



Towards a post-capitalist-politics of food: cultivating subjects of community economies

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Abstract

Agriculture is an increasingly capitalized and industrialized enterprise that has resulted in the alienation of consumers from the process of food production. The separation of consumers from producers is a fundamental source of non-sustainability in the modern food system. In this paper, we present three case examples of civic agriculture representing a breadth of alternatives in the social and spatial organization of agricultural production and distribution. In all cases, producers form associations to engage directly with alternative modes of production, and create markets that enroll consumers in the process of food production and distribution. We argue, using Gibson-Graham's (2006) "post-capitalist politics" that the (re)negotiation of the economic basis of agriculture generates new subjectivities directed toward a more integrated, interdependent and cooperative economy of agriculture.



Introduction

Farming in the United States is a highly capitalized enterprise characterized by increasing control by multi-national corporations over the food supply and increasing alienation between producers and consumers (Goodman and Redclift, 1991). On average, Americans spend less than ten percent of their disposable income on food, which is less than any other nation (Clauson, 2008)². At the same time, farmers receive on average less than 25 cents for each dollar of value for their products, and find it increasingly difficult to cover the costs of production (Nestle, 2003). As a result, many farmers are leaving agricultural livelihoods and the number of farmers has declined to less than two percent of the population (USDA, 2002).

Alternative food networks that aim to support small farms and provide a sustainable livelihood for farmers, however, often produce food for an elite minority of consumers in a system that increasingly mirrors the conventional food supply (Feenstra, 2002; Guthman, 2003; Winne, 2008). Another way forward is required to create a system of food production that does not reproduce the injustices and inequities of the conventional food system. J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006) argues that new spaces of collective decision-making are needed to envision these kinds of alternative futures. Resistance to globalization means “dis-locating” the economy through the creation of new subjects who “construct a new language of economic diversity” (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 6). Gibson-Graham refers to these new spaces, this new language and the subjects it produces collectively as a “post-capitalist politics”.

In this paper, we present three unique and innovative case examples representing a breadth of alternatives in the social and spatial organization of agricultural production and distribution. We demonstrate how these examples create a discursive space within which producers and consumers can engage with a post-capitalist politics as part of the practice of sustainability. These examples, each in their own way, provide spaces of deliberation about the production and consumption of food. We argue that this deliberation reorients the subjects of farming (producers, distributors, and consumers) toward a more integrated, interdependent and cooperative economy of agriculture, even while it is still embedded in a medium of market exchange. In what follows we outline the three case examples—a marketing cooperative, an association supporting non-profit farms, and a market-cooperative hybrid—which provide insight into the various spaces for dialogue about a community economy as articulated by Gibson-Graham (2006). We explain the implications of this shift in the discussion and conclusions of the paper.

² Residents of the UK, by contrast, spend 12% of their disposable income on food and Italians 18% (Economic Research Service, 1997).

Alternative Agriculture and a Post-Capitalist Politics of Sustainability

Civic agriculture and the production of social goods:

It is well documented that conventional agriculture produces cheap food and fungible commodities as well as social, economic and environmental problems (see Carson, 1962; Berry, 1977; Jackson, 1980; Goodman and Redclift, 1991; Pretty, 1995). In addition, consumers are separated socially and geographically from the places of food and commodity production, keeping them ignorant of and disconnected from the potentially unpalatable processes behind the product they consume. Research indicates that alternative agricultures work against the economic logic of conventional agriculture by producing public goods in addition to food. A few of these externalized benefits include "food citizenship" (Lyson, 2005; Delind, 2002), social justice (Barham, 1997; Hassanein, 1999; Trauger et al, 2009), community and economic development (Campbell, 1997) and rural development (Morgan and Murdoch, 2000). Additionally, alternative agriculture aims to bring consumers closer to the farm through building short supply chains, or alternative food networks, that are premised on trust, transparency and reciprocity that directly challenge the economic logic of the global food system (Ilbery and Bowler, 1998; Renting, Marsden and Banks, 2003).

Alternative food networks work to produce healthier food and environments through reduced chemical use in organic systems and decreased food miles through local production, (Halweil, 2002; Kneafsey, Holloway and Maye, 2007). Some scholars argue that because of this emphasis on the technical aspects of agriculture and on production practices, such as organic practices, issues of social equity are overlooked (Allen, 1993; Allen and Sachs, 1993; DeLind, 1994; Sachs, 1996). Advocates for social equity in the food system, call for the long term maintenance of farming livelihoods, the provision of quality food and nutrition to individuals regardless of socio-economic status, and the distribution of public goods (that is, clean water or living wages) throughout a community (Allen et al., 1991; Allen and Sachs, 1993; Delind, 1994; Feenstra, 2002).

Lyson (2004) suggests that a more "civic" agriculture draws on notions of economy that incorporate social relations, cultural and environmental history, and local politics into agricultural production and distribution. Small-scale farmers aim to increase "community capital" by contributing directly to the local economy, and to the social and physical health of its participants. While civic agriculture is often positioned against capital-intensive modes of production and distribution, Hinrichs (2007) distinguishes between approaches that emphasize opposition and those that emphasize "civic renewal and redemocratization" (2007:6). The civic agriculture approach, posited by Lyson (2005), DeLind (2002) and Wilkins (2004) takes the latter course, by highlighting the problem-solving capacity of locally-organized systems, which are "characterized by networks of producers who are bound together by place" (Lyson 2005: 92).

Civic agricultural enterprises, which rely primarily upon more socialized approaches to food production, contribute to community health and vitality by promoting “agricultural literacy” and local economic viability (DeLind 2002). Proponents of civic agriculture argue that raising awareness about the ways in which food is produced and distributed is crucial for developing devoted “food citizens.” These food citizens engage “in food-related behaviors that support...the development of a democratic, socially and economically just, and environmentally sustainable food system” (Wilkins, 2004: 269). Ultimately, the aim of civic agriculture is to cultivate in consumers a sense of loyalty to the agricultural capacities and limitations of a particular place.

Some, however, suggest that despite deliberate attempts to associate social and economic activities with a sense of place, many farmers remain isolated and separated from consumers and their communities (Brodt et al., 2006). Power and privilege are not evenly distributed in locality-based food systems, and often a bifurcated class system emerges between privileged upper-middle class consumers and producers (Hinrichs, 2000). Even in food systems that aim to change these power relations, the production and consumption of food is often still embedded in market relations and pre-existing social-economic inequalities (DeLind, 2002). Indeed, Delind (2002) argues that civic agriculture cannot provide the public goods it aims to provide, unless it is embedded in material ways in the community within which it produces food. Less clear in these accounts are the actual processes required to create interdependence within communities and generate public goods through agriculture.

Post-capitalist politics: the discourse and practice of interdependence

Delind’s (2002) criticism parallels the arguments about building the “community economy” made by J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006). She suggests resisting the inequities and exploitation of capitalist forms of economic relations by practicing ways of “being in common” (86). Being in common is achieved through the interdependence of a variety of economic subjects, and accomplished via the conscious and deliberate re/negotiation of foundational economic ideas and practices. Gibson-Graham also argues that capitalist social relations are structured against visible and intentional forms of interdependence between individuals. Reconfiguring foundational economic ideas, such as the production and distribution of surplus³, thus requires the creation of reciprocal and interdependent social relations between producers and consumers.

³ Surplus refers to value or capital generated and appropriated above and beyond the costs of production. Profit is one kind of surplus and is most frequently appropriated by the owner of the means of production, but can be shared amongst a cooperative or association of owners. In this article we use surplus to refer broadly to capital generated by production, of which profit is one particular kind, and use it in the context of the conceptual framework developed by Gibson-Graham (2006) for community economies.

Gibson-Graham (2006) provides a conceptual framework, or what they call a “weak theory” within which to create these new social and economic relations. They identify two important maneuvers in the struggle against the disempowering tendencies of the instruments and agents of global capital. The first is the construction of a new language of economic diversity. This involves deliberate discussions about the meaning behind four economic fundamentals: 1) economic necessities, or what is required for economic and social survival; 2) economic surplus, or whether and how to appropriate value and/or capital generated beyond the cost of production; 3) the distribution of such surpluses and 4) whether and how the commons is produced and sustained (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 88). The second process is the construction of new economic subjects. Gibson-Graham (2006) identifies this as the process of “resubjectivation”, that is, “the mobilization and transformation of desires, the cultivation of capacities, and the making of new identifications” (xxxvi) with alternative economic forms.

Participating in a community economy critically involves the construction and maintenance of a commons. The commons, as defined by Gibson-Graham is “a community stock that needs to be maintained and replenished so that it can continue to constitute the community by providing its direct input (subsidy) to survival” (2006: 97). In their view, this ranges from public health systems to shared cultural traditions to a forest or marine environment. Proponents of post-productivist agriculture have long emphasized the need for more environmentally sustainable agricultures, and have identified clean air and clean water, as well as well-educated consumers and social capital as objectives of the movement. As public goods, these contribute to the production of the commons as defined by Gibson-Graham. As indicated above, scholars of alternative agriculture suggest that the process of citizen engagement in agriculture is critical for the maintenance and sustenance of the commons.

Agriculture has always been somewhat outside of capitalist frameworks through its reliance on petty commodity production (Goodman and Watts, 1997). Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, however, farmers have become increasingly proletarianized and their production has become industrialized. This process has alienated producers from each other through competitive market models, and spatially distanced producers from consumers. This prevents both producers and consumers from having a stake in the goods and bads of the food system. Farmers participating in alternative food networks aim to contribute to the creation and proliferation of new market forms, and seek out new kinds of consumers who engage with them.

In order to achieve the social equity goals of sustainability, producers and consumers must be re-imagined as economic actors with social and environmental awareness, and a mutual stake in the food system, even as this exchange is still mediated by a market process. Critically, the forms of subjectivity most necessary for this kind of politics are those that recognize and embrace forms of interdependence between actors in the food system. Rather than relying on

consumers who know nothing about the production process, alternative agriculture premises its production models on consumer knowledge about the product and participation in decision-making as stakeholders. These production models are developed through ongoing dialogue between actors in associations, organizations and networks dedicated to sustainability.

Methods and Methodology

This research is based on fieldwork in communities in Central and Southeast Pennsylvania, between February 2003 and February 2004, and in Northeast Georgia over a two-month period in 2009. In Pennsylvania, two organizations were selected for the research based on their engagement with sustainable agriculture in the state, and were included in one of the authors' dissertation project. The Tuscarora Organic Growers (TOG) is an organic marketing cooperative selling certified organic produce grown in Pennsylvania to the Washington D.C. area. The Pennsylvania Women's Agricultural Network (WAgN) is an organization dedicated to empowerment and education for women farmers. In Georgia, the Athens Locally Grown (ALG) market is an internet-based market that facilitates the ordering of produce directly from farmers by individual consumers. This case was also part of a master's thesis written by one of the authors.

The primary data collection methods for all three organizations included approximately 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews with farm owner/operators per case study (n= 64). Interviews were transcribed and coded in an iterative process designed to identify common and recurring themes. Informal interviews (which were not transcribed) were also conducted with truck drivers, dock workers, farm workers, produce buyers (owners of restaurants, co-ops, retail stores), CSA⁴ members and family members of the farm owner/operators. In addition to the interview data, the research was informed by participant observation while volunteering at several participating farms. The authors also served on the boards of community organizations and non-profits that promote and engage with all sectors of the burgeoning local food system. The study sites were chosen because of the large and rapidly growing membership and involvement in civic agriculture in both places, as well as the authors' proximity to the research site.

Researcher proximity to the study sites allowed for the establishment of long-term relationships with respondents that enabled the use of qualitative, ethnographic and participatory methodologies. Qualitative methodologies are particularly important for researching populations who are often "invisible" such as women farmers or farm workers, and about whom little quantitative data exist (Patton, 2002). We also used ethnographic methods which require repeated

⁴ CSA stands for Community Supported Agriculture. This is a form of marketing and distribution of farm products that involves the customers buying a share of the farm's produce at the beginning of the season. They receive a box or poundage of farm produce weekly or biweekly, and bear the financial burden of any crop failure.

interaction over time, during which a researcher "builds a complex holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting." Creswell (1998: 15). The strength of ethnography is the opportunity to participate intensively in the lives of respondents, and to create a space for the use of participatory action methods. Participatory methods focus on conducting research with a community of research participants, "not to describe social reality, but to change it" (Pratt, 2000) and were used with the PA-WAgN case.

For the TOG case, interviews with all grower-members were primarily conducted during three weeks of participant observation during the growing season in 2003. Research was conducted while working on five member farms, which included participating in packing, shipping and delivering and shadowing produce from farm to fork. For the WAgN case, data collection occurred throughout the year during meetings of the steering committee and at educational events. Interviews with steering committee members occurred separately during this time period, and survey data on educational needs was also collected at a conference in 2003 (n=38). For the Georgia case, research participants were recruited based on their identification as growers selling through one or more local food outlets and using the ALG market for distributing a portion or all of their production. Semi-structured interviews with 18 growers were conducted on farms and at the ALG pickup site. Participating producers represent a broad range of farm size, product, and market portfolio.

Case Studies

Tuscarora Organic Growers, Southeast Pennsylvania

The Tuscarora Organic Growers (TOG) cooperative was formed in 1988 by Jim and Moie Crawford of New Morning Farm and five other growers in south-central Pennsylvania. In 2004, TOG had seventeen active member farms. All the farms are family owned and operated and include seven Mennonite or Amish farms. The farm sizes range from 1 to 80 acres. The largest category of labor on farms in the network is family labor (n=36), followed by local waged labor (n=21), migrant laborer (n=14) and apprentices (n=13). Four farms sell all of their produce to TOG, while the rest employ a diversity of marketing strategies including wholesale, retail and CSA. All of the farms must be certified organic to sell to TOG (Interview with Chris Fullerton, cooperative manager, 2003).

The primary market for TOG is in the Washington D.C. area, but also includes some Maryland and Pennsylvania cities. The Crawfords and their colleagues developed this market through informal sales of vegetables and fruit in neighborhood markets. As the cooperative developed, sales in these neighborhoods expanded to include sales to grocers, food co-ops and restaurants. The cooperative sells to 30 to 40 restaurants and 15 to 20 stores in the Washington D.C. metro region, and a few stores and restaurants in the State College, Pennsylvania area. Over the course of the year they may sell between 50-60,000 cases of produce and

in the peak season, they may sell 2,000 cases each week. About 40% of sales are to retail businesses, 40% to restaurants, 15% to member farmers who resell in their own markets and the remaining 5% is sold to volume buyers (Interview with Chris Fullerton, 2003). Profits from the cooperative's efforts are returned to the cooperative itself and individual farmers in the form of yearly dividends.

The Crawford's motivation for starting the cooperative was a need to expand and diversify the market for organic produce through wholesaling. At the time of the cooperative's founding, few wholesale markets existed for organic products, and the primary vehicle for marketing organic produce was through retail sales. Retail sales were limiting in terms of volume, predictability and profitability, and the founding members felt that by acting cooperatively, they could capitalize on efficiencies of scale through shared resources. The original mission of the cooperative was to "provide services for the mutual benefit of its member patrons on a cooperative service and cost basis", but this mission has since been reinterpreted by the employees of the cooperative, as explained by Chris Fullerton, the cooperative director:

Our employees got together and created their own mission...It's...a place to build a stable company based on cooperative principles and personal relationships, that delivers quality to our customers and provides security for our members (Interview with Chris Fullerton, 2003)

The motivations cited by the member farms to be involved with TOG are four-fold and include: a fair price for produce, efficiencies in marketing, a local market and shared economic and social resources. TOG also offers members benefits that go beyond the purely economic. While members can pool their resources to buy supplies, such as boxes and seeds, they also pool their knowledge in what are called "crop improvement meetings". TOG allows farmers to charge a premium for organic produce and provides a volume of sales that can sustain a farm. All the farmers indicated some attraction to the competitiveness of TOG as a market, and four farmers are supported completely by TOG. Aaron says, "TOG is the only market I have, I probably wouldn't be able to farm here at this scale without it". David, an Amish farmer who sells only to TOG, remarks "I can't complain about the price TOG pays us for the produce. I would have a hard time asking that prices myself, but it's fair". Other farmers identified the "higher-end market", the "fair price" and the "very good prices" as reasons they sold to TOG. The issue of price is also related to the volume of produce that farmers can sell. Ryan argues that selling to TOG "gives me an outlet for selling greater quantities that I could market myself".

TOG also allows farmers to sell their surplus inventory from other market outlets and to diversify their market portfolio. A number of individuals involved with the cooperative identify that the high prices for the farmers encourage the cultivation of an elite class of consumers. John, who is employed by the

cooperative as a truck-driver told me, “The fact that we sell to these wealthy suburban consumers is my least favorite part of the whole movement”. Chris Fullerton, as director of the cooperative, finds that his priority is to find a good market for farmers and ensure a fair price for their products, despite the conflicts that it presents for him and his views on economic and social justice in the food system. ...“my job is to focus on the farming end of things you know and that means we have to find higher market for the food and so sometimes it's distresses me that the main markets that we find are the higher end markets...” (Chris).

Others involved with the cooperative cite the two-class food system as both a source of economic instability, and a source of non-sustainability. Annie says, “I don't like that I can grow this fresh healthy food and not everyone can buy it. It makes me wonder how long it can really last.” By this she refers to both the cooperative in particular and local, organic agriculture in general when it relies on a wealthy class of consumers for its sustenance. In her mind, and the minds of many other respondents, the lack of a wider base of consumers means that the growth of the market is limited by the size of the upper class and by the inevitable swings of capitalist markets that could mean loss of sales for products that are widely viewed as a luxury.

Providing high quality produce to consumers in a local/regional market and ensuring a form of economic security for farmers are stated goals by the management and members of the cooperative. Strategies toward achieving these goals include transportation and marketing efficiencies, and shared access to skills, capital and resources. A greater volume of production through the cooperative allows TOG to sell into a wholesale organic market, which is more lucrative than retail markets, and the cooperative also allows for a greater degree of diversification so that more selective markets, such as white-tablecloth restaurants, can be included in the market portfolio. The cooperative also provides employment opportunities for the low-income rural area in which it is located. It also provides a social network of support for farmers, generating forms of interdependence between producers. The transportation efficiencies of the shared warehouses and trucks, and the cultivation of premium markets adds additional surplus for the cooperative which is then used to replenish shared capital reserves and invest in development.

Pennsylvania Women's Agricultural Network

WAgN (pronounced “wagon”) is a trademarked acronym for a program begun by Mary Peabody, Extension Specialist in Community Resources and Economic Development for the University of Vermont. The vision of the organization is to “increase the number of women owning and operating profitable farms and related businesses while, at the same time, increasing the profile of women in leadership positions throughout the agricultural sectors of business, government and community” (VT-WAgN, 2009). The mission is to: “provide top quality education and technical assistance to individuals starting or enhancing farm

and ag-related businesses” (VT-WAgN, 2009). WAgN networks have since diffused to Maine, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Connecticut and New York. The Pennsylvania WAgN at the time of this research was composed of an informal steering committee and 116 members who have expressed interest in developing the network.

The steering committee in 2004 was composed of 20 women farmers and agricultural professionals interested in working with women in agriculture in Pennsylvania. The first meeting of the WAgN steering committee was in May 2003, and since then meetings have been held on a quarterly basis every year. These meetings were used to organize a strategic planning retreat with the directors of the Maine and Vermont WAgN chapters, a state-wide conference, field days for summer 2004 and strategies for funding and building the network. The strategic planning retreat was a holistic management session designed to visualize values, identify resources and stakeholders and to draft a mission statement. The resulting mission was articulated as “Supporting women in agriculture today and in the future by providing a positive learning environment, networking and empowerment” (PA-WAgN, 2009).

PA-WAgN now has over 1000 members through Pennsylvania and other mid-Atlantic states. The primary purpose of the network is to provide educational opportunities for women working in agriculture on small, diversified farms, and to provide a space of acceptance for their identities, livelihood strategies and occupations. Each year, the network facilitates 10-12 on-farm, hands-on and interactive workshops led by women farmers. The subject of the workshops can range from business planning to tractor safety and maintenance (PA-WAgN, 2009). The educational events provide a forum for discussing the economic fundamentals of farming, such as prices for products, access to capital (especially land) and strategies for making a better living at farming. While not all their information needs are gender specific, women farmers, according to the survey, are most interested in labor-saving, value-added and creative marketing practices that increase the profitability of the farm. In addition to their interests in meeting their livelihood needs through innovative economic strategies, women in this study also expressed interest in community involvement and social entrepreneurship. In the survey they also express an interest in promoting practices that provide "clean water", "fertile soils" and "healthy food" (Survey results, 2003).

Consequently, some women experiment with a variety of for profit and non-profit models, including, for example a community center for underprivileged rural youth, an organic demonstration farm for school children, and a farm camp for girls. In other cases, women operate farms in urban areas to provide food through community supported agriculture in low-income communities. Such efforts were designed to counter the low margins and high labor costs of agriculture, and to meet their needs for community involvement, social interaction and economic security (see also Trauger et al, 2009). Most CSA models incorporate volunteers, apprentices or consumer-members into their labor structure to save costs.

Frequently farmers barter for food or labor between their farms if they are in close proximity to each other. Non-profits often rely on volunteers, apprentices and other consumers to provide much of the labor of farming.

Women on larger farms with a high level of profit orientation also oriented their business models toward community service through donations of cash to community projects, donations of food to local food banks, work shares for CSA members, and the like. One well known farmer and WAgN member, who uses a highly successful for-profit model and CSA strategy articulated the following in a public forum in 2004,

Maybe about three years ago it occurred to me that business wasn't sort of this elusive thing but actually it was really about a whole series of relationships...I have actively sought to create relationships with people in my community and create...a network of people I respect on all levels. And we sort of mutually support one another in our endeavor and particularly in this community is to make it a better place. (Kim)

Farming with a focus on mutually supportive relations between producers and consumers allows women like Kim to meet their livelihood needs in a way that simultaneously contributes, in their view, to social justice, a healthier community and "a better place". These values resonate with civic agriculture's objective of increasing the problem solving capacity of a place. The network creates a space and mechanism for ideas and innovations to diffuse through the community of women, and promotes the growth and adaptation of a variety of farming models. While on the fringe of agricultural production, the network allows women farmers to create a new center around community orientation rather than profit orientation, and they use this center to bring food to their communities. The network model also creates a space for discussions about and new negotiations of the relationships between livelihoods, public goods and profit. Adopting hybrid models that blend for-profit farm production with non-profit educational or community centers allow farmers to seek private foundation money or other public funding to subsidize their operations and livelihoods.

In these cases, which are still few in number, farmers meet their livelihood needs with public and/or private funding and return any appropriated surplus from the for-profit part of the business into the production of commons. This can include education about the importance of watersheds, demonstrations of organic food production and the provision of educational or "safe" rural spaces for at-risk teens. The number of farmers adopting these models is not as important as the space that WAgN creates for education about and diffusion of these innovative ideas about the relationship between needs, surplus and the commons. These spaces not only question and resignify the economic foundations of farming, but also generate and diffuse new ideas about the subjects of agriculture, including and especially farmers. The community of consumers is also resubjectified, by the

acknowledgement that agriculture produces more goods for consumption than simply produce or commodities.

Athens Locally Grown, Athens, GA

Athens Locally Grown (ALG) began in 2001 in Athens, Georgia as an online initiative to connect local food producers with restaurant owners. ALG's founders quickly realized that wholesale distribution could not afford farmers the prices they deserved, so they shifted their customer base to local individuals and families. At the time of its inception, ALG consisted of just a handful of small-scale growers and approximately twenty customers. Just eight years later, the ALG network encompasses nearly one-hundred producers selling local produce, meat, dairy, baked goods, value-added food items, and handmade crafts to over 1200 members (individuals and families) in the Athens area. ALG's manager and creator designed a web-based market model that is simple and transferable. Consequently, the Locally Grown Market model has now spread to over seventy communities nationwide. During the "off-season" (roughly, late Fall to early Spring), ALG processes about 200 orders per week; that number jumps to between 300 and 400 orders during the height of the summer season. While growers acknowledge that 1700 people is still a small percentage of the Athens community (only about 1.5% of Athens' 114,063 residents and university students), they are encouraged by the market's early successes. The Athens market also accepts SNAP payments.

The model for ALG is innovative and efficient. ALG's founder, Eric Wagoner, describes the web-based grower cooperative as an "example of technology making things easier for both the farmer and the customer" (Locally Grown, 2009). In this model, the software is designed to allow growers to post their expected weekly availability of particular products, which include everything from milk to meat to vegetables and fruit, and customers log on to the ALG website to place their order from a list of available products. One day each week, customers pick up their pre-ordered items at a centralized in-town facility, where they are greeted by Wagoner, his staff of volunteers, and that week's farmer occupying a "Meet the Grower" table. One of the newest innovations in sustainable farming is the "distributed farm," and Wagoner refers to ALG as part of this development.

There are entire CSAs fed not from one single farm, but by a group of growers who plant gardens throughout their town, using their member's yards for space. Why have one community garden when the entire neighborhood can be a garden?" (Eric Wagoner).

ALG does not require that its producers be certified organic, although many are certified and most farm organically without certification. Growers are also able to post any amount of available product. Thus, ALG enables a diverse range of "farmers" to sell through a single market. Some vendors are backyard gardeners who are happy for a profitable outlet for their surplus summer tomatoes or cuttings from a prolific rosemary bush. Others are full-time farmers who utilize ALG to complement other markets.

Most ALG producers are not full-time farmers, although many now aspire towards that end. Because ALG allows even small-scale producers access to a reliable customer base, it helps to make market farming viable for small-scale farmers and gardeners. Rob, for example, is a seasonal ALG producer who works full-time as an archaeologist but endeavors to someday transition entirely to farming. Currently, he has less than an acre in production, and says he had never thought of himself as a farmer before joining ALG:

I don't know where the break is between gardening and farming...I didn't really start selling produce until about six or seven years ago...I had so much of a surplus, I couldn't give it all away...

Like Rob, many producers who sell through ALG laud the convenience and security of the system, which enables them to harvest to order, thus preventing wasteful over-harvesting or frustrating under-harvesting, foibles often associated with a traditional farmers' market. Additionally, growers save time in this model, because they can drop off produce and the market volunteers handle the distribution and sales. In fact, many of ALG's growers claim that they could not viably farm if not for ALG. At the very least, producers with diversified market structures consider ALG a valuable complement to other markets; for new or very small-scale producers, it is the easiest way to begin marketing and selling their product.

While ALG is not a true cooperative, in the sense that all growers have a financial stake in the market, 10% of all sales go back into running the market. Growers can join without having to pay any fees up front, and there is no penalty if they choose not to sell regularly or if they leave the market. Because of these low barriers to entry, ALG is appealing to producers who have very limited or inconsistent supply, but still desire a profitable outlet for their products. By collecting 10% of sales, ALG is able to cover the ongoing expenses of maintaining their website and software, while still offering producers the convenience and profitability described above. Both the Athens Locally Grown market structure and its participating producers and consumers demonstrate a commitment to their perception of the public good. When asked why he chose to participate in this form of agriculture, Farmer Todd responded:

We're watching farming in America die at the hands of corporate monsters who are all about profit and are destroying the food chain...People who are recognizing the problem are pursuing an alternative: clean food, locally grown, without the fossil fuels to transport it... I'm 56 years old, and I don't have any children. I grow clean food for other people's children.

Farmers participating in the Athens Locally Grown market resignify social and economic relations between producers through a creative tension between cooperation and competition. Each farmer sets his or her own prices against other farmers' products, but all contribute an equal proportion of their profit to the

functioning of the cooperative/market hybrid. This market structure allows farmers who otherwise would not have viable operations, the opportunity to distribute products to a wide audience. The technology of the internet also works to keep costs down and reach a wide array of consumers, although only those with reliable and affordable access to it.

Post-capitalist Politics: Towards/against a community economy

While all these examples embed the exchange of food in market relations, they all open up a space for dialogue that reflects the post-capitalist politics identified and articulated by Gibson-Graham (2006). Actors, particularly farmers, participate in a negotiation of economic necessities, surplus appropriation and distribution and the production of the commons through their involvement with the network, market or cooperative. Interdependence between economic subjects in these food systems is generated through their cooperative or associative activities and through their negotiation of the economic fundamentals of farming. Table 1 illustrates the variety of ways these concepts are articulated and compares and contrasts them across each category of analysis.

Table 1. Case example comparisons

	TOG	WAgN	ALG
Need	Prices for farm products are decided/met through cooperative	Needs are discussed during educational events and met with alternative models on individual farms, e.g., non-profit models	Prices are collectively decided/met through distributed CSA
Surplus	Appropriated through high-end markets, technology and low-wage labor	Appropriated through public subsidy, non-profit/for profit hybrid models	Appropriated through technology and volunteer labor in a for-profit model
Distribution	Surplus replenishes and maintains shared resources, profits returned to member farmers	Surplus maintains farms and livelihoods of farmers, profits returned to individual farmers	Surplus replenishes and maintains shared resources, profits returned to member farmers and market owner
Commons	Market infrastructure, farming livelihoods, agricultural landscapes	Social capital in the community, enhancing ecological health,	Market infrastructure, farming livelihoods, local food systems,

	and pesticide free farms	education, humane and safe food production	social capital between farmers, humane and safe food production
Subjects	Interdependence between producers through cooperative model; between consumers and producers regional market	Interdependence between producers through WAgN; between producers and consumers through non-profit models, CSAs and community centers	Interdependence between producers through shared market infrastructure; between producers and consumers through internet medium

Economic Necessities

Discussions of how to meet the livelihood needs of producers are at the forefront of most discussions within these organizations. Indeed, in at least two cases (TOG and ALG) meeting these needs is the *raison d'etre* of the network. WAgN, while not explicitly oriented toward producing income for farmers, has as its mission, the sustenance of the livelihoods of farmers through education and empowerment. TOG adheres to a traditional cooperative model to work collectively towards the goals of sustenance, while ALG experiments with a new model of a distributed CSA that blends competitive pricing with cooperative distribution of profit. WAgN's members sustain their livelihoods through a variety of innovative and traditional farming models, but increasingly focus on non-profit and non-profit/for-profit models to meet their livelihood needs. These strategies, in their dependence on grant funding are not necessarily sustainable, but generate a new conceptual frame for economic activities on a farm, and question the premise that profit can or should be generated from food. The cooperative and collective approach to communicating about how to meet livelihood needs is a radical departure from the ways in which prices are set through competition, farm policy and subsidy in productivist systems. For mutual gain, farmers in these models work together to meet their needs.

Surplus appropriation

In spite of the occasional experiment with non-profit models, all individuals in these cases articulated the importance of the appropriation of surplus as critical to the sustainability of their farming operations. The appropriation of surplus was never questioned, rather the source of surplus and to whom it was directed were the subjects of debate. TOG is the most conventional in its approach to appropriating surplus, through the use of low-waged labor and the cultivation of markets that guarantee a high price for produce. In at least two cases (TOG and ALG) the technology of the internet allows for the appropriation of surplus as the labor of market organization and communication between buyers and sellers is accomplished through a digital medium rather than through the labor of individual

marketing efforts. ALG also appropriates surplus through volunteers who work in the market in exchange for food. WAgN members are perhaps the most non-conventional in their efforts to appropriate surplus to maintain their operations through a public subsidy of non-profit models, bartering and volunteerism.

Surplus distribution

The distribution of surplus is also a subject of debate for all members of these food systems. Again, TOG, by distributing surplus equitably among members to the cooperative is the most collective in its approach. ALG distributes a percentage of surplus back to individual members in proportion to their sales, but also returns surplus to the market and to the market owner. While collective and innovative, ALG is the most capitalist in its approach to surplus, as the means of production, including the market itself, are all privately owned. WAgN members identify a tension between producing surplus for themselves and meeting the social needs of their community. Their solutions to this problem involve appropriating public funds to meet their livelihood needs, so that their products (whether food or education) can be distributed more equitably to customers, workers or CSA members. While surplus is key to sustainability for these organizations and individuals, farmers in these systems form community economies around surplus so that profits are distributed to those who need it, in addition to those who earned it. These strategies signal a radical departure from models of surplus generation in productivist agriculture that benefit individuals and multi-national firms from the appropriation of surplus from consumers, farmers and laborers.

Commons

The unique structures of local food economies, such as the ones studied here, encourage participating producers to work collaboratively and collectively toward building a "community stock" (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 97). This includes the sustainability of farming small-scale livelihoods, legibility of the supply chain and accessibility of food or other goods to multiple communities. In most cases, farms and farmers of this study could not exist without the network, such as the case of ALG's "distributed CSA" and TOG's cooperative. Without a strong and cooperative network connecting producers to one another and to present and potential consumers, the viability of small-scale organic agriculture would not be possible. WAgN members identify several objectives related to producing and sustaining the commons, and most have made this the operational logic of their farms. In the case of TOG and ALG, due to their cooperative structure, the generation of surpluses was used to replenish and maintain the commons of the market infrastructure. This sort of local and regional commons cannot be maintained or sustained in globalized models of agricultural production, in which surplus is generated from productive activities in far-flung and disconnected places and redistributed to multi-national firms. The generation of the commons requires food-citizen engagement in a particular place through the creation of a mutually dependent stake in the outcomes of agriculture.

Subjectivity

Gibson-Graham (2006) writes that post-capitalist politics results in, and cannot be separated from the production of new economic subjects that relate to each other in interdependent, rather than disconnected, ways. This research identifies new subject creation, which manifest in what Gibson-Graham identifies as shifts in “desires, capacities and identifications,” (xxxvi) in a variety of ways. The TOG and ALG networks allow small-scale farmers to participate in a large-scale market through mutual reliance, and as such constitutes a shift in identification for producers. WAgN challenges the family farming model by introducing a new cultural frame for the category of “farmer,” and by changing the location of and motivations behind food production to include urban gardening and community development. ALG's low barriers to entry and streamlined marketing structure enable a new cadre of food producers to begin selling within the local marketplace. In this instance, individuals and families who may never have envisioned themselves as farmers are now self-identifying that way. They are increasingly convinced that a vibrant local food system may enable them to justifiably embody a new notion of “farmer” that may have been impractical or unsustainable in the past.

These examples may not present anything radically outside a market exchange process, but what they do provide is a space for dialogue about the meaning of economic exchange. In so doing, they generate a possibility for the production of new subjectivities. Broadly defined, the subjects of agriculture are the producers, distributors and consumers. Productivist agricultural systems involve extended supply chains with many intermediaries and geographically distant producers and consumers. The examples outlined in this article depend on knowledgeable, involved and committed members, workers and consumers who are actively engaged in the production process, who have different “desires” and capacities” than those who engage with a typical supply chain. Re-envisioning farms and communities requires connecting and integrating a much wider variety of groups who have often been alienated from each other due to differences in race, class or geography, and reducing the social and geographic distance between them. Farmers are no longer limited to individual family farmers (although they can be), but also include communities of individuals farmers, families and consumers themselves. This requires bridging geographic gaps and conceptual divides between producer and consumer and creating more interdependent social relations in agriculture through a shared stake in the consequences of agriculture.

Conclusions and Extensions

Sustainability rests on a three-legged stool, or a “triple bottom line” of social equity, economic viability and environmental soundness. Forms of economic viability for productivist farmers involve the generation of profit through labor exploitation, globalized production dominated by multi-national firms and/or economies of scale, which ultimately confound efforts toward social equity (i.e.,

fair wages) or environmental soundness (i.e., protecting water quality). In addition, economic inequities force farmers to use environmentally destructive practices in an effort to sustain a livelihood through farming. The production of profit at the expense environmental soundness, or only from those who are willing and able to pay at any given time is fundamentally unsustainable. Therefore new forms of surplus appropriation and distribution are required for a more sustainable agriculture. Using the conceptual frame of post-capitalist politics, we aim to illustrate how actors in self-described sustainable enterprises re/interpret the meaning of foundational economic principles. Through this process these actors create new economic subjectivities through relations of interdependence and mutual reliance between consumers and producers.

Gibson-Graham (2006) identifies the context-specific and historically-contingent dimensions of post-capitalist politics and practice in place. This is especially critical in food systems which take on the character of their cultural, economic and ecological environments. The empirical examples above illustrate how farms have moved beyond merely being a space of food production, and become nodes in interdependent social relations. Through the formation of collective association they create a space to envision a community economy that is characterized by the creation of interdependence between producers and between producers and consumers. Community centers, cooperatives, urban gardens, and distributed farms provide the food needs for a group of people, and are often in immediate or very close proximity to communities of consumers, therefore building community-economies in place.

All sustainabilities are necessarily local and thus, place-specific (Whitehead, 2007). The place of production and the place of consumption are critical elements of sustainable systems and disconnection between these places is a source of inherent instability and non-sustainability. The discursive spaces of the organizations described here provide a forum for debating and negotiating new rules of operating in the agricultural economy. These organizations also create spaces that are exclusionary to some, and through this, perpetuate some of the unsustainabilities and injustices of productivist agriculture. The ways in which mutual decision-making deliberately determines the meaning of economic necessities and the appropriation of surplus, however, creates a degree of interdependence that has the potential to sustain alternative agricultures into the future. The existence of new ways of envisioning economic needs also suggests that the discursive space of decision-making could potentially be expanded to those stake-holders who continue to be excluded, such as migrant workers or low-income consumers.

The engagement with actual post-capitalist modes of production and distribution are only partial in these examples. Most exchanges of food are mediated through a market mechanism, and as such they do not constitute a radical departure from capitalist agriculture. In addition, the majority of consumers in these systems are still upper-middle class, well educated and majority white. What

is important and different about these networks is their engagement in a dialogue about how to do a “community economy” of food in which consumers and producers are situated in a knowing and mutual reliance. We believe this is a necessary, albeit, incremental step toward “dislocating” the capitalist economy of food. The transformation of our food system will not happen without dialogue, and these three examples represent ways in which other communities of economies can be built and transformed through the creation of new subjects and subjectivities.

Shifting the location of the "farm," both geographically and conceptually, to the center of the community it serves, and subsequently expanding the edges of these communities through mutual interdependence to include marginalized groups are critical steps in the process of creating a community economy of food. As global economies shift amid seemingly inevitable tectonic forces, consumers increasingly seek out alternative economic and social systems that are accessible, manageable, and sustainable for farmers and the communities within which they are embedded. Rising global food prices, food scares, concerns about harmful pesticides and the environmental impacts of productivist farming have all encouraged consumers to seek out a food system that produces and sustains a different sort of commons. As this research demonstrates, innovative systems and strong local and community partnerships that forge interdependent social relations can prioritize equitable access to “real food, clean food”—as one farmer put it. This requires the appropriation of surplus from those who can afford it to those who need it within a community, and the sustenance and maintenance of a commons of ecological health, social equity and economic diversity.

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