me to build trust and develop relationships with staff and volunteers at each farm (Bradley and Herrera 2015). It also provided me with a more complete understanding of the geographical context of each farm and the ability to “thickly” describe the sites, the program functions, and the participants, as well as the opportunity to meet people outside of my interview criteria (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011).

Review of Publicly Available Materials

Document review supplemented the in-depth interviews and participant observation at both sites, and provided more historical context for both. By looking through noninteractive data, like the organizations’ websites and articles about each farm, I learned about the programs—especially about their internally-driven goals and internally and externally perceived impacts—through the things they and others had produced (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). This content, which is publicly available, provide another layer of context for this research.

Analysis

The various methods of data collection provided numerous types of data to analyze. As mentioned above, I recorded all interviews, which were then transcribed by professionals. Additionally, I wrote memos about my initial impressions after each interview, as well as recording field notes after each session of participant observation. Both of these writings included notes on emergent themes.

Because I began this research with existing food democracy theory from the literature, I coded my notes and transcripts with themes I had extracted from food democracy’s dimensions. I

also used open coding to allow for new themes and analytical categories to emerge, working to deepen and elaborate on existing theory (Burawoy 1998; Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). As I developed my analysis, I compared the experiences of various participants, with different roles, within and across programs, paying particular attention to how the themes that arose related to or developed food democracy theory (Burawoy 1998). I also paid attention to the context of the participants' responses and actions, couching their discrete experiences of community agriculture participation in their broader lived experiences (Burawoy 1998; Figueroa 2015).

Research Strengths, Limitations, and Considerations

Many of the strengths and limitations of this research are direct results of my methods, sample size, and level of experience. By using multiple qualitative research methods to study only two programs, I was able to achieve a depth of understanding about people's individual experiences and the context in which each program operates. Had I chosen to conduct a multiple case study with more cases, this level of depth would not have been possible. On the other hand, due to the small number of cases and the context-dependence of my results, it is difficult to make broad generalizations from this research (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). I was, however, able to use the particulars of each case to investigate food democracy theory and build on it (Burawoy 1998). As a novice researcher, I brought enthusiasm to this research that may or may not be typical of someone more experienced. My inexperience also meant that I may not have probed as deeply in interviews or recorded as thorough of field notes as a more advanced researcher.

Some of the strengths and limitations of this research also stem from my background with each of the farms. As I mentioned above, I was already very familiar with River Road prior to my researching its volunteer program. This established relationship allowed me to easily identify

potential interviewees. It also helped me feel immediately comfortable during participant observation, and created an initial understanding of the context of the farm and the function of its volunteer program. Simultaneously, my history and familiarity with River Road may have dulled my ability to see the farm and the program clearly.

I had no background knowledge of Alemany, nor relationships with any of its participants. This made initial contact and logistics difficult, and required that I build trust from scratch with volunteers and staff. This made for slightly awkward experiences in participant observation at first, and may have affected how people on site interacted with me. It also, however, allowed me to see the farm and the volunteer program with fresh eyes and curiosity, the same level of which I may not have brought to River Road. Additionally, I spent more time conducting participant observation at Alemany than at River Road, to help make up for my lack of history with Alemany and build a more equal contextual and programmatic understanding of each farm and their respective volunteer programs.

Given my different level of knowledge and familiarity with each site, I have also tried to be attentive to my analysis of both programs and treat them both fairly (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). For River Road, this means that I have intentionally worked to share honest observations and relevant information about their volunteer program, not allowing my relationship with GCH to cloud my ability to think critically about their programs. For Alemany, this involved tempering the exciting newness of the program to me, and being careful to bring a critical eye to all aspects of the program. In conducting field work and analyzing both farms, I regularly reflected on my social location, made comments about my reactions to certain events in my field notes, and wrote memos during the coding process to capture my responses to the data (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011).

CASE STUDY: RIVER ROAD FARM

When I arrived at River Road Farm on a cool and overcast mid-June morning, the farm was just waking up. An apprentice was helping a few interns in one corner of the farm; they were harvesting spinach for one of Garden City Harvest's community supported agriculture (CSA) programs. A handful of construction workers, finishing a build-out on the farm's new facilities – a giant barn and an office to serve as the organization's headquarters – provided a loud but ambient sonic backdrop to the peaceful urban farm, complemented by the quiet cluck of hens, drifting from the chicken coop.

River Road Farm, as the name suggests, is on River Road, and directly across the street is the Clark Fork River, which cuts Missoula, Montana, in half. The farm, which sits on almost four acres, is surrounded on three sides by housing. To the south and east are apartment buildings and single-family homes. To the west lies a trailer court, beyond which is one of Missoula's busiest roads. Between the farm and the river is the relatively quiet River Road, a nondescript building, and a riparian zone with poplar trees and other native plants. Osprey nest here, along with a variety of other wildlife, and it's common to see these birds of prey flying overhead while working at the farm.

When you see River Road for the first time, the very first thing you notice is the fence. It's over six feet tall, has been described to me as reminding someone of their experiences in the army, and keeps out foraging deer. On this particular morning, I parked outside the looming fence, which still seemed to loom over me, despite having been to the farm on multiple occasions, and walked into the much more welcoming atmosphere of the farm.

I walked along the narrow gravel driveway to the farm's central meeting point to wait for the farm manager and his assistant. The central meeting point is comprised of a small toolshed with a covered front area, housing some stuffed chairs covered in faded, tattered upholstery. This sitting area is surrounded by well-used long tables that serve as platforms for boxes of harvested produce on CSA days. I sat in my favorite chair, the green velvet one, and looked out across the rows of young vegetables and flowers.

Allison, the farm assistant who is a tall and youthful woman with long brown hair and bright eyes, drove up in a small Toyota pickup after a few minutes had passed, and apologized for being late. We chatted briefly before she disappeared into the toolshed, and immediately came back out with a notebook. She flipped open the pages and wrote down what crops needed harvesting that morning.

A few minutes later, the farm manager, Logan, arrived. Logan has a wild but friendly look about him, with a scruffy two-day beard and curly brown hair that sticks out in all directions. Logan and Allison talked lightly about start times, and how start and end times at River Road are generally fuzzy and flexible. "I don't care if people are late, as long as they're flexible on the other end, too," said Logan. "It's okay to get here at 9:15 or 9:30, but if there's still work to do at 5:00, you should be okay to stick around." Logan noted that there weren't any other volunteers there, but that they might come later.

Allison suggested to Logan that we harvest spinach, and, agreeing, he asked us to "clear cut the last row." By this point, the apprentice, Edye, had returned from helping the interns. She, Allison, and I grabbed some boxes and set off to pick spinach.

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the results of the River Road Farm case study. The first section of the chapter reviews the organizational structure, function, and governance of River Road Farm, its volunteer program, and its parent organization. This context is necessary for two reasons. First, it provides useful information regarding how the farm and its volunteer program work. Second, the context in which the farm and its volunteer program are situated likely influence the volunteers' experience of the farm, and therefore the food democracy related results of this research. The second section of the chapter explores the extent to which River Road's volunteer program exemplifies and informs food democracy.

River Road Farm: Context

History

In 1996, Garden City Harvest (GCH) took on River Road Farm as one of the group's first projects, initially using the space as a small community garden, where people rent, tend to, and harvest from individual plots. Under the management of GCH, the site has grown into a neighborhood farm with three distinct programs. In addition to the still-existent community garden, which now contains 55 plots, the farm offers a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program and a volunteer program. Each spring, around 60 individuals and families purchase a CSA "share". These participants then pick up a selection of produce on a weekly basis throughout the harvest season, like a subscription. The Volunteer for Veggies program, the focus of this case study, allows community members to volunteer on the farm in exchange for produce.

Twenty-one years after its establishment, River Road Farm is a high-intensity production farm. Missoula, Montana, where the farm is located, has a population of approximately 70,000

and growing, and is experiencing steeply increasing housing costs. Though the farm sits on just under four acres, only about two are in food production, which produces about 40,000 pounds of food each year. The rest of the land holds pockets of flowers, community garden plots, a farm toolshed, a community garden toolshed, a chicken coop and run (though the chickens spend most of each day exploring the rows of vegetables), and some fallow land. An orchard is in development, and two new buildings started being used at the beginning of 2018. The farm's crops grow in long, straight rows that are dotted with sunflowers. Killdeer nest and fledge their young in some of the beds. At least one section of the farm is growing cover crop at any given time to replenish the soil. While the farm isn't certified organic, they use organic methods like cover cropping, compost building, and crop rotation – that work together to build good, healthy, and productive soil.

Situated in the Rocky Mountain West, the farm is subject to hot, dry summers and cold, snowy winters, with first and last frosts often falling in May and September, respectively. Accordingly, River Road Farm operates late winter through fall. Sitting on flat land with ample sun exposure, the farmers at River Road grow a variety of produce, including spinach and other greens, peas, beets, and carrots in the early season; tomatoes, potatoes, broccoli, beans, and peppers in the height of summer; and winter squash and leeks in the early fall.

River Road Farm is managed by Logan, who has done so since 2002. Logan is the primary person who does farm planning and day-to-day task and volunteer management. A full-time farm assistant and a part-time farm apprentice work on the farm with Logan. With only three staff, volunteers have always been and are still the main labor force for the farm.

Organizational Structure and Governance

River Road Farm is one of four neighborhood farms in Missoula, Montana, managed by GCH, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The organization's mission is "to build community through agriculture by growing food with and for people with low incomes, offering education and training in ecologically conscious agriculture, and using our sites for the personal restoration of youth and adults." In addition to farms, GCH runs a community garden program, a farm-to-school program involving school gardens and farmer-in-the-classroom visits, and a youth development program. The organization has a typical nonprofit structure, in that it has a governing board with fiduciary responsibility, an Executive Director who runs the organization, administrative staff who manage communications and fund development, and program staff who manage the programs.

Each of Garden City Harvest's four neighborhood farms is run mostly autonomously, with a farm manager at the helm to do the farm planning and make farm-related decisions. The farms are similar in that they grow food through organic methods, in the city, and work toward the organization's mission. They differ, however, in culture and feel, due to their programmatic focus, farm location, and the personality of their farm manager. Following the same hierarchical structure of the organization, each farm manager has staff and/or interns who work under them. Volunteers comprise the bulk of the labor force at two of the farms, including River Road Farm.

River Road Farm is supported by GCH's fundraising efforts. GCH is funded primarily through individual contributions. Other funding sources include the organization's programs, grants, and events. The CSA programs at River Road Farm and other neighborhood farms contribute income to Garden City Harvest. The expenses associated with River Road Farm include staff, seeds and other planting materials, various hand and power tools, a tractor, and two

tool sheds. River Road Farm's new facilities brought an additional expense the year I conducted this research. To fund the building project, GCH ran a capital campaign. In addition to bringing offices to the farm, the new facilities provide a commercial kitchen, event and classroom space, vegetable storage, new tool storage, tractor storage, indoor restrooms for farm volunteers and community gardeners, and housing for a forthcoming caretaker.

Land Ownership

In 2014, Garden City Harvest purchased the land underneath River Road Farm with donations from private donors and Missoula's publicly funded Open Space Fund. This represented the first use of public funding to purchase agricultural land in Missoula. The purchasing of River Road Farm also provided a sense of permanency. Garden City Harvest, for instance, leases the land for all of its other neighborhood farms and community gardens, which inherently contributes to a sense of impermanence.

While the threat of losing access to the land is no longer an issue at River Road Farm, the land purchase poses some new transitions. Likely the most impactful transition is that Garden City Harvest is moving its headquarters to River Road Farm. In order to relocate the offices, GCH needed a building into which they could move. The board decided to design and construct two new buildings on the farm: an office and a barn. The offices will house the administrative staff and provide indoor space for program staff to work; the barn will function both as a community space and a storage space for the farm.

These new buildings change the immediate visual impact of the farm, and various staff and volunteers were worried that they might also change the farm and volunteer program. Some volunteers expressed concerns about the farm losing its rustic look. Others were concerned about

the dynamics of having the organization administration on site, and how potentially closer oversight by them might affect the farm's flexible and laidback culture.

Most people I spoke with also recognized the potential positive impacts of the new buildings. Some were excited about the possibility of new programming, like food preservation classes. Others thought that the new buildings might increase visibility of the farm, and therefore might also increase neighborhood involvement in the farm's programs. As of this writing, the buildings have been finished; time will tell to what extent and in what ways the farm changes.

Where the Food Goes

The food that River Road Farm produces has multiple outlets. The majority of the produce is grown for one of River Road Farm's CSA programs. The main season CSA program, which runs from June through October, provides food for approximately 60 paying members in a given year. The farm also runs a winter CSA, which provides closer to 15 paying members with bulk food items that members can preserve or store for use later in the year – like tomatoes, green beans, onions, potatoes, and winter squash. About 4-6,000 pounds of produce is grown for a local homeless shelter and soup kitchen. Volunteers and staff also take home produce. River Road Farm volunteers track their volunteer hours and then take home food based on how many hours they've worked. The exception to this is volunteers who participate in corporate or service group work days, who Logan views as having different motivations than individual volunteers – their reward, he says, is in feeling civically-minded and participating in team-building with the people in their group. For the volunteers who do take home food, there's no specific equation to determine how much food they can take; volunteers often just pick out food they want from what was harvested that day and ask Logan how many hours that food is worth.

And yet, the farm still produces food that doesn't get consumed. While Logan will give away excess produce to volunteers, "[some volunteers] don't want to take food," he said. "They want to leave it for the poor people. That's weird to me that you would come and participate in something and not want to take home some food. Then I have to be careful not to be like ... I just say there's plenty of food, but the real story is no, there's more food than we can give out even to food agencies."

How the Volunteer Program Functions

The volunteer program at River Road Farm is relatively unstructured and flexible. Volunteers can drop in any time a farmer is there, usually between 9 am and 5 pm, Monday through Friday. The majority of volunteers seem to make an effort to work on Mondays and Thursdays, which are the two days a week focused on harvesting. If people want to come early to avoid the heat of the day, they just work it out with Logan in advance.

This high degree of flexibility seems to work well for most of the volunteers, but when Logan is talking with people who have never volunteered at the farm, he sometimes encounters confusion. "Sometimes people call and they ask, 'What day do you need me here?'" said Logan. "I'm like, 'Well, it's a farm. Every day there's lots of work to do, so I'd rather leave it flexible for when it works for you.' I need people here who are flexible and can roll with what the day has to offer."

Because volunteers are the primary source of labor at River Road Farm, they participate in just about every aspect of the farm work. "They do all the farm work that we all do. During planting season, they're planting. When it's time to harvest, they're harvesting," said Logan. The few exceptions to this include helping with irrigation, using most power tools (like the mower

and the tractor), and maintaining records, tasks and details around which Logan expressed wanting to maintain control. Volunteers also spend a fair amount of time weeding.

River Road staff mentioned that education is a priority for the Volunteer for Veggies program. Education is experiential, unstructured, and often spontaneous. New volunteers are shown how to do specific tasks by staff or more experienced volunteers.

Before volunteers leave, they mark their hours worked on a personal tracking sheet in a binder. They might also pick out some vegetables to take home, ask Logan to estimate how many hours their bounty that day is worth, and then subtract that number from their running total. If one or more of the farmers are nearby, they usually thank the volunteer who is leaving.

The Volunteers

River Road Farm attracts volunteers from across Missoula. The farm attracts approximately 150 volunteers each year. While the most valuable volunteers seem to be the ones who come consistently, and who therefore build skills and knowledge in respect to the farm and the farm's tasks, fewer than ten people volunteer regularly. The rest of the volunteers are infrequent drop-ins, or come as a part of a corporate or service group.

Logan described most of the regular volunteers as "semi-retired," which gives them the time to commit to volunteering on a consistent basis. That said, I spoke with a number of regular volunteers ranging in age from their early twenties to their late 40s. Some of these volunteers were students, and the rest ranged from unemployed to fully employed. Regular volunteers at River Road Farm seem to volunteer two or more days a week, for several hours at a time. These regular volunteers bring with them a wide range of gardening and farming experience, from no experience to being a Master Gardener to having apprenticed on a different farm. Logan said that

the number of regular, consistent volunteers has declined in recent years. Very few, if any, people who live in the surrounding River Road neighborhood volunteer.

River Road Farm & Food Democracy

In previous research on food democracy, dimensions included knowledge about the food system, sharing ideas about food and food issues, efficacy, and an orientation toward the common good. In this case study, two more distinct dimensions emerged: collective work and problem solving, and community and enduring relationships.

Knowledge about the Food System

Knowledge about the food system is, effectively, a prerequisite for active food system participation, and is therefore critical to food democracy (Hassanein 2008). In order to investigate the knowledge participants had acquired through their volunteer activities, and to gain an understanding of what type of knowledge GCH staff expected volunteers to glean, I specifically asked in interviews what volunteers learned about. While most of the conversation with interviewees occurred in response to this question, some discussion of volunteers' learning emerged during other portions of the interviews as well. Some of the GCH staff I spoke with expressed education as a primary goal for the Volunteers for Veggies program, and each volunteer talked about learning something through their experiences on the farm. The types of information learned by volunteers falls into two main categories: skills and knowledge about farming, and information about the food system more broadly.

Because volunteers participate in farm work, it makes sense that each volunteer discussed learning something about farming. Volunteers talked about two types of farming knowledge: learning practical farm skills and learning more generally about food and farming. While several

people attributed all their farming knowledge to their experience at River Road Farm, some of whom had significant gardening experience prior to volunteering, most volunteers discussed several specific farm skills that they learned. All volunteers discussed learning how to do something related to farming. Most people learned planting skills, like when to plant, how densely to plant, or how to plant in succession. Volunteers also learned skills around weeding, harvesting, cleaning and storing produce, pruning, and using farm hand tools. While the “how” in all of these skills was apparent to volunteers, the “why” was often less clear unless volunteers specifically asked questions pertaining to “why,” a pattern I also noticed during my time on the farm (see above: How the Volunteer Program Works). Four volunteers mentioned learning new and different ways of doing things that they did not necessarily like, but were grateful to know because it taught them what they didn’t want to implement in their own future farm or garden.

In addition to learning farming skills, all the volunteers also learned more generally about food and the more theoretical aspects of farming. Volunteers learned about the farm ecosystem, including about the killdeer that nest in some of the beds, farm cycles and seasons, which plants are particularly suited to a Western Montana climate, new plant varieties, pathogens, how the chickens contribute to the farm, and the osprey that nest nearby and often fly overhead. One volunteer, who came to the farm with no horticultural experience, said he even learned how certain plants grow. Some learned about theories behind using organic practices and building soil health through compost, cover crops, and allowing land to lay fallow. One volunteer also mentioned learning about running a farm, including running a CSA. I was also struck by some of the regular volunteers’ deep knowledge of River Road Farm and its inner workings. These long-term, consistent volunteers were able to anticipate the farm’s needs and ask pertinent questions about the status of certain crops.

Most volunteers shared that their River Road volunteer experiences also introduced them to eating new types of produce, and some even expressed having changed their diet to incorporate more vegetables or started cooking more because of their volunteer experiences. Several staff members anticipated this, positing that being on the farm probably makes volunteers curious about new vegetables, and that their diets likely change due to eating new foods. That said, some volunteers expressed that their diets changed more as CSA members rather than volunteers, because as volunteers they can take whatever vegetables they want, and therefore tend toward the familiar, whereas as a CSA member they were effectively forced to try new things.

The taste of fresh vegetables was a common theme among respondents who were introduced to new crops or changed their diet, particularly how the fresh taste compares to a similar vegetable or fruit purchased from a grocery store. In reference to freshly picked produce, Ned stated, “[Vegetables] taste better, they’re fresher, they’re crisper, they’re sweeter. I had some cherry tomatoes that I couldn’t stop eating... I don’t usually do that. I’m not a big vegetable eater.” Another person spoke about how her volunteer experience “broadened” her as a cook and an eater because she started incorporating new vegetables, like hot peppers, kohlrabi, mustard greens, and radicchio, into her diet.

In addition to learning about farming and new foods, more than half the volunteers also learned some about the food system more broadly. Nearly all of these volunteers gained a better understanding of where food comes from and the work that it takes to produce, and developed a stronger connection to their food. Ned and Frank both commented on the appreciation for farmers and farm work that they developed from their time on the farm.

While Logan mentioned that he likes to talk to volunteers about food politics – specifically the price of cheap food, food waste, and how to determine if one’s values are aligned with their participation in the food system – only one volunteer, Liz, said that she had learned about these aspects of food politics. She was also the sole person to express having learned about food justice. Another volunteer, Julia, mentioned having learned about food access and hunger, saying, “[Before Missoula,] I had never really been in a place that was so directly involved in helping feed its needy population. So yeah, the whole food bank, [the soup kitchen], by working here I’ve learned a lot more about those organizations – how they operate and what good they do – than I had in any other places I’ve lived. Certainly, I did not learn about that in [city name], where there was lots of room to garden, but you gardened for yourself.” For Julia, farming for others helped her think more about food access and hunger. Though specifically asked, no other volunteers had learned about food access or hunger, however, most had knowledge about and interest in the food system prior to volunteering.

Based on this information, hunger and food access, and food politics more broadly, did not seem like a focus of River Road Farm’s volunteer education. Logan mentioned that these topics come up in conversations sometimes, and two farm staff said they didn’t think volunteers learned about these issues unless somebody asks related questions. Even the Executive Director wasn’t sure if the topic ever got broached, demonstrating a low priority in the organization’s and farm’s educational goals.

While most volunteers did not become experts in farming or food systems from their participation on the farm, it was clear that their experiences at River Road Farm had taught them a lot about these topics. All volunteers were certainly more knowledgeable about food and agriculture because of their volunteer participation. Two volunteers, both of whom had

gardening experience and food system knowledge prior to volunteering, remarked about the large amount of information there is to be learned at the farm. “I think there’s a huge amount to be learned if you just keep coming out,” said Julia. “I appreciate that as I continue to volunteer, I continue to learn things,” said Elliott.

Sharing Ideas

Talking about food issues with others suggests that individuals are thinking about those food issues, and engage with the food system on a level necessary for food democracy. Volunteers and staff were specifically asked about topics of conversation on the farm, and whether they talk about food or farming. Interviewees mentioned several ways that they share ideas about the food system with one another, including talking about food, farming, and other aspects of the food system; engaging in thoughtful discussions around food issues; and peer-to-peer teaching and learning. These methods of idea sharing were corroborated in my participant observation experience on the farm.

Nearly all the volunteers shared that they talked about food, farming, or the food system more generally while they volunteer. Volunteers talk about a variety of subjects related to the food system. They talk about one another’s home gardens and the task at hand, which often involves asking questions about the crop they are working with in that moment. They also talk about the farm more generally, which seems to familiarize the volunteers with farm systems like irrigation, as well as any current challenges with weather, weeds, pathogens, or insects. Two people mentioned talking about food justice, access, and hunger issues, but stated that these weren’t regular topics of conversation. The most common topic by far was what volunteers and staff cook with the vegetables they take home from the farm. Nearly all the volunteers mentioned swapping ideas with others on the farm about preparing, cooking, preserving, and eating various

vegetables and fruits that they had helped grow. As Allison noted about the volunteers she works with, “There’s a lot of, ‘Oh, I made this great dish with this,’ or, ‘This sweet corn is so good.’ I think [conversations] mostly center around cooking, things that we cook, and canning and food preservation.” During my time on the farm, I, too, noticed that the conversation would often drift in this direction.

Only one interviewee mentioned engaging in thoughtful discussion about food issues. Logan discussed engaging volunteers in conversations about food system issues about which not everybody conversing agreed. The example he used to illustrate a contentious topic was food waste, specifically the amount of food that goes to waste by organizations that need food the most, such as food banks. “My regular [volunteers], we get in the weeds all the time,” he said. “That’s where life is. It’s in the weeds, it’s in the gray area. Figure out how to muck around in it. Don’t just stamp it black and white and move on.” This speaks very much to the ‘Sharing Ideas’ dimension of food democracy in that it addresses wrestling with real food issues, not skirting around tough concepts, and figuring things out together. Interestingly, however, no volunteers responded to the question about food system talk with this level of depth. It seems that while conversations like this may happen some of the time, they generally maintain a more casual and benign tone.

Volunteers did, however, share that talk on the farm often centers around learning from and teaching other volunteers. I noticed this peer-to-peer teaching pattern during nearly all of my volunteer days, and three volunteers mentioned taking part in peer-to-peer teaching or learning without such a question ever being asked in the interviews. More experienced volunteers teach newer volunteers how and where to weed, about different farm plants, and how to harvest and process certain crops. Volunteers also teach each other about produce that might be new to

another volunteer, and help them figure out how to cook with it. Elliott, who knows a fair amount about fermentation, remarked that the staff sometimes ask him questions about preparing food: “It’s not just me learning from them, it’s a mutual thing.”

Collective Work and Problem Solving

Not only does food democracy require participation by the individual, it also requires that individuals work together on shared goals. While no interview questions explicitly spoke to collaborative problem solving, I did ask participants about working together, types of conflict that come up at the farm, and how those conflicts are resolved. Volunteers and staff discussed many elements of collective work and problem solving, including cooperation, decision making, and the development of civic skills, as well as how collective work made farming accessible to them and a sense of ownership and responsibility of the farm, all of which I also observed in the field.

At River Road Farm, volunteers almost always work with other volunteers and/or staff on projects, though can request to work alone if they prefer, and their shared tasks involve cooperation. About this style of working together, Julia said, “I like the idea of cooperation, that you are part of a bigger group of people who are all helping, pulling together to make this work, you know? And it isn’t just on any one person’s shoulders. I like that.” While I observed two volunteers acting somewhat competitively (one commented on my slow beet harvesting and another mentioned how she’s always slower than another volunteer), most volunteers demonstrated only a collaborative perspective in regard to shared farm tasks. Usually, everyone, including staff, is working on the same task, so there isn’t “a sense that somebody is getting off easy,” as Ned said, but instead that everyone is contributing equitably.

The cooperative way in which people contribute to the farm intrigued me. Volunteers and staff seemed to work very fluidly together on most tasks, almost like dancing. Liz described the organic nature of people's collective work that I had observed in the field when she stated, "Everyone gets into a nice groove of working together." I noticed people asking for help when they needed it, and providing help even when they weren't specifically asked. For instance, during harvest, when one volunteer would take harvested produce to the cart (which is used to move produce from the field to the wash station) they would take the produce that everyone had harvested, rather than just taking what they had personally harvested. Similarly, if one person had reached their quota of 30 beets, instead of taking a break or heading back to the wash station to clean what they alone had picked, they would help the other volunteers working on that task to fill their quotas, allowing everyone to shift tasks at the same time.

Additionally, the collective nature of the work seems to facilitate conversation and social interaction. Volunteers often work across from one another for hours at a time, and staff tend to initiate conversations if volunteers don't do so on their own. During my time at the farm, I noticed that volunteers felt comfortable pausing work to chat, and there was often a hum of conversation around groups of people harvesting or weeding. Kyle mentioned that working with other people made the time pass more quickly, and made the work seem easier.

While conflict seems to be rare at the farm, some volunteers and staff mentioned that occasional, usually minor, issues do arise. Several volunteers mentioned that they sometimes have trouble understanding exactly what Logan wants them to do, for example, and therefore make mistakes performing a task or picking the correct number of whatever they were responsible for harvesting that day. Logan's flexibility and the flexible farm culture he has created, though, allow these problems to stay small and therefore be easily solved by the parties

involved. Communication among volunteers in even more minor conflicts seemed generally civil, too. Space is tight around the wash station, for instance, and I witnessed multiple occasions when one volunteer would politely ask another to move their project slightly so that everyone could sit in the shade to wash produce.

Decision making at River Road Farm happens in several ways. The majority of decision making occurs at the staff level, with the Farm Manager, Logan, making most farm decisions and then delegating to other staff and volunteers, though both the assistant and apprentice also guide volunteers in their tasks. When asking volunteers to take on certain tasks, staff will often provide two or three options to the volunteers, giving them a small role in that component of the decision-making process. The primary reasons behind the staff leading the decision making are that the staff are the people who are on the farm every day and that they are paid to make decisions about the farm. As Jen, a regular volunteer, said, “You wouldn’t really want to go there and decide to do what you wanted to do. You really do want some guidance, no matter who are, and what you think you know. You don’t know, unless you’re there every day, what’s going on. There’s just a lot of questions having to do with timing, and what needs to be done when.” Several volunteers did mention that directions and feedback are not always given clearly, and one volunteer mentioned the issue as a specific area for improvement for the volunteer program. He wanted more opportunities to receive feedback and wanted clearer delegation of tasks from the staff.

Some of the more experienced volunteers do, however, contribute ideas about what might need to be done on the farm on a certain day, or what task they would like to participate in. Two volunteers specifically said that they will occasionally suggest tasks, like pointing out what needs to get weeded. Marcus, a volunteer of almost 10 years, noted that if it seems like people are just

standing around, he will “throw out ideas of what [he’d] like to do.” He also said, though, that the longer he volunteers, the less he tries to bring up ways of doing things differently on the farm because he’s learned that Logan has ways he likes tasks done, and usually has reasons for those preferences. Abby pointed out that all volunteers can effectively determine what task they help with based on the day of the week they volunteer, for instance, volunteers know that if they come on a Monday or Thursday from June through October, they will help with harvesting; if they come any other day, they’ll likely be helping weed.

While this did not come up in interviews, I noticed decision making among volunteers during shared tasks. When tasks are assigned to volunteers, it is usually just a task and a number, for example, “harvest 200 beets,” or, “weed these three rows of spinach.” It is up to the volunteers to determine who is going to start where in the row, what each person is responsible for, and how to determine when the task is complete. There are many small details to navigate and communicate about, and it seemed like the task of coordinating these details fell to a different person in each situation; volunteers appeared to share this element of leadership.

Four volunteers expressed developing one component of a civic skillset: people and communication skills. Marcus shared that by volunteering on the farm he has learned how to better ask for feedback. Julia said that her time on the farm has helped her grow more patient, and learn how to get along better with a variety of people. “You run into so many different kinds of people, and there are definitely personalities that challenge you,” Liz added. “There’ll be people who you’ll see and you’re like, ‘Oh, God. I hope I don’t have to weed the carrots with so-and-so.’ But it’s good because you learn to just deal the way you would in a community.”

Nearly all the volunteers talked in some way about how the collective nature of the Volunteer for Veggies program is, in part, what made working on the farm accessible to them.

First, because the farm relies on collective, volunteer labor, there is a lot of room in which people can make mistakes without huge consequences. Julia talked about this at length:

Most farmers would go crazy with the problems that occur because of the different kinds of help [Logan] gets... He once had a group of people who he told to go out and weed the zucchini and they pulled all the zucchini plants up. Things like that happen, and if he was doing it on his own he would never do that, but he can't do it all on his own, and he's very practical, and he's very flexible, and he just rolls with the punches... I was weeding in a bed last week and there were two women who were new here, and they were walking in the bed, and they were stepping on the baby carrots in the bed next to it. He comes over and he says, 'You know,' he just says it in a lovely way, doesn't make them feel guilty or stupid or anything, 'Watch out for these seedling carrots, they're right behind you, and we usually don't ... Well, we never walk in the beds, we try to keep them ...' So, he didn't lay into them as if they had committed a mortal sin, you know?

When the volunteers make mistakes, though, the mistakes still need to be corrected; it just falls to the staff to fix the problem. While this has the potential to result in resentment among the farmers, they seem to handle it well. Allison spoke about volunteers' mistakes sometimes being the result of unclear directions, and said when that happens the staff's attitude is, "It's on us. We didn't tell them how to do that."

Second, the farm allows for people of all experience and most ability levels to participate, and helps volunteers build skills. Allison said they usually ease new volunteers into tasks by pairing them with staff or experienced volunteers, so they can work side by side with people until they get the hang of it. If that is not an option, the staff will assign the new volunteer with

something involving less skill, like weeding. Roger told me that when he started volunteering, he had just gotten a hip replacement and could not use shovels very well, so the staff set him up to be able to dig potatoes by hand.

Staff and volunteers both talked about how, over time, volunteers will start working on tasks that require more skill and knowledge. Edey discussed this with me, saying, “I think Marcus and Julia and Elliott, some of the people who have been around for a long time, are able to do pretty much everything. They don’t drive the tractor or anything, but Logan totally trusts them to plant and seed and pretty much do whatever we’re doing.” This trust seems to be extended to volunteers generally, though. While Logan and the other staff may not give a skilled task to a novice gardener, I observed them leaving small groups of volunteers to work on a task alone, and, on one particular occasion, leave the farm to run errands, leaving a new volunteer who was there to fulfill community service hours to weed on her own. Volunteers, while directed by Logan and the other staff, seemed to have a lot of autonomy.

Third, because of the collective nature of the farm, participating in the farm work does not require volunteers to contribute many resources. Volunteers don’t need experience, skills, or land, and don’t have to pay for inputs. As Frank put it, “This offers me everything I need... I don’t have to buy the seeds. I don’t have to buy the starts. I don’t have to buy anything. I just come here, I volunteer, and Logan is gracious enough to feed me and my family.” They don’t even need very much time to help out, and or have to make any long-term commitments. “You can go once or you can go once a week,” said Abby. “It just depends on you. You can work it around your schedule.” And volunteers are not responsible for the success of the crops, or, as Liz put it, “The beautiful thing about this is that you can contribute, but if you have to go, it’s not as if [all the plants are] going to die.” Because everything a volunteer needs to participate exists at

the farm, Jen mentioned that contributing as a volunteer is more manageable for her as a single person than having her own garden plot.

While volunteers did not contribute to the making of any big decisions at the farm, and none of them are paid for their work (other than in vegetables), about half of them expressed having a sense of ownership and responsibility about the farm. Only one person referred to the farm as “Logan’s garden,” but even that person brought his family to the farm to show it off and help them pick kale and other pretty items for his relative’s wedding. Marcus mentioned that he feels badly leaving the farm when there is still work to be done, using the phrase “abandoning them.” “Every year the garden draws me back,” Natalie told me, reflecting Marcus’s sentiment in a slightly different way. “I can’t wait to see it start growing.” Despite volunteers talking in interviews about the farm requiring less of a commitment than a personal garden, most volunteers seemed highly committed to the farm. While there’s no immediate obligation to the farm, as there is in a personal garden situation, there is still a sense of commitment and responsibility over the long-term.

Decision making at the farm is certainly hierarchical, but volunteers still have regular opportunities to make decisions about multiple aspects of farming and how they participate on the farm. Staff and volunteers seem to respect one another’s decisions for the most part, too, and everyone is treated equally. One volunteer even referred to the farm as “egalitarian,” which he explained by saying, “you get veggies in exchange for work, no matter who you are,” whether you are a seasoned and adept volunteer or somebody who accidentally pulled out all the zucchini plants while weeding.

Community Good Orientation

An orientation toward the community good is critical in a democracy, as people have to be able to see their own needs in relation to others' needs, and the same goes for food democracy (Hassanein 2008). I did not ask any direct questions about the extent to which people see themselves as having a community good orientation, though I did ask what participants perceived as the impact(s) of the volunteer program, and River Road Farm more broadly, as well as how they felt about contributing to those impacts. Themes emerged around community good orientation and appreciation for the commons, as well as perceptions about the farm's impacts on its neighborhood, the larger Missoula community, and the larger food system.

Volunteers and staff, alike, conveyed a general orientation toward the community good, which was not surprising considering they are people volunteering their time or working for a nonprofit organization. Despite this inclination toward the community good, however, most interviewees were motivated to volunteer primarily as a means to improve their own situation, and secondarily as a way to support the community. While helping the community may not have been a priority for them, many of these volunteers still expressed a sense of satisfaction from volunteering on the farm, noting that helping the community, organization, and farm staff felt good. As Jen said, "I get so much personal benefit out of being a volunteer that I'm glad if it goes beyond that. If I'm helping out, great. I never do it because I think I'm helping somebody else, but I think we all benefit." For some volunteers, though, a large motivation for volunteering at the farm was the simple fact that they would be volunteering and helping something larger than themselves. Natalie and Frank, for instance, talked about how satisfying it is for them to volunteer and see volunteering as a worthwhile activity; Natalie in particular expressed a

commitment to volunteering in general: “[Volunteering is an] important thing to do if you have the time. I have more time than I have money.”

Volunteers and staff also exhibited generosity in interviews and during my participant observation. During the early summer when the peas were ripening faster than the farmers and volunteers could pick them, Liz noticed Logan’s stress about the peas and offered to come an additional day over the weekend just to help harvest. Logan seems to help create a culture of generosity on the farm, too. He encourages all volunteers to take food, gives volunteers a large quantity of produce for each hour they work, will often give away food to volunteers on top of their work-traded produce, and sometimes lets non-volunteers take home produce for free. Several volunteers described Logan as generous; Roger even shared that he learned about generosity from Logan. Julia mentioned that being able to “take as much food” as she wants, which allows her to share that food with others who need it. Describing this further, she said, “[it] enables me to be a little nicer than I would otherwise be.”

In addition to orientation toward community good, volunteers also demonstrated an orientation toward the more physical version of community good, the commons. Simply by working together on a shared project, in a shared space – a project that results in a shared product being shared with the public – demonstrates some level of appreciation for or value of the commons. Two volunteers also discussed food as part of the commons, describing it as something that should be free and available for all people.

Participants were asked about what they perceived to be the impacts of the farm, at three scales: the immediate neighborhood, the larger Missoula community, and the broader food system. Most interviewees thought – or at least hoped, as numerous participants were reluctant to make assumptions about neighborhood impacts – River Road Farm benefitted the neighborhood.

While many people thought the number of neighbors who interact with the farm was low, nearly half of those interviewed talked about the benefit of the farm as open space, referring to the farm as providing a beautiful green space in an almost park-less neighborhood, and a place for the public to come and enjoy. Two people also mentioned access to fresh food as a possible benefit.

Perceived impacts on the larger Missoula community were similar, but with some additions. Again, preservation of open space was noted as a primary impact in a city currently experiencing rapid development and subsequent decrease in green space, as was access to food, both for people who need it and for people who can pay for it. Another common perceived impact was the possibility for connection – to food and where it comes from, to the farm and Missoula, and to other people – for anyone interested, without needing to sign up or spend months on a waitlist. Finally, people saw the farm as educational in Missoula, helping raise awareness of food issues while demonstrating that farming or gardening in the city is something anyone can do.

If you read Garden City Harvest's marketing materials, the story you'll see is one of helping community members in need. While this is certainly true to a large extent, at River Road the majority of food produced is taken home by paying customers, who have the privilege to prioritize spending their money on a CSA membership. Some of the people I interviewed expressed discomfort in these contradictory discourses. "People think they're growing food just for poor people," said Logan, "but that's not where the majority of the food actually goes."

Interviewees approached the question about the farm's impact on the greater food system with some variation. Some people approached the question with a market-based mentality. These staff and volunteers talked about the farm acting as an education center, which might raise awareness and thus help shift demands to shift supply, or at least provide people with

information so they can make informed decisions in how they spend their money on food. While markets are certainly one means of interacting with the food system, it was surprising to me that some volunteers only brought up consumer-based ways of interacting with the food system, despite their own much deeper form of participation.

Another approach to the question of food system impact was a more deep-rooted approach to change (though some of the people who brought up market-focused ideas also brought up ideas in this category). All of these people thought River Road Farm's contribution to the larger food system was probably small, though some interviewees talked about its transformative potential. Four people saw the farm as helping River Road Farm volunteers and CSA members to opt out of the dominant food system. Logan views the farm as a 'pocket of resistance.' Similarly, the majority of interviewees talked about River Road Farm as perhaps having very little impact on its own, but thought that if more farms like it existed, then the collective impact of that network of farms might be even greater. Julia called the farm "a cog in the wheel," and Natalie spoke about the faith that this type of work requires: "I think our own little farms, in our own little way, make an impact. It's hard to know how much. You just keep doing it."

Community and Enduring Relationships

Building community emerged as a primary theme in this research. While not a discrete dimension in Hassanein's work, the theme exists as a component of the 'Community Good Orientation' dimension; we also see community and enduring relationships in literature on democracy and democratization of the food system (Kemmis 1990; Boyte 1997; Moore 2001; Hassanein 2008; McIvor and Hale 2015; Slotnick 2016). Specific questions about community were not part of the interview guide; most conversation around community came up following

questions regarding volunteers' motivations and how their farm experience had impacted them. Each of the staff mentioned community as a goal and intention of the Volunteers for Veggies program, and all the long-term volunteers described some aspect of community building as one of their top motivations for volunteering. Sense of community, sense of place, inclusion, and neighborhood relations all emerged as categories within the broader community building theme.

All interviewees mentioned the positive social elements of the farm, and the sense of community is created there. Much of the community feel is intentional; all farm staff mentioned creating a welcoming, safe atmosphere as a priority. Logan talked about the specific behaviors he employs and the friendly, laid-back culture he tries to cultivate at the farm; he tries to make everybody feel included, and greets people warmly regardless of his mood. These efforts seem to be effective; all the volunteers mentioned that the farm is a great place to build connections, meet new people, and socialize. Several people specifically mentioned liking the other volunteers and staff, and at least three self-described 'not very social' people said the farm is a great place for them to engage with other people.

All the volunteers, including those who do not think of themselves as social, mentioned sharing personal stories with other volunteers and farm staff. These more personal conversation topics range from safe ones like vacations, personal interests, and people's cats, to what Jen described as "going deep," like relationship woes, family struggles, and personal traumas. Liz shared a particularly moving story about an experience she was able to share because of her involvement with the farm:

This summer 10 years ago, my boyfriend was murdered in [my hometown], and I was with him and everything, so that was this gigantic boulder that I dragged around forever. By the time I came to Missoula, it was not quite two years after.

It's just something I would not talk to anybody about, but Logan, he had so many different traumas and things growing up, and he talked very openly about things. There was a kid... he was having some bad issues with trauma. That was the first time that I ever talked to anybody about it outside of my family and people who already knew. Honestly, it didn't transform me in the way that I started talking about it with everyone, but just to even have it a little bit out in the world with people that I worked with regularly, it was a big deal.

Logan referenced this story in his interview, too. When the “kid” mentioned above told Liz and Logan his story about having witnessed a friend shoot himself, it inspired Liz to tell hers. “The three of us sat here and cried for an hour. I told them some of my personal stuff. It just came out of nowhere,” said Logan.

“Going deep” isn’t limited to frequent volunteers. Edye mentioned talking with a new volunteer about their health troubles, and Logan and Allison shared a story about a community service volunteer who showed up at the farm and announced she had just found out she was pregnant. Logan described the farm as having an ‘extended family’ feeling that allows people, even new volunteers, to share details about their lives that they might not usually share. People who farm at River Road learn a lot about one another, and get to know one another very well.

Not surprisingly, the majority of volunteers also expressed having developed friendships on the farm and a sense of being part of the River Road Farm community. Many described friendships with other volunteers, as well as staff, and about half the volunteers expressed respect for Logan, in particular. While most of these friendships seem like “on-farm friendships,” as one interviewee put it, some people said they had developed friendships that involve spending time together off farm. Regardless of whether or not participants spend time together off farm,

though, more than half the volunteers discussed their sense of connection going beyond friendships, to a feeling of belonging to a community. Two volunteers expressed frustration or annoyance with some other volunteers, but both recognized personality clashes as inevitable, and even important, components of community.

In addition to a sense of community, more than half of the volunteers also expressed feeling a sense of place and a connection with the farm itself. Natalie shared a story about feeling compelled to go straight to the farm after working all day in her office, which is in a basement. “Logan was like, ‘What are you doing here?’ And I was like, ‘Can I just go dead head the flowers? I need some sunshine,’” she said. “I don't know. It just feels good to be there... Just being outside. Being in the sunshine, being in the flowers, the green, everything.” Julia echoed this sentiment: “I love the open space here. It’s a piece of the country in the middle of the city... I love the vast expanses of squash and onions. I just love being part of that, and looking at it, and looking at the sun come through all that green.” Liz said the farm “feels like home.”

Some interviewees said being outside, farming, seemed to facilitate community building. Logan referenced the peripatetic school of philosophy, and sees a correlation between a space and how one feels in that space. For instance, he views being outdoors as mind-expanding because you are literally in an expansive place with no walls or ceiling. Natalie noticed this with her interactions with teenagers from an area youth home who volunteer at the farm. “A lot of those kids were hard to get to know,” she said. “But if you’ve got your hands in the same plot, planting carrots, you get to chat with them a little bit. They loosen up a little bit, where I think in a regular school situation or something, they probably wouldn’t.”

Sense of community and sense of place both translated into a space for healing for four of the volunteers with whom I spoke. While this may not directly contribute to food democracy,

healing seemed like an important part of community building, which is essential to an effective democracy. Three staff members also expressed that they see mental and emotional benefits of the farm. “To have an ear and sit across from someone and weed a bed... the farm is very therapeutic for some people,” said Allison, who also mentioned that a number of volunteers come to the farm specifically when they’re having a bad day. Liz’s story above exemplifies this, as do Jen’s and Roger’s below.

Jen: “The tough year was the summer that I didn't know why I was so tired, and it was because I had cancer, but didn't know it yet. But, being able to come there, and show up, and just do what I could do... I could even cry, and nobody would know it... I’m really glad to have had that time, and that space, and that place, and that kind of work to go to, leading up to and coming out of my health issues. It’s part of my life.”

Roger: “I kind of have been struggling with the place where I'm at emotionally. I get suicidal, I've tried it twice. Didn't like it. I just get depressed. And then I go work in the garden, and everything's alright. It's not so dismal. I'm not alone anymore. So, I would say I need to be in a community setting. If I isolate, then I do all these rotten things. When I'm in a community, I'm okay.”

Going hand in hand with creating a welcoming space that supports community building is creating an inclusive space – something River Road Farm tries hard to do. The farm’s volunteers are diverse, though not in the ethnic or racial way we often use the term. The most prominent form of diversity on the farm is age; the volunteers I worked with range from 14 to mid-60s. Five volunteers noted the age difference, and two discussed that the farm provides an opportunity to

form intergenerational relationships in a society that does not otherwise support them. People's family backgrounds and financial privilege vary, too. For instance, some of the younger volunteers reside in area youth homes, prior to which they may have been homeless or in foster care. College students, retirees, veterans, people with disabilities, and people with different political persuasions all come to volunteer at the farm. The volunteers I spoke with appreciated the opportunity to engage with people who they might not have otherwise encountered in Missoula. Abby views the farm as a "great equalizer": "You're in the fields weeding next to someone else, having a personal conversation with them and getting to know each other and it doesn't matter what you do [for a living] – you're still both on your knees pulling weeds in the farm fields." For four volunteers, interacting with new people from different backgrounds helped them build empathy.

Despite attempting to create an open, welcoming, and inclusive environment, though, River Road Farm's Volunteer for Veggies program – and the farm in general – does not seem to engage the farm's neighbors. While several people who live in the River Road neighborhood rent community garden plots or have a CSA subscription, they are a very small minority. Garden City Harvest's current process of establishing a new farm or community garden begins with the community – the organization has learned from its past mistakes of trying to build a farm or garden without community support or interest. Regardless of what the initial support and interest was, though, current involvement is low, which could be the result of a number of things. Numerous volunteers and staff perceived the farm to still be something of a secret, despite its history. Several people spoke about a lack of outreach to neighborhood residents regarding the farm and its programs. When GCH decided to build new facilities at River Road, I helped them run a focus group to get input from members from some residents of the neighborhood. The

group was by no means representative of the neighborhood as a whole, but did provide an important and otherwise unheard perspective. While they did not specifically discuss the volunteer program, residents did mention barriers to participation in the farm's programs more broadly, like perceptions of the farm as a private space and not knowing what was available to them or ways to participate. All of the people I spoke with that spring appreciated the farm's presence in the neighborhood, though. Some had no interest in farm-specific programming, but were interested in utilizing the farm as a community space for potlucks and other community events. Food democracy requires that all people have the opportunity to meaningfully participate in the food system, and right now River Road Farm does not effectively provide that for the residents of the surrounding neighborhood.

Community, perhaps the operative word in the term "community agriculture," seems to be a critical component of the Volunteer for Veggies experience, and a previously under-represented dimension of food democracy. Logan told me that he hopes volunteers take away from their experience "that feeling of being connected, and that they seek that out more in their life." The volunteers I spoke to certainly feel connected, to one another and to the land. Whether or not they seek that out in other parts of their life, though, was unclear for most of them.

Efficacy

To affect change in the food system, citizens must possess a sense of efficacy (Hassanein 2008; Carolan 2016). Efficacy involves volunteers developing the capacity to determine and produce desired results in the food system, and moving from passive consumers to food system actors (Hassanein 2008). Volunteers all demonstrated some level of efficacy simply through their committed participation in a project that seeks to incrementally change aspects of the food system; some also discussed participation in other food system projects. Additionally, while no

questions were asked specifically about people's sense of efficacy in relation to the food system, nearly all the volunteers brought up topics related to efficacy in terms of determining their relationships to food, including self-sufficiency, a transition from food consumer to consumer-producer, and the personal impacts of receiving fresh food in exchange for work. Volunteers also brought up a variety of personal benefits that may influence their sense of efficacy within the food system.

All the volunteers at River Road Farm participate in public work that addresses some food problems in their community. Though much of the farm's produce is purchased by CSA members who have the necessary means to afford the farm's food, a significant amount of produce also goes to the local soup kitchen where it feeds people who don't have means.

In addition to exhibiting efficacy, more than half of the volunteers expressed feeling a sense of efficacy. Most of these volunteers talked about a feeling of "contributing", which made them feel satisfied and proud. Frank said that they feel "a sense of knowing that I'm doing something worthwhile with my time." Two volunteers extended their sense of efficacy beyond the immediate Missoula community. Marcs felt that his work at River Road allowed him to opt out of the dominant food system, and Julia spoke about the environmental impacts of her participation in the farm and consumption of food from the farm, namely the reduction of fossil fuel use. Additionally, we see a sense, or at least a recognition, of efficacy in the above 'Community Good Orientation' section, in which volunteers described River Road's impacts at different scales.

About half of the volunteers shared that their work on the farm has influenced their involvement in other food system engagement, such as volunteering at other community farms, starting a coffee grounds compost initiative, gleaning neighborhood fruits, talking about the farm

and broader food system with others, and a general inclination toward volunteering. One volunteer also shifted her career direction due to her experience at the farm. “It just changed the whole direction of my life,” said Liz, “professionally, I should say, because here I was, someone who never even... I killed houseplants. I let raspberries die. All you have to do is water them! That’s the kind of person I was. I went from that to being the kind of person whose job is on a farm.”

All the volunteers at River Road also participate in determining their relationship with food. For three volunteers, part of their motivation for volunteering was increasing a sense of self-sufficiency. Three volunteers and one staff member also shared a sense of accomplishment in growing the food that they eat, acknowledging a shift from food consumer to consumer-producer. Comparing his experience with common expression in alternative food movements, “Know your farmer,” Kyle said, “You don’t just get to know the farmer. You are the farmer.” Additionally, all the volunteers I spoke with feed themselves with food from the farm, which makes up the majority of the vegetables they eat during the summer. Some volunteers get most of their winter produce from the farm, too, in the form of storage crops and vegetables that are suited for preservation and fermentation. In talking about the benefit of taking home food from the farm, Natalie said, “It’s huge for me. I’m in my glory when I have my veggies from the farm... When I got involved, it was like, what a bonus! Usually when you work a volunteer job – you don’t get to take home the puppies from the Humane Society.” Five of the volunteers mentioned that their work on the farm, and the food they receive in exchange for that work, allows them to eat more and higher quality produce than they would be able to afford otherwise. Two of these people even consider the farm a second part-time job. Jen expressed this value; she

said that she trusts the farm as a source of food if she ever needed it, even if she hadn't worked the hours yet. "I don't worry about food shortage," she said.

In addition to a self-described sense of efficacy and the clear impacts of their work, volunteers also shared ways in which their participation on the farm impacts them personally that might influence a sense of efficacy. These impacts fall into two primary categories: a sense of satisfaction in the work, as well as personal growth in the form of trust and self confidence. All the volunteers expressed enjoying the farm work they participate in at River Road. They see their work as meaningful, fulfilling, and physically beneficial. Marcus described the satisfaction that comes from farming's tangible outcomes: "It feels good growing food. It's something you can win at, I guess. I mean, there's a lot of things in life which don't—well, like the current politics. Could you imagine winning at that? But I can win at that carrot or that tomato. You know. That kind of stuff where you can see success." Jen described a sentiment held by several volunteers: she never regrets going to the farm. "There are times when I get up in the morning and I don't want to go because I'm very tired," she said, "but the minute I get there I'm just so happy."

During my time on the farm, I was regularly surprised by the amount of trust given to me by the farm staff, and saw this trust extended to other volunteers, too, both experienced and novice. This trust took the form of asking volunteers to report on the state of certain crops, allowing a regular volunteer to use a wheel hoe (which can quickly damage a bed and the crops in it, if the wielder isn't careful), and scheduling a new volunteer to come alone over the weekend to weed so she could fulfill her community service hours. The volunteers with whom I spoke also felt trusted by farm staff. Kyle felt like he was able to be more independent on the farm because of the level of trust he had built with farm staff. Liz went into more depth on the topic of trust: "I feel like I had a really loving family, but there was never this, 'Do it. You can

do that. Do it yourself.’ It was always more like, ‘Let me do that for you.’ Logan, he was the one that was like, ‘Of course you can do that job.’ It was unthinkable to him that I was even sitting there thinking that I couldn’t do it. He would just give me jobs and let me go for it. So I got that sense of ‘I’m trusted to do this thing because this person thinks I can do it.’”

Liz also described feeling trusted as directly increasing her self-confidence, citing that seeing people believe in her allowed her to believe more in herself, and eventually developing a sense of self-worth. Roger echoed the sentiment of building confidence at the farm; he said working on the farm helped him “restore confidence” after years of struggling with bipolar disorder and numerous attempts at drug rehabilitation. He said, “I have spent more of my birthdays locked up than you would believe. In fact, 23 years out of the last 25 I’ve been institutionalized and locked up by November 13. So I know I have to do things to get positive.” Participating in farming at River Road is one of the things he mentioned that helps him accomplish this. “With a new hip, you kinda feel a little bit disabled,” he said. “It’s hard to get a job. I’m old. 60 years old and I’ve got this new hip, I don’t have a driver’s license, I don’t have a car. I can go to River Road and I can work four hours and get enough food for the damn week and know it’s the best food on the planet.”

Key Points

Volunteers at River Road Farm develop many qualities that are critical in food democracy. They build skills in food production, they talk about food and the food system with one another, they work collectively on farm projects and occasionally participate in collective decision making, most of them already have an orientation toward community good, they build a sense of community and belonging, and they impact the local community while developing a

sense of efficacy. River Road Farm has room to improve its contribution to food democracy, however, particularly in terms of increasing knowledge around why certain farming activities take place and creating a more inclusive community that better involves the farm's neighbors. These shortcomings should not detract from the ways in which River Road Farm positively impacts its volunteers and the Missoula community, but may serve as a guide for continual program improvement.

CHAPTER FOUR: ALEMANY FARM CASE STUDY

I arrived at Alemany Farm just before noon on a sunny day in mid-July, after missing the turnoff to the farm and taking an accidental detour into an adjacent neighborhood. While I knew Alemany Farm was next to a housing project, the neighborhood I had gotten lost in was certainly not the projects; it was a very clean and organized neighborhood with colorful stucco houses that all looked about the same, traffic circles at most of the intersections, and curving streets. (I later found out that these houses are worth about \$1.3 million.)

After some intuitive turns through the neighborhood, I ended up at a back entrance to St. Mary's park, the home of Alemany Farm, and turned off my car. I followed a shady pathway downhill on foot, with trees and vines and shrubs mingling overhead like I was in a jungle. I wound my way past a playground and a dog park before finding my way into the farm.

When I stepped off of the plant-covered path and onto the farm, I was met with a multitude of sounds: a constant roar of cars zooming by on the freeway, sporadic thundering of airplanes overhead, a symphony of birds chirping, a whoosh of wind through the eucalyptuses, and the noise of a tiny creek trickling through soil into a pond. I shielded my eyes from the sun and found the air to be hotter than I had expected for a San Francisco summer. I looked out over the 3.5 acres onto something more wild than I had anticipated: in addition to the tidy rows of vegetable crops, trees and shrubs grew into a multi-layered canopy and a creek slid into a pond near the center of the site, creating a habitat for numerous wildlife species.

Once I had digested the sights and sounds of the site, I noticed a man taking shovels out of an old shipping container and placing them in a wheelbarrow. He wore jeans and hiking boots, a brown t-shirt that said "Friends of Alemany Farm," and a green John Deere baseball cap,

and his large, dark beard was streaked with white. A sign on the table next to him said something to the effect of, “Welcome to Alemany Farm. Grab gloves, sign in, and come find us in the garden.”

I walked over and said hello, and we introduced ourselves. “I’m just getting ready,” he said. “Work day managers usually get here about 30 minutes early to set up.” He told me that he was almost done, and then grabbed another couple of shovels, took hold of the wheelbarrow full of tools, and we set off on the tour of the farm.

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the results of the Alemany Farm case study. The first section of the chapter reviews the organizational structure, function, and governance of Alemany Farm, its volunteer program, and its parent organization. As with the River Road Farm case study, this context is necessary because it provides useful information regarding how the farm and its volunteer program work and the farm’s context likely influences its volunteers’ experiences. The second section of the chapter explores the extent to which Alemany’s volunteer program exemplifies and informs food democracy.

Alemany Farm: Context

History

Alemany Farm used to be a dump. For years, people from the neighborhood and around the city took their trash to the neglected, city-owned site and left it there to pile up and slowly decompose. In the ‘90s it had lived a short life as a farm run by the San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners (SLUG), but the organization dissolved after a few years and the site returned

to a dumping ground. In the early 2000s, several 20-somethings who lived nearby began removing trash and returning the site to its former farming use.

These first Alemany Farmers were guerilla gardeners. Without permission from the City and its Recreation and Parks Department (RPD), the owners of the site, the small group removed debris and uncovered fruit trees and former garden beds. They weeded and scrounged together money to buy seed. And, during the early days of their work, they received notice after notice to vacate the property. But the group worked on, undeterred, to form what they called Alemany Farm (Alemany).

Over time, the farm became more established, the volunteer group grew, and the volunteers raised enough money to buy seeds, equipment, and materials for structures. The volunteers created the organization Friends of Alemany Farm (FoAF) to support the farm long-term, and became fiscally sponsored by a local nonprofit organization. The City eventually offered a lease to the farmers, and now FoAF legally occupies the space.

When I visited, about 14 years after its official establishment, Alemany appeared to be a thriving mix of horticultural production and native landscape, and is now the largest urban farm in San Francisco. It is nested between a neighborhood of million-dollar homes, a public housing project, and the freeway, in the rapidly growing city of San Francisco, California, where the housing market is forcing even tech workers to leave. The farm's 3.5 acres hold 1.5 acres of vegetable production, where volunteers produced over 20,000 pounds of food last year. Two orchards, a spring that runs into a lush pond, winding pathways, raised beds, a greenhouse, and an outdoor kitchen fill the rest of the farm's acreage, with two multi-bay composting systems at its center. Volunteers refer to the site as an "organic farm ecosystem;" while the farm is not

certified organic, the entire farm is approached with organic methods, and often a permaculture philosophy.

With its hills, fog, ocean breezes, and consistent temperatures, San Francisco is a city of microclimates, and Alemany's is particularly conducive to growing food. Situated in a bowl, the farm has a south-facing hill, low-lying flatlands, and plenty of water. Its particular orientation allows farmers a year-round farming season, during which they grow everything from lettuce to tomatoes, ground cherries to broccoli, and loquats to apples.

Seven different groups operate at the farm, though the boundaries between some of the groups are fairly fluid. FoAF seems to be the largest entity; they are the people who farm vegetables, tend to the orchards, weed most pathways, and manage the compost system. This was the primary group I worked with and interviewed for this research. But the farm also hosts beekeepers, native gardeners, herb gardeners, and vinyardists; there seems to be significant crossover between FoAF, the herb gardeners, and the native gardeners. RPD's involvement in the farm has grown in recent years. Now RPD holds summer camps on site and has an employee who dedicates some of their time to the farm.

With all these different volunteer groups, land use has the potential to be contentious. Despite this potential, based on my conversations with volunteers of FoAF, the natives garden, and the herb garden, not many conflicts have occurred among the groups. In an effort to resolve some conflicts and avoid future ones, however, the groups worked with the RPD to form a collaborative group, comprised of representatives of each of the main farm groups, RPD, and the local community.

Organizational Structure and Governance

FoAF is fiscally sponsored by a nonprofit organization in San Francisco, and its mission is as follows: “Friends of Alemany Farm grows food security and educates local residents about how they can become their own food producers. We strive to increase ecological knowledge and habitat value, and to sow the seeds for economic and environmental justice.” The group works toward this mission through volunteer work days and educational programs. Their goals include environmental education about food systems and ecosystems through local food production, boosting food security, developing leaders through collective decision making, and promoting ecological economic development by fostering job skills through urban agriculture.

FoAF is a volunteer collective, with two levels of leadership. The FoAF co-managers, or “core group” as some volunteers refer to it, consists of approximately nine members who meet on a monthly basis to discuss anything that needs to happen on the farm and make decisions about the farm through modified consensus.² The co-managers also do farm work throughout the week, coordinate and run the twice weekly farm work days, and perform all administrative tasks. The next tier of leadership is the auxiliary co-manager group. Members of this group help out with everything that the co-managers do, including co-leading work days. They do not, however, attend the monthly meetings or help make big decisions about the farm.

Hundreds of additional volunteers also participate at Alemany. These volunteers, who don’t hold any decision making power other than choosing what they would like to do during their work day, are the work horses of the farm. In work days facilitated by co-managers and auxiliary co-managers, volunteers plant, weed, harvest, work in the green house, and do

² In the past, the group made decisions based on 100% consensus, but after having a group member who the rest of the group felt blocked almost all decisions, they transitioned to a modified consensus structure.

everything else that needs to get done on the farm. Some volunteers come once; others come every week for years.

In the spring of 2017, FoAF hired a paid farm manager for the first time in many years. This sole staff member works alongside the other managers to run the farm and its work days. She will also be in charge of program development, to help FoAF more effectively work toward its goals.

Being an almost-entirely volunteer-run operation, Alemany Farm has limited expenses. Their majority of their funding comes from corporate and individual donors. This last year, though, they ramped up their grant writing to build the funds to hire a farm manager. Over the years, FoAF has built an outdoor kitchen, raised beds, a greenhouse, among other structures. They also have acquired tools, which they keep in an old shipping container.

Land Ownership

While volunteer groups manage most of the projects at Alemany, the land underneath the farm is owned by the City. The relationship between FoAF and the city has ebbed and flowed over the years since the first negative interactions at the farm's beginnings. For years after the land-use contract was signed, RPD managed the farm with "benign neglect" as one volunteer described. More recently, RPD has been getting more involved, with summer camps and a staff member whose partial role is to "manage" the farm, though the volunteers I spoke with view the RPD staff member's role as less managerial and more as coordinator of some group work days.

The land ownership issue is a concern for some volunteers. Some worry that not owning the land themselves reduces the sustainability of the farm, or at least the sustainability of FoAF managing it. RPD could, in theory, evict FoAF and choose to run the farm themselves. Others are concerned that RPD could destabilize the collective management of the site, and declare

ultimate say in horticultural, program, or other issues, strong-arming the situation and limiting the capacity and decision making power of FoAF.

Not owning it themselves, on the other hand, makes the land relatively inexpensive in an increasingly overpriced San Francisco. This frees up income for other farm-related expenses. Having RPD as their landlord has other perks, too, in that the City pays for some equipment. This is not always a benefit, though, as Luke described, and can sometimes cause more work for FOAF due to the bureaucracy involved.

Where the Food Goes

All of Alemany Farm's food is given away for free. Several volunteers estimated that 50% of Alemany Farm produce goes to volunteers at the end of work days, 25% is donated to a free farm stand in San Francisco, and another 25% is taken home by "unsupervised harvesters" or "guerilla harvesters," people who come to the farm and take what they want without necessarily participating in a work day.

During the last hour or so of each work day, volunteers are set to the task of harvesting. The work day leaders – either members of the co-manager or auxiliary co-manager group, or the one staff member – direct volunteers to harvest whatever produce is ready for picking. Depending on the season and how much was harvested earlier in the week, this could include mainly greens or a wide variety of vegetables and fruits. Volunteers bring their harvest to a large, central willow tree by a small creek, weigh and record the produce, and set it down. Then all the volunteers, including the leaders of the work day, gather around and talk about what they harvested before each person starts collecting their fill.

The free farm stand is a long-running free farmers market, of sorts, and a partner of FoAF. People from across San Francisco, and sometimes from farther away, stand in line on

Sundays to peruse the bounty of the farm stand and pick what interests them, at no cost. Volunteers harvest food for the free farm stand on Fridays, and take care to leave enough ripe produce on the plants so other volunteers have plenty to harvest during weekend workdays.

Being a public space, unsupervised harvesters come with the terrain. While the volunteers I spoke with had varying reactions to the unsupervised harvests that can wipe out entire crops, most of the volunteers accepted and even had positive feelings about this type of harvesting. That said, to avoid situations like unsupervised harvesters taking an entire bed of unripe cauliflower, FoAF has tailored their selection of crops to being good for unsupervised harvesters to harvest. Now, they focus a lot on lettuce and other leafy greens – things that will keep growing after being cut all the way back.

How the Volunteer Program Functions

Twice a week, on Mondays and a weekend day, two co-managers or auxiliary co-managers lead volunteer workdays. These work days involve all types of farm work, from planting to weeding to harvesting to fixing irrigation. At the end of each workday, volunteers participate in the harvest, picking ripe produce from across the farm. People who volunteer with the other groups but do not help with crop production, like those who volunteer with the native plant or herb garden groups, can also take home produce.

In addition to regular work days, co-managers and auxiliary co-managers, as well as non-FoAF-affiliated volunteers, might come do some farm work on other days throughout the week. Wednesdays, for instance, are always greenhouse days, and attract a couple interested volunteers. Two volunteers in the co-manager group, in particular, have maintained a presence on the farm, coming almost daily to check on the crops, water, and perform any farm work that needs to be

done. Many of the co-managers considered these hyper-regular volunteers to be the ‘de-facto farm managers’ who knew most about the farm’s state on any given day.

The Volunteers

Alemaný attracts volunteers from across the city. Most of Alemany’s volunteers drop in for just one work day, but drop-in volunteers are numerous. Dozens of drop-in volunteers help out on the farm each week, making Alemany San Francisco’s second most popular volunteer site, after Golden Gate State Park. These drop-in volunteers come from all different backgrounds, from tech workers participating in an employer-sponsored volunteer day, to students on a school volunteer trip, to people fulfilling their court-ordered community service. While some drop-in volunteers might come back two or three times throughout the year after their first visit, not many people volunteer regularly who are not part of FoAF’s co-manager or auxiliary co-manager groups. Not many volunteers come from the adjacent Alemany Housing.

Alemaný Farm & Food Democracy

As in the River Road Farm case study, the dimensions of food democracy that emerged in this case include knowledge about the food system, sharing ideas about food and food issues, collective work and problem solving, an orientation toward the common good, community and enduring relationships, and efficacy.

Knowledge about the Food System

Many of the Alemany co-managers and the single staff member stated that education was a priority and goal of their volunteer program. All volunteers shared that they had learned a variety of things about food and farming at Alemany Farm. Volunteers’ learning falls into two

main categories: skills and knowledge about farming, and information about the food system more broadly.

Similar to River Road Farm, volunteers at Alemany are actively involved in farming; it therefore follows logically that volunteers would learn both practical farm skills as well as more general information about food and farming. Despite many of the volunteers having prior farming or gardening experience, nearly all the volunteers expressed having increased their farming skills at Alemany; many of these described themselves as better farmers or gardeners because of their volunteer involvement. Nearly half of the volunteers learned about and practiced different irrigation techniques. Four volunteers discussed learning how to tend to the farm's orchard. Another four described learning about planting and greenhouse work. "I've learned that you don't need to be afraid when you plant seeds," said Calvin. "I was so stressed out the first time sowing seeds... I've learned to have faith that if you put a seed in at the appropriate depth and give it some water and tend to it, it wants to grow." Other skills volunteers learned include preparing beds for planting, building compost, weeding and weed identification, harvesting, tool use, and caring for herbs. During my time at the farm, I noticed that whoever was teaching me how to perform a task usually also explained why we were doing that task, and why we were doing it a specific way. Four of the volunteers who lead work days mentioned, unprompted, that they try to provide context for each task they ask volunteers to perform to make the experience more meaningful. The focus on context of farm tasks seemed to help volunteers create a holistic understanding of farm systems.

Volunteers also learned more broadly about theoretical components of farming, including farm ecosystems and sustainable agriculture. Eleven of the volunteers I interviewed had learned about the farm's ecosystem, in particular its microclimates, seasonality of produce and plants,

soil, and interconnectedness of species. Before his experience at Alemany, for instance, Jake hadn't thought much about soil. "Before it was all just dirt," he said. "Now there's dirt and there's the soil. Learning about the soil, compost, [and] appreciating the life in the soil, was a new concept to me." Several volunteers mentioned developing a deeper sense of interconnectedness at the farm. Margaret, for instance, told me about learning the farm's ecology:

I think what also I really like about what I've learned is the identification of butterflies and birds and things like the sense of connectedness to the ecology of place that the plants offer, [and] just learning about how completely connected all of that is. If you offer a really diverse ecosystem of plants with companion planting and orchards and all of that, that draws in and feeds the winged things.

Almost half of the volunteers learned about theories behind sustainable agriculture practices, including soil health, systems like crop rotation and cover cropping that can support soil health, and treating plant pathogens. Hugh said that he felt connected to food and growing food for the first time in his life.

It was an abstraction before, this idea that, 'Oh, I don't know how to grow food. I want to learn how to grow food.' And then to actually touch the bean, touch the cucumber, and then eat that thing after having had my hands in that dirt. It's like a light bulb went off. Like, 'Oh, this is food. It comes from the earth in this way, and I've not been connected to this my entire life.' Now I feel that connect[ion]. There's just something about that connection that feels whole and so much deeper than going to the supermarket and getting your cucumber there. I got hooked on that feeling of connection.

As with River Road, I was also impressed by the amount of knowledge each of the long-term volunteers possessed about the particulars of the farm.

Most of the volunteers I interviewed ate differently because of their experience with Alemany, demonstrating reskilling in food consumption. Six had tried new fruits and vegetables like loquats, pineapple guava, ground cherries, fava beans, and edible flowers, and five had shifted their diets to include more vegetables. Several volunteers mentioned that taking home vegetables from the farm inspired them to look up new recipes and improve their cooking skills. Three people discussed that working on the farm brought a new awareness about seasonal produce, and changed their ideas about what fresh means.

Many volunteers also learned about the food system, even though most of them possessed food system knowledge prior to volunteering. Half the volunteers mentioned learning about the amount of work involved in food production. Joe, for example, said, “There's so many things where you're like, 'Oh, that should be so easy,' but [then you realize], 'Oh, well no.' You have to really make sure that it's done right. It's cool to learn all that.” Several people made comments about the humbling nature of farm work because of how much there is to know, and Margaret built a deeper understanding of where food comes from: “I think one of the earliest things that I learned is what seeds look like.” Four people mentioned that their time at Alemany has increased their interest in and awareness of food politics, in part due to conversations with other volunteers on the farm. When asked if they had learned anything about food access or hunger from Alemany Farm, the answers were split; about half the participants felt like they had at least learned something about hunger and food access, attributing some of this learning to experiences with people who live in the adjacent Alemany Housing project. Two volunteers learned about

social issues within the food system, one of whom called several years of his experience with the farm “an incredible crash course in the pathologies of racism and classism in our country.”

Volunteering at Alemany on a regular basis seems to build a deep set of skills and knowledge for participants. Numerous volunteers expressed how much they had learned thus far in their involvement with Alemany, and a handful shared that even though they had learned so much already, they felt there was still an incredible amount of knowledge for them to gain by continuing to volunteer. As Brian, a volunteer co-manager who leads work days, shared, “By the end of every day I have always learned and explained something,” which is what keeps him coming back month after month.

Sharing Ideas

Volunteers at Alemany share ideas about the food system with one another, which demonstrates thoughtful engagement with the food system. Those interviewed discussed several ways in which sharing ideas occurs. The primary means of sharing food system ideas is through casual conversations; less often, volunteers also engage in more deliberative discourse about food system issues. Active peer-to-peer teaching also commonly occurs at the farm.

All volunteers interviewed reported that they talk about at least some aspects of the food system while they do farm work. Half of the volunteers specifically mentioned talking about food, recipes, cooking, and herbal medicine. Calvin shared that “the topic of food comes up a lot. People like to talk about food. Something we're doing might remind them of some other type of food that they're familiar with, where they're from. People talk about how they like to prepare foods.” Additionally, through interviews and participant observation, I found that each volunteer work day ends with the volunteers talking about what the group harvested that day, and that the

work day leaders usually share information about how to cook some of the more unusual produce in that day's harvest. Talking about food, then, occurs during every volunteer work day.

Half of the volunteers also mentioned the farm itself coming up in on-farm conversations. People talk about the farm's history, ecology, and crops, as well as farm business and the farm's impact on the community; volunteers who lead work days mentioned getting asked lots of questions about the farm and hearing comments of amazement from new volunteers. Again, through interviews and participant observation, I found that this topic probably comes up more often than specifically reported due to the farm tours that occur at the beginning of every work day that include a significant amount of conversation about the farm. Other common food system conversation topics include farming techniques, the task at hand, and people's personal gardens or experience farming.

While most conversations on the farm are fairly casual, two volunteers shared that they sometimes delve into more serious and contentious food system topics. One regular volunteer shared that he talks with both regular and new volunteers about how organic farming practices compare to industrial agriculture. Another volunteer shared that she rarely talks with people new to the farm about food issues, "but when people [who] have been around a lot are there, you can drop into these conversations."

I observed peer-to-peer teaching every day during my time on the farm, and six interviewees mentioned it in their interviews. Because all the volunteer days are led by other volunteers, volunteers teaching other volunteers is practically inevitable. Despite having more experience at Alemany, however, regular volunteers including those in the co-manager group still learn from new or less regular volunteers. More experienced volunteers teach newer volunteers the whys and how-tos of the tasks at hand, as well as share farm history and

experiences. Newer volunteers bring in their own expertise that they share with the regular volunteers. “I’m not out here as the expert,” said George, a member of the co-manager group, “so oftentimes I’m talking to people who have more information than I do, or different information, so then I take that in...and [I can give] that back to someone else.”

Collective Work and Problem Solving

At Alemany, all volunteers farm together during volunteer work days, and co-managers and auxiliary managers collectively manage the farm. Interviewees reported practicing and developing skills in collective work and problem solving through both of these activities. Numerous components of collective work and problem solving emerged from the data, including cooperation, collaborative decision making, and the development of some civic skills. Many interviewees also expressed an appreciation for the accessibility of the farm due to its collective nature, as well as a sense of ownership, responsibility, and admiration for Alemany.

For most of the projects I undertook at Alemany, I worked with other volunteers. This is typical for the volunteer experience, though some work alone if they prefer. As with River Road Farm, volunteers seem to work together fluidly on tasks, which is sometimes coordinated through verbal communication but often seems to happen through body language alone. Volunteers also tend to offer help and otherwise act generously toward one another, showing a similar “we’re in this together” attitude to the volunteers at River Road Farm. Most of the volunteers expressed that at the farm they are happy to help with wherever needs to be done. People speak kindly to one another, and the pace and type of work facilitates conversation. All interviewees said that conflict amongst volunteers at the farm was rare. In addition to volunteering with physical farm labor, co-managers, and to a lesser extent auxiliary co-managers, work collectively and cooperatively in meetings and to lead work days.

There are a variety of decision making processes at Alemany Farm. All the co-managers said that major decisions go through the co-manager group and are discussed and decided on collectively. When co-managers are interested in starting a new project, they bring their idea to the group. “You assert that you want to do something and have the energy to do it, and for the most part the group says, ‘Do it,’” said Hugh. Leadership roles are also shared among the co-manager group, as well as with the new staff member. These roles include “bottom-lining,” or co-leading, volunteer work days, doing the bookkeeping, writing grants, managing outreach, and other program and administrative tasks. “Everyone kind of does a similar level of work,” said Luke. He made sure to mention, though, that usually one or two volunteers carry a little more weight. For instance, over the last several years Luke and another volunteer have effectively functioned as the “de facto” farm managers, as several volunteers referred to them, spending about 40 hours a week on farm-related tasks. Because of their more regular presence at the farm, they were often the people to write up to-do lists for “bottom liners” to facilitate during volunteer work days. The new farm manager has joined the two “de facto” managers in determining daily tasks. Even with a small handful of people deciding on daily tasks, co-managers still have autonomy while leading work days. Calvin illustrated this well when he said, “Those of us who are actually out there have the latitude to figure out what we can actually manage to accomplish, based on who shows up [or] if anything else just seems of importance to us.”

This autonomy and participation in decision making is extended beyond the co-manager group, as well. Decision making outside of the co-manager group includes three primary categories. First, volunteers have to make decisions during work days. When I volunteered, for instance, I was always offered a selection of tasks to choose from, and often a variety of ways in which I could accomplish those tasks, which seemed to be a courtesy extended to all volunteers

by all the co-leaders. As with River Road Farm, volunteers also make decisions amongst one another in how to work together on shared tasks.

Second, the co-manager group supports experimentation by both members of the group as well as other volunteers. Volunteers who demonstrate interest in starting new projects or learning a new skill are given the agency to do so. Seven of the volunteers with whom I spoke, some of whom are co-managers and some of whom are not, expressed gratitude for having room to try new and different things, and for being given the freedom to experiment on the farm. For Dennis, this freedom allowed him to shift his focus from the food production side of the farm to helping with the herb garden, which, he said, “as a result, it sort of just allows me to have a renewed interest in [the farm].” Similarly, after having volunteered for a short while, Joe asked how the greenhouse portion of the farm worked, and was invited to come to the farm on days when co-managers work in the greenhouse, which are not normal volunteer work days. He now volunteers every week on greenhouse days. Several volunteers also have plots dedicated to experimenting with plants, like asparagus and blue corn, to which they tend on their own, often with help from more experienced co-managers.

Third, volunteers and neighbors of the farm also contribute ideas to farm planning and activities. Alemany Farm plants similar crops from year to year, but also brings in a few new plants each year based on the interests and recommendations of co-managers, other volunteers, and the farm’s neighbors. For instance, the farm grew taro for a while after some Samoan members of the Alemany Housing community requested it. They also were experimenting with a Vietnamese variety of cucumbers while I was there, because a neighboring community member had shown interest. While projects are generally decided on by the co-managers, the direction and type of projects is influenced by other volunteers and community members. Dennis talked

about how this works in the herb garden: “We'll also work with the group [of volunteers] as a whole and ask them what would they like to see planted – what dye plants, what herb plants would they like to see.” Matt worked for years with a leader in the Alemany housing project, whose ideas shifted the direction of some of the farm’s projects. At one point in the farm’s history, for instance, Alemany Farm had a free farm stand in the Alemany housing community. The aforementioned leader told Matt something to the effect of, “Stop bringing food down to the basketball courts. If people want food, they can go up there and get it themselves – you don’t need to come to the community, the community needs to go to the farm.” So Alemany Farm slowly transitioned away from the farm stand model to just allowing neighbors to harvest what they wanted from the farm. While co-managers at Alemany Farm generally have a certain way of performing farm tasks, several volunteers mentioned that the co-manager group is also open to volunteers suggesting other ways of accomplishing a task. “It’s an educational space and it’s really open to seeing things done in other ways, so if you have a suggestion on how you’d like to do it, I think that it’s totally possible that you could do it your way...I think it’s very open minded,” said Olivia.

Despite the collaborative nature of decision making at Alemany Farm, conflicts do arise both within the co-manager group and with other farm stakeholders. Of the nine volunteers who reported conflicts within the co-manager group, all of them stated that conflicts generally involved minor operational issues, such as what to grow or how to prioritize spending, and were solved primarily through open dialogue. A more serious incident that occurred many years ago was cited by numerous volunteers, who described one member of the co-manager group not cooperating with the rest of the group and eventually leaving. The group operates on a modified consensus to solve these types of problems, but strives for full consensus; in the six years Luke

has been involved, he said, he hasn't seen any conflict end in a vote. Several volunteers mentioned that reaching consensus could be a very slow process. Olivia elaborated on this, saying that the consensus process is sometimes "a little painful... [but ensures that] everyone gets heard, which can be a good thing." George expanded on the latter concept in his interview: "It's not just so black and white. If you can solve a problem and make two people feel good [about it], then that's what I would strive for."

FoAF volunteers seem to extend the collaborative approach to decision making with other stakeholders as well. After some conflicts with other entities that operate on or otherwise have a stake in the farm (e.g. beekeepers, neighbors, and others), they all came together with the landowner to form the Community Advisory Council (CAC) for Alemany Farm. While meetings are "like watching paint dry," said Matt, the CAC "has served its function of reducing conflicts" by providing a space for collaborating on a shared vision and land use plan. One conflict with a community leader from the neighborhood couldn't be resolved through normal means, and resulted in mediation and a renegotiation of the relationship between the two entities. Other conflicts also occur at the farm that are not solved through collaboration or dialogue, like vandalism and occasional shootings. "It's one of the things that was unexpected when I joined the farm," said Olivia. "You think you're going out there to garden, but it's an open space, you know, next to housing projects, [with] lots of different personalities involved. It's very rich."

Nearly all of the volunteers with whom I spoke reported having developed civic skills due to their participation on the farm. Thirteen volunteers expressed developing or enhancing people and communication skills, and six of these also expanded their knowledge of political systems. Specific interpersonal and communication skills that volunteers developed include patience, the ability to work with diverse people, leadership and coordination skills, managing

group dynamics, public speaking, teaching, and being more mindful of other people's situations. Developing people skills, Jake shared, "was one thing I didn't quite expect when I first started." Volunteers' increased knowledge of political systems included learning how city government functions, how to navigate uneven power dynamics, identifying leaders within communities (or "community gatekeepers," as one volunteer referred to them), and participating in collective governance. Hugh spoke most explicitly about his interest in learning about politics by volunteering with Alemany Farm:

I wanted to learn about politics... I'm reasonably informed about politics and I know about history, but this is actually doing politics... How does power operate within the group, how did this group get things done? I was interested in that, [and] learning about it by being in it. And how does this group, then, politically interact with the world, and with power in the world... It seemed like they put politics on the very ground level.

Like with River Road, volunteers at Alemany Farm said that the collective nature of the farm work is part of what made the volunteer experience accessible to them. Half the volunteers mentioned the low level of responsibility as an important farm trait, most of these stating that they feel reassured knowing that the farm will go on should they not be able to participate on a given day. Walter called the farm "resilient." "I've been coming every weekend," he said, "but I know that if I don't come, the farm will keep running." The informality and flexibility of the volunteer program was also mentioned as a benefit by almost half the volunteers. The farm has no waitlist and offers frequent work days, meaning that volunteers can drop in whenever works for them without a long-term commitment. Additionally, several volunteers spoke about setting volunteers up to succeed, either by gradually increasing responsibility for volunteers who start to

come regularly or just by ensuring that people of all physical abilities have a meaningful task to work on. Three volunteers mentioned that volunteering does not require previous farming knowledge, making it accessible to people who might be interested in farming but have no experience. Brian described this in our conversation, talking about each work day at the farm:

By and large, everybody gets involved in composting, planting, harvesting, weeding – at least two different steps [in the farming cycle]. And maybe they come back, maybe they never do, but they were instantly able to get involved in something, whereas a community plot, a private plot in a community garden... They're great, they're wonderful, but first of all, you have to at least know something. I knew nothing when I showed up [at Alemany]. I'd be harvesting dirt right now if I had a community plot.

Two members of the co-manager group found that the collective structure of the group also helped them show up more regularly. Additionally, I observed that working together on farm tasks seemed to allow groups to accomplish more than the members of the group could accomplish alone. On one occasion, I was harvesting and clearing a bed of beans with about eight other people. Walter and I were working side by side, and he mentioned that it felt like this job was never going to end. After less than an hour, though, we had picked the last bean off the last plant, and Francois and I talked about how amazing it was that you could accomplish so much, so quickly, with that many hands.

Most of the volunteers expressed either a sense of ownership over the farm or an admiration for how much FoAF has accomplished as a mostly volunteer organization. When we talked, Hugh was planning on moving across the country, but said he would stay involved with Alemany despite the distance. “[Alemany] is really part of me in a way,” he said. “Maybe it’ll

change once I'm 3,000 miles away, I don't know, but for now I can't imagine giving it up." Several volunteers spoke about a sense of obligation to the farm, including Brian who said, "At this point there's also a sense of... It's not responsibility in an onerous way, but in a keeping something wonderful going kind of way." One of the founders of the farm who is still involved in the program, Matt, said, "The collective totally exceeded my expectations. The fact that we've kept it going, the fact that it's had so many different iterations... It's just a totally different mix of people and personalities, and somehow we've sustained it." Some volunteers expressed concern about the long-term survival of the farm, due to fluctuations in the number of people interested enough to commit to serving as a co-manager, but most of these hoped that the recent hiring of a farm manager would help mitigate the issue.

Community Good Orientation

An orientation toward the community good, as well as an appreciation for the commons, arose as a theme in interviews with volunteers and participant observation at the farm. Interviewees also spoke about their perceived impacts of the farm, on neighborhood, regional, and food system scales.

Everyone I interviewed seemed to care about doing things that helped the larger community. While most volunteers were initially motivated by individual benefits, namely their own learning about farming and participation in the food system, some had come to the farm to support FoAF's mission of increasing food security. Nearly everyone I talked to continues to volunteer, though, at least in part because of the impact they see as a result of their work. Most of them also stated that they feel good about the ways in which they contribute to San Francisco's food system. As George said, "You wouldn't do it, otherwise. It's certainly not just because I get some free lettuce. It does feel good." The volunteers I worked with all demonstrated generosity

and helpfulness, and seemed to contribute to a culture of generosity. Even a non-comprehensive list of generous acts begins to tell this story: I was loaned a pair of nice, personal snips to prune one day at the farm; volunteers bought me and one another drinks when we went out after a work day; during the end of the day circle, work day leaders always took food last.

Volunteers also clearly appreciated the idea of the commons, and viewed the farm as a commons. As I wrote about in the above section on collective work, numerous volunteers mentioned the communal aspect of the farm as a reason why they choose to participate at Alemany, rather than somewhere else; in addition to liking shared work, they also expressed appreciating the shared nature of the space itself. In addition to viewing the space as a commons, the topic of food as a “commons” and basic human right came up in about half of the interviews, and every volunteer is working to produce food that eventually makes its way onto the plate of another human being, for free. Most of the volunteers even supported the guerilla harvesters who come to the farm and sometimes harvest entire crops: “We came in one day and an avocado tree was entirely stripped,” said Brian. “[The] avocados were nowhere near ripe, so someone walked out with 20 pounds of organic paperweights. But what do you do? That person wasn’t taking avocados to go score drugs. That person probably took avocados and went to sell them at the farmers market because they needed some money.” One of the newer members of the co-manager group, however, expressed that these unsupervised harvesters are his biggest challenge at the farm. Walter added, though, that they help him build a stronger orientation toward the common good. He said that when situations like the mass avocado harvest occur, it feels like “people are stealing your food, which is my reflex, which is not aligned with [FoAF’s] mission. I’m working on it... The [idea of] food scarcity is kind of an organized myth. I have enough

every week, so why would I care that people are actually coming other days, harvesting? I'm working on it.”

In addition to a general orientation toward the commons and common good, I spoke with volunteers and the one staff member about what they perceive as the impact of the farm at a neighborhood, regional, and food system scale. Almost all the volunteers brought up the same three impacts that they believe the farm has on the adjacent community. Commonly perceived neighborhood impacts include the farm providing a beautiful green space, or ‘back yard’, for neighborhood residences, to which they have access at any time; access to free, fresh produce, although most volunteers said that only a small percentage of residents take advantage of this; and a safe place for kids to play, learn, look for snakes, and pick strawberries, beans, and other snackable produce. “Sometimes when I've arrived in the morning, I'll see someone there sitting, just looking out,” said Melissa. “I think it's kind of a quiet, peaceful place, that's kind of a backyard. The kids play there. They pick the strawberries, look at the butterflies... Some different residents do different things. Some probably have never even stepped up there.” Most of the people I spoke with also saw limitations to more significant neighborhood impacts, which I discuss more in ‘Community and Enduring Relationships,’ below.

There was slightly more variety between volunteers’ responses to my question about what they perceive to be the farm’s impacts on the larger Bay Area. Education about farming and the food system more generally, however, was the primary reported farm impact that volunteers perceived. Providing food access to anyone who seeks it and increasing food security of the city were also commonly perceived impacts of the farm, though some volunteers also expressed skepticism extent of the farm’s impact on food security. Many people also view Alemany Farm as a model of what’s possible, and think it can be an inspiration to others in the area. Other

themes that arose here include preserving a public green space, providing a place for individuals and groups to volunteer and be outside, a space for kids' summer camps, creating an opportunity for people to form connections with food and San Francisco, and the political impacts of Alemany contributing to an urban agriculture network in San Francisco and the Bay Area.

Most volunteers did not think that Alemany Farm was having much, if any, impact on the larger food system. People either saw no impact, small transformative potential, or market-based impacts; any transformative potential was viewed to be incremental. Most interviewees cited education as the primary role and impact of the farm. Some of these thought that Alemany's educational efforts might encourage people to think more critically about the food system, which could eventually influence food policy or might change their purchasing habits. The latter, five volunteers thought, could, in turn, slowly increase the demand for more sustainably produced food. Others saw the farm as an educational model for food production and community participation in the food system. "I think it's an anomaly in the greater food system... [but] it could be something that inspires other Bay Area cities or other cities around the country to value their open space and their parks in a food production lens," said Ryan. Melissa recognized that the farm wasn't perfect, but saw it as part of the solution to greater structural issues in the food system and society: "Instead of just saying what you don't want, [Alemany is] trying to model and create what we do want... [it's nice] being part of something constructive because it's very easy to just criticize and critique." Matt added to this, highlighting the nature of urban agriculture as something of a spectacle: "We're a fantastic living example of urban agriculture, of urban food security and food sovereignty, of environmental education. Urban farming is basically horticultural performance art. Right? You're almost doing it as this performative act that will hopefully blow visitors' minds just through the unlikely juxtapositions of the whole thing – this

huge fekkin' garden right next to a freeway and a public housing complex." Volunteers generally shared the sentiment, though, that the farm's existence has a net positive impact. The farm certainly impacts its regular volunteers' lives in a positive way. It also seems to have at least a small positive impact on the adjacent neighborhoods, despite having some major limitations, as well as on the city and potentially the larger food system.

Community and Enduring Relationships

In my interview with Matt, he said, "With community farming, the community comes before the farm." It makes sense, then, that themes steeped in community, community building, and relationships emerged in every interview and participant observation. Strong categories came out of this community-based theme, including a sense of community, sharing personal stories, developing friendships, sense of place, the physical space of the farm as facilitating community building, healing, the farm as an inclusive and diverse space, and the level of engagement between the farm and the residents in the neighboring community.

Every person interviewed spoke about the community at the farm. Co-managers and auxiliary co-managers, both of whom co-lead work days, talked about trying to create a welcoming, friendly space for volunteers. Work day co-leaders ask volunteers questions to get to know them, make jokes and build rapport which makes volunteers feel more comfortable, and express gratitude for the volunteers' efforts. The majority of volunteers cited meeting new people as a benefit of their volunteer experience; Walter said that there is "always something interesting to discover in the people you meet [at Alemany Farm]." Margaret found the social aspects of the farm to be motivating: "It was easier for me to get on my bicycle and ride 45 minutes across town to get to Alemany Farm on my work days than to walk down the back steps and just putter around in my garden any day of the week... A lot of what I came to realize about that was not

just that the farm was more successful in growing than me, but that it was also about the social aspect.” The majority of the people I interviewed also said that they feel like a part of the Alemany community, that they felt a sense of belonging. Calvin said that part of why he came to the farm was for this feeling:

I think part of me was looking for that sense of community. I had dealt with, especially in the couple of years before that, a lot of loneliness and a sense of dislocation and depression... I found that there was a feeling of openness [at Alemany] among the folks who were running the workdays, and the other folks I met there. I just think it's a really nice way to build community because people aren't focused on “my little plot.” People show up and they're like, "I have no idea what needs to be done today but I'm willing to help." I think, over time, you develop a sense of, I don't think ownership's the right word, but, involvement or belonging, maybe, in what's going on.

Many volunteers mentioned “going deep” or “digging deep” in conversations with other volunteers at the farm. Meaningful conversations tend to happen more between volunteers who have interacted with one another several times. Conversation topics range from family, life history, problems with people’s spouses, raising kids. Annie said that, if people seem willing, she’ll share her journey with cancer. On one of my last days at the farm, I was weeding across from another volunteer, Jon, who I had never met before, and, after I asked him where he lived, he started telling me about his life and how he had ended up at Alemany Farm. He told me that he had been in a well-paying but unfulfilling career, and that the money he made from his job allowed him to make “bad choices” with a bad crowd of people. He decided to go back to college, in a business program. At some point in this time period, he saw the documentary *Can*

You Dig This, about urban farming in South Central LA. Jon saw elements of his own life in Ron Finley, one of the farmers in the film: “We have a similar background,” he said. He looked for a farm near his house where he could learn farming skills and participate in something like what he saw in the documentary, and found Alemany Farm. These experiences have given him “hope and a new direction in life.” He now wants to do “something meaningful.” He changed his major at school, and is now focusing on Environmental Studies and Sustainability. Somewhat recently, he set up a community showing of *Can You Dig This* to “share the transformative film and the transformative work” he’s gotten involved in. I wasn’t expecting to have such an intimate and honest conversation with a person I had never met before.

Like at River Road Farm, the majority of volunteers said that they had developed close friendships with people they met on the farm. George said, “I now have a new best friend, and an extended group of friends with really diverse backgrounds and opinions and values.” One person had met his current partner at the farm, and several people said that their closest friends are people they met at the farm. Volunteers spend time together off-farm, too, going out for drinks or dinner after work days, cooking dinner together, and even going backpacking together.

In addition to expressing a sense of community with other people at the farm, most of the volunteers also described feeling a sense of place. Volunteers described the site as beautiful, unique, lovely, an oasis. The spoke about the juxtaposition of the natural and even wild setting in the midst of the city. “It makes it even more unique, these extremes,” said Melissa, “that it’s kind of wedged between a rec center, a housing project, the freeway.” Volunteers feel connected to the space itself.

Volunteers connected the farm space with the sense of human community that develops there. The volunteers speak to this concept beautifully.

Ryan: “You get a sense of people if you’re weeding next to them for three hours.”

Calvin “Something about it encourages people to bring their best selves there.”

Margaret: “Next to each other, weeding or planting, [people] talk about really deep things. They go quickly into a space that’s very intimate.”

George: “The space allows you to let down your guard, and opens you up to more intimate conversation. You get closer to someone quicker. Like, really quick.”

They felt that the space provides a great platform for getting to know other people.

Some of the volunteers also found the farm to be a healing space. Three volunteers talked about the farm as providing them with spiritual sustenance. One of these, Lanie, who says she rarely uses the word ‘spiritual,’ said, “The connection is knowing that we’re all ... I’m part of the same life force and the plants, and we’re all made of the same chemicals and compounds and we’re growing... So it fulfills that... a little bit of having more of a deeper connection to my place on Earth.” Two people referred to the farm as “therapeutic,” one of whom said he goes to the farm when he needs therapy. And Luke said that when his wife of 43 years died, the farm provided some continuity during a period of his life that was otherwise full of transition and upheaval. Annie came to the farm after having cancer, and found the space to be healing, too: “My body went through a really rough time. My spirit had a really tough time. So just personally being in a place that floods me with so much positive emotion has been really nice too.”

One component of creating a welcoming and inviting community is being inclusive. Matt said that the goal of Alemany Farm is to “make it a safe, happy place... ideally for whomever.” While the co-manager group is predominantly white and mostly male, it contains some age diversity. Outside of that group, a diverse cross section of San Francisco volunteers at the farm: some volunteers work at tech companies, some are there doing court-ordered community service,

some live in the public housing adjacent to the farm, and others are at the farm because it helps them to access free food. Volunteers also bring different political views and life experiences to the farm. “There's an amazing cross section of people at the farm week to week,” said Brian. “There are folks who come up from the residences...And then there's like 23-year-old software engineers from LinkedIn and Google and Facebook or whatever. So it's a pretty funny and interesting cross section... You look around, people are just talking. People who would never talk to each other. More than like, ‘Hey,’ or whatever. Actually interacting, which is pretty rad.” The majority of volunteers I interviewed said that they would not have met the other volunteers if not for their time at the farm. “It’s the farm that brings us together,” said Dennis.

Interacting with a wide range of people helped five of the interviewees become more empathic, and better understand other people’s perspectives. In just a few months, Diane had already seen the effects of people working together on shared tasks at the farm: “[It] breaks down social barriers and preconceived notions and biases that we have, that we all carry, about who people are until we know them. So all of that gets deconstructed when you actually start doing projects together.” Dennis said that volunteering at Alemany Farm was the first time that he had been to a public housing project: “Having met the people who live there and realizing that their lives are really not that much different than most people, except that they're in an environment that is often conducive to prejudice, class discrimination, and a lot of other forms of discrimination. I grew up in a middle class family in San Francisco in the Sunset District, you know, traditionally pretty homogenous. And hanging out at Alemany was an eye opener even though I was older at the time. It was part of the growth experience.”

Despite intentions of inclusivity, most volunteers discussed disappointment with the level of engagement the farm has with its neighbors. Working with the residents of the adjacent

Alemaný Housing project has always been a mission of the farm. Some residents do interact with the farm: some harvest food, volunteer, or recreate; some are friends with the volunteers and come to the farm to hang out; and some provide input on new types of produce to grow. Alemany Farm also hosts two community events each year, too, and these bring in a lot of people from the adjacent neighborhoods. And yet, nearly every volunteer wanted to see more integration between the farm and the community, as well as a stronger relationship there.

Over the years, the relationship between the farm and the Alemany Housing project has been complex, to say the least. Volunteers at Alemany Farm have worked with Alemany Housing leadership to develop projects specifically for residents, including a free farm stand, a free CSA program complete with delivery, and youth employment programs. Many of these projects have received criticism from some housing leaders, including calling the farmers “white missionaries” on one occasion. Numerous volunteers said some residents perceive the food from the farm as dirty, and have expressed a preference for food from the grocery store. Additionally, Matt said that people who live at the far end of the housing projects do not even know about the farm’s existence, and that their “closest relationships are mostly determined by proximity.”

Matt also commented, “Connection with the community is the one thing we’re still just totally struggling with... There’s still challenges we’re facing, which are the challenges of the nation at large around race and class, that we’re very far from cracking.” He posited that seeing 30 white people pushing wheelbarrows doesn’t necessarily create the most welcoming atmosphere for a community like Alemany Housing, which is inhabited predominately by people of color, and that the popularity of the farm in the wider Bay Area might have alienated the farm’s closest neighbors. He also thought it might have made a difference if the co-manager group had been more intentional about including more people of color, but volunteers had few

concrete ideas about how to strengthen the relationship with the residents of Alemany Housing. Despite this, though, the issue seemed to be at the top of their minds, and many still saw building a better relationship as an opportunity, as Hugh describes here:

And that opportunity for what is, at least in the context of the urban Bay area, an extremely white activity, in a space that has been made a white space by our group, to interact with people of color who ... It's also a class thing too. [Our group is] upper middle class white [people] for the most part. And our immediate neighbors – and [Alemany] is their backyard, they helped build this thing in 1995 before any of us were even here – they're people of color of a lower class. And to have those two populations mixing – the potential is so great... That's something that I want to prosper.

All of the people who volunteer regularly at the farm, though, do feel included and do feel a sense of community at the farm. But Brian talked about assumptions in the Alemany Farm model that might exclude people: “I think there's the ideal cycle with which we want the farm community to work, which is people contribute work, people are involved in community, people take out produce. But that also assumes a certain amount of privilege of being able to come and volunteer.” Involvement in the farm not only requires an interest in food and farming, but also the ability to contribute time and energy.

Efficacy

A sense of efficacy is critical in making intentional change. At Alemany Farm, volunteers both acted efficaciously through their volunteer work and, to some extent, expressed a sense of awareness about their efficacy, or a sense of efficacy in themselves. Volunteers demonstrated efficacy in the food system through their public work to address and solve community food

problems and determining their relationship to food. They also developed numerous skills and qualities that may have impacted, or may impact in the future, their sense of efficacy within the food system and their lives.

Volunteers discussed the results of their work both on the farm, as well as other ways in which they participate in the food system. Simply by volunteering at Alemany Farm and contributing to the farm's impacts on the community and city, participants make an impact and demonstrate efficacy, even if they don't necessarily feel a sense of efficacy. Most interviewees, however, recognized their contributions to the farm's impacts. They talked about their role in helping build a better community, increasing food security in San Francisco, and more generally making a difference and doing good work. Volunteers also discussed their involvement in other food system efforts. While most volunteers focus the majority of their free time on Alemany Farm, more than half participate in other activities as well, such as the Community Advisory Council, which manages and plans the farm space. Four people I interviewed also volunteer with other food-oriented organizations, and two have helped start gardens, one in a high school and one on the rooftop of a business. Five volunteers also said that their involvement with Alemany Farm led to an increased interest in food system issues, which has manifested in each of their lives through self-guided education, like reading more books, attending classes, and going to conferences and lectures. Several volunteers also said that their farm experience had motivated them to change their careers to farming or a field more aligned with their values.

All the volunteers mentioned an increased sense of agency in determining their relationship with food and the food system. The most obvious way this occurs is through the process of shifting from a consumer of food to a citizen-producer – growing, harvesting, and then eating produce. The produce from the farm supplied most of the volunteers with about 50%

of their monthly produce needs; on either end of the spectrum, some volunteers occasionally take food while others have experienced years where fruits and vegetables from the farm accounted for 85% of their produce. Hugh talked about this process as reconnecting him to the food system: “I work and all the sudden I got to take home some beans and a cucumber and squash. And then go cook that. That experience was sort of transformative. Like I could not believe that I'd taken home this food that was in the ground where I was working and then I was cooking with it an hour later. That hooked me.” This process was valuable to Lanie, as well, who said, “As a cook, I'm going to farmer's markets mostly and buying the stuff secondhand, but this is so much more intimate. I'm involved in growing it, and that's really valuable to me.”

Almost half the volunteers talked about learning to farm as a means of self- and community-sufficiency, and four of these specifically stated that they felt they had built the skills through Alemany Farm to start their own farm or garden. Several volunteers alluded to the civic nature of their volunteer work, referring to it as political. Three people spoke about the social impacts of their farm experience, saying that their friends think of them as farmers and ask them farming and gardening questions; one of these even said she thinks that when people find out about her involvement in the farm, it elevates their opinion of her.

In addition to being or feeling efficacious within the food system, all the volunteers mentioned other benefits that seem relevant to building efficacy in their personal and civic lives, and perhaps in the food system as well. First, nearly every volunteer expressed a sense of personal satisfaction, fulfillment, or enjoyment in working on the farm, specifically mentioning enjoying physical labor, getting exercise, feeling like they were participating in meaningful work, and appreciating farming's tangible outcomes. Many of these volunteers also said that working on the farm is very different from their day jobs. Walter, put it like this: “After farming,

I was like, I feel physically good, mentally good, and the joke I was saying was, after some work days at work, I feel like I need a beer; after a day of farming, I deserve a beer.” I interviewed Brian a few days after we had worked together, adding pigeon poop to the compost pile, and he said, “I mostly spend my week digging through email. It’s really nice to dig through something more organic on the weekends. Would I have ever thought that shoveling shit on a weekend would be fun? No. But after reading 400 emails on Friday, shoveling shit on Saturday sounds great.” A common statement among volunteers was also that they never regretted coming to the farm. “But I always go. I never bag it. I always go. And I have never, not one time, have I been like, oh man, you know what, that did suck. It always feels, even though there's this four tiered highway right there, it's just restorative,” said Hugh. Luke said that part of what he likes about the farm is the optimism he sees there:

I think there is something very optimistic and sort of affirming about watching and helping things grow because this life is not always full of optimism, but actually when you plant something, you can actually be fairly optimistic and you can have your optimism fulfilled, rewarded. It happens. You grow stuff, you put the seed in the ground, and you get seven-foot-high tomato plants, so that's a continuing pleasure.

Several volunteers also shared that farming is in their family history, so working on the farm helps them connect with their heritage.

Second, twelve volunteers mentioned professional development as an added benefit of volunteering at the farm. For most of these volunteers, the development was in the form of transferable skills, like project management, people management, and running meetings. Joe, a bartender, learned about new herbs and flowers to include in his drinks. The volunteer

experience at Alemany Farm helped three of the interviewees get jobs. Four volunteers also said their experience on the farm helped them determine a new life direction; all of these people are in some phase of shifting to work more in the food system.

Third, personal growth was mentioned by several volunteers as an impact the farm has had on their lives. Two people talked about trust, and three talked about building confidence. One of the volunteers who mentioned trust described one of his first days on the farm, when he was given a scythe to use. “It was awesome,” he said. “It’s empowering. And it also lowers the bar of, ‘I don’t know anything,’ to, ‘Oh, But I can think, and someone is trusting me and showing me.’” I saw something like this happen during one of my days at the farm. I was working with a teenager to move bark chips onto a path, using a wheelbarrow. She had never used a wheelbarrow before, but the assumption was that she could figure it out and she did. With each trip, she pushed the wheelbarrow with more confidence and skill. The three volunteers who mentioned building confidence were all part of the co-manager group, and two cited their leadership roles within that group as the reason why their confidence had grown. Calvin shared with me that before volunteering at Alemany Farm, he was suffering from depression and was in a job that was not a good fit. He said, “I really think [volunteering at Alemany Farm] wound up helping to restore some of the confidence I had lost.”

Volunteers also talked about being inspired by the farm, loving the farm, and feeling gratitude for the opportunities and experiences Alemany Farm has provided them. These farm experiences helped bring a sense of efficacy to most of the volunteers’ lives. Diane told me that she sees community farming as a special and empowering experience. “To be able to plant something and see it grow and be able to harvest it,” she said, “there’s something really amazing and empowering in that experience.”

Key Points

Volunteers at Alemany Farm build skills necessary to food democracy. They develop food system knowledge, share ideas with one another about food and the food system, work collectively on common projects and to solve shared challenges, enhance their orientation toward the common good, develop a sense of community, and are efficacious in their work. This helps shift frequent volunteers away from being one-dimensional food consumers to people who actively participate in the food system as co-producers of their food. Despite Alemany helping its volunteers build critical food democracy skills, the farm is not perfect. Volunteers shared concerns about the long-term sustainability of a mostly volunteer-run organization and overwhelmingly expressed a need for a better relationship between the farm and the adjacent Alemany Housing neighborhood. Overall, Alemany Farm seems to be an example of a step toward a more democratic food system, or “part of the solution,” as Melissa said.

DISCUSSION

The objective of this research was twofold. First, I wanted to explore the extent to which volunteer programs at two urban community farms, in which volunteers participate in farm work and receive farm produce in exchange for their work, exemplify and inform food democracy. Second, I wanted to describe the purpose, governance, and function of these volunteer programs. Multiple factors inspired this research. First, there is a need for increased democratization of the dominant food system, which is currently characterized by environmentally and socially degrading industrial practices and consolidated, corporate control. Second, while food democracy presents a compelling, participation-oriented alternative to the current dominant food system, we still have a limited understanding of what this theory looks like in practice, as well as how to operationalize it. Third, community agriculture, with its focus on the social impacts of farming, and especially urban community agriculture projects that provide food for volunteers, seemed like a natural and understudied site for the development of food democracy. With this research, I sought to identify dimensions of democratic citizenship within the two case studies that may be creating small-scale, incremental change that can build toward food system transformation.

In the previous two chapters, I described two case studies, River Road Farm in Missoula, Montana, and Alemany Farm in San Francisco, California. These chapters individually investigate each farm: their volunteer programs' purpose, governance, and function, as well as their contribution to food democracy. In this final chapter, I bring these two case studies together to compare them, elucidating significant points that become stronger when both cases are

considered. This comparison also allows for a more in-depth examination of how these case studies might inform food democracy.

While reading this section, it is important to remember the strengths and limitations of this study. Namely, the qualitative methods employed in building these case studies allow for a depth of understanding of individual experiences and the contexts in which they were formed (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). This depth was in part made possible by the limited number of cases studied, which also makes generalization from the case studies difficult. Using Burawoy's extended case method, however, allows for the investigation of the micro-level to inform the general, macro-level by extending the theory of food democracy (1998).

This chapter begins with a review of each farm's context, including each farm's purpose, governance, and structure. The purpose of this first section is to provide a rough outline of the programs and insight into the contexts that might influence the volunteer experience at each farm. Then, I compare the two programs through the lens of food democracy's dimensions: knowledge, sharing ideas, collective work and problem solving, community good orientation, community and enduring relationships, and efficacy. The chapter concludes with ideas for future research and a return to the significance of this project.

Context

The Farms

The founding of both River Road Farm (River Road) and Alemany Farm (Alemany) was context-dependent. They both began as underutilized land, private in the case of River Road and public in the case of Alemany, and have evolved over the last twenty or so years due to the dedication and hard work of numerous people. Both farms exist in cities known for their

orientation toward sustainability and their agricultural history, Missoula, Montana, and San Francisco, California. Both cities are facing spikes in housing costs and the associated gentrification of various neighborhoods.

The farms differ in their organizational structure, in that one is staff-run and the other is volunteer-run. River Road is one of four farms in Missoula run by a conventional, hierarchical nonprofit organization, Garden City Harvest (GCH), which employs a farm manager, farm assistant, and farm apprentice to manage the farm. The group responsible for managing the horticulture, education, and volunteer programs at Alemany, Friends of Alemany Farm (FoAF), is fiscally sponsored by a nonprofit organization, but is directly managed by a group of volunteers, or “co-managers,” who, along with a recently hired staff member, make decisions about the farm and manage farm programs and administration; the co-managers and staff member, along with the “auxiliary co-manager” group, also lead work days. Both organizations have missions that contain language about education, building community through agriculture, and food security; FoAF’s mission also includes language about economic and environmental justice. River Road’s income is generated through GCH’s fundraising efforts, as well as through its Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program; Alemany Farm has a relatively small budget, and FoAF raises funds through grants and gifts from individual donors.

Despite differences in their organizational structures, the farms are managed with fairly similar techniques, values, and goals. Both farms contain approximately two acres of food production on approximately four acres of land, which are farmed using sustainable methods. Alemany brings in more permaculture influences than River Road, and has more land dedicated to native plants and features like ponds, though managers at both farms take measures to cultivate an ecologically healthy space. Much of the native landscape at Alemany, as well as

other projects like the bees and vineyard, are managed by separate groups. Multiple entities managing projects on the same four acres necessitates working and planning together; a community advisory council exist to facilitate this cooperation.

GCH recently purchased the land beneath River Road, whereas Alemany is owned by the City of San Francisco. The purchase of River Road, while an expensive endeavor that required a year-long capital campaign, creates stability for the farm. But with that stability also comes transitions in the form of new buildings and the GCH headquarters relocating to the farm. Some staff and volunteers expressed concern about this physical change altering the culture and accessibility of the farm, while also demonstrating excitement and curiosity about potential new projects that will likely accompany the new facilities, such as education around cooking and preserving produce. Leasing the farm from the City allows Alemany's land to remain affordable in an increasingly expensive San Francisco, but it poses potential threats to the farm's long-term ability to stay on the land.

A portion of the food grown at each farm goes to volunteers. The majority of River Road's produce is purchased through the farm's Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, and some goes to the local soup kitchen. All of Alemany's produce is given away for free, to volunteers, a free farm stand, and "unsupervised harvesters," people who come to the farm and harvest food without volunteering their time to group farm work. FoAF takes the latter group into account when planning what to plant, and will often avoid foods that only have one harvest in them, like broccoli, and will instead plant types of vegetables that can be harvested multiple times, like lettuce and other greens.

The Farms' Volunteer Programs

The volunteer programs at River Road and Alemany are structured somewhat differently, though both programs offer flexibility to volunteers and are relatively unstructured compared to other types of volunteer opportunities. At River Road, volunteers can come any time between 9 am and 5 pm, Monday through Friday, and volunteers generally get assigned a task with other volunteers by the farm manager; volunteers track their hours, and then exchange their hours for produce. At Alemany, volunteers come on specified work days, but can show up at any time during the work day. A pair of co-managers and auxiliary co-managers usually lead a tour of the farm before assigning farm tasks to groups of volunteers, and at the end of each work day volunteers participate in a harvest, talk about the available produce together, and then all divvy up the food and take it home. Due to the very different climates and growing seasons in Missoula and San Francisco, River Road's volunteer program runs from approximately May through October, while Alemany's program runs year-round.

People come to volunteer at both farms from across their respective city, though very few volunteers live in the farms' surrounding neighborhoods. Both farms have solid groups of long-term volunteers who help out at the farm on a regular basis. At Alemany Farm, approximately 18 regular FoAF volunteers come two or more times a month. River Road has approximately nine regular volunteers who generally come at least once a week. Both farms also see irregular or one-time volunteers, though Alemany attracts many hundreds of volunteers each year, while River Road attracts about 150. People at both farms expressed concerns about a declining number of regular volunteers in recent years. Those who mentioned these concerns attributed this decline to an increased cost of living and a decrease in novelty of urban agriculture, although the objective causes are unclear.

Volunteers make up the majority of the labor source at both farms, and almost all of the labor at Alemany Farm. Similar volunteer tasks between the two farms include weeding, harvesting, and planting. In addition to these tasks, the volunteers I interviewed from Alemany Farm also set and replace irrigation, start seeds and conduct other greenhouse work, plant and prune fruit trees, prepare beds for planting, build compost, and participate in all other farm tasks. These differences are likely due to the fact that all but one of the farmers at Alemany Farm are volunteers, although many of the Alemany-specific tasks are conducted or assisted by drop-in volunteers as well as experienced volunteers; additionally, River Road Farm had neither an orchard nor a greenhouse at the time of this research, so associated activities would not have been possible.

Education is a stated goal of both farms, and most education that occurs at the farms is experiential and happens while volunteers are working on farm tasks. While education does not seem to be structured at either farm, leaders at both farms strive to engage drop-in volunteers and take advantage of teachable moments. Farm leaders work alongside newer volunteers to demonstrate tasks, and volunteers who are new to a task learn by doing. Additionally, co-managers at Alemany Farm are particularly intentional about describing the context of each task they assign to other volunteers.

Comparisons and Contributions to Food Democracy Theory

The dimensions of food democracy I explore in this research include knowledge, sharing ideas, collective work, community and enduring relationships, and efficacy (Hassanein 2008; McIvor and Hale 2015). In order to effectively participate in the food system, people must first know about the food system (Hassanein 2008). Sharing ideas about the food system is important

because these interactions suggest a level of engagement required in democratic decision making (Hassanein 2008). Food democracy also requires citizens who care about the public good (Hassanein 2008). Building community and enduring relationships has been described in literature on democratization of the food system as a critical step in building civic skills (McIvor and Hale 2015), yet, it has previously not been specifically included in food democracy theory as its own dimension. Finally, while people can be efficacious within the food system without feeling a sense of efficacy, a sense of efficacy is necessary to affect intentional change (Hassanein 2008; McIvor and Hale 2015; Carolan 2016). At both farms, volunteers described developing skills in each of food democracy's dimensions due to their participation, which suggests that both farms are, to some extent, embodying and building food democracy.

Knowledge

Knowledge about the food system, whether in the form of practical skills or conceptual understanding, is a civic skill that provides a platform from which citizens can participate in the food system (Hassanein 2008; McIvor and Hale 2015). Similar to other research on community farms, at both River Road and Alemany volunteers learn about the food system (Hassanein 2008; White 2011). At both farms, volunteers primarily learn skills and knowledge specific to farming, and, to a lesser extent, they also enhance their conceptual understanding of the food system more generally.

Most of the volunteers I interviewed at both farms, all of whom were regular and long-term volunteers, either expressed or demonstrated competency in farming tasks, which is an important skill for a functioning food democracy. While volunteers at both farms possessed knowledge of the farm at which they volunteered, volunteers at Alemany Farm seemed to better understand the context around each of their tasks. This seemed to be a result of several factors at

Aleman Farm, including, but not necessarily limited to, the following: numerous co-managers prioritize explaining the context around each farm task, so that volunteers understand why they are doing a given task; nearly all of the volunteers I interviewed co-lead work days, and therefore have regular opportunities to teach various farm tasks; and, many of the co-managers participate to some extent in farm and work day planning, and therefore have to understand the reasons behind each farm tasks. None of these factors exist to the same extent at River Road Farm, though experienced volunteers do often show or teach newer volunteers how to accomplish tasks at the farm. This is not to say volunteers at River Road Farm did not possess contextual understanding of their farm tasks, but they did seem to need to be more proactive in gathering contextual information, often by asking questions rather than farm leaders sharing that information unprompted.

In addition to learning farm skills, volunteers at both farms also learned more conceptual information about farming, primarily about each farm's ecosystem as well as about sustainable agriculture and being introduced to new types of produce. Learning about the farms' ecosystems seemed to help volunteers recognize relationships between plants, animals, and soil. Understanding sustainable agriculture, and taking part in it, helped people develop a stronger connection to their food. For most volunteers at both farms, their participation also brought new types of produce into their lives, and some volunteers shifted their diets to include more vegetables due to their experiences on the farms.

Finally, more than half of the volunteers also learned about the food system more broadly, despite neither farm actively educating on the topic. The most common example of food system learning was volunteers gaining a better understanding of where food comes from, and the skills and effort required to grow food. While very few volunteers at River Road Farm

expressed learning about food politics, food justice, or hunger and food access, about half of Alemany Farm's volunteers said that their experiences at Alemany Farm had increased their awareness and knowledge of these issues; many of these volunteers attributed at least some of this learning to interactions with residents of the adjacent Alemany Housing.

Similar to Hassanein's 2008 study, while volunteers at both farms expressed learning a great deal about farming, learning more conceptually about the food system was not nearly as common. Food production is only one component of the food system. In order to participate effectively in the food system as a whole, citizens need to have a broader understanding of the food system. Both farms exist in cities where people are hungry, both provide produce to organizations that offer free access to fresh food, and both are attempting to create a small and local alternative to the food system. In short, both farms are actively engaged in food politics, and thus well-positioned to educate volunteers about the food system. Helping their volunteers learn more about the food system and food politics is an opportunity for growth at both farms.

Overall, both farms are places where people are learning and reskilling. By learning farm skills and developing food system knowledge, volunteers at both farms have become more informed food system participants, which exemplifies this dimension of food democracy. While none of the volunteers engage in all steps of the food system, their participation is enhanced where they do.

Sharing Ideas

Effective democratic decision making necessitates talk and deliberation, so sharing ideas about the food system is an important component of food democracy (Hassanein 2008). Volunteers at River Road Farm and Alemany Farm talk amongst themselves about the food system. At both farms, sharing ideas about the food system fell into three categories: casual

conversations about food, farming, and other aspects of the food system; more deliberative discourse about the food system; and peer-to-peer teaching.

While volunteers at both farms talked about the farm itself, the task at hand, one another's home gardens or experiences on other farms, and other food system topics, the primary topic of casual, food-system focused conversations at both farms was food and cooking. Participants shared recipe ideas with one another and described what they had made with food from the farm, usually while working together on farm tasks. Additionally, volunteers at Alemany Farm participate in a somewhat structured conversation at the end of every work day about the produce harvested that day, including ideas for how to use that produce, so every volunteer who stays until the end of the work day is involved in a conversation about food. In addition to demonstrating mental engagement with the food system, talking about food in these ways suggests building knowledge about areas of the food system beyond production, such as food preparation and cooking.

A small portion of interviewees mentioned participating in more serious deliberations about the food system and food system issues. These interviewees commented that more deliberative conversations generally happen with other regular volunteers, rather than new volunteers. This type of conversation is important to food democracy, as it suggest an even deeper mental engagement with the food system involving asking questions and thinking more critically about food system issues, in concert with others. More deliberative conversations also require the ability to listen to other perspectives, which is an important facet of democracy.

Another common way of sharing ideas about the food system at both farms is through peer-to-peer teaching and learning. Experienced volunteers at both farms teach newer volunteers about the farm and how to do certain tasks. Interviewees at Alemany Farm said that new

volunteers also bring expertise to the farm and teach more experienced volunteers about new ways of doing a farm task or about different uses of produce and herbs. At River Road Farm, this two-way peer-to-peer teaching occurs as well, though usually with volunteers teaching the staff about food preparation and fermentation. The ability to learn from and teach peers, and the open and honest dialogue that such interactions suggest, is important in democracy as well.

Collective Work and Problem Solving

In order to have a functioning and effective democracy, around food or otherwise, citizens need to know how to work together on common tasks, solve common problems, and implement solutions. Democracy is, after all, “a social form of interaction and collaboration” involving cooperation with others, and collective work suggests the development, or at least practice, of skills that support effective collaboration (McIvor and Hale 2015:728; Wolin 1989). Both White (2011) and Hassanein (2008) found that the community agriculture projects in their respective studies supported people working, deliberating, and making decisions together; in this research I combine these qualities in the term “collective work.” The research theme of collective work proved to be one of the richer themes for both River Road and Alemany, despite the interview guide containing no explicit questions about impacts of collective work or problem solving. Hassanein included concepts from this theme as a component of the ‘Sharing Ideas’ dimension of food democracy (2008). After seeing the potency of collective work and problem solving as an emergent theme in this research that participants did not directly connect to talking about the food system more broadly, though, as well as it being a component of deep democracy (McIvor and Hale 2015), I removed collective work concepts from the ‘Sharing Ideas’ dimension so that collective work could be an additional focus of food democracy. Volunteers at both farms work together on most tasks, and all volunteers reported participating in elements of collective

work and problem solving, including cooperation, collaborative decision making, and the development of civic skills; additionally, many volunteers expressed a sense of ownership of and responsibility for the farm, and many also described the collective aspect of the farms as increasing accessibility to participation.

I witnessed cooperation and collaborative decision making at both farms, and heard more about collective work from volunteers in interviews. Volunteers at both farms appear to work together fluidly with a “we’re in this together” attitude, and respectfully communicate their needs both verbally and non-verbally. While decision making power is hierarchical at River Road Farm, with the farm manager having the most power in decisions, decision making and problem solving are also delegated to lower-level staff and volunteers, especially around things such as deciding between tasks and how to work together on a specific task. Similarly, at Alemany, decision making is shared evenly among the FoAF co-managers, and auxiliary co-managers have decision making power regarding tasks on work days as well, but drop-in volunteers still have a say in the tasks in which they participate and are responsible for navigating team work with other volunteers. An important difference to note here, however, is that the decision making that occurs at Alemany is almost always collective, whereas the farm manager at River Road has the ultimate say in decisions regarding his farm.

Participating in collective work, decision making, and problem solving seemed to contribute to the development of some civic skills in many of the volunteers. Specifically, volunteers at both farms developed people and communication skills; volunteers at Alemany Farm also increased their understanding of political systems, including identifying power dynamics (Battistoni 1997; McIvor and Hale 2015). Specific people and communication skills included patience and the ability to get along with a diversity of people at both farms; leadership

and coordination skills, public speaking, and mindfulness of others' situations also emerged at Alemany. FoAF volunteers' understanding of political systems included learning how city government functions, recognizing and navigating uneven power dynamics (both as a power holder and as a participant with less power), identifying community gatekeepers, and participating in collective governance; in other words, by working through conflict and struggles with the City, FoAF volunteers do politics. Differences in civic skills developed at the two farms directly reflect the amount of responsibility, leadership, and decision making power the regular volunteers at Alemany have compared to those at River Road.

Numerous volunteers expressed a deep connection with, shared ownership of, and responsibility to the farms (see also: Hassanein 2008). This was not surprising; the idea that an active participant might develop a sense of ownership over a project is not new. In 1997, for instance, Boyte wrote, "When we help to build something, we experience it as ours." He goes on to connect this feeling of ownership with a sense of efficacy and knowledge-building, too, saying, "We gain authority and confidence to act, and a deep stake in governance. We have motivation to learn."

Because food democracy requires participation of citizens in the formation of their food system, access to opportunities for participation is paramount. The collective, community farm model – rather than a more individual food production model like community gardens – made participating in food production accessible to many of the volunteers I interviewed. While many volunteers expressed feeling a responsibility to the farm, they said that the reduced pressure due to not being solely responsible for the farm's success helped them participate. The farms' collective natures, supported by their goal of education, also allows for people of all skill levels, physical abilities, and farming experience to participate in meaningful tasks immediately upon

arrival, and mistakes made by volunteers are treated by farm leadership as learning opportunities rather than offenses that require punitive action.

By participating in these farms, volunteers developed skills to work more effectively with diverse people. Working cooperatively with other people despite differences, and the associated set of skills required to do so, is both necessary to food democracy. These skills can also be applied elsewhere in volunteers' lives. By learning to engage in the politics of their respective farms, volunteers developed skills that can help them engage more effectively in broader food system politics, and potentially in democracy more generally.

Community Good Orientation

Food democracy requires citizens to “go beyond one’s self-interest” to see and work toward the community good (Hassanein 2008:298). A community good orientation was prevalent among interviewees, as was an appreciation of the commons, a component of the “common good” theme that McIvor and Hale include in their definition of deep democracy (2015). An appreciation of the commons is inherent in urban agriculture, as UA usually “relies upon common spaces and settings, and it implies a care for and a concern with the relational aspects of those spaces” (McIvor and Hale 2015:735). Volunteers also shared their perceptions on the neighborhood, city, and food system impacts of the farm where they volunteer.

All the volunteers at both farms shared some sense of orientation toward the community good and the commons. While motivations for volunteering at the farms differed between volunteers, and most volunteers were motivated by individual benefits more than by a sense of communitarianism, nearly all the volunteers at both farms expressed feeling good about the impacts of their work on the community. Similarly, all the volunteers with whom I worked and spoke demonstrated generosity and helpfulness, qualities we can expect to see in people who are

oriented toward the community good. Simply by working in a shared space, on shared projects, growing food that will be shared with the greater community, volunteers conveyed an orientation toward the commons. Some volunteers at both farms expressed explicit appreciation for the commons, too; food, in particular, was viewed by numerous volunteers as a “commons,” and something that should be available to and accessible for all people.

Despite River Road and Alemany being more than 1,000 miles apart, volunteers at each farm perceived similar impacts of the farm on the immediate neighborhood, the larger city community, and the broader food system. At both farms, volunteers acknowledged the low participation by residents of the surrounding communities, but hoped that neighbors still benefitted from the farm. At River Road Farm, volunteers saw the farm as a potential green space for neighbors to enjoy, should they choose to do so, and a potential source of fresh food. At Alemany Farm, volunteers perceived similar potential neighborhood impacts: a beautiful, green “back yard,” that neighbors can theoretically access at any time; access to free, fresh produce, that neighbors can harvest whenever they choose to do so; and a safe space in which neighbor kids can, and do, play.

Common perceptions between the two farms of impacts on their larger city areas include preservation of open space, education about farming and the food system, access to fresh and local food, and a demonstration of what is possible regarding gardening and farming in a city. At Alemany Farm, volunteers also saw the farm as increasing food security in the city because it gives all its produce away for free. Most volunteers did not think that the farms were having much, if any, impact on the larger food system; the potential impacts they perceived fell into one of two categories. First, some volunteers at both farms saw potential for the education at the farm to shift people’s buying habits and slowly increase the demand for more sustainably grown

produce. Second, some volunteers saw the farms potentially contributing to a more collective impact. These volunteers thought that perhaps the individual farm did not have much impact on its own, but could contribute to shifting the food system toward something more locally controlled and ecologically sustainable when seen in concert with other similar farms across the country, especially if the prevalence of similar farms grows. In addition to these two potential types of impact, many volunteers also saw these farms as models or sources of inspiration, to help people see what is possible.

Community and Enduring Relationships

Community, and the enduring relationships that can comprise such social groups, are important to food democracy because “the health of democracy is tied to the well being of its “roots”—the everyday relationships and practices of ordinary citizens” (McIvor and Hale 2015:728). While elements of community are mentioned in previous food democracy literature, community and enduring relationships have not previously been explicitly set aside as their own food democracy dimension (Hassanein 2008). Building community was stated as a top priority and benefit for the volunteer program at each farm, by everyone I interviewed. The question, “Building community for whom?” arose in discussions with volunteers and staff from both farms, as well.

The people I interviewed, people who have been involved with River Road or Alemany regularly for an extended period of time, all discussed the community element of their respective community farm, some describing the “community” portion of community farms as more important than the farm. Farm leaders are intentional about creating a welcoming environment for volunteers, and volunteers stated that the farm helped them meet new people, develop lasting friendships, and discuss both mundane and deeply personal topics with one another while

working on shared farm tasks. Most volunteers expressed feeling a sense of belonging to the farm community, which, similar to public work leading to a feeling of ownership of a project (Boyte 1997), can lead to an increased commitment to that community and a sense of place (Kemmis 1990; Moore 2001; Slotnick 2016). The concept of community was extended by many volunteers to include the space of the farm in addition to the people, which some said provided a place of healing. The farms' volunteers are diverse in terms of age, life experiences, and cultural backgrounds, and leaders at both farms attempt to create an inclusive space. Interacting with a wide range of people helped volunteers at both farms develop a greater sense of empathy, which Carolan found can be a practice that forges what he refers to as "actors of citizenship," or citizens in a food democracy (2016).

Despite some volunteers' increased ability to feel empathy and both farms' clear intentions to create welcoming spaces, volunteers and staff at both farms described engaging their low-income neighbors as a major challenge. The occurrence of urban agriculture being perceived as a welcoming space and a positive experience to some and an exclusive space to others is not uncommon in UA literature, and reflects the conflation of community with inclusivity (Block et al. 2011; Hoover 2013; H. Lyson 2014; Figueroa 2015). Fortunately, farm leaders at both River Road Farm and Alemany Farm recognize the opportunity for improved relationships with neighbors. At Alemany Farm, especially, volunteers expressed sincere disappointment at volunteers' inability thus far to engage the residents of the adjacent Alemany Housing community in a meaningful way or provide opportunities that are meaningful to those residents (Hassanein 2008). H. Lyson's research found that the UA activists in her study framed their activism around education and "bringing the benefits of healthy, locally grown food to the low-income communities that surrounded them," which ended up reinforcing social hierarchies

rather than dismantling them and creating an exclusive space (2014). Various volunteers at Alemany shared similar stories in which volunteers were perceived as “missionaries” or saw themselves as accidentally creating “white spaces,” echoing scholarship on the problems that arise when exogenous groups try to work on the behalf of others (Li 2005; H. Lyson 2014; Passidomo 2014). Scholars who have researched this issue suggest involving the affected communities to develop effective solutions; Alemany and River Road might be able to begin shifting their relationship with their neighbors if they approach their neighbors without a prescribed solution for including them in the farm’s activities, but instead by involving the community in determining what the solution(s) might be and what kind of opportunities might be meaningful to them (Alinsky 1971; Hassanein 2003, 2008; Li 2005; Block et al. 2011; Hoover 2013; Bradley and Galt 2014; Figueroa 2015; McIvor and Hale 2015). Shifting this approach interrupts the trend of privileged groups working on behalf of others, and “turns the focus from ‘helping’ to ‘assisting,’ and from ‘intervening’ to ‘collaborating’ or ‘co-creating’” (McIvor and Hale 2015:731). Redefining these relationships will require building trust, which takes time, as well as the unpacking of the social power dynamics at play (White 2011; Passidomo 2014; McIvor and Hale 2015).

The River Road and Alemany case studies demonstrate that community is an important component of both farms’ volunteer programs, mirroring the critical role that community and relationships play in democracy (McIvor and Hale 2015). Building community is important to democracy in at least two ways. First, building community can change the way people interact with one another and help them learn the difficult task of recognizing common ground, which is important to the participatory nature of democracy (Kemmis 1990). We see both of these impacts in this research. Second, building community can contribute to participants’ sense of place,

which helps reduce a sense of placelessness (Kemmis 1990; Slotnick 2016). Again, interviewees at both farms expressed experiencing these impacts. These results present a case for the inclusion of community as a distinct dimension of food democracy.

While relationships exist between my proposed food democracy dimension of community and the existing dimension of an orientation toward the common good, I view the two as separate dimensions. An orientation toward the community good is an attitude that may influence decision making, whereas community is a network of relationships. An orientation toward the community good does not necessarily involve lasting relationships with other people. Being in community, on the other hand, requires enduring relationships with others, and the struggle, communication, and growth involved in those relationships. Again, the two are related, and a sense of community may influence one's community good orientation; a person who feels like they are a part of a community, for instance, may be more likely to prioritize the needs of that community over their individual needs.

Additionally, McIvor and Hale (2015) see building civic skills such as efficacy and knowledge, which interestingly are also food democracy dimensions, as potential beneficial side effects to building community and enduring relationships. They see community and relationships as critical to building a sense of democratic agency, as this form of agency is “only actualized in concert with others,” and view community as the vehicle through which democratic efficacy can occur (730). We see connections here between the food democracy dimensions of community, knowledge, and efficacy, and earlier in this chapter between collective work and efficacy as well as community and community good orientation. These dimensions, then, are not necessarily discrete; rather, they may be intrinsically related and may even influence one another.

Efficacy

In order to consciously affect change in the food system, citizens must feel like citizens – they must recognize that they possess the power to make change; in other words, they must feel a sense of efficacy (Hassanein 2008; Carolan 2016). Volunteers at both farms demonstrated efficacy simply by participating in the efficacious work of the farms. Similar to other research, most volunteers also described at least some sense of efficacy, recognizing the impacts of their actions and their capacity to determine their relationship with and enact change in the food system (Hassanein 2008; White 2011).

While volunteers never used the term “efficacy,” they spoke about various ways their actions impacted the food system. About half the volunteers at River Road Farm and most of the volunteers at Alemany Farm recognized that their participation contributed to the community impacts of the farms. Most volunteers also increased their involvement with their respective farm over time, and, for some volunteers, their farm involvement inspired food system action off the farm in the forms of activism with other food system organizations, pursuing structured food system education, and changing careers to be more involved in addressing food system issues. All the volunteers demonstrated efficacy, too, by actively determining their relationship with food through transitioning from a consumer of food to a citizen-producer who grows, harvests, and eats produce, thus “blurring the traditional distinction between ‘producers’ and ‘consumers’” (Renting, Schermer, and Rossi 2012:301). Additionally, some volunteers at Alemany Farm felt confident in their ability to start a farm of their own. While the volunteers take produce home in exchange for the work, the work is not seen as simply a means to an end; indeed, most of the volunteers said that while they value the produce, the compensation was not the reason why they participate at the farm. These volunteers are participating in public work, which “cultivates the

ability to see a larger context and the skills of working with diverse groups on public tasks” (Boyte 1997:6).

Volunteers at both farms also shared ways in which their farm participation affects them personally, which may contribute to a sense of efficacy. First, all the volunteers expressed genuine enjoyment of and satisfaction from their time volunteering at the farms. Second, numerous Alemany Farm volunteers developed professionally by volunteering at the farm, namely in the form of transferable skills like project management. Third, volunteers at both farms felt they had grown personally due to their farm participation; specifically, they felt trusted by others and they had developed a stronger sense of self-confidence.

Most of the volunteers I interviewed recognized their power to make small-scale food system change. By participating as farm volunteers, these interviewees developed a sense of agency and efficacy within the food system, and established themselves as food citizens, which is a necessary component of food democracy. Most of the volunteers, too, effectively participated in small-scale food democracy by engaging in the food system as more than consumers, and actively participating in defining what their food system looks like.

Recommendations for Future Research

Conducting this research raised many more questions than it answered. These questions fall into four general categories: the relationship between the dimensions of food democracy, the experiences of people who live or work in communities adjacent to urban farms who are not involved in the farms, the impacts of other community agriculture projects on their volunteers, and food democracy’s contributions to democracy.

The results of this study and the literature on food democracy, democracy, and community agriculture suggest that efficacy does not exist as separate from the other dimensions of food democracy. In particular, the results suggest connections between knowledge, collective work and problem solving, community and enduring relationships, and efficacy. Future research in this area could investigate how different dimensions of food democracy influence one another, where they overlap, and how knowledge of these relationships might be used to design future community agriculture programs.

Both farms acknowledged difficulty engaging the people who live closest to the farm, who in both cases were people who the farm intended to serve. Future research could look into the barriers neighbors face in participating in nearby urban farms, especially people of low-income as in the cases of both River Road and Alemany. This research could also investigate what those neighbors envision a positive relationship with a farm might look like, as well as what needs they have that a farm might be able to fill.

More empirical studies on community farms and their impact on creating a more democratic food system could be useful. The literature on the subject is limited, so adding cases could be helpful both in comparing existing cases, as well as creating a clear outline of some common ingredients that make community agriculture projects effective. Naturally, all community farms will be different and context-dependent, but there may be qualities that are constant among successful programs that could be adapted to different contexts. Creating a model like this could be helpful for people looking to develop new community agriculture projects.

Finally, this research raised questions about food democracy's contributions to democracy more broadly. For instance, in this research we learned that Alemany and River Road

volunteers built skills that are helpful in food democracy, but to what extent are those democratic skills transferrable to other democratic contexts? Additionally, do volunteers need to view their food system work as explicitly political in order to realize broader democratic change? Future research on these subjects could help elucidate the impacts of political food system work on democracy, citizenship, and democratic participation more generally.

Conclusion

When I set out to conduct this research, I felt a responsibility as a researcher to have both academic and practical implications to my project, and I was hoping to explore how to make change toward a more just and equitable food system. By studying River Road Farm and Alemany Farm through the lens of food democracy, I wanted to identify components of the programs that were successful in democratizing the food system, even just at the farm scale, and components that proved challenging. I think, to some extent, I succeeded in doing this.

While neither River Road Farm nor Alemany Farm perfectly creates a space for building food democracy – indeed, both programs have the opportunity to improve their relationships with and engagement of their surrounding communities, and, in doing so, better live up to food democracy’s ideals by providing people who live adjacent to the farm with equal opportunity to meaningfully participate in the food system – the farms do help build food democracy in many ways. Frequent and long-term volunteers learn farming skills and, to a certain extent, food system concepts. They talk with one another about the food system and work collectively on farm tasks and decision making. They develop a stronger sense of community good orientation, and become a valued member of a community. They develop the capacity to make change in the

food system. Volunteers' reskilling in how to actively participate in their food system represents small-scale food system change, and movement, however slight, toward food democracy.

As volunteers mentioned, these farms can act as models for similar projects in cities across the United States, and potentially across the globe. While each was founded and evolved within their specific contexts, combining unique ingredients of people, land, and circumstances, they both contain ingredients that can be adapted to new and different contexts. While they may not noticeably impact the food system as individual farms, the impact of a network of farms like this might ripple across the landscape, interrupting and redirecting the dominant food system to create something more democratic. We're not there yet, but "the knowledge necessary to imagine and enact more egalitarian futures must come from somewhere. Urban agriculture is an activity where such knowledge can potentially be cultivated" (McIvor and Hale 2015). Projects like River Road Farm and Alemany Farm are spaces where imagining and enacting a more egalitarian food system can transpire.

Additionally, "food democracy is not only a method; establishing a strong food democracy will itself constitute a genuine transformation of societal values and practices" (Hassanein 2003:85). Perhaps in identifying what *is* working in some contexts, we can provide a window into how others might also work to affect food system change. And, because the food system is a product of our larger social, political, and economic systems—and because the food system produces and reproduces those larger systems—in working to transform the food system, we are also working to transform those larger systems into more equitable entities.

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APPENDIX A

ADMINISTRATIVE INTERVIEW GUIDE

QUESTIONS

ICE BREAKERS

1. To get started, when did you first get involved with FARM?
Probe: So, you've been here for X years?
Follow up: What is your current role here?
Probe: And when did you start in this role?
2. Why did you initially decided to get involved with the farm/organization?
Follow up: What was your experience with urban agriculture before this?

SEGUE Since my research focuses on volunteer programs on urban farms, I'd love to hear your thoughts about your volunteer program.

MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

3. What do farm volunteers typically do?
Probe for depth: What kind of tasks?
Follow up: Who decides what volunteers do?

KNOWLEDGE

4. What sorts of things do volunteers learn while working on the farm?
Follow up: What do they learn to **do** related to food and farming from volunteering here?
Follow up: How do they learn these things?
Follow up: I know some of the food you grow here gets donated to POVERELLO CENTER/PUBLIC HOUSING PROJECT. Do you include much education on things like hunger and food distribution with your volunteers?
Probe for depth: Can you talk about that some? Any examples?
Probe for depth: Any other key things volunteers learn?

GENERAL BENEFITS

5. What do you think volunteers get out of their experience working here?
Probe for depth: Any specific benefits? Social, economic, personal?
Probe for depth: Will you describe why you see this as a benefit?
Follow up: Do you have any stories about volunteers that illustrate these benefits?

EFFICACY & ECONOMIC IMPACT

6. Do volunteers ever mention the role food from the farm plays in their lives?
Follow up: Do you think volunteers' eating habits change due to volunteering here?
Probe for depth: In what ways would do you think they change?

CONCERNS

7. We've talked a lot about the benefits of this program. Is there anything you have concerns about or would change about the program? If so, what?
Probe for depth: Will you tell me more about that?

SEGUE We've talked a lot about your role and experience on the farm, and now I'd I'm going to ask some questions about other people on the farm, and the broader farm community and its impact.

DIVERSITY & COLLECTIVE ACTION

8. Do volunteers typically interact with one another?
Follow up: Do volunteers work together on shared tasks?
Follow up: What kinds of people volunteer at the farm?
Follow up: What types of things do volunteers talk about while they're working?
Probe for depth: Do they talk at all about food or farming?

COLLECTIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

9. Is there ever conflict at the farm?
Probe for depth: What happens? Can you give me an example?
Follow up: How do those types of things get resolved?
Probe for depth: Who resolves them?

BROADER IMPACTS & CIVIC LIFE

10. How do you think the experience here impacts other parts of volunteers' lives, if at all?
Probe for depth: Do you have any stories about volunteers that illustrate these impacts?
Follow up: Are volunteers involved in other ways with food issues?
Probe: In what ways?

COMMON GOOD

11. What do you think the nearby community gets out of having a farm like this?
Follow up: What about the larger San Francisco or Bay Area communities?
Follow up: How do you feel about being part of those impacts?
12. I'm curious about how this farm fits into the bigger food system picture. Do you have any thoughts about how FARM relates to the larger food system as a whole?

FINAL THOUGHTS

13. Is there anything else you'd like to mention about your experience with the farm before we wrap up?
14. Thank you so much for your time. This has been really valuable. To wrap up, would you be willing to fill out this form? It just has a couple questions about you, and should only take a few seconds. Thank you. [Give demographic questionnaire to interviewee.]

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Record “end of interview [title]” (e.g. “End of River Road number one, A A”) and turn off recorder.

Write interview title/number at the top right corner of the written demographic questionnaire.

VOLUNTEER INTERVIEW GUIDE

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Test recorder; ensure that you have batteries or that the recorder is fully charged. Record the title of the interview with the code name for the interviewee (e.g. “River Road interview one, V(olunteer)-A/A(dmin)-A”).

Ensure that the wind block is in place if outdoors, or find an indoor interview location if necessary.

Be prepared with pens and paper to take notes, if the interviewee does not want the interview recorded.

INTRODUCTION

“This interview is part of a larger study about volunteer programs on urban farms.

As part of this study, I’m trying to learn about what volunteering at these farms is like for people. I’m interested in what your experiences have been on and with FARM, what you get out of it, what you’ve learned, those types of things.

Because this interview is meant to gather your perspective on this program, I hope you’ll be comfortable speaking freely and openly with me. I want to hear your thoughts and ideas—whether they’re positive, negative, or neutral! There are no right or wrong answers.

I also want to let you know that your identity as a participant in this research will remain confidential. Unless you request otherwise or we discuss otherwise, I won’t use your name, or the names of any other organizations you might be involved with, should that come up, in any presentations or written reports.

If it’s okay with you, I’d like to record this discussion. Recording allows me to listen more closely to what you’re saying instead of taking notes, and ensures that I’m accurately representing your views. Is that okay with you?”

IF YES, TURN ON THE RECORDER. MAKE SURE IT’S ON!

QUESTIONS

ICE BREAKERS & MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

To get started, when did you first get involved as a volunteer at FARM?

Probe: So, you’ve been volunteering for X years?

Follow up: How often would you say you volunteer?
What do you typically do as a volunteer?
Probe for depth: What kind of tasks?
Follow up: Who decides what you do when you volunteer?
Probe: Do you have any say in what tasks you do?
Why did you initially decided to volunteer at the farm?
Follow up: What was your experience with farming or gardening before this?
Follow up: What were you expecting to get out of your experience?
Probe: Have those expectations been met?
Follow up: Do you have your own garden?
Probe: What made you decide to volunteer instead of/in addition to getting a community garden plot?
Follow up: What makes you continue to volunteer?

SEGUE: You've talked about a number of things you've gotten out of your experience as a volunteer at the farm. Let's go into some of those things a little deeper.

KNOWLEDGE

What sorts of things have you learned during your time working on the farm?
Follow up: What have you learned to **do** related to food and farming from volunteering here?
Follow up: I know some of the food you help grow here gets donated to POVERELLO CENTER/PUBLIC HOUSING PROJECT. Do you feel like you've learned some things about hunger and food access from volunteering here?
Probe for depth: Can you talk about that some? Any examples?
Probe for depth: Any other key things you've learned?

EFFICACY & ECONOMIC IMPACT

Consider your [household's] weekly food needs. What role does food from the farm play in that?
Follow up: Have your eating habits changed at all since you started volunteering here?
Probe for depth: In what ways would you say they've changed?

GENERAL BENEFITS

What personal benefits have you experienced as a volunteer, if any?
Probe for depth: What else do you personally get out of being a volunteer on the farm? Any other benefits?
Probe for depth: Will you describe why you see this as a benefit?
Follow up: Think about the end of your shift as a volunteer. How does working on the farm make you feel?

CONCERNS

We've talked a lot about the benefits of the Volunteers for Veggies program. Is there anything you have concerns about or would change about the program? If so, what?
Probe for depth: Will you tell me more about that?

SEGUE We've talked a lot about your role and experience on the farm, and now I'd I'm going to ask some questions about other people on the farm, and the broader farm community and its impact.

DIVERSITY & COLLECTIVE ACTION/COMMUNITY

Are there other people at the farm who you typically interact with?

Follow up: Do you work with other people on shared tasks at the farm?

Follow up: Are these people you might interact with if not for the farm?

Follow up: What types of things do you talk about while you're working?

Probe for depth: Do you talk at all about food or farming?

COLLECTIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

Is there ever conflict at the farm?

Probe for depth: What happens? Can you give me an example?

Follow up: How do those types of things get resolved?

Probe for depth: Who usually resolves them?

BROADER IMPACTS & CIVIC LIFE

Has anything (else) changed in your life because of volunteering on the farm?

Probe for depth: Can you tell me more about that?

Follow up: Are you involved in any other ways with food issues?

Probe: In what ways?

Probe: Did your experience as a volunteer here contribute to you getting involved in those other food issues?

COMMON GOOD

What do you think the nearby community gets out of having a farm like this?

Follow up: What about the larger San Francisco or Bay Area communities?

Follow up: How do you feel about being part of those impacts?

I'm curious about how this farm fits into the bigger food system picture. Do you have any thoughts about how FARM relates to the larger food system as a whole?

FINAL THOUGHTS

Is there anything else you'd like to mention about your experience as a volunteer before we wrap up?

1. Thank you so much for your time. This has been really valuable. To wrap up, would you be willing to fill out this form? It just has a couple questions about you, and should only take a few seconds. Thank you. [Give demographic questionnaire to interviewee.]

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Record “end of interview [title]” (e.g. “End of River Road number one, V A”) and turn off recorder. Write interview title/number at the top right corner of the written demographic questionnaire.

VOLUNTEER-ADMIN INTERVIEW GUIDE

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Test recorder; ensure that you have batteries or that the recorder is fully charged. Record the title of the interview with the code name for the interviewee (e.g. “Alemany interview one, M(anager)-A [or AM (Auxiliary Manager-A”).

Ensure that the wind block is in place if outdoors, or find an indoor interview location if necessary.

Be prepared with pens and paper to take notes, if the interviewee does not want the interview recorded.

INTRODUCTION

“This interview is part of a larger study about volunteer programs on urban farms.

As part of this study, I’m trying to learn about what volunteering at these farms is like for people. I’m interested in what your experiences have been on and with Alemany Farm, what you get out of it, what you’ve learned, those types of things.

Because this interview is meant to gather your perspective on this program, I hope you’ll be comfortable speaking freely and openly with me. I want to hear your thoughts and ideas—whether they’re positive, negative, or neutral! There are no right or wrong answers.

I also want to let you know that your identity as a participant in this research will remain confidential. Unless you request otherwise or we discuss otherwise, I won’t use your name, or the names of any other organizations you might be involved with, should that come up, in any presentations or written reports.

If it’s okay with you, I’d like to record this discussion. Recording allows me to listen more closely to what you’re saying instead of taking notes, and ensures that I’m accurately representing your views. Is that okay with you?”

IF YES, TURN ON THE RECORDER. MAKE SURE IT’S ON!

QUESTIONS

ICE BREAKERS & MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

2. To get started, when did you first get involved as a volunteer at Alemany Farm?
Probe: So, you've been volunteering for X years?
Follow up: Tell me about your role at the farm.
Follow up: How often would you say you volunteer?
3. What do you typically do as a volunteer?
Probe for depth: What kind of tasks?
Follow up: Who decides what you do when you volunteer?
Probe: Do you have any say in what tasks you do?
4. Why did you initially decided to volunteer at the farm?
Follow up: What was your experience with farming or gardening before this?
Follow up: What were you expecting to get out of your experience?
Probe: Have those expectations been met?
Follow up: Do you have your own garden?
Probe: What made you decide to volunteer instead of/in addition to getting a community garden plot?
Follow up: What makes you continue to volunteer?

IF NO DIRECT FARM WORK, GO TO PAGE 5.

SEGUE: You've talked about a number of things you've gotten out of your experience as a volunteer at the farm. Let's go into some of those things a little deeper.

KNOWLEDGE

5. What sorts of things have you learned during your time working on *or with* the farm?
Follow up: What have you learned to **do** related to food and farming from volunteering here?
Follow up: I know some of the food you help grow here gets donated to PUBLIC HOUSING PROJECT (?). Do you feel like you've learned some things about hunger and food access from volunteering here?
Probe for depth: Can you talk about that some? Any examples?
Probe for depth: Any other key things you've learned?

EFFICACY & ECONOMIC IMPACT

6. Consider your [household's] weekly food needs. What role does food from the farm play in that?
Follow up: Have your eating habits changed at all since you started volunteering here?
Probe for depth: In what ways would you say they've changed?

GENERAL BENEFITS

7. What personal benefits have you experienced as a volunteer, if any?
Probe for depth: What else do you personally get out of being a volunteer on the farm? Any other benefits?
Probe for depth: Will you describe why you see this as a benefit?
Follow up: Think about the end of your shift as a volunteer. How does working on the farm make you feel?

CONCERNS

8. We've talked a lot about the benefits of the volunteer program. Is there anything you have concerns about or would change about the program? If so, what?
Probe for depth: Will you tell me more about that?

SEGUE We've talked a lot about your role and experience on the farm, and now I'm going to ask some questions about other people on the farm, and the broader farm community and its impact.

DIVERSITY & COLLECTIVE ACTION/COMMUNITY

9. Are there other people at the farm who you typically interact with?
Follow up: Do you work with other people on shared tasks at the farm?
Follow up: Are these people you might interact with if not for the farm?
Follow up: What types of things do you talk about while you're working?
Probe for depth: Do you talk at all about food or farming?

COLLECTIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

10. Is there ever conflict at the farm?
Probe for depth: What happens? Can you give me an example?
Follow up: How do those types of things get resolved?
Probe for depth: Who usually resolves them?

BROADER IMPACTS & CIVIC LIFE

11. Has anything (else) changed in your life because of volunteering on the farm?
Probe for depth: Can you tell me more about that?
Follow up: Are you involved in any other ways with food issues?
Probe: In what ways?
Probe: Did your experience as a volunteer here contribute to you getting involved in those other food issues?

COMMON GOOD

12. What do you think the nearby community gets out of having a farm like this?
Follow up: What about the larger San Francisco or Bay Area communities?
Follow up: How do you feel about being part of those impacts?
13. I'm curious about how this farm fits into the bigger food system picture. Do you have any thoughts about how Alemany Farm relates to the larger food system as a whole?

FINAL THOUGHTS

14. Is there anything else you'd like to mention about your experience as a volunteer before we wrap up?
15. Thank you so much for your time. This has been really valuable. To wrap up, would you be willing to fill out this form? It just has a couple questions about you, and should only take a few seconds. Thank you. [Give demographic questionnaire to interviewee.]

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

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