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Uprooting Food Injustice: A Qualitative Analysis of Activist Efforts Combating Food Deserts and Inequality

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**Uprooting Food Injustice: A Qualitative Analysis of
Activist Efforts Combating Food Deserts and Inequality**

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for
Honors in the Department of Sociology

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Abstract

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Food insecurity is rampant in the United States in both rural and urban settings. The limited access to affordable nutritious food and education about healthy eating, increase risks for diet related illness and impact community health. Through participant observation and analysis of various community-based initiatives, this thesis explores interconnections between community solutions and public policy. Six cases studies in New Mexico and New York are examined to better understand how communities and government programs must collaborate to create effective change. Further, each case study reveals similar factors of food injustice, yet modes of activism to counterattack food injustice are in place to encourage greater recognition of a problem permeating communities. Finally, this presentation and the longer thesis sheds light on the intersections of race, class, and place which contribute to food insecurity and activism created to address the problem not fully recognized by larger structural institutions.

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Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1 Introduction: What is Food Injustice?

Is it a privilege or a right? Food is considered necessary for survival, yet issues of hunger are rampant across the United States, and people are hungry for change. Food insecurity, or limited access to food resources, has become an ever-increasing problem resulting from continued distinctions across race, class, and geographic location. Further, government policies often fail to fully recognize the major challenges experienced within communities and corporate grocery chains have little interest in investing in areas where they cannot make major profits (Sharkey and Horel 2008). For many living within urban and rural areas, a lack of food resources is all too common, leaving individuals trapped, constrained, hungry, and dependent on a system, which fails to fully recognize the social causes contributing to inequality within the food system (Poppendieck 2012).

Often, issues of food insecurity and injustice perpetuate among lower socioeconomic groups, which places them at higher risks for health problems and leaves them further disadvantaged in a system centered on confining individuals to poverty (Poppendieck 2012). As food evokes feeling, issues of hunger are generally recognized as significant causes and most individuals would agree no one should be denied a basic human right (Kasper 2010). However, individuals often fail to fully comprehend the extent of food inaccessibility and do not always connect the issue back to historical oppression, most commonly tied to race and class. In acknowledging the significance of food's role towards existence, it becomes problematic realizing the massive degree to which individuals lack proper access to food, and are either left hungry or inadequately fed as a result of social causes (Poppendieck 2012). Food injustice is the idea that food resources are linked to social causes, including race and class, which results in

oppression and inequality across society (Clendenning 2016). In attempting to restore justice within the food system, this thesis acknowledges different community-based strategies working to eliminate issues of food inaccessibility and explores their interconnections with public policy. This chapter will provide an overview of aspects related to food injustice and will also acknowledge government programs along with community-based strategies directed towards food empowerment. Additionally, this chapter will recognize how aspects of race, class, and geography, are interwoven with issues of food injustice.

Food Security vs. Insecurity

The terms food security and food insecurity mainly relate to the degree to which an individual has access to food in order to subsist. As all life forms need food for survival, issues of security relate to whether or not individuals can readily meet and act on this need. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) classifies food security and insecurity on a scale and formally defines this issue as “household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food (Coleman-Jenson et al. 2016). Food insecurity undoubtedly results from a lack of monetary resources, and most commonly, people who are food insecure endure hunger because of their inability to access a general necessity. Although food insecurity and hunger are major issues plaguing the world, the U.S. has managed to implement some different programs, such as the Feeding America program in order to better address this issue and provide hunger relief (Jablonski 2016).

Frequently, food insecurity is expressed in terms of food deserts since both issues pertain to having a lack of food resources. The major difference between the two terms is mainly a result of food insecure individuals being unable to obtain food on their own, usually due to cost, compared with food deserts, where entire communities lack access to food resources in general.

In both circumstances, individuals must forgo life essentials, ultimately raising the question of food inequality and injustice. The article “Food Justice or Food Sovereignty? Understanding the Rise of Urban Food Movements in the USA,” addresses how the poor are notably the ones to struggle the most from issues present in the food system, and underlines the fact that growing food is not necessarily an issue, but rather the distribution of these sources (Clendenning 2016). The problems of food insecurity and food injustice are wholly interrelated as access to food becomes more closely associated with issues of class, race, and other socioeconomic factors. As minorities and impoverished people tend to make up a larger percentage of the food insecure, it becomes important to focus on ways to work towards improving the food system in order to create more equality.

Food Deserts

Though closely related to concepts of food insecurity and food injustice, the term “food desert,” must also be defined as this notion encompasses ideas of food access and availability to healthy resources (Tach and Amorium 2015). A food desert is often characterized as a marginalized area with restricted availability to affordable healthy food options and resources such as grocery stores, farmers markets, and other food sources (Kwate 2008). Although multiple definitions of food deserts exist, it is important to recognize how food deserts vary by region, state, landscape, and other socioeconomic factors. The USDA further refines food deserts by explaining that “[in order] to qualify as a ‘low-access community,’ at least 500 people and/or at least 33 percent of the census tract’s population must live more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store (10 miles, in the case of non-metropolitan census tracts)” (Wright 2016:171). Since food deserts in both rural and urban areas share the common problem of not having access to food, each community is presented with unique challenges and opportunities as

the ability to grow food varies in addition to poverty levels (Jablonski 2016). As a whole, food deserts have gained more attention over the past decades, yet there is still a need for recognizing the differences present within each location.

Often times, individuals become trapped in food deserts as a result of geographic location, lack of access to transportation, inadequate monetary means, or limited knowledge about resources available to them regarding healthy eating. When an individual fails to possess both the means and knowledge to improve their diets, there are often many detrimental health problems such as obesity and heart disease that can arise as a result (The White House 2016). In many cases, food deserts are plagued by heavy influences of fast food resulting in people relying mostly on convenience stores for purchasing basic groceries (Tach and Amorium 2015). With restricted access to stores, residents in many areas are left with few options for obtaining substantial nutrition, which often lead to greater risks of long-term health problems (Hurt 2013).

Fast Food and Convenience Stores

One particular characteristic of communities located in food deserts is the paucity of grocery stores, frequently coupled with small alternatives such as convenience stores or fast food restaurants. While most definitions of food deserts emphasize limited access to grocery stores, they fail to fully examine the disadvantages created by these restrictive resources. Though concerns surrounding fast food often go unnoticed in low-income areas, it is important to address this particular issue as being problematic, since these businesses often appear to target the lower class (Kwate 2008). Disadvantaged groups fall vulnerable to fast food giants as this industry has the ability to tempt low-income individuals with their cheap deals and seemingly “good” food (Kwate 2008). In many respects, the fast food industry creates a cycle of dependency because individuals are faced with no other options for food and become accustomed to a diet that does

very little for their health (Walker, Keane, and Burke 2010). Furthermore, because many low-income individuals lead inactive lifestyles, commonly due to the nature of their environment and lack of resources, there typically is greater dependency on television, which coincidentally advertises for fast food (Lippert 2016). Low-income individuals often fall victim to television and sedentary lifestyles as a result of crime rates and lack of safety within their neighborhoods, which leads to less exercise (Lippert 2016). Inactive lifestyles paired with unhealthy eating habits carries individuals down a predictable path of obesity and an array of health problems that are not present among those with greater access to food.

When fast food is solely viewed from middle and upper class standpoints, there is often inadequate awareness of the problems present since these groups have the option to choose healthy alternatives as opposed to what is convenient and available (Kwate 2008). For most individuals in low-income areas, when posed with the question of hunger, there is an acute awareness of the constrained resources available within their communities. Individuals living in food deserts are constantly struggling to access any food to ensure they do not go hungry, which often leads to a dependency on cheap and convenient food (letsmove.gov 2016). On the other hand, since fast food is not as strategically placed within middle and upper class neighborhoods and these groups typically have a greater ability to exercise, and are not as vulnerable to obesity (Lippert 2016). By and large, issues of food and health are largely controlled by social structures such as privilege and class, which make it more necessary for communities to make healthier food opportunities available for the disadvantaged.

When further considering the limitations in accessing food, it becomes important to recognize other features, which set a food desert apart from a “food oasis” and how other structural forces largely influence the ways through which one can access what they truly need

(Walker et al. 2010). A food oasis contrasts with the idea of a food desert, as it is an area abundant with food choices and has the ability to provide individuals with a number of healthy options (Walker et al. 2010). Laura Tach and Mariana Amorim's article "Constrained, Convenient and Symbolic Consumption: Neighborhood Food Environments and Economic Coping Strategies among the Urban Poor" introduces the idea of "food mirages," which essentially considers how having access to food does not necessarily resolve the issues of food deserts because of the major roles of affordability and convenience (2015). At times, food sold in places like convenience stores are often more expensive than other large supermarkets, creating challenges, which often makes the issue of cost more dismal for those without dependable public transit or personal transportation. In circumstances when an individual does have access to a car, there is often more freedom and flexibility for shopping at a variety of stores in order to find the best prices for food. Furthermore, when also considering matters of convenience and general access for those without reliable transportation, it becomes important to question the quality of food being sold at small stores, which are primarily canned and processed products (Tach and Amorim 2015).

The Urban vs. Rural Struggle

Another major factor to consider in terms of the large-scale issue of food deserts is the types of areas in which food deserts are present. Food deserts located in rural areas differ significantly from urban food deserts as access to resources and opportunities in rural areas are often more scarce (Piontak and Schulman 2014). When considering rural areas as a whole, it is noteworthy to recognize the spatial distance one must travel to get places and interact with a variety of means as well as other demographic factors. Additionally, the fact that many individuals living in rural areas have different social capacities, often leads to differences in

accessing resources. It is often vital for individuals to be part of social networks or possess some form social capital, as this quality has the ability to strongly influences one's access to food resources like hot meals or food baskets (Whitley 2013:40). In being somewhat involved with the community, there is greater opportunity to build trust among others, who can later provide support during times of need. However, if one is an individual living on the outskirts of an inner group, it becomes challenging to infiltrate established cadres lacking inclusivity (Whitley 2013).

Furthermore, greater constraints exist within rural communities, simply due to the nonexistence of grocery stores in many areas, the lack of funding available for food pantries and other food resources, and the inability to leave these areas (Whitley 2013). The food struggle within rural areas is intensified by the expensive costs of food transportation to rural areas and the lack of population density within these areas, which disqualifies them for more food resources as much of the funding for food assistance is based on population density (Whitley 2013). Differences in accessing resources are quite apparent between urban and rural food deserts, especially in terms of food pantries, as donations for these organizations tend to be more plentiful in population dense areas (Whitley 2013). Since rural areas have fewer residents, and are thus less capable of donating to food pantries, there often becomes an increased difficulty for food-insecure households to be able to obtain food.

Additionally, many individuals are forced to move to food deserts because they have no other places where they can afford to live, and when money is already difficult to come across, it becomes an even greater challenge to have to find funds for transportation costs such as gas money for car travel (Whitley 2013). The external constraints of living in a food desert are strikingly different in both rural and urban areas, as it can be argued that rural areas face greater challenges in terms of coming across resources. Overall, the struggle between urban and rural

food deserts connects to issues of access and support since rural areas are often faced with greater challenges tied to spatial density and limited resources present within the specific communities. Though individuals living in urban areas as well as a variety of other areas face adversity with regards to finding healthy food, rural areas constantly face the same if not more challenging hardships as it is increasingly more difficult to get places and assimilate into closely knit communities.

1.2 Federal Food Programs

In examining the role the government has played in terms of assisting individuals in their quest for food, it is noteworthy to recognize both the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Supplemental Nutrition for Women Infants and Children (WIC) in addition to other programs like school breakfast and lunch, which serve millions across the United States. SNAP is the new name for the Food Stamp program, which provides assistance to needy individuals and families who lack access to adequate food supply (Pringle 2013). The Food Stamp program was initially established in 1964 as part of Lyndon B. Johnson's initiative to end poverty, and has since served as a major way to create improved access to food resources, which would previously be out of reach. It is estimated that approximately one out of six Americans relies on government food assistance, and from this population, a large number of children are the ones who benefit most from this support (Local Food Connection 2013).

SNAP benefits are granted on the basis of income and generally allowances are provided to individuals after careful examination of other necessities they are responsible for paying (Pringle 2013). Further, SNAP benefits are used in the form of EBT, or electronic benefits transfer, which allows for individuals to purchase their food in a variety of places like farmers markets, as this card functions like a credit/debit card (Schumacher et al. 2013). The use of EBT

also has some limitations and is only capable of buying food such as fruits, vegetables, grains, meat, eggs, and dairy, and excludes purchases on alcohol, cleaning supply, and other non-essentials (Edin and Shaefer 2015). Similar to SNAP, WIC is a program implemented in order to assist pregnant and nursing women and young children and babies to provide ample nutrition during critical periods of development (Pringle 2013). Both WIC and SNAP are beneficial assistance programs, however, due to these support measures being based on income, there are often challenges arising for some if their income happens to increase ever so slightly, leading to a decrease in their benefits (Edin and Shaefer 2015). Overall, SNAP supports many families in need, but due to difficulties of having to pay for other necessities, food stamps are sometimes traded for other purposes, which leads the government and others to doubt the struggles of the needy if their resources are going towards balancing other expenses (Poppendieck 2012). In New York City, up until recently, it was required for recipients of SNAP to be fingerprinted before applying for assistance, which illustrates a sense of distrust among the poor and only serves as another hurdle for individuals simply looking for food assistance (Getlin and Stringer 2013).

Lastly, additional programs like free and reduced breakfast and lunch programs have also been effective in reducing childhood hunger as these initiatives have been aimed to help children perform better at school (Pringle 2013). In specifically examining how a quarter of children living in New York City grow up in food insecure households, the city has implemented a federally funded “Breakfast in the Classroom” program targeted towards decreasing the number of children who come to school hungry and unable to focus during class (Getlin and Stringer 2013:166). While this program overall wants to benefit as many students as possible, there are often discrepancies across the city since there is not a universal policy set requiring schools to provide breakfast for all students or needy individuals (Getlin and Stringer 2013). Breakfast and

lunch programs are positive efforts in terms of improving issues of hunger, but there is often contention over nutritious quality of these meals, further contributing to disparities in health and overall wellness (Mitchell 2009).

Government Support for Local Food

Though food insecurity continues to remain a massive problem, there has been evidence of the U.S. government being in support of programs to alleviate hunger and unhealthiness (Johnson 2016). According to one Congressional Report, “The Role of Local and Regional Food Systems in U.S. Farm Policy,” the government has actually taken on an approach where it supports local food initiatives as it views these programs as effective ways to improve issues of food inaccessibility in food deserts (Johnson 2016). Some examples of these measures include accepting SNAP benefits at local food markets, urban gardening efforts, and other alternatives. Furthermore, the U.S. government has decided to grant local food efforts more independence as they view these programs as being more capable of resolving food insecurity issues within their community and additionally stimulate local economies (Johnson 2016). Since, food availability differs so greatly across the country, it is important to recognize local food, as these programs are notably the first steps in addressing problems within communities (Johnson 2016). In granting local food initiative more funding, there are greater opportunities for the disadvantaged to empower themselves and take steps towards improving their dire circumstance (Johnson 2016).

Let’s Move!

Moreover, initiatives set in place by First Lady, Michelle Obama, have also sought ways to address issues of health and food inequality through the “Let’s Move” campaign. This effort was established to better recognize the epidemic of childhood obesity and unhealthy eating patterns and concentrated on wanting to change these habits in order to improve quality of life

(The White House 2016). Though this effort was largely focused on children, the program also aimed to get families involved in healthier eating and exercise patterns as a whole since children learn life and eating habits at home.

Further, Let's Move emphasized creating changes in school breakfast and lunch programs, as many families receiving food assistance depend on these programs to feed their children (The White House 2016). Michelle Obama's effort to increase the quality of meals served at schools was a large attempt to address how the national epidemic of childhood obesity persists through unhealthy eating and limited physical activities found within schools. By encouraging schools to offer healthier alternatives for students and through getting children to engage more in aspects tied to their health, there is greater opportunity for healthier habits to cross over to people's home lives (The White House 2016). Again, since a large percentage of school lunches are free or reduced, it is vital for school lunch programs to take advantage of the six cents incentive provided to schools for abiding by new healthier nutrient focused standards of Let's Move rather than cheap processed foods (The White House 2016). Schools must serve as a vital link for providing students opportunities to eat healthier food options, especially if children are coming from food deserts or families with limited food budgets. The ultimate draw for decreasing obesity and unhealthy lifestyles habits rests in the fear of younger generations being unable to support themselves as a result of complications from obesity (Barnes 2010). By both focusing and educating others both at home and in school about healthier eating habits, individuals gain the power to improve their lifestyles through being able to know about better foods and can learn how to advocate for better resources within their communities.

1.3 Strategies for Increasing Food Access

Since the main difference setting food deserts apart from places with a surplus of food choices relates to the struggle for obtaining food, it appears that alternative solutions should be established to address this issue. One of the most evident solutions suggested comprises of building more grocery stores in low-income areas. While this seems like a quick solution, it is necessary to additionally consider other factors. Though it is easy to believe the simple construction of more grocery stores has the ability to end food deserts and food crisis, the important assumption that individuals often forget is the fact that not all people know how to practice healthy eating patterns or will feel uncomfortable with grocery stores selling unfamiliar products (Local Food Connection 2013).

Moreover, a PBS News Hour Article suggests increasing education about healthy eating behaviors in order for food insecurity to decrease among low-income residents (Corapi 2014). The article states: “The problem may not lie solely with food accessibility; it could also be due to people’s shopping and eating habits...[building supermarkets] can improve perceptions of food access, but it doesn’t necessarily translate into a behavior change.” By recognizing how individual behavior and one’s level of food access influences food deserts, it becomes important for programs aimed at eliminating food injustice to educate the importance of healthy eating habits to offset health risks. Coinciding with the idea of education, the idea of exposing individuals to new foods they may never have had the chance to experience also proves to be significant as many individuals struggle to go out of their way to try and prepare new foods with products they have limited or no knowledge about. Even more, an individual’s upbringing has a major influence over their eating patterns especially since it serves as a basis for their personal foundation and relates back to familial tradition (Edge 2013).

Again in further recognizing the need for grocery stores within food deserts, the cost of healthy foods must also be considered. If prices of healthy food continue to far exceed the prices of junk food, there is little benefit to building grocery stores in low-income areas (Gnosh-Dastidar et al. 2014). Frequently, when individuals in disadvantaged communities shop for their families, which tend to be large, they normally search for food that can be purchased in large quantities at the best price (Tach and Amorim 2015). Additionally, when providing for a big family, there is more of an incline to feed members more processed food such as macaroni and cheese or canned/boxed goods as opposed to fresh vegetables because they are typically cheaper and have a longer shelf life (Local Food Connection 2013). In wanting to break away from these tendencies, many local communities have begun to implement different measures in order to provide individuals with easier access to healthy food options within close range.

Farmer's Market and Mobile Markets

Efforts such as farmer's markets and mobile grocery stores have considerably impacted many communities, as they have been able to increase healthy food access and provide fresher alternatives for a variety of areas functioning with very little to no food options. While both efforts are focused on delivering and expanding fresh fruit and vegetable selections to people across diverse areas, there is an added push for creating greater convenience for individuals lacking the means to get these foods within their own communities (Zepeda 2014). Since individuals within low-income areas and food deserts struggle to get basic nutrition, it is important for assisting efforts to not be ignored by the communities as a result of further inaccessibility (Wright 2016).

Farmer's markets are one way local food is able to infiltrate communities as it allows individuals to have direct contact with where their food originates before they consume and

purchase particular goods (Johnson 2016). The USDA has favorably supported farmer's markets, as they view these efforts as a way to give smaller communities the opportunity to solve their own struggles tied to food insecurity (Johnson 2016). By allowing individuals to have closer connections with their food, and through local efforts recognizing the pressing matter of hunger, greater action can be taken to resolve these issues in ways like accepting SNAP benefits at markets and establishing community gardens. The major disadvantage to farmer's markets has predominantly been the subtle class distinction among attendees, as most people going to farmer's markets are part of the middle and upper class. However, as more communities have begun to take interest in wanting to combat issues of food inequality, there have been greater efforts aimed at publicizing the benefits of farmers markets to those who are not necessarily well informed (Johnson 2016).

In considering how mobile markets are a relatively new phenomenon, the major advantage to these programs has been that these vehicles can cover large areas, allowing for a greater number of people to gain more access to different foods. Moreover, mobile markets often accept SNAP benefits and frequently price their produce at more affordable levels in order to weaken the class bias, which typically comes along with eating healthily (Stringer 2013). In conjunction with providing healthier food options, many mobile markets must reach a bit further in order to educate and expose individuals to different foods they may not necessarily had familiarity with before their encounter with the mobile market (Zepeda 2014). More so, mobile markets have managed to address issues of hunger, and examine if there are improvements towards diets and overall health patterns without investing in building large supermarkets (Dubowitz 2015). While mobile markets have by and large been successful, some of the disadvantages to these efforts have mostly been tied to lack of funding and limited knowledge

about these programs (Zepeda 2014). Even when mobile markets manage to extend to desolate areas, the most secluded still struggle to gain access to food. Some solutions to this problem have been focused on increasing advertising about these programs, while other mobiles have attempted to make more stops in different neighborhoods and areas to better ensure individuals are not stranded or left walking far distances (Zepeda 2014).

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

Community supported agriculture (CSA) serves as another way for individuals to access fresh food and other grocery items while providing the added benefit of establishing relationships with local growers and becoming better informed about healthy food choices. The CSA model encourages individuals to get involved in their food process, through fostering relationships between both growers and consumers in a joint food initiative, where farmers sell shares of their products and consumers buy locally (Kelley 2013). The concept of CSA originated in Switzerland, and was introduced to the United States in 1984 as an idea of creating a system of exchange benefiting both small local growers and consumers (Adam 2006). Typically, a farm share consists of a weekly box of produce with 8-12 vegetables, and depending on the specific CSA, some offer additional items like eggs, dairy, bread, and more (Kelley 2013). Further, many CSAs encourage their members to volunteer on farms, providing greater chances for building community and trust among members (Kelley 2013).

In addition to benefiting local growers, shareholders often receive stable prices for their food as the shares are usually purchased at the beginning of the season without fluctuation in price (Kelley 2013). By agreeing to purchase a share upfront members also sign up for the risk of potentially not getting their full share's worth of crops, due to high unpredictability of each season (Just Food 2016). Although some downfalls exist to this program, some CSAs have

begun to accept SNAP benefits, which has expand the possibility of eating local healthy food beyond the scope of those possessing financial means (Kelley 2013). Furthermore, many CSAs deliver their produce to shareholders, which further open this effort to those with limited transportation access. Though the concept of CSA continues to grow, this effort has strong potential to move towards the direction of creating access to healthy food at reasonable prices for those currently residing in areas that are deprived of resources.

Food Banks

In response to issues surrounding food inequality, food banks have often served as another effective means for eliminating hunger as this model is designed to serve a number of networks and organizations also associated with food. Food banks are nonprofit organizations designed to collect excess food resources both fresh and processed, from grocery stores and a wide array of other places (Gregg 2014). The purpose of food banks is to redistribute food to other sources that can better allocate food to other establishments dedicated to helping those in need (Gregg 2014). Generally, food banks are one step above food pantries and soup kitchens, as they are not responsible for the direct distribution of food to individuals, and rather serve as a resource for providing goods to those in need (Feeding America 2017). While food banks provide food to a number of organizations associated with reducing hunger, much criticism surrounding the true effectiveness reducing food insecurity and injustice exists, as many food banks rely on the support of middle class, further perpetuating a system where the disadvantaged are forced to become dependent on the help of the financially stable (Vitiello 2014). This model ultimately fails to allow disadvantaged groups to participate in food processes in order to work towards resolving their own food needs (Vitiello 2014). Additionally, skepticism about the quality of food provided by food banks has also generated beliefs about food banks not fully

acting effectively to combat issues of food injustice, thus reinforcing unhealthy eating patterns and inequality (Vitiello 2014). Since food banks operate at a large scale, they have the potential to change how emergency food resources operate by finding other alternatives, like gardening efforts, to get local community members more integrated in their food (Vitiello 2014).

Urban and Community Gardening

Urban gardening has been an additional effort to get communities more involved with the local food processes as well as educating others about how they can contribute towards their own food consumption. While many individuals suffer unnecessarily as a result of the current food system, urban and community gardens have been an effort to empower individuals and allow them to reestablish control over their food (Meyer 2013). Though community gardens cannot fully combat issues surrounding hunger, they offer individuals a chance at becoming more educated about where their food is coming from and allow for greater connections to be made in terms of health (Meyer 2013). By simply recognizing food issues from a more agrarian standpoint there is hope for the modern food system to make adjustments in stopping food inequality. In order for any improvements to be made, there needs to be critical reexamination of the capitalist influence over food, and how this system has ultimately created wider gaps between people and social groups.

Community Kitchens

Though research on community kitchens found within the United States has been limited, many studies in Canada and Australia have suggested the idea serves as a useful strategy in minimizing food insecurity and promoting healthy nutrition (Iacovou et al. 2012). Evidence related to community kitchens has mainly concluded these efforts are successful in promoting greater social interactions among people and are also successful in increasing nutrition and

improving kitchen skills (Iacovou et al. 2012). Community Kitchens largely serve as a place of social support where individuals can come together to prepare a meal for themselves and their families (Tarasuk and Reynolds 1999). Although this definition technically describes community kitchens, it is important to note that many variations around this idea differ and there is no set model for what constitutes one kitchen compared to another (Tarasuk and Reynolds). Many community kitchens are often supported through grants or donations, and in some locations the food used in the kitchens is either donated or subsidized (Tarasuk and Reynolds 1999). Although community kitchens are usually regarded positively, some disadvantages to these facilities usually relate to their location not always being convenient for all individuals, poor advertisement of these resources and, time constraints and incompatibility with individuals work schedules (Loopstra and Tarasuk 2013). Though community kitchens are not always accessible to all, their presence in Canada has served as a useful way for reducing the stigma and shame frequently associated with charity, food pantries, and soup kitchens (Tarasuk and Reynolds 1999). In generally, community kitchens have not been proven to fully reduce food insecurity, but they have created another option for individuals to independently work towards resolving their own food struggles (Loopstra and Tarasuk 2013).

1.4 Race, Class, and Food

The lower class is faced with unpleasant realities when it comes to food options and availability often resulting in greater risk of health problems. Individuals living in food deserts and areas with fewer resources, undoubtedly experience more struggles than advantaged groups, as there are greater discrepancies with regard to access. Although many fail to fully acknowledge the extent to which inequalities are present within the current food system, it remains vital to educate the significance of this issue being tied to class. As modern shifts from agrarian to

industrial lifestyles have occurred over time, there is no denial of the rise of differentiated class status between urban and suburban culture. As individuals become wealthier, they gain the opportunity to move outside of urban areas, which overall results in denigrated conditions for the less fortunate, who must remain as urban dwellers (Walker et al. 2010). In the United States, having access to food is generally taken for granted and individuals often believe that those in need can readily access different resources for assistance. However, since problems surrounding hunger persist, there is a dire need to reassess current programs to better address this barrier. Even now, it is appalling knowing how economic segregation has continued to manifest in such a way that a basic necessity is no longer attainable for those of a lesser status (Walker et al. 2010).

In combination with an abundance of fast food options, limited access to grocery stores and historical cultural food values, there is often an increase in health problems such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease and others occurring within lower socioeconomic groups (Hurt 2013). In general, obesity is a cause for alarm as this condition left unaddressed has the potential to be lethal as the body begins to face a number of issues from excessive quantities of fat. Though obesity has become an issue for all people across the U.S., it is noteworthy to examine how Blacks and Latinos are twice as likely to become obese than whites and how these trends frequently affect children (Karpyn and Treuhaft 2013). In questioning reasons as to how obesity has become so much of a problem among lower-class and historically marginalized groups, it is necessary to observe the structural factors put in place to provide different food resources.

Again, many of the health issues impacting individuals of the lower class today are attributed to limited access to healthy food and lack of knowledge around overall health as well as differences with regard to lifestyles and cultural norms. However, within these disparities, it is vital to draw attention to what other influences led to these separations across culture.

Historically, when considering aspects of food inequality, much of this issue has roots dating back to slavery where slaves were forced to adapt to new eating habits upon entering the Americas (Mitchell 2009). In continuation, slaves were viewed as property, which equated to not being given the same advantages as white slave owners. This punitive discrimination amid people translated into differences between the types of food consumed by racial groups and methods used to prepare meals (Mitchell 2009:6). Through additionally recognizing both matters of food and racial segregation, it should be noted how many African Americans were the ones responsible for preparing meals for whites, and how society often attribute southern food to whites, when in fact this food is richer in black origins (Hurt 2013).

Southern vs. Soul Food

By further recognizing food distinctions in terms of racial class it is significant to differentiate between southern food and soul food, which embody two separate cultures. While the two food types are interrelated, southern food is often classified as white, whereas soul food is considered southern food with a cultural twist (Edge 2013). Soul food has a richer past, as this cuisine marked a greater sense of empowerment to the black community (Edge 2013). Soul food comprises of fried chicken, barbecue ribs, collard greens, candied yams, cornbread, okra, potato salad, macaroni and cheese and so much more. While soul food is a large part of African American culture and identity, another side of this issue relates to the ways these foods are being prepared and how these cooking methods in conjunction with the widespread influence of fast food have an overall negative impact over health.

Though the essences of soul food are not necessarily harmful, excessive amounts of butter, lard, oil, sugar, salt, and other fats used to prepare these foods and increased food portions only increase an individual's chances of becoming obese and developing heart disease (Mitchell

2009). Although altering techniques for preparing food may appear to be simple, there are often deeper values set within food culture which make it more challenging for individuals to want to accept change (Hurt 2013). Temporarily setting food disparities and access aside, individuals must take ownership of their own cooking and make compromises in place of tradition for the sake of their own health. Though food has the ability to bring people together, it is important to recognize how current factors within the U.S. food system have managed to doom certain groups to unhealthy fates.

Inequality

In the context of food justice, the issues plaguing disadvantaged areas are often deemed insignificant as a number of stereotypes about black food and culture are continuously perpetuated through the media and other outlets (Hurt 2013). Generally, there is a lack of interest in the types of food the lower class consumes and people of higher status, hold very little concern over the challenges lower class individuals must take in order to come across foods. In many cases the lower class is restricted to convenience stores, which essentially perpetuate a diet of candy, sweetened beverages, chips, and other junk food (Dubowitz 2013). The lack of access to healthy food options can best be characterized as a form of enslavement as the lower-class lacks the means and ability to free themselves from an entrapped cycle of unhealthiness.

As expressed previously, the lower class is confined to the resources made available in their areas and when convenience stores, high numbers of fast food chains and sparse knowledge is presented about healthy habits, it becomes increasingly easier for the lower class to accept a fate of health complications. In briefly comparing health issues across socioeconomic status, it appears the lower class almost always has a greater predisposition to obesity, diabetes, and heart disease than their middle and upper class counterparts, ultimately leaving them at greater risk for

premature death (Karpyn and Treuhaft 2013). Finally, poor health in low-income areas is further propagated by the media and other advertising sources such as the internet and T.V., which target youth who are more susceptible to purchasing junk food (Harris 2013). Major corporations take advantage of the lower class through marketing their products to young helpless individuals lacking proper nutritional knowledge. These individuals are also often unable to escape the constant exposure they have to these products due to having no other viable healthy options and as a result of living with parents who are unaware of the dangers of these products (Jablonski 2016). The extreme unethical measures on corporations' part need to be counteracted with more substantive pushes towards getting youth to practice overall better wellness.

1.5 Chapter Overview

This thesis assesses the strategies for combating food inequality and food injustice in rural and urban communities through examining six case studies. Each organization presented offers a different glance into the many ways this complex issue can be addressed. Through completing participant observation and analysis of each organization's structure and programs, I argue that issues of food injustice are being attacked by multiple layered strategies interwoven in community agency and collaborations at a macro level. The issues of food deserts and food inequality stem from a number of systemic problems including racial inequality, unlivable wages and disregard for public policy, which leave disadvantaged groups oppressed in modern segregation and poverty. Through recognizing different means in how individuals access food, there is a greater chance for exploring what historical and structural foundations have led to such disparities for obtaining an essential for survival. In many respects, this thesis will highlight how our social world ultimately continues to place divisions between the needs of the privileged and the disadvantaged, which often leaves class status permanently immobilized for the poor and

marginalized. Further, this thesis strives to examine how race and cultural values influence the ways many groups perceive food and continue to practice certain eating habits. Lastly, this thesis will focus on alternative programs set in place to combat the massive issue of food injustice and will make connections about food culture and how it relates to overall values and attitudes among various individuals. Thus, the sociological question to my study seeks to better understand what initiatives have been established throughout different regions in the United States, and why these various efforts see importance in wanting to combat issues of food insecurity and inequality.

Although individuals often view issues of food injustice as existing solely at a global level, this thesis draws attention to the significance of this issue within the United States, especially as there is much racial and class diversity to be noted across various regions within one of the world's wealthiest countries. In addition to individual states differing in terms of their demographics, it is also noteworthy to compare how urban and rural communities face stark differences in their levels of food inaccessibility. In order to recognize the wide array of representation on this front, this thesis will make a comparison between issues of food injustice in New Mexico and New York as these two states differ in their approaches towards combating hunger and limited food resources.

Examining issues of food insecurity and injustice remain largely important because food is a necessity for survival, and based on the number of resources present in the modern world, it is absurd how difficult it is for individuals to obtain a basic right. Although it is important to recognize how both hunger and food inequality exist as pervasive problems, the solution to resolving these issues does not merely rest in providing food to those who are hungry. Rather, society must view issues of food inequality and injustice from a broader scope and acknowledge

the systemic issues of racism and classism, which initially led certain groups and individuals to face hunger and become dependent on a structure failing to adequately meet their needs. The government has coopted disadvantaged groups and people into a system perceived to be granting basic rights and freedoms to all; however, many individuals on government food support or groups struggling to survive, continue to face oppression and lack autonomy. Participant observation of alternative programs is one of the first steps in addressing methods to combat the root causes of racism and food insecurity as it provides useful evaluation of the effectiveness of tactics already existing. Lastly, this thesis serves as a form of activism as it aims to bring awareness of the seriousness of oppression and inaccessibility associated with food and hopes to inspire others to take direct action towards empowering individuals who seek to gain control of their food situations. If individuals can recognize the limitations in their donated can food, larger implications can be made at a macro level, which would challenge the ways the government views the oppressed in order to better meet their needs. Overall, this study strives to explore the sociological questions of how race and class influence food justice and seeks to better understand the various crusades and programs created as solutions to the immensity of food deserts and food inequality, which continue to generally go unacknowledged by greater society.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Research Question

The purpose of this research is to better understand and highlight what social aspects contribute to food insecurity and food injustice within two different parts of the United States. Though limited food accessibility is a struggle found on both a global and national level, this study has chosen to specifically focus on New Mexico and New York as these two states are quite different and provide a unique comparison with regards to a number of social factors. Moreover, each state's history, racial and ethnic composition, geographic diversity, as well as class and other socioeconomic factors offer an interesting glance into how issues of food inequality are addressed in varying forms. This study examines evidence as to why food injustice persists and explores different strategies employed by different community efforts to improve this large-scale issue through creating access to resources and empowering individuals. By exploring issues of food insecurity and food injustice from a qualitative approach there is greater opportunity to examine how various solutions and activism are being implemented in order to address an issue, which currently has no one solution.

2.2 Population and Procedures

The research for this study was conducted primarily through a number of interviews with members from organizations located in both New Mexico and New York classified as nonprofits, cooperatives, or community gardening initiatives. All of the organizations featured in this study were selected due to their mission towards addressing issues of food inequality and inaccessibility to better serve communities suffering from a dearth of healthy food. Additionally, many of the interviews were accompanied by visits to these organizations to provide a better sense of the work and activism being implemented towards this serious issue. Further, this study

examined a number of initiatives and programs carried out by each organization, which help demonstrate the reality that there are multiple solutions for empowering disadvantaged communities and creating greater access to food resources. All of the case studies featured in this study are compiled based on information from organizations' websites, interviews with members from these organizations, and accompanied onsite visits to various places. Through taking a qualitative approach towards the massive problem of food injustice, there was a greater opportunity to witness the many different ways communities are working together in order to create greater access to a necessary resource.

2.3 Interviews and Method

The primary research for this study was based in the form of personal interviews with members primarily involved in nonprofits, cooperatives, or gardening initiatives. The organizations featured throughout this thesis were both discovered online and often times through suggestions from other individuals who were familiar with certain organizations. Initial contact with each organization was made via sending inquiry emails to approximately 12 different organizations; out of these, five interviews were completed. Some emails additionally required follow up phone calls or were redirected to other individuals within certain organizations who felt another person would be more knowledgeable about certain issues. Prior to completing interviews, this thesis was granted approval by the Human Subject Review Board, which allowed for meetings to be arranged with individuals from each organization.

To learn more about different organizations mission and efforts, interviews were conducted with directors, coordinators, and other organization members about how they initially became involved in the work they do and how they felt their work was impacting their communities. Out of the five interviews that took place, four were with organizations based in

New Mexico: MoGro, Seed 2 Need, El Morro Valley Cooperative, and Roadrunner Food Bank.

The last organization, called Capital Roots, was based in New York. Before interviewing individuals, a general overview of the thesis was provided and individuals were asked for verbal consent to being interviewed as well as permission to use individuals' names within this thesis.

In New Mexico, Josh Norman, the Outreach Coordinator at MoGro, Penny Davis, the Founder of Seed 2 Need, Genevieve Humenay, the head of the board of directors at El Morro Valley Cooperative, and Tabitha Bennett, the Community Programs Manager at Roadrunner Food Bank were interviewed. While in New York, Marissa Peck, the Food Assessment Coordinator at Capital Roots was also interviewed.

The interviews took place during the months of December 2016 to January 2017. Some interactions were accompanied by onsite visits allowing for better understanding, while others were unable to be completed due to scheduling conflicts and communication difficulties. The majority of formal interviews were conducted face-to-face, which allowed for better rapport and engaging conversation; however, some additionally occurred over phone. Each interview lasted approximately an hour and was guided by a set list of open-ended questions. Interviews primarily took place at the different organizations, but some also occurred in local coffee shops as well. As each interview progressed, there were often opportunities to ask more specified questions related to each organization and their particular programs and efforts. Throughout each interview, responses provided by interviewee's were transcribed by hand and during in-person interviews, permission was asked to record the conversation using a cell phone. After meeting and speaking with individuals, handwritten notes were typed up and missing pieces from interviews were pieced together.

2.4 Data Analysis

After interviewing individuals from various organizations, responses provided by each individual were examined and the different approaches each organization takes in order to address issues of food access were also considered. In addition to reviewing interview notes and comments about initial reactions of each organization, a comparison was made between organizations to better see how and why certain strategies were more effective in one location as opposed to another. Based on all methods observed, each organization had different levels of effectiveness, which resulted in certain programs and techniques being more useful for specific areas compared to others. Also, due to a number of factors linked to specific communities and areas, there was not one model that proved to be the most successful at addressing food insecurity for all locations. Still, most programs and initiatives made an effort to incorporate members of local communities into their own food systems through including a learning component about food or nutrition, such as learning gardening skills or becoming acquainted with a new vegetable. Regardless of the specific method, all programs were effective at working towards reducing food inequality and sought ways to contribute towards improving a societal dilemma.

The use of participant observation was considerably the best method to employ for this study as it provided an exclusive first hand look into how issues related to food inequality and injustice are being addressed and allowed for individuals' real life stories to be heard. Although this study was limited in its ability to hear personal accounts of individuals currently suffering from food injustice, having the opportunity to learn what drove people to step up as activists for this issue was also insightful. Speaking with individuals connected to this issue on a personal level is more useful for understanding food inequality and injustice as a whole, because it

provides a deeper sense of what is being accomplished on a micro level in order to remedy this issue on a larger social level. Oftentimes when examining data, it is challenging to grasp the true weight and impact certain factors have on society, and because communities vary so much, it is important to recognize how viewing differences in direct action through firsthand accounts can serve as a better way to mediate this issue as a whole. A qualitative approach was most effective for this study as allowed for a greater picture of various communities to be painted and relates this issue back to a human problem, which needs greater social consciousness.

Chapter 3: Case Studies

3.1 Exploring Activism

While issues of food insecurity and inequality exist nearly everywhere, one must recognize how no single solution can serve as “the model” for ameliorating food inequality across the country. Due to the vast array of issues contributing to food inequality, this thesis explores the intersectionalities of food injustice and food insecurity by acknowledging the different types of action and resources present within the two diverse landscapes of the southwest and northeast. Through exploring a variety of alternatives such as nonprofits, cooperatives, and community gardening initiatives dedicated towards improving disadvantaged individual’s access to nutritious food, this following chapter will provide a better understanding of the extent of food inequality as a societal problem. In conjunction with online and print resources, a collection of six interviews was conducted with individuals from five different organizations to better obtain vital information for this comparative case study. Furthermore, this chapter comprises of one case study based solely on information obtained online and in a magazine article. In order to create awareness of the issues surrounding food deserts, the following sections attempt to provide insight into the different areas through which this study is centered.

In hopes of better providing an understanding of the structures and organizations aimed at addressing issues related to food deserts and inequality, this chapter will include a brief section about the demographic features of New Mexico and will then provide in depth descriptions of MoGro, Seed 2 Need, Roadrunner Food Bank and El Morro Valley Cooperative. The chapter will then continue with a demographic overview of the Capital District of New York and will then focus on examining Capital Roots and Soul Fire Farm. For each case study, there will be descriptions of each organization’s mission, foundation, populations served, programs, funding,

and plans for the future. Chapter 4 will then draw out the similarities and differences between the various organizations and will offer solutions for what can be better implemented in the future. This chapter mainly sets the foundation for the different efforts being established within communities for a greater understanding of the issues plaguing food deserts and areas with limited food access.

New Mexico Demographics

Home to a mixture of identities and various geographic landscapes, New Mexico promoted diversity in terms of race and class, as well as other social factors. According to the 2010 United States Census data, in the state of New Mexico, 46.3% of people identify as Hispanic, while, 9.4% identified as Native American compared to national rates of 16.3% and 0.9% respectively. Though the state as a whole additionally comprises of 68.4% of people who identify as white, 2.1% as African American, 1.4% as Asian, and 3.7% as two or more races, the high percentages of Hispanics and Native American people must not be ignored, considering many other areas across the country lack this level of diversity. Moreover, due to the state's proximity to Mexico, there are a number of undocumented individuals who struggle to receive food assistance and support as a result of certain eligibility requirements surrounding SNAP and other government programs (USDA 2016). Aside from racial demographics, New Mexico also consists of 35.7% of people (ages five and older) who speak another primary language in addition English, and often times this language is either Spanish or a tribal tongue (United States Census Bureau 2016). Though English is officially used across the United States, it cannot be denied that language serves as an additional barrier in gaining access to food resources, as individuals must seek out resources where they can effectively communicate their needs.

New Mexico additionally has one of the highest poverty rates across the country at 20.4%, alongside 16.2% of its residents receiving SNAP benefits in the past year (American Fact Finder 2015). Though there are numerous possibilities for why such high poverty rates exist across the state, it is also important to consider the geographic spread of the region, consisting of several Native American reservations or pueblos, and many small communities. While New Mexico is ecologically considered a desert, there are still establishments and cities found throughout the state, in conjunction with large open spaces land and natural phenomena. Regardless, many of the communities present across the state lack proper resources or modern conveniences that cities can offer, leaving them deprived of proper necessities. Due to the state's historic relationship with nature and land, many individuals located in smaller communities owned their own land and often grew their own food. However, as society has shifted from agrarianism to capitalist ventures, there has been little done to support rural areas, and the corporate world has little interest in constructing grocery stores in areas with limited populations (Sharkey and Horel 2008). As a result, this remains important to consider because it serves as another layer in better comprehending problems of food deserts and inaccessibility.

New York Demographics

While New Mexico's demographic area is much more spread out and comprises of large populations of Native Americans and Hispanics, the Northeast, more specifically upstate New York offers another glance at differences present within another area of the United States. The Capital District of New York is made up of 11 different counties including Schenectady, Albany, and Rensselaer counties, each sharing similar demographics (United States Census Bureau 2016). The city of Troy and the town of Grafton, both located within Rensselaer County are the primary areas in New York for which this thesis will focus. According to 2010 Census data,

Rensselaer County has 159,429 residents, with approximately 87.5% of the population identifying as white and 6.5% as black (United States Census Bureau 2016). Further, Asians make up 2.2%, Hispanics 3.8%, Native America 0.2%, and 2.4% identifying as two or more races (United States Census Bureau 2016). Additionally, it is estimated that there is approximately 12% of individuals living in poverty and only 6.9% of the population is reported as speaking another primary language besides English in their homes (United States Census Bureau 2016). Lastly, the county is made up of both rural and urban areas resulting in different solutions for food inequality to be addressed.

3.2 MoGro Mobile Grocery

Mission

MoGro is a nonprofit located in Albuquerque, New Mexico, which focuses its energy on creating access to healthy food primarily for individuals receiving SNAP benefits or residing in low-income areas with limited access to healthy food. The organization was founded in 2011 when a retired CEO of Sysco Corporation, Rick Schnieder and his wife started giving back to the community (Mogro 2017). The Schnieders decided to work towards increasing access to healthy food for families and residents of Native American reservations—by partnering with the Johns Hopkins Center for Indian Health. More specifically, the organization partners with Santo Domingo Pueblo located outside of Albuquerque (Norman 12/8/16). Although Pueblo communities across the state of New Mexico face a number of challenges, issues related to health and nutrition are detrimental as they affect quality of life and wellness. MoGro operates under the mission of “working with underserved communities to support sustainable local food systems,” while also “eliminating barriers to affordable healthy food” (Mogro 2017). Since many

Pueblos are located in rural or isolated areas, MoGro has acted to create easier access to healthy food within these communities in order to create positive impacts on overall health.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Food Boxes

In its beginnings, MoGro operated as a fully stocked refrigerated mobile grocery store capable of traveling to various locations across the state. However, this mobile model became very costly, thus leading to CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) model grocery boxes, which provide individuals the power to select their food online, and later purchase their boxes weekly from an established distribution location (Norman 12/8/16). Although the newer model poses some challenges for individuals, especially those lacking Internet access, there is still an opportunity to obtain fresh healthy food at a reasonable price (Norman 12/8/16). The online model additionally allows for individuals to customize their orders to suit their individual needs and creates ease for the organization as orders can be more easily managed. In considering the structure of the organization, it is important to note that as a nonprofit with limited funding, MoGro operates as a team of three working members and additionally partners with a local CSA called Skarsgard Farms, who oversees the packing and distribution aspect of the boxes (Mogro 2017). Skarsgard Farms has been around since the early 2000s and though it began as a local farm, the CSA has now taken on an industrial approach where organic products are collected from both local and regional areas and distributed as organic food and produce boxes to customers enrolled in their program (Norman 12/8/16). While Skarsgard Farms has generally appealed to the middle and upper class, MoGro has distinguished itself through creating access for healthy resources to populations living in food deserts and has managed to subsidize these boxes for SNAP recipients.

Distribution

Across the state of New Mexico, MoGro has 14 distribution locations, which range from rural, urban, or community centers such as health clinics or schools (Norman 12/8/16). Because the nonprofit is only comprised of three members, MoGro relies heavily on Food Champions, who are community members who volunteer to assist in the distribution of boxes weekly during established distribution times (Norman 12/8/16). Food Champions often have established connections with members at specific locations, which make it easier to the spread word about the program and ensures that individuals are satisfied with their orders (Norman 12/8/16). Box distributions typically occur on Wednesday and sometimes stay open past 5pm to accommodate the schedules of the working class. Beyond the distribution of boxes, many Food Champions are bilingual giving them more flexibility to communicate with the groups they are working with, while also allowing for greater cultivation of relationships. Further, as a result of having many distribution locations established in health clinics, schools, or community centers, MoGro has had greater opportunities to advertise its resources to those using the services of the various locations (Norman 12/8/16). For instance, at La Familia health clinic located in Santa Fe, clinicians encourage their patients to enroll in MoGro's program as an effort to work on improving their patients overall health, especially if they are prone to develop diet related illnesses (Norman 12/8/16).

Through having the opportunity to visit MoGro's office, Skarsgard Farm's warehouse, and a distribution location at a WIC Center in Santa Fe, I developed a greater understanding of how the program worked in action to get food to those in need. After speaking with Josh Norman (12/8/16), the outreach coordinator for MoGro, I learned a great deal about how the organization works to establish new sites across the state that are located in both rural areas, and urban places.

Interestingly enough, Norman brought up a valid point that individuals living within cities with grocery stores can still be left trapped as they may lack adequate transportation or may struggle to be able to afford the goods sold in their neighborhood's grocery store. Upon visiting La Familia, one of the distribution locations in Santa Fe, I was surprised by how removed the clinic was from the more densely populated areas in the small city, and I was also curious about how far customers of MoGro lived from this health center. Although it is not clear how far individuals must travel to reach their closest distribution center, it should be noted how many locations are selected in well established health clinics, community centers, or at schools, where a large percentage of the population of an area may pass through.

Funding and Accounting for Culture

While MoGro has made efforts to identify communities in need across New Mexico, much of the organization's struggle relates back to funding and encouraging healthy eating. MoGro primarily operates from a number of grants; including a Newman's Own grant, a USDA local food grant, as well as others, which warrant SNAP recipients' access to purchasing organic vegetable boxes at half the price (Norman 12/8/16). While unsubsidized boxes usually cost \$20 for ten produce items, this cost is often burdensome for some individuals who primarily do their shopping at larger retail stores like Walmart (Norman 12/8/16). Additionally, some customers remain skeptical about the produce in the boxes since organic fruits and vegetables do not look the same as primed commercialized products sold in grocery stores, leading them to doubt the quality (Norman 12/8/16). While the product is in fact wholesome, and arguably healthier, MoGro cannot force individuals to participate in their program, and instead, persists in its efforts to deliver healthy affordable food to those who are interested.

Though the organization does its best to meet the needs of the various populations it serves, some individuals on tribal land and within other communities remain disinterested in what MoGro has to offer and are steadfast about their communities' ability to provide for themselves (Norman 12/8/16). Though this opinion varies among each individual, some of tribal land's rejection of MoGro's vegetable boxes are not necessarily related to the organization, but rather stem from historic treatment and relations with outsiders coming into their communities (Norman 12/8/16). Some reasons for the hostility between tribal groups and the Federal government have mainly seeded from broken land treaties and government boarding schools, which attempted to erase Native American culture (National Museum of the American Indian 2007). Understandably, some tribal groups are mainly interested in finding ways to build their communities without leaving them dependent on produce boxes coming from outside of their communities, which causes to other alternatives.

3.3 Seed 2 Need: Reducing Hunger one Garden at a Time

Mission

The nonprofit organization Seed 2 Need located in Corrales, New Mexico is a community gardening initiative established in 2008, committed to gardening for a cause. At the onset of the Recession of 2008, Seed 2 Need founder, Penny Davis, discovered she was drawn to stories in the news about the surge of families across the United States having to turn to emergency food resources due to families not having enough money to budget towards food. As a result, many food pantries and soup kitchens had to turn individuals away due to not having enough food to be able to provide for the influx of people (Davis 12/16/16). Though many news reports are about misfortune, Davis felt inspired to become active as she had recently become a master

gardener, an individual trained in gardening technique and then motivated to volunteer and educate the public about gardening. By having both an interest in gardening and wanting to do something to help individuals suffering from limited food resources, Seed 2 Need began with the mission to “reduce hunger in New Mexico one garden at a time” through “improving the nutrition of families facing food insecurity by growing fresh produce and donating it to local food pantries” (Seed 2 Need 2015). In working towards this mission, the organization strives to get members of the local community involved in this gardening effort in order to build awareness of hunger issues occurring across the state.

Plot by Plot

Seed 2 Need became a reality after Davis partnered with a friend and established and tended to a 20 by 20 foot garden where the annual yield of crops was donated to a local food pantry (Davis 12/16/16). The following year, Davis became acquainted with a woman named Judy Jacobs, who offered Davis land to expand the gardening program and additionally connected Davis to woman name Nora Scherzinger, who also agreed to donate property (Davis 12/16/16). In addition to reaching out to private landowners located in Corrales, Davis contacted both the Sandoval County Master Gardeners organization and a local utility company who offered her funding and support to get Seed 2 Need off the ground (Davis 12/16/16). To further cultivate her project, Davis recruited local volunteers from within the community and searched for additional grants to get her project to where it is now. Currently, Seed 2 Need operates with four gardening plots, including a greenhouse and an orchard all located in Corrales, serving for the purpose of feeding the hungry (Davis 12/16/16). The organization strives to grow as much produce as it can in order to help over 17 food pantries and soup kitchens located in nearby counties and mostly operates on volunteer labor and support (Seed 2 Need 2015). Since

individuals are not paid for their labor, this organization serves to show the extent people will go to work towards reducing hunger in their area.

Importance of Produce

One aspect of Seed 2 Need setting them apart from other organizations dedicated to helping food pantries, is the fact that they are devoted to providing fresh food to individuals lacking the ability or resources to feed themselves. Though most individuals have donated food to pantries or food drives at one point or another, it is almost always certain that the food donated was either canned or nonperishable. Many hungry people turning to food pantries, struggle to get the proper nutrients they need, as much of the food provided is canned or processed, and many food banks and food pantries are limited in their ability to offer patrons fresh food because they lack the facilities to accommodate large amounts of fresh food or are unable to distribute resources adequately (Davis 12/16/16). However, when food banks and food pantries are capable of receiving fresh foods, like fruits and vegetables, there is wide approval among food recipients and better nutrition capable of going around. Annually, Seed 2 Need donates approximately 70,000 pounds of fresh produce and over the course of the past 7 years the organization has provided over 375,000 pounds of produce to a number of organizations (Seed 2 Need 2015). While much of the growing season occurs during the course of the summer, the primary crops grown are tomatoes, squash, zucchini, and cucumbers, chile, green beans, bell peppers, and sometimes eggplants or habanero peppers. Additionally, the orchard produces an abundance of apples, pears, and peaches, which are often harvested by different youth or community members (Davis 12/16/16).

Volunteers and Community Support

The backbone of Seed 2 Need is supported by its strong volunteer base, and without the commitment from the community, Seed 2 Need would not be able to operate to the large extent that it does. On a typical day during the growing season, volunteers from the community come and gather each week on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday around 7 in the morning and harvest the garden for two hours until a truck from a local food bank called Roadrunner Food Bank arrives (Davis 12/16/16). The produce collected during each session is placed into trays, weighed, and later loaded onto a truck (Davis 12/16/16). During any given session, there are typically 25 volunteers and individuals range in age and gardening ability (Davis 12/16/16). While the main focus of Seed 2 Need's initiative is based in growing food for those in need, another important factor is about building community and connections with others (Davis 12/16/16). Since this movement is rooted in wanting to grow food for a meaningful cause, there is importance in fostering relations between the individuals working to make a difference. Additionally, through working with a variety of individuals, there are opportunities for groups of individuals to grow from one another and gain a better sense of problems surrounding hunger.

Educating Others

In considering the concept of local areas taking the problem of limited food resources into their own hands through a community supported growing effort, individuals are able to directly address the needs of their communities to improve problems. Seed 2 Need not only donates fresh food to local food pantries, but also has a commitment to getting others involved in the process of gardening as well (Davis 12/16/16). Though growing one's own garden might not be a feasible option for all individuals, the idea of a community garden or encouraging others to learn the process of where one's food comes and creates a greater incentive to eat healthy foods,

especially if an individual had the opportunity to put the labor into what they are consuming. In order to instill healthier eating patterns among youth, Seed 2 Need has several efforts seeking to educate the importance of healthy foods and teach a number of harvesting techniques (Davis 12/16/16). By exposing both elementary and middle school students to the processes of where food comes from, in addition to explaining the significance for how growing one's own food serves as a method for alleviating hunger, there is greater hope more individuals will grow up to recognize the inequalities surrounding food.

3.4 Roadrunner Food Bank

Food banks are another alternative used to help individuals work towards addressing issues of food injustice, hunger, and limited accessibility. Unlike a food pantry, a food bank serves as a distribution hub, where numerous foods are collected from a variety of places and then redistributed to other organizations and initiatives seeking to alleviate hunger (Bennett 1/13/17). Though food pantries also work to alleviate hunger, they differ from food banks because they often deal more closely with hungry individuals by directly giving food coming from food banks. Much of the work food banks engage in often corresponds with food rescue, which is an effort focused on obtaining food which is perfectly edible from being thrown away in response to a variety of factors (Bennett 1/13/17). Frequently, as a result of government and corporate policies, grocery stores and many other food businesses must discard their food after a set period of time even if the food is not past its prime (Bennett 1/13/17). Although society's high aesthetic standards around food typically result in waste, food banks work hard to diminish waste by providing food to those in need and seek other alternatives for food, which has little reason to be discarded when so many people are starving.

Mission

Roadrunner Food Bank, based in Albuquerque, New Mexico operates as the state's largest food bank, serving a variety of individuals in regions located across the state. The demographics of the individuals served vary in both racial and ethnic background, age, and other social economic factors (Roadrunner Food Bank 2017). While Roadrunner Food Bank works to prevent hunger, much of their action does not directly involve working with hungry individuals at a personal level, but rather seeks to provide a number of organizations with food resources in order to better serve the community (Bennett 1/13/17). Much of the organization works to create partnerships with different nonprofits, churches, soup kitchens, food pantries, and more in order to get food to those in need (Bennett 1/13/17). Roadrunner Food Bank operates under the mission of "feeding every hungry person today, seed partnerships for self sufficiency for tomorrow, and lead in the mission to achieving a permanent end to hunger" (Roadrunner Food Bank 2017). Originally established in 1980 by Titus Scholl, Roadrunner Food Bank started as an effort which provided food to those in need from the back of a car (Bennett 1/13/17). Roadrunner Food Bank has since grown and now operates as a distribution center where food is delivered to individuals through a number of programs. Working in conjunction with a national program called Feeding America, Roadrunner Food Bank benefits from receiving food from major grocery stores like Walmart, and also gains access to additional funding (Bennett 1/13/17).

Feeding America

Feeding America is a national nonprofit program dedicated to eliminating hunger within the United States through raising awareness about issues of food insecurity by partnering with a number of food banks, food pantries, and other feeding programs also committed to the same goal (Feeding America 2017). The program has partnerships with 200 food banks and 60,000

food pantries across the country and recognizes how the importance of providing those with limited food access, resources to food (Feeding America 2017). Feeding America's network of food organizations has been successful in their efforts as the organization has support from donors, large corporations who are willing to participate in donating their excess food, as well as celebrity endorsement. Food banks and other initiatives part of Feeding America's network often benefit, as Feeding America has strong connections with many powerful industries in the country. Essentially, Feeding America serves as the surface layer for getting food to the hungry through matching food banks to corporate industries and agencies like Walmart, Target, Starbucks, General Mills, the USDA, and many more, where goods and products can be redistributed to food pantries or soup kitchens, which eventually provide these resources to those in need (Feeding America 2017). Annually, Feeding America rescues approximately 2.2 billion pounds of food while serving the needs of many different individuals ranging in age, socioeconomic status, and geographic location (Feeding America 2017). Although Feeding America plays heavily into some capitalist aspects and does not work as much towards empowering individuals, the one major benefit of this organization is its rich connections and desire to want to eliminate unnecessary waste and get food resources to individuals who are in dire need.

Roadrunner Food Bank Programs

As recognized above, Roadrunner Food Bank functions as a middle layer mainly concerned with delivering food to a variety of partners and organizations to better serve as many individuals as possible (Bennett 1/13/17). Typically Roadrunner Food Bank serves a wide array of individuals mostly living under the poverty line and often times approximately 30% of those being served are children (Roadrunner Food Bank 2017). Most of the food obtained from food

rescue is often delivered directly to churches, food pantries, soup kitchens, and more, however, Roadrunner additionally operates under five main programs, including: a childhood hunger initiative, an emergency family food box program, a healthy food center, a mobile food pantry, and a senior hunger initiative (Roadrunner Food Bank 2017). Each of these programs seeks to address a distinct issue and a different population. For example, the childhood hunger initiative often takes place at schools where counselors or nurses are able to hand out food resources to children through a backpack program, where students take food home to their families in a backpack, or in the form of a mobile pantry (Roadrunner Food Bank 2017). The mobile food pantry still requires the need of a partner, however, rather than having food delivered to one set location, like a food pantry, the mobile pantry can be set up in different locations, where many individuals pass in order to create better access (Bennett 1/13/17). Furthermore, the emergency family food box program works to get food to individuals suffering from a crisis, while the senior hunger initiative works to get food to low income senior living arrangements and senior centers, as approximately 20% of individuals struggling with hunger in New Mexico are elderly (Roadrunner Food Bank 2017).

Healthy Food Center

In specifically examining the issue of food inequality from a health perspective, Roadrunner Food Bank's Healthy Food Center program offers individuals a chance to shop affordably while learning how to eat healthier, and provide more nutrient rich meals (Bennett 1/13/17). Through having the opportunity to speak with Tabatha Bennett, the Community Programs Manager at Roadrunner Food Bank, better insight was provided about alternative ways the food bank helps others in addition to distributing food. Across New Mexico, 25-30% of adults are considered overweight and among this population, those identifying as Hispanic make

up approximately 30-35% of adults (CDC 2015). Though this percentage of adults is not divided into categories based on income, often times many of the individuals suffering from obesity and diet related illness such as diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity and more, are individuals who are food insecure. In considering this factor, it is very important for organizations aimed at eliminating hunger to pay close attention to how their efforts have an impact on overall health.

Roadrunner Food Bank's Healthy Food Center started in August of 2015 as a collaborative effort with three different health clinics in order to get doctors to prescribe prescriptions for healthy food for food insecure individuals (Bennett 1/13/17). For one to be considered food insecure, a screening takes place by asking "Has the food you have bought not lasted?" and if this is the case, they are granted a prescription allowing them to shop once a week at the Healthy Food Center (Bennett 1/13/17). In addition to being food insecure, individual's participating in the program must either be living with a diet related illnesses or be at risk for developing one, as this particular program centers around improving individual's eating habits (Bennett 1/13/17). After obtaining a prescription for the Healthy Food Store, an individual is able to buy up to 45 pounds of fresh produce, and other healthy product such as milk, eggs, dry foods, and more (Bennett 1/13/17). Although approximately 47.8% of farmer's markets across the state of New Mexico accept SNAP benefits, programs like the Healthy Food Center remain important, due to the strict policy requirements surrounding federal programs like SNAP and WIC (Center for Disease Control 2015).

Funding

According to data from the Mind the Meal Gap feature on the Feeding America website, New Mexico has approximately 358,770 individuals or a rate 17.2% people living as food insecure across the state (Feeding America 2017). Though the Healthy Food Center is only in its

beginning stages, the biggest challenge faced by this program is tied to issues of funding. Currently, Roadrunner Food Banks programs operates on funding provided by the organization, but programs like the Healthy Food Center must find other ways to secure grants as Roadrunner is unable to support the program on their own (Bennett 1/13/17). Another interesting fact about the Healthy Food Center is that this program enjoys operating using produce from local food organizations, like Seed 2 Need, which create greater appeal for local goods (Bennett 1/13/17). Moreover, the Healthy Food Center has served over 300,000 pounds of food and hopes to become a major preventative health measure by opening up options for individuals suffering from diet related diseases. Lastly, Roadrunner Food Bank plans to expand the Healthy Food Center through collaborating with more clinics and educating others about healthy foods so they may begin the journey to transform their diet (Bennett 1/13/17). Although providing affordable healthy food is a major part of the solution to food injustice, another vital component to this issue involves making sure individuals are educated properly to better sustain healthy lifestyles. Since individuals growing up with limited food options experience limited exposure to healthy foods, it is essential they learn new ways to prepare foods for their overall health and wellness.

3.5 El Morro Valley Cooperative: Local People, Local Food

El Morro Valley Cooperative is a food network located in Ramah, New Mexico centered on increasing awareness around access to healthy food through engaging the community and supporting local entrepreneurial food efforts. The network began in 2010 as a food cooperative, with the intention of allowing individuals to have access to healthy food, even in the absence of a large grocery store (Humenay 12/24/16). Ramah, New Mexico is located in McKinley County, which is one of the poorest counties in the state, with one of the highest rates (25.3%) of New

Mexicans facing food insecurity (Feeding America 2014). According to U.S. Census Bureau data from 2010, the population of McKinley County is 71,492 and approximately 13.3% of the population is Hispanic, while 75.5% is Native American, and 15.2% of individuals are white (United States Census Bureau 2016). However, the population of the village of Ramah is approximately 400 people, existing in a surrounding area comprised of about 5,000 individuals (Renaud and Humenay 2015). Furthermore, the town of Ramah is a rural community located approximately 50 miles away from the nearest city with a fully stocked grocery store, which amounts to hours of driving round trip (Humenay 12/24/16). The struggle for obtaining basic needs is further illustrated by lack of transportation, which reinforces the need for creating change on a local level (Renaud and Humenay 2015).

Mission

El Morro Valley Cooperative operates under the mission of providing the Ramah community with access to resources in order to build connections between local food growers, small business, and consumers (El Morro Valley Coop 2017). The organization's vision centers on three main components including, a community grocery store, a community kitchen, and a distribution service, which all serve to create an independent local economy, while additionally providing access to food for communities (El Morro Valley Coop 2017). El Morro Valley Cooperative is distinct as it operates as an initiative established by community members in order to make a direct impact within their community, rather than relying on outside resources. This model additionally promotes the idea of building up small local business owners, which provides community members the opportunity to support themselves independently, eliminating current struggles that arise from having a lack of food resources (Humenay 12/24/16). The movement to "feed their local economy while feeding families" is critical in this organization's mission, as the

lack of food and economic resources currently deprives the community of a vital means for survival (Renaud and Humenay 2015:4).

Growing a Vision

Although Ramah's location is remote, within the past decade, the community has taken steps towards creating healthier eating options for its residents through establishing a food cooperative and is currently in the process of expanding. El Morro Valley Cooperative has the vision to further combat food inequality through (1) implementing a local community grocery store, (2) installing a certified community kitchen, and (3) creating a distribution service for other small business owners (Renaud and Humenay 2015). The building of a local community grocery store is of value for El Morro Valley Cooperative's growth, as this resource will allow for individuals within the community to have a location to buy fresh produce, local goods, and more without having to travel hours. The purpose of a certified community kitchen allows food processes to expedite on a local level and provides individuals the opportunity to pursue entrepreneurial pursuits in local food efforts.

In Ramah, the construction of a certified community kitchen is highly valued as it will provide individuals the chance to use their own goods and produce in a way to create revenue, which in turn supports the local economy (Humenay 12/24/16). A community kitchen is essential to the success of the cooperative, as it serves as a bridge between the small community grocery store and distribution service and ultimately provides individuals in the community a way to operate independently and localize food (Humenay 12/24/16). Another unique aspect about the community kitchen is that the idea stemmed from people's feedback from a community survey, which reflects the true needs of a community seeking alternatives promote local food in addition to economic growth (Humenay 12/24/16). Finally, El Morro Valley Cooperative foresees

developing a distribution service, which would alleviate many local businesses struggles for obtaining the stock needed for their stores by having a truck travel to larger cities for goods (Renaud and Humenay 2015). The distribution truck would ultimately resolve the community's struggle to get food, as corporate grocery stores have no interest in providing for small desert communities (Humenay 12/24/16).

Cooperation and Funding

El Morro Valley Cooperative stemmed from the La Cocina initiative, a statewide effort within New Mexico to promote community kitchens while joining forces with local business and from the support the USDA and another local nonprofit named Farm to Table (Humanay 12/24/16). Essentially, the concept of El Morro Valley Cooperative is based in a local business model interested in addressing the needs of local people through food and local production. Since this effort is a cooperative, individuals within the community pay a \$20 membership fee annually, and depending on the sales of products, individuals receive a dividend of the profits made at the end of the year (Renaud and Humenay 2015). A cooperative is a business model, which operates under a common goal and shares all its profits among its members (Humenay 12/24/16).

El Morro Valley Cooperative additionally has received grants and has spent timeless effort fundraising and seeking out resources in order to obtain the money to implement the additions to their economic model. Like many other organizations, El Morro Valley Cooperative has faced a number of hurdles with their plans to open their community kitchen and continues to struggle to obtain enough financial funds to finish constructing their community kitchen. Although funding is a struggle, the board of directors and a number of volunteers continue to bolster support for this vital need in Ramah and continuously work to educate others about the

importance of creating food access (Humenay 12/24/16). Overall, Board Director Genevieve Humenay emphasizes the importance of El Morro Valley Food Cooperative through recognizing the need to improve community health by creating ways for individuals to sustain themselves and make connections between food access and local economic development.

3.6 Capital Roots: Growing, Educating, and Providing

Mission

Capital Roots is a nonprofit organization located in the Capital District of New York committed to creating access to healthy, affordable, fresh food for individuals living in urban areas through a wide array of programs (Capital Roots 2017). The organization was initially established in 1975 as a community gardening plan to better inform individuals in the Troy community about the ways one can grow their own food (Peck 1/10/17). Through teaching gardening skills and purchasing land plots, Capital Roots worked to preserve green spaces within urban areas. Further, the program was able to expand its base through implementing additional programs to increase access to healthy foods (Peck 1/10/17). Since limited access and knowledge about healthy foods is a common issue experienced throughout a number of communities and there is a lack of interest and feasibility in gardening, Capital Roots has dedicated itself to providing a number of alternatives to better serve the needs of Capital District.

Programs

In following their mission “to nourish healthy communities by providing fresh food and green spaces to all,” Capital Roots has approximately 10 different programs across four counties, Albany, Schenectady, Rensselaer, and Southern Saratoga to address different needs (Capital Roots 2017). The main programs include Community Gardens, Produce Project, Squash Hunger,

Taste Good Series, Veggie Mobile, Healthy Stores, and Veggie Rx (Capital Roots 2017).

Although each program has a slightly different focus, each works to provide alternatives to empower individuals and build food security. The Community Gardens program is open to all individuals and essentially offers guidance and resources in order to allow residents in different neighborhoods to be able to grow their own food and take charge of their own health (Peck 1/10/17). Similarly, the Produce Project works towards helping others learn how to grow produce, but specifically works with disadvantaged urban youth in order build solid job and communication skills (Peck 1/10/17). This program is additionally focused on creating opportunities for youth to come in contact with fresh foods and food growing practices in order to establish healthier lifestyles (Capital Roots 2017). Furthermore, Capital Roots has programs dedicated to educating younger children about the importance of healthy eating and gives youth exposure to produce, which they may previously never have encountered (Capital Roots 2017).

On a different note, Capital Roots has a program called Squash Hunger, which is dedicated to diminishing hunger within the Capital District through collaborative efforts with emergency feeding organizations such as soup kitchens, food pantries, and homeless shelters (Peck 1/10/17). Since many emergency feeding efforts are primarily stocked with nonperishable food items, Squash Hunger seeks to provide fresh food to these feeding operations for the sake of nutrition. Much of the fresh food matched to various organizations is often donated by local growers, purchased at wholesale value, or rescued, meaning perfectly edible food came from grocery stores or other locations where it would otherwise be discarded (Peck 1/10/17). Due to strict food regulations and high demands for aesthetically appealing produce, it is necessary to have programs such as Squash Hunger in order to prevent usable food from being wasted when there are many individuals who still suffer from hunger (Capital Roots 2017). Since food

pantries and shelters frequently struggle to offer their clients fresh produce, Capital Roots provides the opportunity for over 100 different organizations to buy produce at wholesale, meaning these products are being sold close to their actual cost (Peck 1/10/17). Usually, food pantries do not have the capacity to buy healthy produce at wholesale value due to needing a truck and place to distribute the products. However, Capital Roots serves as a food distributor or a food hub because they are able to not only deliver food to different locations, but also allow smaller pantries to purchase what they need for the number of people they serve (Peck 1/10/17).

Furthermore, in considering other aspects tied to food deserts and limited food accessibility, Capital Roots has two programs, the Veggie Mobile and Healthy Stores programs specifically addressing this need within urban areas. The Veggie Mobile is a mobile grocery truck stocked with fresh fruits and vegetables, traveling to approximately 30 locations in six cities throughout the Capital District each week (Peck 1/10/17). The program focuses on making stops in low-income areas and often in public areas or at senior centers (Peck 1/10/17). Though an individual does not necessarily need to be on SNAP to make purchases from the mobile market, the vast majority of individuals benefitting from this service are individuals with a limited food budget (Capital Roots 2017). Again, since most of the produce purchased by Capital Roots either comes from local growers or from wholesale, which is sold at the prices for which the good were purchased, thus, creating easier access and greater affordability for individuals with limited resources (Peck 1/10/17). The Veggie Mobile additionally offers a Taste and Take program, which provides customers with the opportunity to sample a healthy recipe in exchange for a bag of produce that can be used to replicate the recipe at home (Capital Roots 2017). For instance, one week the veggie mobile made a recipe using spaghetti squash and tomatoes, and individuals who tried the recipe were given a spaghetti squash as well as tomatoes and garlic.

This program not only provides healthy food, but also offers people the opportunity to try produce, they may never have had exposure to previously.

In conjunction with the Veggie Mobile, the Healthy Stores program also serves to alleviate issues of food deserts as Capital Roots works to get fresh produce into convenience stores already situated in various neighborhoods (Peck 1/10/17). Since the USDA mainly identifies food deserts as areas lacking grocery stores, the Healthy Stores program creates alternatives for individuals seeking fresh food other than chips and candy found in local convenience stores. This program additionally benefits individuals in low-income areas, as communities are able to work towards alleviating this issue on their own without having to go through grueling journeys for healthy food. The program also creates a link with the community, as many local convenience stores are culturally and ethnically diverse, offering certain products specific to individuals living within certain neighborhoods (Peck 1/10/17). Though only implemented in 2011, the Healthy Stores program continues to grow and support areas where chain grocery stores have little desire to expand (Peck 1/10/17).

Future Plans

Aside from the numerous programs offered, Capital Roots operates as a food hub and is structured in such a way that there are several units working to create improved access to healthy food resources. The organization comprises of approximately 30 members, and by being the only food hub of its kind, Capital Roots strives to define itself and constantly works to find other ways to create easier access to food and adapt to the needs of the community (Peck 1/10/17). In wanting to create food secure communities, the organization further plans to expand through implementing a greenhouse and certified community kitchen, which will allow for nutrition cooking classes to be taught and give individuals who are interested in starting their own food

business a place to prepare their goods (Peck 1/10/17). The major challenges faced by this organization often relate to figuring out the best ways to meet the needs of the people and communities it serves, while also focusing on how to create programs which will actually benefit those looking to become secure through healthy food resources.

3.7 Soul Fire Farm

Mission

Adopting an original approach dedicated to empowering people of color through agrarianism, Soul Fire Farm serves as an additional example of an initiative interested in resolving issues of food injustice. The organization is “a family farm committed to ending racism and food injustice in our food system,” and is located in Grafton, New York, about 45 minutes outside of the capital region (Soul Fire Farm 2017). Soul Fire Farm was founded in 2010 after Leah Penniman and her husband Jonah Vitale-Wolff decided they wanted to make change by using food as a way to help communities brimming with drugs, weapons, and unhealthy food (Wechsler 2016). The mission of the farm comprises of eight main goals, which essentially comprise of education, training, collaborating and empowering youth and minorities within their food systems (Soul Fire Farm 2017). The farm consists of full time employees, interns, and volunteers, who all work to not only upkeep a farm and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) share, but also assist with programs ranging from farm education to alternative prison sentencing programs (Wechsler 2016). The farm compound is mainly concerned with proving alternatives for marginalized groups and people suffering within a disparate food system that has strayed away from nourishing individuals to monetization.

Food Sovereignty

The idea of Soul Fire mainly stemmed from both founders passion for farming and educating, in addition to their desire to want to empower disadvantaged groups through creating alternatives for those living in food insecure locations (Wechsler 2016). Further, the organization operates under eight main goals and follows the philosophy food sovereignty, which encompasses the idea that all individuals are entitled to healthy sustainable food and also considers the how producers are part of this process as well (Soul Fire Farm 2017). This concept largely embodies how both producers and consumers of food are interwoven and suggests how this system must recognize differences within identities tied to race, socioeconomic status, gender, age, and more in order to fully operate as a whole. The Soul Fire Farm website additionally provides the six principles of food sovereignty which include: (1) Focusing on food for people, (2) valuing food providers, (3) localizing food systems, (4) maintaining local control while rejecting the privatization of natural resources, (5) building knowledge and skills, and (6) working with nature (Soul Fire Farm 2017). These principles are important to note as they guide the mission of the farm and allow for others to better understand the work carried out by this unique operation.

CSA Farm Share

Again while a major part of Soul Fire Farm is devoted educating and empowering marginalized communities, the organization also has a strong focus on delivering and creating access to healthy food for individuals and communities. The farm functions as a CSA which offers 80-100 shares annually, to individuals within the capital region interested in purchasing a share of the farm's yield in the form of weekly boxes from the months of June to November (Soul Fire Farm 2017). The program is open to all individuals, however, unlike many CSA's,

Soul Fire Farms operates on a “sliding scale fee,” which offers individuals receiving SNAP benefits or qualifying within a lower income bracket to pay according to their financial status (Soul Fire Farm 2017). This concept truly encapsulates the awareness the organization is attempting to spread, by recognizing how everyone should contribute what they have into a collective effort as a result of the varying advantages and privileges one has in their life. By electing to participate in Soul Fire Farm’s CSA, individuals have the opportunity to buy local produce at affordable prices, while also supporting local growers and ethical farming practices. Further, Soul Fire Farms delivers food boxes to individuals living in Troy and Albany regions of New York, and drops off boxes at established sites for individuals not living within various drop off regions, which eliminates some individuals’ struggle for obtaining fresh healthy food as a result of having limited transportation (Soul Fire Farm 2017).

Programs

Though constantly expanding, Soul Fire Farm has a number of programs and initiatives set in place aligning with their mission of “ending racism and injustice in the food system,” while additionally seeking to empower individuals in their efforts to have a larger role in their food (Soul Fire Farm 2017). The programs offered by Soul Fire Farm include: Black and Latinx Farmer’s Immersion, Uprooting Racism Farmer’s Immersion, Youth Food Justice Empowerment Program, Activist Retreat, as well as hosting volunteering community days. The Black and Latinx Farmer’s Immersion program is a weeklong experience, which brings people of color together to learn farming and food preparation skills, while additionally providing individuals the opportunity to have a greater connection with the earth and land. As a result of historical injustices, this program allows minorities, who have historically been oppressed, the opportunity to reestablish connections with agriculture in ways they were previously excluded (Soul Fire

Farm 2017). Since black and Latino individuals have undoubtedly faced discrimination within the United States and have either historically been connected to the land as slaves or migrant workers, Soul Fire Farm is attempting to restore power to these individuals through providing them the opportunity to return to agricultural roots as independent farmers.

Similarly, the Youth Food Justice Empowerment Program aims to educate youth in food systems and educates through exploring skills related to healthy eating and living in order to get youth to make responsible choices (Soul Fire Farm 2017). This program is important because when youth are educated about the significance of healthy eating and about where their food comes from, they have a better chance of establishing healthy eating patterns, which can assist in them later in life. Education serves as a vital tool needed in preventing food deserts and food injustice, because when individuals are educated about food, they gain the power to fight against systems of food oppression, which they are subject to on a constant basis (Soul Fire Farm 2017). Further, through opening up their farm to all through designated volunteer days, individuals are able to reconnect with the earth and soil through learning valuable skills, which allow for reconsideration of agrarian roots. Farming skills were once intended to sustain people through building relationships with the planet, as opposed to a means for profit. By gaining a better understanding of where one's food is coming from and through learning valuable skills related to growing food, individuals are provided with a greater sense of what steps they can take in order to improve their own food struggles.

Chapter 4: Discussion

4.1 Comparisons and Evaluation

In acknowledging the organizations discussed in the previous chapter, it is vital to assess which actions have been successful at addressing the needs of communities experiencing the effects of food inequality and food injustice and how these efforts compare on a micro level. Although issues of food injustice and food inequality are widespread, much of the struggle related to these issues largely pertains to there being no one solution to alleviating disparities around food. Demographics, geographic location, culture, access to resources, history, and more all influence the strategies implemented across localities, which results in people and communities having to assert themselves as advocates for change.

As noted from the case studies, it is apparent how issues of food injustice and food inequality exist differently for both rural and urban communities specifically in New York and New Mexico, as the circumstances for which inequality was created vary severely. Further, the resources available to localities create additional layers for addressing problems faced by food deserts, as each area must implement solutions based on their means. However, even if resources were equally accessible, some communities' solutions would not benefit in the same ways as others, based on different community needs. This chapter makes comparisons between organization's strategies and addresses advantages and disadvantages to alternatives implemented by each case study. The criteria for the comparisons will also acknowledge programs' effectiveness at incorporating local communities as well as food insecure individuals into improving food circumstances, and additionally considers programs overall success. Further, this chapter offers solutions for ways to improve struggles around food and ultimately makes

recommendations for how local people and governments must cooperate to appropriately remedy this societal dilemma.

4.2 Critiquing Mobile Grocery Stores

Mobile Grocery stores were one effort recognized by MoGro and Capital Roots, however; Capital Roots continues to maintain this effort, whereas MoGro has switched to a CSA food box delivery model. The benefit of mobile grocery stores, such as the Veggie Mobile at Capital Roots mainly rests in creating access to underserved populations who lack contact with grocery stores at affordable prices. At Capital Roots, this model was largely carried out by fresh produce being purchased at wholesale value and then distributed to areas in need of access of healthy foods. Additionally, Capital Roots managed to promote their services to reach more people in need, through partnering with health clinics and forming the Veggie Rx program, where doctors can prescribe their patients currently with or at risk of developing diet related illness, prescriptions or coupons to purchase items at the Veggie Mobile. Even more, the Veggie Mobile further encouraged healthy eating through the “Taste and Take” component of their program, where individuals were provided the opportunity to sample new foods they may have never had exposure to and given simple recipes and ingredients to prepare the food at home.

Though having the potential to be more costly to maintain, due to having to upkeep with truck maintenance, this model serves as a beneficial solution towards minimizing the detriment associated with limited food access. This model provides customers with the opportunity to shop for healthy food at affordable prices. That being said, mobile grocery stores also have the potential to be limiting in their selection, as they are only able to fit so much into a truck. Further, mobile grocery stores must also be mindful of including a diverse array of stops to better reach more individuals and avoid restricting access in areas which need these resources the most

(Zepeda 2014). Even more, advertising remains important for these programs, as their primary purpose involves maximizing the number of communities served as a whole.

One major improvement, which could benefit mobile grocery's all together would be more government funding, and the possibility of the government subsidizing these efforts in order to make these models practical and accessible for areas that require their services the most. As a whole, mobile grocery stores are a practical approach for urban areas where neighborhoods and community spaces are more centrally located; however, for more dispersed locations like New Mexico, this resource is challenging to fund as vehicles must travel greater lengths to reach individuals (Norman 12/8/16). With government support or additional funding, greater access could expand to other areas in dire need of food. Although the mobile grocery store at MoGro was replaced with CSA food boxes, both models serve as essential methods for reducing food deserts and creating better access through acknowledging what measures are most feasible on a micro or more community oriented level.

4.3 Sowing change with CSA Models

In further reassessing issues of health and examining other resources aimed at reducing rates of diet related illness and limited food accessibility, MoGro's CSA vegetable boxes are another noteworthy effort to consider in addition to the CSA operation carried out at Soul Fire Farm. Although CSAs are not specifically associated with food security, these models have the potential to play a larger role in efforts aimed at reducing food inaccessibility and injustice, as local farmers can work to get their goods to people within their own communities who are in need of food. Additionally, many CSAs now accept SNAP benefits, which allow this resource to be accessed by more groups of people. Expanding beyond SNAP and other federal programs, Soul Fire Farm institutes a "sliding scale" payment method, where the price of farm shares vary

per person based on their income (Soul Fire Farm 2017). This model is advantageous because many individuals who are struggling to access food often fall just above the requirements to qualify for programs like SNAP.

In considering MoGro's shift to a CSA model from a mobile grocery, it is noteworthy how the organization partners with health clinics and other locations to distribute reasonably priced CSA vegetable boxes. Although MoGro became unable to support their mobile grocery effort, the compromise of having 14 established distribution locations, with community based food champions, create greater opportunity to provide necessary healthy resources to individuals struggling to find convenient and accessible food (Norman 12/8/16). The advantage to MoGro's CSA boxes are that they allow for customers to purchase and customize their own food boxes online, which reduces food waste, while still providing access to food resources for individuals living in more isolated areas. However, though the online system allows for customizing orders, the main disadvantage to this model is that all individuals do not always have access to the Internet or may lack the education for how to navigate MoGro's website (Norman 12/8/17). Josh Norman explained how "there are alternatives [to using the online order system] but they are not ideal mainly because [MoGro] is made up of three employees and [lacks] the infrastructure to support this. People can call in their orders, [but] we encourage people to go to family, libraries, and community centers to help them with Internet problems" (12/8/17). Another disadvantage to this model is that participants are left slightly removed from their food, as they do not have the experience of physically selecting or growing their own food.

While MoGro's CSA food box model works to deliver food to communities in need, the program could further expand by finding ways to become better integrated with the communities they are assisting. Food champions are often part of the community, but the idea of ordering food

boxes is still not widely embraced by many of the communities MoGro serves, which could potentially result from the concept of ordering food online being novel. However, unlike Soul Fire Farm CSA members, MoGro participants do not have the opportunity to connect with their food in ways like visiting the farm from which their produce is being grown. This separation between food and people limits box recipients to being solely receivers of goods, rather than having a chance at empowering themselves through learning valuable growing skills. Although food champions are seen as assets to this program, MoGro could benefit by finding other ways to include participants of the program into their own food process, rather than simply delivering food. MoGro's effort to provide simple recipes using ingredients from the vegetable boxes is one way to begin educating others on healthy eating, but there is also a strong need for efforts, such as community cooking lessons or opportunities to learn new skills for individuals to provide for themselves and their families. Again, in acknowledging how many New Mexico natives have had ancestors connected to land, the concept of receiving food boxes generates uncertainty, as there is desire for individuals to want to be able to have a part in cultivation of their food.

On the other hand, Soul Fire Farm's CSA model is wholeheartedly focused on getting individuals reconnected with their food process, and highly encourages its members to spend time volunteering on the farm (Soul Fire Farm 2017). Soul Fire Farm's effort is also strong because it includes a significant education component tied to learning about food processes in order for historically oppressed groups to have an opportunity to empower themselves. This aspect will be further examined later, but it is noteworthy how this effort recognizes the racial and class aspect tied to food injustice. Further, Soul Fire delivers its food to individuals, which makes it possible for food insecure individuals to gain access to healthy food. Again, in recognizing the differences between both rural and urban areas, Soul Fire has an easier time

getting food to others due to less dramatic spatial differences. Overall, the only downside to Soul Fire's program relates to their limit of CSA farm shares. Ultimately, Soul Fire Farm should serve as a model for other CSAs, as it is highly concerned with ensuring underrepresented races and classes have a place within healthy food systems.

4.4 Revitalized Convenience Stores as Healthy Food Stores

Programs like the Healthy Food Center supported by Roadrunner Food Bank and the Healthy Stores program at Capital Roots, are both aimed at increasing access to healthy resources at affordable prices, while also incorporating aspects of convenience. The Healthy Food Center shares many similarities with Capital Root's Veggie Rx program, where participants can redeem prescriptions for healthy food, however this model is not carried out on a mobile level. Subsequently, the Healthy Stores program is significant as it makes healthier foods available to low income communities lacking grocery stores, through providing fresh wholesale produce at affordable prices to convenient stores. Generating healthy options within convenience stores located in food deserts is a useful strategy as it serves as an easy way to acquire food needed for health in places, which are easily accessible in neighborhoods. Specifically, Capital Roots works to establish relationships with local storeowners to create change in models already existing within neighborhoods.

The Healthy Food Center has the benefit of allowing participants of the program to have access to a demonstration kitchen, where they can learn to prepare foods for which they may have never had previous exposure, in addition to receiving up to 45 pounds of fresh food. The major challenge of encouraging healthy eating in both the Healthy Stores program and the Healthy Food Center is that organizations have to educate on ways to make vegetables both easy, fast, and affordable, as this model must compete against fast food and already prepackaged store

bought food. Tabatha Bennett, from Roadrunner Food Bank explained how in our society “[people] lean more towards convenience meals, [which makes] it difficult [for learning] how to plan and make meals.” This is especially true when families may have limited food budgets or no previous experience or knowledge about cooking. In having shifted towards a model of convenience, many individual now lack the ability or time to be able to prepare foods for themselves and their families, which further creates another wrench towards resolving issues of unhealthy eating patterns.

As a whole, this model is advantageous, as it places affordable produce within convenience stores and can directly attack food deserts by awarding individuals the opportunity to easily select the types healthier foods, thus eliminating the compulsive need to buy chips or cookies (Peck 1/17/17). However, the major challenges this solution faces relate to maintaining funding, and discovering new ways to grow and expand, especially in places like New Mexico, where there is a greater need to meet the needs of individuals residing in more open and rural (Bennett 1/13/17). Overall, this solution is an effective way to reduce food deserts and promote healthier eating patterns among individuals experiencing food insecurity as it challenges corporate models and ideals of what is both convenient and fast.

4.5 Growing with Education

Overall, education and convenience components of all solutions are critical in addressing issues of diet related illness and food injustice, as participants must become aware of other alternatives which they can access in order to avoid becoming victims of fast food corporations and cheap junk food. Further, most programs found within the organizations examined included components of education associated with healthier eating, which instilled greater power in participants, as they were made more aware of ways they could change their health outcomes and

food circumstances. If an individual can recognize the health benefits of fresh food as a remedy for illness, and if people are granted access to fresh foods at affordable prices, individuals residing in food deserts can learn to become better-informed consumers and can learn to break their dependency from industries aimed at preying on the vulnerable and disenfranchised (Kwate 2008). Ultimately, when one is better informed of healthier food choices, and has the option and power to purchase these items, there is a better chance at lowering the rates of diet related illness among low-income groups and reducing the gap in accessing a necessity for survival.

4.6 Assessing Access via Farmer's Markets and Cooperative Models

Moreover, farmer's markets are another alternative for addressing limited food access, however, issues of affordability and lack of inclusivity sometimes make this model less effective in resolving food deserts. While farmer's markets outwardly appear to be a simple solution for alleviating food deserts, there are many issues of race, class, culture and socioeconomic factors that are not considered when these markets placed in food deserts. Marissa Peck, Food Assessment Coordinator from Capital Roots provided insight into this issue and stated:

The reality is that farmers markets in our area (the Capital District) are boutique markets [with] fancy, flashy, heirloom varieties that are often expensive. In a lot of ways, our farmer's markets are not inclusive and are not being utilized by a large group of minority or low-income people. All farmer's markets take food stamps, but it is really confusing [going through the process] to buy produce with your food stamps, [when] the prices aren't really well displayed and you cannot really shop around because you literally have to go through the crowds to ask vendors what their price is for carrots. So you do not know if you are getting the best deal on them and if [price is your biggest concern] because you have a [limited] food budget, then it is easier to not [go]. I go to the farmer's market and I rarely see black people. [T]here are a lot of black people walking around outside in other parts of the city, but for some reason, for understandable reasons, they do not see [farmer's markets] as a space for them.

Peck's assessment of farmer's markets presents a realistic portrait of class distinction and emphasizes the cultural knowledge needed to feel comfortable navigating a market for food.

Again, in illustrating how farmer's markets accept SNAP benefits, but make it challenging for

people of lower socioeconomic status to utilize this resource, it becomes important to find ways to better include low-income people as farmer's markets could be an alternative means for individuals within food deserts to obtain fresh food. Furthermore, farmer's markets need to find better ways to include local populations living within food deserts, rather than creating a savior complex, which only stagnates individuals from being able to empower themselves.

On the other hand, efforts put in place by organizations like El Morro Valley Food Cooperative are in the works of becoming a comprehensive community-based solution seeking to address the major struggles arising from residence in a food desert. Although El Morro Valley Cooperative is in the process of building a community kitchen and fully securing funding for their community store, the city of Ramah operates a weekly farmer's market, which provides residents the opportunity to purchase local goods. Though there is a mixture of groups living within Ramah, people tend to have similar food situations, which makes this this farmer's market less exclusive and more focused on collaborating on a joint food initiative (Humenay 12/24/16). Further, the classism present within farmer's markets in Upstate New York compared to Ramah, New Mexico could potentially be a result of differences between rural and urban areas.

Though the food cooperative is in the process of expanding, all current members, regardless of monetary resources pay \$20 annually for membership, and later once the community kitchen opens for operation, there will be opportunities for individuals to barter or trade goods to have access to this facility (Renaud and Humenay 2015). The inclusivity of the cooperative model and appeal towards creating an independent business plan designed to support the local economy and people of Ramah, is a approach towards resolving issues of food deserts as it incorporates norms, and values shared by communities. This model also provides better price alternatives for community members and resolves difficulties associated with transportation

costs and travel (Renaud and Humenay 2015). When seeking solutions for resolving food insecurity and food deserts, it is essential to address the needs and desires of local people in order to have a better chance at finding an enduring solution, which ultimately results in empowerment. Though the community solution is self-operated, funding is often difficult to obtain, as many members are of lower socioeconomic status, which leads to greater need for state and government support towards local food efforts. Although the project has faced challenges in terms of fully being able to implement their vision, this model has potential to inspire other rural and geographically isolated communities to be able to create their own change through supporting themselves. As Humenay stated: “It’s about community health [and] it’s about places being able to sustain themselves. [Food] security [comes from communities] pooling resources [to] find the strength in order to connect the dots to common ground” (12/24/16). Through having food insecure communities recognize their own place within their food systems, there is potential for greater change to alleviate food struggles.

4.7 Cultivating Success with Community Gardens and Farming Education

Community gardens and community farming initiatives are additional models for addressing issues of food deserts and food inequality as these methods not only lead to physical results in the production of food, but additionally offer individuals the opportunity to integrate themselves into a comprehensive process. It is important to recognize how all people once provided for themselves by growing their own food, yet with the rise of industrialism and urbanization, people began to no longer have as much of a need to farm. Organizations like Seed 2 Need, Capital Root’s Community Gardens program, and Soul Fire Farm promote methods for communities to come together to cultivate food as a solution to the flaws in the current food system. The main advantages to these approaches are that they educate people about natural food

processes, which results in healthier eating, and allows for individuals to have a greater connection with where their food is coming from. Community gardening and farming efforts additionally promote interactions between people, which fosters conversation and solidarity in working together to grow food. Though each of these organizations result in direct solutions towards improving the food system, each program has slightly different approaches geared towards addressing different aspects of food insecurity.

Seed 2 Need's community gardening effort works to make a difference in reducing hunger, through a volunteer base consisting of individuals within the local community. The program also aims to harvest food several times each week during the growing season to donate to local food banks, including Roadrunner Food Bank. While this model readily produces food for those in need, the program is mostly an effort driven by the food secure to assist those who are hungry. This is noteworthy, because it illustrates the importance of limited food access having to reach across class and racial boundaries within society, as this awareness can only bring about more change for those currently experiencing food injustice. The volunteers of Seed 2 Need have the power to evoke change and educate others about issues of food inequality and emphasize why their efforts are significant.

On the other hand, Capital Roots' community gardening effort is aimed at bringing members interested in gardening together through purchasing gardening plots rather than emphasizing the program as a way to grow food for disadvantaged populations. The program essentially offers all individuals the chance to grow their own food, which for some, may help to reduce their food budgets. Each organization relies on donations and volunteer support, which once again brings these efforts back to being about community need and taking action. While gardening programs are solid efforts, they have the potential to improve through better

advertising and expanding to other groups and individuals not fully aware of these types of programs, and can additionally seek out allies who can also help to support these causes.

Moreover, Soul Fire Farm is an agrarian approach deeply connected to the idea of encouraging disadvantaged groups to reclaim their roots to land, while rejecting a modern food system fostering oppression. Though this effort is similar to community gardening by building solidarity within communities through producing food, this effort diverges through identifying how lower class individuals—often minorities—require greater opportunities to grow both healthy food and out of repression. Soul Fire Farm identifies how many people of color were once forced to work on land, and now encourages minorities, mostly black and Latinx, to reappropriate their identities as agents of the land in order to create a panacea to food oppression. Soul Fire Farm additionally has a strong component tied to education, as it conveys the importance of individuals having to learn how to grow their own healthy foods to serve as solutions within their own communities. In having the knowledge of growing food, individuals are able to further teach others within their own neighborhoods to further create change. Soul Fire Farm is largely concerned with creating a network of minority farmers in an effort to empower individuals to make changes within their own community without having to depend on a weak system of government support.

In many respects, Soul Fire Farm represents one of the strongest solutions for fighting food injustice and issues associated with a disparate food system, as their model truly understands how communities must come together to embolden minorities to reclaim historic identities in order to revolutionize change in a modern day and age. Though many individuals have little interest in wanting to return to agrarian roots, it is evident how reintegrating oneself into their food process, no longer makes them vulnerable to a system failing to meet their needs.

This approach is also commendable due to its ability to bolster community support among minorities, which is essential for being able to make greater impacts. Once again, Soul Fire Farm serves as an exemplary for combating food injustice as it identifies people of color and lower class needs, and provides a solution, which simply involves getting individuals to rekindle connections with soil. Lastly, Soul Fire Farm works to educate youth, in learning skills related to healthy eating and farming, as they believe encouraging people to relearn agricultural skills from past generations can equip youth with the tools to end inequality within food systems.

4.8 A Need for Greater Resources and Support

There is an undeniable need for greater government support in local food efforts designed to reduce struggles of individuals living within food deserts and suffering from food inequality. Since every organization featured in this study was either a nonprofit or community supported effort, issues around securing funding were one of the greatest challenges experienced by each group. Many community efforts tied to reducing food insecurity and injustice were able to get their projects approved through applying for grants and later managed to acquire support through additional grants, donors, fundraising, and community support. Although community support is vital for these efforts survival, many of the populations backing community solutions have little to offer monetarily. Thus, programs sponsored by the USDA must find ways to increase funding for local food grants and must take a deeper glance into acknowledging how race and class are embedded in food policy. Even greater, the government must acknowledge how their requirements for SNAP and definitions of food deserts must expand in order to better recognize the true struggles experienced within communities.

From a theoretical perspective, it would appear symbolic interactionism is present within this study as issues encompassing food deserts and food injustice relate to interactions between

individuals and the food resources they obtain within their communities. Since symbolic interactionism relates to ideas of individuals relationship with symbols present within their society, it remains important to recognize how both factors influence how individuals are able to mediate their roles in relations to these symbols to impact their own perceptions of self (Inglis and Thorpe 2012). Thus, the interactions individuals' hold in terms of their food is necessary for examining alternatives improving food access. Overall, the finding of my research have confirmed the topics covered in my literature review as there is solid evidence of community efforts having a strong influence on resolving issues of food inequality. This thesis connects to symbolic interactionism as individuals and communities experience food injustice and learn how to behave according to the interactions they have between their food and society. As a whole, this thesis is largely important because it identifies community action and reveals the realities of food injustice while emphasizing the need for greater interaction to occur between communities and government entities. Through revealing the challenges of food injustice and recognizing community agency, there is a greater chance for food policy to address the embedded factors of race, class, and place in order to create equity through effective change.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

5.1 Overview of Thesis

This thesis has explored issues of food inequality and food injustice through participant observation and analysis of six case studies aimed at addressing challenges within the current food system from a community-based approach intertwined with alliances at the macro level. The main purpose for exploring issues of food inequality and injustice is to serve as a mode of activism to inspire others and larger forces to take direct approaches towards addressing issues of food inaccessibility and injustice within their own communities. Through interviewing individuals involved in community-oriented efforts, this study offers a comprehensive glance into different solutions implemented to better resolve an issue deep set in racism, classism, and overall oppression within the current food system.

Further, by recognizing efforts such as mobile grocery stores, community gardens, healthy food education, CSA initiatives, community kitchens, cooperatives, farmer's markets, nonprofit partnerships with health clinics, and more, as having the potential to ameliorate food security by adapting to meet specific communities' needs there is high potential for injustice to diminish. Mobile grocery stores and CSA initiatives offer individuals the chance at reclaiming their health and food security, as these efforts provide the option for individuals to select healthy alternatives, which do not exist in many areas otherwise. Similarly, farmer's markets have the potential to expand and integrate the areas where they establish their markets, potentially through including better ways for others within the low-income communities to navigate these resources by expanding access for SNAP recipients and making prices more visible and affordable.

Moreover, efforts like community gardens, community farms, and healthy food education programs provide individuals a way to actively participate in growing their own food, which

reinforces the possibility of reclaiming health and taking pride in having ways to provide for oneself. Even more, by having the opportunity to take the food one has produced and effectively prepare healthy meals, people become emboldened in the food process, no longer reliant on ineffective food sources like fast food or junk food found in convenience stores. Overall, increased support within local communities and deeper relationships associated with food are necessary to bring about food security and justice. Additionally, it remains vital for the government to comprehend this connection in order to better aid community needs.

5.2 Significance of Research and Conclusions

This thesis serves as a means of activism to bring greater awareness of the issues of food deserts, food insecurity, and food injustice as these problems are widely present across society, yet poorly recognized by current approaches and policies undertaken by the government. The major findings of this study discovered no one unique alternative exists for resolving issues of food deserts and food insecurity, as these dilemmas are intertwined with community agency and support from larger macro forces, such as government funding. This conclusion emphasizes how individuals are the ones with the drive to create change for both themselves and their communities, as this sense of direction is lost at greater societal levels. Since this is the case, it becomes increasingly important for communities to recognize how their actions can influence how greater forces, such as the USDA, approach problems surrounding food inaccessibility and injustice. The current macro level approaches related to food accessibility have ultimately failed to consider the actual needs of people living within communities and often provide fixes to problems, without generating concrete results. Although the USDA has instated hunger relief programs like SNAP, WIC, reduced school breakfast and lunch programs, in addition to providing funding to soup kitchens and food pantries, these efforts ensnare lower class groups, as

these efforts fail to create meaningful ways for the oppressed to reclaim autonomy over their own food. Merely providing food resources does not eliminate issues of racism and inequality, which are often at the root of food issues. Even more, when individuals are forced to rely on emergency food resources they begin to lack legitimate recognition by greater society, which additionally contributes to their exclusion from current food systems. The solution to resolving issues surrounding limited food access is intertwined with the concept of food justice because individuals must be the one's to reclaim their own rights to food, rather than depend on inadequate support.

Although community models for improving food deserts are beginning to gain greater support from the government, there is a continued need for emphasis on the ways micro level solutions can ultimately resolve issues of food insecurity. Participant observation of this study elucidated the various alternatives, which can be taken to address issues of food insecurity; therefore, these efforts must challenge the government's view on how to alleviate food problems. If greater recognition for resolving food deserts and limited food accessibility, and if greater connections are made between race and class, there is hope for the government to take steps towards reconsidering their views of minorities and lower class individuals across society. Addressing issues of food on a local level has the potential to ignite change for other systemic oppression tied to race, as it forces societies to recognize how current solutions are also not currently recognizing issues of poverty, lack of health education, and other sources of discrimination tied with food insecurity.

5.3 Policy Implications

In assessing the practicality and usefulness of government policies and programs, it is necessary for the government to recognize the urgency of issues of food accessibility and find

alternative ways to invest in the needs of the lower class and oppressed. The current criteria needed to qualify for government assistance for food, in combination with the definition of food deserts, and the present amount of funding the USDA invests in local food efforts must be readdressed. Although the USDA has policies in place to aid individuals experiencing dire hunger issues, programs like SNAP and WIC often have strict income requirements for individuals and families to even qualify for these programs and fail to acknowledge other important factors surrounding food such as price and quality (Pringle 2013). Further, the USDA's severe cutoff qualification standards for federal food support leave many individuals dependent on emergency food programs, which are not sustaining solutions for food insecurity. The government must take steps towards broadening the requirements for SNAP because too many individuals fall on the cusp of meeting these requirements and suffer to adequately sustain themselves due to issues related to food deserts and food injustice.

Further, the USDA recognizes the existence of food deserts; however, their current definition is arbitrary and often misguided about the true realities of food insecurity. In having the opportunity to speak with individuals working at the organizations featured in this study, it is clear the USDA's current definition of food deserts fails to consider other criteria of food deserts except the physical location's distance from a "recognized" list of grocery stores. In speaking with both Josh Norman from MoGro and Marissa Peck from Capital Roots, it becomes clear this issue does not only affect people living in rural communities or low-income areas, but also affects individuals unable to afford food prices at their nearest grocery store. The USDA must expand their criteria for food deserts because many communities are overlooked leading to misconceptions of the resources existing within truly inaccessible areas.

In recognizing the next steps that must be taken by community-based solutions working to eliminate food injustice, it remains important to seek outside funding, and further push the government for support of programs aimed at benefiting local food efforts. Even more, organizations must discover ways to advocate their cause to others who are food secure, as increased awareness of the massive problems encompassing food injustice bolster greater support. By recognizing the effectiveness of local means addressing issues of inequality, there is a stronger chance for change, as the government becomes faced with the complexities of race, class, and geography within the food system.

Moreover, the evidence from the cases presented in this thesis suggests the USDA needs to expand their funding and grants for local food initiatives. The government currently has begun to recognize how local communities are most familiar with the circumstances surrounding their food issues, and must further acknowledge how local solutions are most effective as areas vary widely across the country. More grants for local funding can serve as a remedy for food issues as these grants begin to foster interactions with the micro level, which ultimately leads to greater comprehension for how poverty and racism are currently entangled in food policy. Thus, in recognizing the intersections of the micro and macro level, the government has the potential to propagate change in conjunction with local leaders. Overall, if the USDA managed to alter their policies surrounding SNAP, food deserts, and the expansion of local food grants, there is a greater opportunity for embedded social problems like racism and classism, to be recognized within food policy. In order to alter issues of food injustice, there must be greater collaboration between local needs and the role of the government and an expansion in policy, which would broaden qualifications for government programs. Finally, steps must be taken towards alternatives aimed at empowering local food solutions, which move beyond corporate interests.

5.4 Limitations

As with many societal studies, this thesis had many different paths it was interested in following, but due to the pressure of time and money constraints, there was only so much that could be accomplished. Thus, even though this study managed to explore six organizations and several alternatives aimed at reducing food deserts, it should be noted how the complexities unearthed only scratched the surface of a much larger issue. Issues of food injustice and food deserts virtually occur within every community, and as injustice and inequality persist, food deserts require greater awareness. As food inequality is intricate and because all communities experiences this problem from slightly different scopes, it remains important to further pursue alternative approaches to better understand this hardship within a number of communities.

If more time were granted to complete this thesis, there would have been a greater selection of nonprofits, cooperatives, food banks, community gardens and other alternatives included in this analysis, all encompassing a number of geographic areas. In relation to geography, this thesis could have been enriched with a perspective from the South as this region has a different history around food and injustice and could have served as an interesting comparison. Even if this study were not to expand to different regions, it still would have been helpful to include a greater number of organizations, and alternative locations throughout New Mexico and New York, as both regions comprise of different groups. Specifically, within New Mexico it would have been useful to go into greater depth exploring the challenges Native Americans face around food security, and it would have also been interesting to explore many smaller towns scattered across the state. Within New York, it would have been useful to explore New York City, in order to gain a broader scope of this issue within an immense city.

Moreover, this study did not have the opportunity to include the perspective of actual individuals experiencing the day-to-day realities of food injustice, as the interviews conducted for this thesis only featured people working for the various organizations. Although interviews with founders, directors, and employees, were helpful in providing insight from an organizational standpoint, it would have been beneficial to obtain perspectives of individuals' part of lower socioeconomic groups and experiencing hardships around food, as they could have offered a different opinion about the types actions being taken within their communities. Although there were no interviews conducted with people utilizing the services of food injustice efforts, this study accomplished what it could with regards to the timespan of the study. Further, this study was incomplete in its ability to make greater comparisons between different cultures and food, which could be a factor, examined in future research.

5.5 Further Research

If further research were to be carried out on this thesis, it would be advisable for individuals to obtain a diverse array of personal perspectives to better recognize the challenges faced by the oppressed. If more time were devoted to better understanding communities, there could be greater analysis for discovering which solutions are most effective. Much of the solution to resolving food deserts and injustice involves highlighting the unfairness of the food system, where individuals fight a constant battle to access food, and have their voices heard and recognized by society. Though the government has the capacity to provide more monetary assistance to different communities, much of the solution to food deserts and limited food accessibility is also interwoven with communities at the micro level, as individuals must recognize the necessity to create alternatives. Moreover, if this study were to be further pursued, it would be highly encouraged to expand to other geographic regions for broader perspectives.

By exploring this problem from distinct locations, greater comparisons of local and global food policies could offer insight into how food issues exist across various locations. Further, more research could be investigated into how the government could better implement policies to aid local efforts. Even more, it could be interesting to pursue how governments in other places support local food efforts and how local communities have been able to collaborate with larger government resources in order to tackle issues surrounding food injustice. There is also great potential in revisiting the organizations featured in this study at a later point in time to reassess the pitfalls and successes of each program. If follow-ups were conducted, it would be advisable to reconsider support from larger macro forces and the how they manage to support local community based food solutions.

Overall, current food systems established by the United States government perpetuate food injustice as they fail to entirely recognize how race, class, and, place intersect with food policy. In prioritizing food as a right rather than a privilege, rural and urban communities have acted through agency to generate change and empower individuals at a local level. Ultimately, the solution to food problems rests in increased partnerships between local communities and larger government agencies, like the USDA, to create effective change, which can lead to justice.

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Appendix

Interview Questions:

- Tell me about your organization?
- What is your organization considered? Non-Profit? Co-Op?
- How is your organization funded?
- When was your organization established?
- How did you become involved in this type of work/activism?
- What actions does your organization take in order to address issues of food inequality/food deserts?
- How would you define a food desert?
- How does your organization get members of the local community involved? What programs exist?
- What different groups of people is your organization serving?
- How does your organization benefit the community?
- How do you view your organization's mission as helping others?
- What are some challenges your organization encounters regularly?
- How do you foresee your organization expanding in the future to further resolve issues of food insecurity?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Photographs of Organizations



Image 1: Food deserts within the actual desert-
La Familia, MoGro Distribution Location,
Santa Fe, NM



Image 2: CSA boxes ready to be distributed



Image 3: MoGro/Skarsgard Farm's distribution warehouse



Image 4: MoGro Produce Box



Image 5: Seed 2 Need Orchard, Corrales, NM

Image 6: Seed 2 Need Gardening Plot, Corrales, NM



Image 7: Seed 2 Need Greenhouse, Corrales, NM



Image 8 (above): Capital Roots, Troy, NY



Image 9 (above): Capital Roots Distribution Center, Troy, NY

Image 10 (below): Capital Roots-Inside of Veggie Mobile #1

Image 11 (below): Capital Roots-Inside Veggie Mobile #2 Troy, NY

