

**The Institutionalization of Food Movement Projects and
The Role of Land Rights in Social Transformation**

Stories from Boston, Detroit and Philadelphia

A thesis
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ABSTRACT

This paper first weaves together discourses on the food crisis, land control, power, and the political economies of accumulation through dispossession. With this context and through the lens of food and land sovereignty, it explores the institutionalization of food movement projects into municipal frameworks. This research questions whether or not increasing processes of institutionalization engender the kind of structural transformation sought by food movement actors. It draws on urban agriculture-based land disputes in Boston, Detroit and Philadelphia, to illustrate the implications of these forms of institutionalization. Finally, it proposes a set of strategies that if employed in the American urban context has potential to redistribute land and aid in shifting power structures in society.

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SECTION 1.

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Land is becoming increasingly valuable, and globally, small farmers are losing their land as it is bought by foreign governments, international corporations, and Wall Street investors. Small farmers in the U.S. are unable to stay on their rural farmland, and urban land is lost to the gentrification of cities and waterfronts. Farmers are losing control over productive resources (land, water, seeds) and rights to save, exchange and share those resources; fishermen have increasingly limited access to the water; community gardens are cleared for expensive housing and commercial development projects; and farmers from other countries are often forced to migrate to the U.S. to work as food and farm workers. Changes in land and fisheries use and ownership are critical for developing just and sustainable local food economies and ending hunger and poverty. As a common link to all struggles for food justice and sovereignty, efforts to win community access to and control over land, water, seeds and the oceans can enhance and frame all struggles.

- US Food Sovereignty Alliance, 2012

The last decade has seen tremendous growth and progress in the global food movement. Comprised of a multiplicity of belief systems, addressing a diverse range of global crises and having varying levels of efficacy across the world, the movement is not monolithic. The thread that strives for food sovereignty, particularly among the world's most marginalized populations, seeks deep structural change in what the movement views as a broken food system. As the statement above from the US Food Sovereignty Alliance indicates, land is a key factor in achieving this kind of transformation.

The importance of land rights have long been at the core of the food movement in the developing world, as peasant struggles often center on their

physical displacement from the land on which they subsist. Increasingly, land rights are being recognized as inherent to social change in the developed world as well.

For decades, residents of America's disinvested urban neighborhoods have taken responsibility for stewarding vacant and blighted land in their communities. Increasingly, stewardship takes the form of guerilla gardening and community farming as the urban food movement grows. In recent years, recognition of the promise of sustainable food systems and the multiple social and environmental benefits attributed to urban agriculture have led municipal governments to begin incorporating food movement projects and goals into their policy frameworks. In many cases this translates to broad goals around healthy, sustainable communities, city-wide food security and local food system development, coupled with more specific policy action focused on facilitating agricultural production in the built environment.

This trend is exciting for food movement actors and represents a progressive step in the policy arena. However, in cities across the country this progress is often accompanied by land-based disputes between municipalities and both the individuals who have been practicing urban agriculture and the communities directly affected by the policy changes.

Nested within the interconnected discourses of the food crisis, land control, power, neoliberal political economies, and the struggle for food sovereignty, this thesis presents three case studies of such land disputes. It questions if the policy changes garnering excitement among food movement

actors actually facilitate the kind of transformation for which food sovereignty advocates strive. It explores the role of land control in these struggles, and seeks to develop a model for land redistribution that has both the necessary incentives for municipalities and the potential to shift more power into the hands of marginalized communities.

METHODOLOGY

Beginning with a review of the scholarly literature, this paper first weaves together discourses on the food crisis, land control, power, and the political economies of accumulation through dispossession to convey the complex context upon which this qualitative research builds. Using food and land sovereignty as a lens, this research then employs narrative analysis, or an analysis that “centers around the study of stories or accounts – usually of individuals, but also of groups, societies and cultures.” (President, 2008. For more details on narrative analysis see Chase, 2005; Reissman, 2008) The analysis first employs a case study approach, revealing the story of land struggles in three American cities using aspects of both naturalist and instrumental typological forms.¹ (President, 2008. For more details on the case study approach see Willig, 2008; Stake, 1995, Yin 2009) These case studies are compiled through a synthesis of scholarly literature review, popular and municipal government literature review, analysis of public speeches, participant observation and interviews with food movement leaders in each city.² They serve as illustrative vignettes and do not intend to act as comprehensive case studies depicting in full the complexities of each city.

The Boston case study primarily employs literature review and interviews, while also relying heavily on participant observation and drawing on public speeches and open meetings. Here, interview subjects were selected based on their direct involvement in the land dispute or their activity in the grassroots food movement in Boston. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for content analysis. Public speeches and open meetings held by municipal officials and

¹ Naturalist case studies seek to describe a case from the ground-up, embedded in its particular context. Instrumental case studies usually describe a specific case of a more general phenomenon.

² See appendix A for a complete list of interview subjects and their affiliations.

pertaining directly to the pending urban agriculture ordinance were selected based on their direct relevance to the case study. Participant observation was also employed because during the time of this research I was a resident of Boston.

The Philadelphia case study primarily employs literature review and a larger interview base than either Boston or Detroit. Interview subjects were selected based on recommendations from the public interest lawyer/food movement leader who was the initial point of contact in the city. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for content analysis. Public documents from the city were analyzed in lieu of interviews with municipal officials who were difficult to reach.

Due to difficulties solidifying contacts in Detroit, the Detroit case study relies heavily on literature review, including extensive review of news stories and popular commentary on events that transpired. Because the Detroit land struggle has garnered significant national attention, there was significant popular and grey literature to explore. The one interview subject successfully contacted was selected based on his direct role in the land acquisition in question. That interview was conducted through question and answer over email. Detroit's narrative also utilizes public speeches made by individuals directly involved in the Detroit grassroots food movement.

The concept map that follows in the final section pulls together and builds from ideas revealed through the interview and literature review process. It serves as a visual representation of strategies being utilized or conceived in the three cities analyzed.

CHAPTER 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Markers of a Broken Food System

In recent years the severity of the global food crisis climaxed in price spikes that sent over one hundred million new people into hunger (Food and Agriculture Organization, n.d,a). According to the FAO, “by mid-2008, food prices on international markets had reached their highest level in nearly 30 years.” (Food and Agriculture Organization, n.d,b) These spikes occurred at a time of record harvests and windfall corporate agri-business profits (Lean 2008a, 2008b). Adding to the consistent 800 million people that have constituted the hungry population for the last 40 years, this pushed the number of hungry individuals to over 1 billion worldwide (Food and Agriculture Organization, n.d.a; Food and Agriculture Organization, n.d.c). The results were food riots – rebellions - across the globe (Bush, 2010; Holt-Gimenez & Patel, 2009; FAO, 2008).

The food riots and growing global food movements are outgrowths of a food regime that marginalizes billions of people (Holt-Gimenez & Patel, 2009). Today nearly one billion people are hungry (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2012), two billion suffer from micronutrient (particularly iron) deficiency (World Health Organization, n.d.) and nearly 1.4 billion are overweight or obese (World Health Organization, 2013).³ Over half of the global population – comprised of

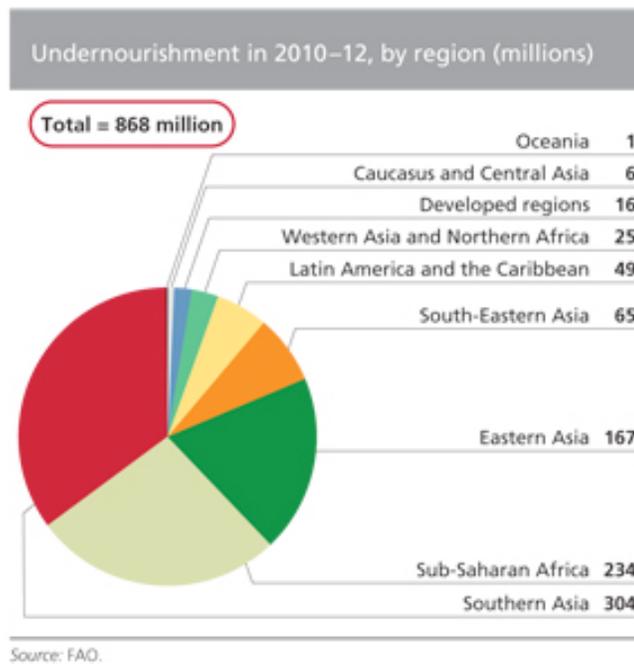
³ Hunger refers to protein-energy malnutrition and is the kind of malnutrition referred to in the dialogue around world hunger. Micronutrient deficiency refers to inadequate vitamins and mineral based on a diet that may or may not contain enough calories but provides inadequate nutrition. Micronutrient deficiency is not the kind of malnutrition that is referred to when world hunger is discussed. (World Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics. World Hunger Education Service.) Obesity refers to having too much body fat, or a body mass

people in the Global South *and* North - suffer marginalization from the food system.

Hunger is most prevalent and most severe in the developing world. See

Figure 1.

Figure 1. Global Hunger Statistics



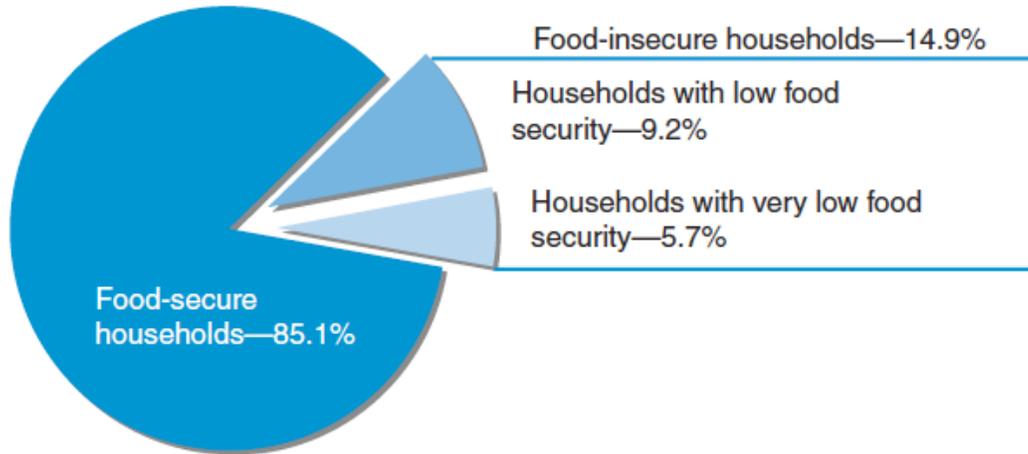
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Hunger Portal, <http://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>, accessed 3/21/13

Hunger is not, however, solely a crisis of the global south. The USDA reports that nearly 15% of American households suffer from food insecurity. This amounts to over 50 million individuals living in food insecure homes. (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2012) See **Figure 2.**

index thought to be unhealthy for his or her height. (U.S. National Library of Medicine, PubMed Health 2012)

Figure 2. U.S. Hunger Statistics

U.S. households by food security status, 2011



Source: Calculated by USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the December 2011 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

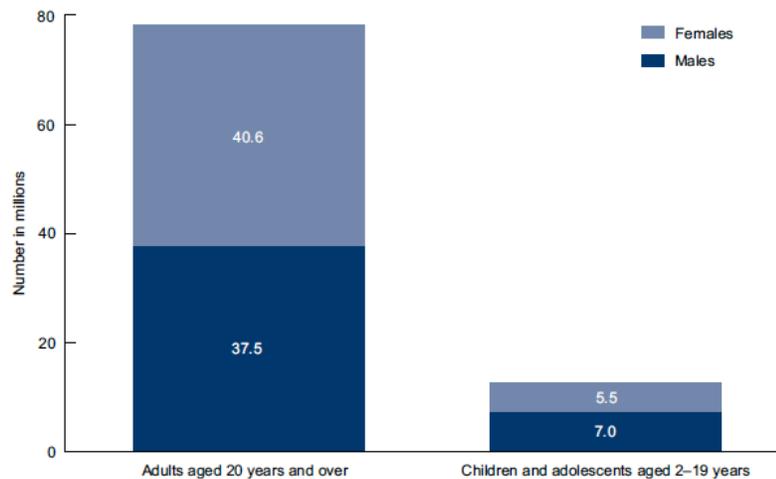
Economic Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture. (n.d.) "Household Food Insecurity in the United States in 2011," (4) <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/884525/err141.pdf>, accessed 3/21/13

Further, the developed world is home to most individuals suffering from obesity.

According to the Center for Disease Control, more than one-third of American adults (nearly 78 million people) and almost 17 percent of American youth (nearly 12.5 million adolescents and children) were obese in 2009/2010. (See

Figure 3.)

Figure 3. Number of Obese Individuals in America



Center for Disease Control – National Center for Health Statistics. (2012). National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2009-2010, NCHS Data Brief – Number 82 – January 2012, p. 3. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db82.pdf>

Though the nature and severity of the food crisis varies across the world, hunger, micro-nutrient deficiency and obesity are all symptoms of the same dysfunctional food regime.

Food Regimes

The analysis of food regimes, defined as “rule-governed structure[s] of production and consumption of food on a world scale,” (Friedmann, 1993, 30-1) was introduced by Friedmann in 1987 and elaborated upon by Friedmann and McMichael in 1989. In 2007 Friedmann established the concept as an analytical lens through which to assess the modern food system. The findings and relevance of such analysis were synthesized by Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck in their 2011 article, “Food Crises, Food Regimes and Food Movements: Rumbblings of Reform or Tides of Transformation?” In their synthesis, Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck

summarize the three distinct global food regimes. The first was established from 1870-1930s, in which the “cheap food and raw materials from the tropical and temperate settler colonies fueled industrialization in Europe. Concurrently, the emerging settler states, led by the US, provided Europe with wheat and meat, the dietary staples of the working class (Friedmann and McMichael 1989, 100),” (Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck, 2011, 110).

A reverse in the movement of food characterized the second notable food regime, when from the 1950s-1970s US agricultural surpluses began flowing south in the form of food aid. The Green Revolution introduced industrial agriculture to regions of Asia and Latin America, heavily favoring large landowners to the detriment of peasant farmers (Holt Gimenez and Shattuck, 2011, 110, citing Hewitt de Alcantara 1976, Jennings 1988, Shiva 1991). Land became increasingly consolidated displacing peasants who were forced either onto fragile hillsides inadequate for farming or into urban slums. At the same time, a “deepening of class, gender and regional inequalities,” plagued this part of the world (Hewitt de Alcantara 1976, Agarwal 1994, Byres 1981, Feder 1976, Griffin 1974, Pearse 1980, Shiva 1991, 1992 as cited by Holt Gimenez & Shattuck, 2011, 110). Though there was a net increase in caloric production as a result of Green Revolution technology, whether the program did more good than harm is still hotly contested.

During the same time period, land concentration plagued the United States, where “the number of farms decreased from seven million in 1935 to 1.9 million in 1997, with the most precipitous decline occurring between 1935 and

1974 (Strange, 1988). By 1999, farms greater than 500 acres controlled 79 percent of all US farmland (USDA 2002a, 2002b, Weis 2007, 83),” (Holt-Gimenez & Shattuck, 2011, 110-1).

The third, corporate food regime began in the 1980s and continues today. Emerging from the economic crises of the 1970s and 80s this third regime is distinct because of the burgeoning neo-liberal phase of capitalism and capitalist expansion.⁴ Marked by free trade agreements, dismantled national marketing boards, broken tariff structures, and agricultural liberalization among other things, Holt Gimenez and Shattuck describe this corporate food regime to be,

...characterized by the unprecedented market power and profits of monopoly agrifood corporations, globalized animal protein chains, growing links between food and fuel economies, a ‘supermarket revolution’, liberalized global trade in food, increasingly concentrated land ownership, a shrinking natural resource base, and growing opposition from food movements worldwide (Holt-Gimenez et al. 2009, McMichael 2009), (Holt Gimenez & Shattuck, 2011, 111).

Because of the increasingly globalized nature of the food system, these characteristics are not geographically specific in their implications – by definition the food regime has far-reaching impacts around the world. From displacing indigenous populations for large-scale biofuel production in Latin America, to pricing young farmers out of farmland in the American west, the effects are widespread.

⁴ Citing David Harvey (2006), Levkoe defines Neoliberalism “as a political and economic project that emerged in the 1970s in order to consolidate class power by removing state regulations and supporting the free movement of capital. Described as a theory of political and economic practices, neoliberalism proposes that human well-being is best advanced by entrepreneurial freedom with an institutional framework of property rights, individual liberty, free markets and free trade (Harvey 2006),” (Levkoe, 2011, 690).

Disparate Impacts of the Corporate Food Regime

In the United States, the corporate food regime has disparate impact on various populations, revealing entrenched classism and racism. Around the world food insecurity is closely associated with poverty, and the U.S. is no exception. According to the Economic Research Service at the United States Department of Agriculture (ERS USDA), 41.1 percent of households living below the poverty line were food insecure in 2011, while just 7 percent of those with incomes above 185 percent of the poverty line suffered.⁵ Food insecurity has a gender bias as well. Single female-headed households with children face some of the highest risks for food insecurity in the country – 36.8 percent of these households were food insecure in 2011 whereas male-headed households faced food insecurity rates of 24.9 percent (Coleman-Jensen, Nord, Andrews & Carlson, 2012, 10).

Not solely tied to poverty, hunger statistics in the U.S. also reveal embedded racial disparities. At 11.4 percent, food insecurity for White, non-Hispanic households was below the national average in 2011. Conversely, food insecurity rates for Black and Hispanic households were well above the national average at 25.1 percent and 26.2 percent respectively (Coleman-Jensen, et al., 2012, 10). Further, according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), Black adults had 51 percent higher obesity rates and Hispanic adults 21 percent higher compared to White adults (Center for Disease Control, 2009). Because there is no inherent bias towards hunger and obesity based on social constructions of identity,

⁵ The Federal poverty line was \$22,811 for a family of four in 2011. (ERS USDA, 2012, 8)

these numbers alone reveal a racialization of the crisis entrenched in the structure of the food system.

In fact, this kind of racialization pervades all three food regimes outlined above. In the first, resources and goods were extracted from communities of color in the developing world, for the benefit of white communities in the Global North. In the second, predominantly white, developed countries “helped” communities of color in the developing world while simultaneously exporting technologies, economic structures and lifeways that undermined agricultural systems throughout the Global South. Finally, in this third regime marginalized communities – poor communities, predominantly poor communities of color, and specifically the women in these communities – fall victim to institutionalized vulnerabilities of the corporate food system throughout the world, as evidenced by the statistics above.

WhyHunger, a New York based organization advocating an end to hunger since 1972 defines institutional racism as,

the ways in which the structures, systems, policies, and procedures of institutions in the U.S. are founded upon and then promote, reproduce, and perpetuate advantages for white people and the oppression of people of color (Why Hunger, n.d.).

They go on to explain that,

the racism present in our food and other systems is a process that is built into the nation’s past and present, its social norms, language and institutional policies, its economic system and culture and its militarism against people of color both in the US and abroad (Why Hunger, n.d.).

Institutional racism and the disenfranchisement of the poor in general bare a legacy of dispossession of marginalized groups. In this context, hunger and

health disparities are not solely about food, but are manifestations of power imbalances evidenced through the food system.

Power, Dispossession and Land

Agrarian Dispossession

At its historical core, power is rooted in the accumulation of resources. This is particularly salient in a Neoliberal economic system that by definition centers on wealth accumulation through the free market (Harvey, 2003a; Harvey, 2005). Those with power accumulate, those without remain lacking - accumulation for some is necessarily defined by the dispossession of others (Harvey 2003a, 2005 as cited by White et al 2012, 627).

In its most fundamental form, dispossession of power takes the form of stripped ownership of and displacement from land – the ultimate resource. Questioning, “what difference does land control make,” Peluso and Lund remind us “the answers have been shaped by conflicts, contexts, histories and agency, as land has been struggled over for livelihoods, revenue, production and power,” (Peluso and Lund, 2011, 667). This is particularly relevant with regards to the food system, which is rooted, literally, in land.

This theme – the relationship between land, power and dispossession – weaves acutely through American history, over time institutionalizing a system entrenched in disparity and injustice. The nation’s very establishment relied upon the mass dispossession of Native Americans, in favor of white colonists. After

colonization, and until 1776, only property owners (white males) were given the right to vote. It wasn't until 1856 that the last state removed restrictions barring male citizens who did not own property to vote. By 1870 the Fifteenth Amendment guaranteed voting rights to all non-white men. It was not until 1920 that women enjoyed these rights (Eddins, 2012).

Overt race-based discrimination continued throughout the mid 20th century. Between 1913 and 1952 California's Alien Land Law denied aliens ineligible for citizenship from owning land. This affected virtually all Asian immigrants, having particular affect on Japanese nationals and Japanese Americans (Ferguson, 1947; Supreme Court of CA, 1952; Villazor, 2010).

Discrimination of African American's plagued the 20th century as well.

Citing USDA census data, Gilbert et al. explain,

in 1920, 14 percent of all U.S. farmers were black (926,000), and all but 10,000 were in the South. They owned over 16 million acres. By 1997, fewer than 20,000 were black, and they owned only about 2 million acres, according to the Census of Agriculture (USDA 1999). (Gilbert et al, 2002 2-3)

Gilbert et al. go on to explain that,

The federal government provides a wide variety of programs to assist farmers. Black farmers, however, have never participated in these programs in proportion to their numbers. According to Grim (1996), African-American farmers were basically uninvolved in or unaware of many government programs prior to the Civil Rights Movement. Racism contributed greatly to low participation rates because most of the programs were implemented by local committees on which blacks were not represented, even in majority-black counties. Complaints of racism in the USDA's Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) and Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) were levied loudly during the Civil Rights Era." (Gilbert et al, 2002, 9)

The civil rights era did not, however, put an end to the marginalization of farmers of color. In 1994 a USDA commissioned study revealed that,

from 1990 to 1995, minority participation in FSA programs was very low and minorities received less than their fair share of USDA money for crop payments, disaster payments, and loans" (Cowan and Feder 2012, 2) Further, the study

found that “(1) the largest USDA loans (top 1%) went to corporations (65%) and white male farmers (25%); (2) loans to black males averaged \$4,000 (or 25%) less than those given to white males; and (3) 97% of disaster payments went to white farmers, while less than 1% went to black farmers.” (Cowan and Feder 2012, 2)

Then, in 1999 *Pigford v. Glickman*, a class action discrimination suit filed against the USDA, prevailed. According to Cowan and Feder,

For many years, black farmers had complained that they were not receiving fair treatment when they applied to local county committees (which make the decisions) for farm loans or assistance. These farmers alleged that they were being denied USDA farm loans or forced to wait longer for loan approval than were non-minority farmers. *Many black farmers contended that they were facing foreclosure and financial ruin because the USDA denied them timely loans and debt restructuring.*” (emphasis added) (Cowan and Feder 2012, 1)

Urban and Suburban Dispossession

Throughout the twentieth century, exclusion from wealth accumulation continued to plague communities of color outside of agriculture, as well. The New Deal provided home loans and mortgage insurance through the Federal Housing Administration; however these benefits were largely only available to White Americans. After World War II, the GI Bill created vast opportunity for veterans to become homeowners. Considered the signature of economic security at the time, homeownership gave veterans the opportunity for upward mobility. However, because of the bill’s construction, vital power was put in southern hands, and the GI Bill had more racially distinct aspects than any other New Deal program. In the end it fostered greater neighborhood segregation, “white flight” and a widening of the economic and educational gaps between Blacks and Whites (Katznelson, 2005).

New Deal lending patterns excluding Black homeownership echoed throughout the later half of the 20th century. The systematic redlining of communities – bank’s refusals to provide mortgages based on race and neighborhood – characterized cities throughout the country. Over time these trends have built limited urban land ownership among Black communities into the structure of society. They have, in effect, institutionalized the dispossession of urban communities of color across the country (Jennings, 2011).

Land Rights, Power and the Food Movement

The United States is increasingly less agrarian based, and dispossession is as present in the urban landscape as the rural. This trend renders the connection between a broken food system and community land access – particularly in the urban context - somewhat precarious. However, sparked by the growing global prevalence of and dialogue around large-scale land acquisitions – situations in which foreign governments, private companies or multinational corporations acquire large swaths of land through either lease or sale, from host countries or communities - land rights have become a growing concern of the food movement. Land grabs are criticized heavily for the ways in which they displace people, strip families, communities and entire countries of their resource base, and shift balances of power all over the world (White, Borras, Hall, Scoones, & Wolford, 2012; Borras, Franco, & Wang, 2012; Borras & Franco, 2012; International Conference on Global Land Grabbing, 2011 & 2012, Behram, Meinzen-Dick, & Quisumbing, 2011; McMichael, 2012).

Because land is the basis for most resources, and because power is held by those who own the resources, access to, control over or *ownership* of land rests at the heart of power.⁶ Derek Hall et al. (2011) refer to the “‘powers of exclusion’ – the interacting processes of regulation, force, the market, and legitimation that include or exclude people from land” (Hall et al., 2011 as paraphrased by White et al., 2012). Sikor and Lund (2009) and Peluso and Lund (2011) elaborate, explaining that “property and access are not, or not only, matters of land title and contract, but fundamentally matters of power and authority” (Sikor & Lund, 2009, 1; Peluso & Lund, 2011, as cited by White et al., 2012),

There is an inherent shift of power and authority present in the ownership of large parcels changing hands. Communities had access to and some kind of “ownership” over these resources and thus some measure of power, even if solely over their own livelihood. They are now stripped of that power. Citing both La Via Campesina⁷ and Harvey, Holt-Gimenez et al. contend that,

...there is more at stake in the global land grab than farmland. Large-scale land

⁶ It is important to note here that the concept of ownership does not refer solely to private property rights and ownership models common to capitalism. Ownership has varied meanings in different societies. Among others it can refer to communal ownership, as in, the commons. In the north it is increasingly being considered in the form of community or cooperative sense.

⁷ “Founded in 1993, “La Via Campesina is the international movement which brings together millions of peasants, small and medium-size farmers, landless people, women farmers, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from around the world. It defends small-scale sustainable agriculture as a way to promote social justice and dignity. It strongly opposes corporate driven agriculture and transnational companies that are destroying people and nature....

...La Via Campesina comprises about 150 local and national organizations in 70 countries from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. Altogether, it represents about 200 million farmers. It is an autonomous, pluralist and multicultural movement, independent from any political, economic or other type of affiliation.” (La Via Campesina, 2011)

...La Via Campesina is built on a strong sense of unity and solidarity between small and medium-scale agricultural producers from the North and South. The main goal of the movement is to realize food sovereignty and stop the destructive neoliberal process.”

(<http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/organisation-mainmenu-44>, accessed 4/10/13)

acquisitions take both the physical places in which food is produced, and the political and economic spaces (Harvey 2003) in which the land resides. This political and economic space represents the terrain of political possibility and struggle in the food system, from the agrarian base to the political discourse, as well as material support from the state. Therefore when scholars apply the lens of Harvey's politics of accumulation by dispossession, we must understand the totality of what is being taken. The global land grabs dispossess peasants as not only the land itself, but the social, political and economic entitlements that come with it. (Holt Gimenez, Yi & Shattuck, 2011, 3)

There is growing realization in food movement discourse that land rights are significant for shifting and establishing structures of power. They are thus necessary for transforming the food system. At an international conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Malik Yakini, the leader of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network stated it clearly when he said, “we are acutely aware of the fact that land is the basis for all power,” (Yakini, 2013). Because of this, there is a growing dialogue around the trajectory of ownership and control structures perpetuated by the Neoliberal system.

Peluso and Lund explain that land control refers to, “practices that fix or consolidate forms of access, claiming, and exclusion for some time. Enclosure, territorialization, and legalization processes, as well as force and violence (or the threat of them), all serve to control land” (Peluso and Lund, 2011 668). Peluso and Lund’s conceptions of land control are apt to consider in the American urban context – particularly when considering growing threads of grassroots resistance to them.

Citing Antonio Gramsci, Peluso and Lund remind that,

[through] law and formality...the wealthiest landholders assume they are establishing immutable hegemonic positions of land control...However, the long term ‘stickiness’ depends on more than law. As we know, hegemony is neither static nor unchallenged; it is tentative, temporary, and incomplete (Gramsci 1971). (Peluso and Lund, 2011, 674)

In other words, alongside the growing sense of enclosure exists a growing sense

of resistance. Increasingly, urban communities recognize the assets and resources inherent in vacant land in their disinvested neighborhoods. There is growing recognition that controlling these resources may be key to thwarting hegemonic structures that historically fail to serve the most marginalized populations. State and corporate-led control are doggedly matched by community-based struggles reclaiming power.

Saturnino Borrás, of the International Institute of Social Studies, explains the burgeoning concept of land sovereignty as, “an alternative frame that better expresses a truly pro-working poor class bias in land issues – especially the core idea of the rural working classes being able to exercise full and effective control over the land where they live and work” (Borrás 2012, 6). This framework surely has potential to span rural and urban movements across the world. Borrás goes on to explain that,

...the term connotes a sense of ‘belongingness’: the land belongs to the people who work it, care for it and live on it, and, the people belong to a particular land as a people. It also should remind us that individual and collective plots of land are part of larger socially constructed landscapes and waterscapes... The issues of space, ecology, territory, identity, and belongingness [are] key dimensions of a truly pro-poor and sustainable conception of and demand for land that can be prioritized and promoted into the future. (Borrás 2012, 6)

The belongingness that Borrás speaks to is most commonly referenced with regards to land-based, indigenous populations. Nevertheless, the poignancy and complexity of this concept is not alien to urban America. Historically disinvested communities are often land-locked in complex ways, their neighborhood boundaries often starkly defined by freeway overpasses or psychologically impassable thoroughfares (see Ahmadi, 2011 and McClintock, 2011 on West Oakland, CA). These neighborhoods have come to be understood

based on what Harvey calls a concentration of devaluation (Harvey, 2006) - the blight inherent in disinvestment as physical and political infrastructure “demarcate and quarantine devaluation,” (McClintock, 2011, 95). The prevalence of vacancy as well as the social turmoil often coupled with this trend, become identifying characteristics.

However, relationships to space within communities perhaps take a different shape. In disinvested urban neighborhoods, communities often become the stewards and guardians of vacant land in the face of disenfranchisement from municipal systems whose job it is to maintain the integrity of urban spaces. Across the country communities build capacity, using blight to create new structures of power and control through the reclamation of vacant space (McClintock, 2013). One might assume a deeply rooted sense of place-making inherent in this struggle-based reclamation (see Mares and Pena, 2011, on autotopography). Somewhat perversely, disinvestment itself may become a catalyst for changing structures in a more transformative way (McClintock, 2013, 15). Citing the struggles of the South Central Farmers in Los Angeles, food movement leader Saulo Araujo, maintains that transformation only happens when adversity is faced – the struggle is a necessary component of social change (S. Araujo, personal communication, October 25, 2012).

Because of the *structural* shifts sought in shifting land ownership frameworks, the concern for land rights is heard most clearly in the cry for food sovereignty, and increasingly in the demands for food justice. These threads of the food movement demand transformative rather than reformative change.

Food Sovereignty and Food Justice

The call for food sovereignty came in response to the growing neoliberal underpinnings of food security rhetoric. As Patel points out, the definition of food security strategically, “avoided discussing the social control of the food system” (Patel 2009, 665). Raising questions about the *context* of food security and the “relations of power that characterize decisions about how food security should be attained,” (Patel 2009, 665) La Via Campesina introduced food sovereignty at the World Food Summit in 1996 (Via Campesina, 2009). They said,

Long-term food security depends on those who produce food and care for the natural environment. As the stewards of food producing resources we hold the following principles as the necessary foundation for achieving food security...Food is a basic human right. This right can only be realized in a system where food sovereignty is guaranteed. Food sovereignty is the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity. We have the right to produce our own food in our own territory. Food sovereignty is a precondition to genuine food security. (Via Campesina 1996)

Patel points out the strategy in La Via Campesina’s methods:

In the context of an international meeting, at a time of unquestioned US hegemony, and given states’ reluctance to discuss the means through which food security was to be achieved, it made sense to deploy language to which states had already committed themselves. Thus, the language of food sovereignty inserts itself into international discourse by making claims on rights and democracy, the cornerstones of liberal governance. (Patel 2009, 665)

Though the concept of food sovereignty never gained traction within the hegemonic discourse, it remains a key framework for the food movement thread seeking deep structural change within the system. Teasing out the meaning and intention of the framework has been an iterative process. The most comprehensive and well-embraced definition came from a group of over 500 representatives from 80 countries around the world who convened in Selengue, Mali, for the first

Forum for Food Sovereignty, Nyeleni 2007. Their intention was to strengthen and put words to the global movement. After several days of dialogue the coalition outlined what it is that food sovereignty fights for and against. In defining food sovereignty, the group at Nyeleni explained,

Food sovereignty gives us the hope and power to preserve, recover and build on our food producing knowledge and capacity. Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers and users. Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal – fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just incomes to all peoples as well as the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. *It ensures that the rights to use and manage lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social and economic classes and generations* (emphasis added) (Patel, 2009, 673).

This lengthy explanation of food sovereignty has its rhetorical glitches.

Patel points out that transnational corporations are also those who produce, distribute and consume food. There is little mention of a core tension in agrarian capitalism - the relationship between farmers and farm workers. Further, there are problems with the notion of “new social relations” in family farms, which are historically patriarchal bodies. It nevertheless pulls together key threads of the social change the food sovereignty movement requires, challenging the embedded inequalities of power (Patel 2009, 667). The movement seeks to democratize the food system in a way that integrates and engages all voices in to policy making (Patel 2010, 670). As Patel insists,

...the prerequisites for this are a society in which the equality-distorting effects of sexism, patriarchy, racism, and class power have been eradicated. Activities that instantiate this kind of radical ‘moral universalism’ are the necessary precursor to the formal ‘cosmopolitan federalism’ that the language of rights summons. And it is by these activities that we shall know food sovereignty.”(Patel 2009, 670)

The call for food sovereignty is one that recognizes that the food crisis is not simply about food security, access or nutrition. It is about power, and a systematic dispossession of power throughout history, across both space and time. More precisely, it is about reclaiming that power. Inherent in this is the reclamation of human rights, including rights to resources like land.

The food sovereignty movement represents the radical end of a broader social movement that spans race and class, urban and rural.⁸ With its origins in the developing world, translating food sovereignty’s goals and methodologies to the American context is a complex process. How to do so is a question currently at the fore of the movement in the United States, which is made up of organizations that have come together to form the US Food Sovereignty Alliance. This coalition is comprised primarily of progressive food justice groups across the country – those who are allies with this more transformative rhetoric. Emerging from the environmental justice movement, food justice is “grounded in an empowerment orientation in which the poor, oppressed and underserved assert their rights through the power of self-respect and community organization (Alkon & Norgaard 2009, Levkoe 2006, Morland & Wing 2007),” (Holt Gimenez & Shattuck 2011, 124). The movement draws from racial justice movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Ahmadi, 2009). It organizes around critiques of structural

⁸ Joshua Sbicca reminds us that “‘radical’” refers to changing social structures and value systems at their root. This is derived from the Latin *radix*, or “‘root.’” (Sbicca 2012)

racism (Allen 2008, Self 2000) as evidenced by disparities in the food system that have disproportionately negative affects on poor communities and communities of color (Herrera et al., 2009 as cited in Holt Gimenez & Shattuck, 2011, 124).

While the food justice movement harnesses food as a lens, "...the focus on food provides a basis for a radical critique of many social and environmental inequalities," (Sbicca, 2012). This provides an example of the movement's alliance with the struggle for food sovereignty. In theory, both seek to change structures of power and re-assert the rights of marginalized people through the lens of food.

A Framework for Consideration

Further situating food justice and sovereignty, Holt Gimenez and Shattuck (2011, 117) lay out a framework outlining the basic categories of food regimes and movements, spanning neoliberal and radical ideologies. See **Figure 4**.

Figure 4. Food Regime/Food Movement Framework

POLITICS	Corporate food regime		Food movements	
	NEOLIBERAL	REFORMIST	PROGRESSIVE	RADICAL
<i>Discourse</i>	<i>Food Enterprise</i>	<i>Food Security</i>	<i>Food Justice</i>	<i>Food Sovereignty</i>
Main Institutions	International Finance Corporation (World Bank); IMF; WTO; USDA; USAID; GAFSP; Green Revolution/CGIAR; Millennium Challenge; Global Harvest; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; Cargill; Monsanto; ADM; Tyson; Carrefour; Tesco; Wal-Mart	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank); FAO; HLTF; CFA; CGIAR; IFAP; mainstream Fair Trade; Slow Food; some Food Policy Councils; Worldwatch; OXFAM-AMERICA; CARE; Feeding America and most food banks and food aid programs	CFS; Alternative Fair Trade & many Slow Foods chapters; many organizations in the Community Food Security Movement; CSAs; many Food Policy Councils & youth food and justice movements; Coalition of Immokalee Workers and other farmworker & labor organizations	Via Campesina and other agrarian-based farmers' movements (ROPPA, EAFF, ESAFF); International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty; ATTAC; World March of Women; and many Food Justice and rights-based movements
<i>Orientation</i>	<i>Corporate/Global market</i>	<i>Development/Aid</i>	<i>Empowerment</i>	<i>Entitlement/Redistribution</i>
Model	Overproduction; corporate concentration; unregulated markets and monopolies; monocultures (including organic); GMOs; agrofuels; mass global consumption of industrial food; phasing out of peasant & family agriculture and local retail	Mainstreaming/certification of niche markets (e.g. organic, fair, local, sustainable); maintaining northern agricultural subsidies; 'sustainable' roundtables for agrofuels, soy, forest products, etc; market-led land reform; microcredit	Agroecologically-produced local food; investment in underserved communities; new business models and community benefit packages for production, processing & retail; better wages for ag. workers; solidarity economies; land access; regulated markets & supply	Dismantle corporate agri-foods monopoly power; parity; redistributive land reform; community rights to water & seed; regionally-based food systems; democratization of food system; sustainable livelihoods; protection from dumping/overproduction; revival of agroecologically-managed peasant agriculture to distribute wealth and cool the planet
Approach to the food crisis	Increased industrial production; unregulated corporate monopolies; land grabs; expansion of GMOs; public-private partnerships; liberal markets; microenterprise; international sourced food aid; GAFSPF – The Global Agriculture and Food Security Program	Same as neoliberal but with increased middle peasant production & some locally-sourced food aid; microcredit; more agricultural aid, but tied to GMOs & 'bio-fortified/ climate-resistant' crops; <i>Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA)</i>	Right to food; better safety nets; sustainably produced, locally sourced food; agroecologically-based agricultural development; Committee on World Food Security (CFS)	Human right to food; locally sourced, sustainably produced, culturally appropriate, democratically controlled; focus on UN/FAO negotiations
Key documents	World Bank 2008 Development Report	World Bank 2008 Development Report	IAASTD	Declaration of Nyeleni; Peoples' comprehensive framework for action to eradicate hunger; ICAARD; UN Declaration of Peasant Rights; IAASTD

Holt Gimenez, E., & Shattuck, A. (2011). Food crisis, food regimes and food movements: Rumblings of reform or tides of transformation? *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38:1 (109-144) pages 117-118.

Holt Gimenez makes it clear that many organizations straddle discourses, and that many are not necessarily static. In fact, it is the relationship between categories that is most pertinent to this discussion. First, the relationship between the neoliberal and reformist models bears great significance. In his 1944 work “The Great Transformation,” Polanyi noted that unregulated markets are not

sustainable – without regulation capitalist markets will inevitably destroy both society and their own natural resource base. Because of this, unregulated markets are necessarily coupled with periods of reform. This cyclical relationship between deregulation and reform acts to ensure the liberal state, in what is described as a ‘double movement’ (Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck 2011, citing Polanyi, 1944). In other words, processes of reform are a necessary and reinforcing component of the Neoliberal, corporate food regime described above.

Because of this relationship, structural changes in the food system inherently require something beyond reform. In this regard, Holt-Gimenez and Wang ascribe great influence to the food justice movement of the developed world. They assert that whether the food justice movement builds alliances with reformative or transformative threads in the food system will determine the extent to which the food movement influences change (Holt-Gimenez and Wang, 2011).

Socio-Political Questions and Institutionalization

Of great importance is the fact that currently the food movement itself is in a moment of deep self-reflection and critique. Not only is there growing recognition of the hegemonic ‘whiteness’ characterizing the bulk of the movement, (Slocum, 2006; Guthman, 2008a; Guthman, 2008b; Alkon & Norgaard, 2009; Agyeman & Alkon, 2011), but there is simultaneous concern regarding the ways in which food movement projects themselves underwrite the

neoliberal state and create neoliberal subjectivities⁹ (Alkon & Mares 2012; Allen & Guthman, 2006; Guthman 2008c; Harper et al 2009; Pudup 2008).

Guthman questions, “How it is that current arenas of activism around food and agriculture seem to produce and reproduce neoliberal forms and spaces of governance, at the same time they oppose neoliberalism writ large?” (Guthman 2008c, 1172). She goes on to say, “it is important to interrogate the micro-politics of various activist projects, in terms of what strategic decisions under-gird them, how these strategies are operationalized and what sort of subjectivities they create,” (Guthman 2008, 1172). In other words, the discourse within the food movement itself is currently tenuous as scholars and activists are deeply questioning the nature of their work.

Simultaneously, the very sorts of projects originating in this grassroots movement are being swept in to municipal frameworks across the country. Food movement concepts are being institutionalized in many forms, quite frequently dealing specifically with issues of land use. More often than not, this takes the form of reforming zoning code to allow for urban agriculture within the city.

Nathan McClintock points out that,

Encouraged by urban agriculture’s potential contribution to fresh vegetable production, physical activity, green space, job creation, storm-water retention, greenhouse gas mitigation, neighbourhood beautification, “eyes on the street”, and community-building, municipal officials across North America are drafting

⁹ According to Alkon and Mares, “scholars and critics use the term neoliberal subjectivities to denote the ways that this market logic increasingly pervades individuals’ and communities’ everyday thoughts and practices as we embrace such ideals as individualism, efficiency, and self-help (Del Casino and Jocoy 2008; Stephenson 2003).” (348) With specific attention to community gardening, Pudup further explains that these are “spaces of neoliberal governmentality, that is, spaces in which gardening puts individuals in charge of their own adjustment to economic restructuring and social dislocation through self-help technologies centered on personal contact with nature.” (Pudup 2008, 1229) This is explained within the context of “roll-out neoliberalism” or neoliberalization which entails “both the ‘rolling back’ of the safety net and government oversight, and the “rolling out” of new social and economic relationships that further fuel capitalist accumulation.” (McClintock 2012, 8)

policy to foster urban food production (Lerner 2012, McClintock et al. 2012, Thibert 2012). (McClintock 2013, 6)

McClintock also reinforces the fact that urban agriculture is often at the heart of the aforementioned contention and critique within the food movement. It is a project that on the one hand is rooted in “oppositional, if not radical” ideology. It weaves in to the dialogues centered on re-claiming the commons (Johnston ,2008) and re-claiming the “right to the city” (Eizenberg 2012, Shillington 2013, Crane et al. 2012 as cited by McClintock 2013). On the other hand urban agriculture can act to reinforce a neoliberal political economy through re-creating the neoliberal subjectivities described above (McClintock, 2012, 2-6). In fact, McClintock contends that urban agriculture’s various forms,

...can be radical and neoliberal at once...it has to be both. It would not arise as a viable social movement without elements of both, insofar as contradictory processes of capitalism both create opportunities for urban agriculture and impose obstacles to its expansion. Focusing on process – on how and where urban agriculture arises – ultimately offers a better understanding of urban agriculture’s various functions and forms and the contradictory tendencies internal to its growth. (McClintock 2012, 11)

McClintock goes on to explain the way that nuances in urban geography play out in urban agriculture projects, and the role this geography plays in both defining and asserting the need to move beyond a purely dualistic critique:

“...urban gardens often arise in the interstitial spaces and lumpengeographies of the urban landscape when a neighbourhood becomes devalued, with devaluation manifest as unemployment, food insecurity, falling land values, and the dilapidation of fixed capital or the built environment. Home gardens notwithstanding, urban agriculture’s physical location is often largely a function of land value. Collective, guerrilla, and community gardeners, non-profit and commercial urban agriculturalists alike cultivate opportunistically on land left vacant by the retreat of capital (as in the case of devalued neighbourhoods following disinvestment) and by capitalist speculation (as in the case where parcels are bought by land speculators hoping to sell to developers when markets are at their peak). At these times, a vacant parcel’s multiple use values – as a site of food production and social interaction – exceed its exchange value on the market.

These same processes of uneven development also create obstacles to urban agriculture’s expansion, thereby undermining its long-term stability. When land values increase due to a housing bubble, to the arrival of gentrifiers, or to redevelopment initiatives, the vacant parcel’s use values are trumped by its rising exchange value. At these moments, gardens

are viewed as hindrances to development, taking up valuable space when markets are booming (cf. Schmelzkopf 2002, Staeheli et al. 2002, Smith and Kurtz 2003). Capitalism's cycles of booms and busts – markers of its internal tendencies towards crisis (Harvey 2007) – therefore both enable and constrain urban agriculture's possibilities.

Urban agriculture therefore represents the simultaneous outgrowth from and reaction to crises of capital... Due to this dialectic, urban agriculture is unable to truly derail the industrial agri-food system or the neoliberal logic of contemporary urban political economies... This internal contradiction lies at the root of the debate over urban agriculture's radical or neoliberal nature. Categorising urban agriculture as solely neoliberal or radical obscures these internal contradictions. (McClintock 2013, 15)

McClintock's dissection of urban agriculture's political geography is a necessary component in any analysis of justice within the urban food movement.

Simultaneously, while this continued debate is imperative to critical self-reflection, it is essential to remember that urban agriculture is not static. With institutionalization, there is an inherent power structure being embedded in the framework in which urban agriculture resides. In addition to an internal project-level critique, we must go further and address this.

Having already determined the significance of land with regards to power structures in society, the prevalence of land-based municipal policy changes becomes inherently important when considered through the lens of transformative food movement ideology. While institutionalization may be necessary to achieve social change (rather than relying on continual resistance), examining the processes by which these forms of institutionalization take place is crucial. David Campbell contends that,

The process of co-optation has long been understood as a key obstacle facing social movements in American democracy. The basic idea is that the elite-dominated political and economic establishment, when confronted with active protest, is adept at "bending without breaking." Protest leaders are vulnerable to a variety of elite strategies, from "co-opting them through programs that bring protest leaders into the 'system' " (Dye and Zeigler, 1987: 413), to taking protest issues as their own but treating them in a superficial way (Buttel, 1992: 13).(Campbell 2001, 354)

Campbell turns our attention back to the work of Dolbeare and Edelman, who speak to the relationship between grassroots social movements and subsequent policy reform:

Co-optation does not mean that new leaders give up their independence, ideas, or programs entirely. They retain substantial proportions of each, but learn to adapt them to the framework of the established system so that they are compatible with it. They frequently do succeed in changing things, if they are skilled advocates for their causes, but not as much as they might have originally wished (and for reasons that they – and we – might rightly consider to be fully persuasive). The directions of public policy may shift in response to such initiatives after strenuous efforts by the new leaders, their supporters, and the new allies their establishment status has made available to them. When the process has run its course, some new policies have been instituted, the basic complaints against the system have been reduced, the establishment has absorbed new members, and the system has acquired new defenders. The basic outlines of the system have again survived. (Dolbeare and Edelman 1985. 508)

In light of this, the institutionalization of food movement ideology requires not just a blind approval of “progress.” Nor does a project-based critique suffice. Rather a rigorous assessment of what the progressive process really entails is necessary. An examination of *what* is institutionalized and *how* it is institutionalized is key. This is especially pertinent when the *what* is still in question within the food movement itself. Whether or not the institutionalizing process embraces the transformation sought by food movement actors, or if it perpetuates reformist solutions that provide temporary relief of grievances but in the end reinforce the power structures the food movement seeks to change, must be addressed.

Institutionalization and Urban Land Disputes

Urban land disputes within this institutionalizing framework abound. This trend hints at the fact that what is being institutionalized may not be aligning with

the transformative ideology of food sovereignty or even food justice. It is once again important to recognize that urban agriculture, and the counter-hegemonic efforts therein are not solely about the production of food. The efforts are also inherently about power. The disputes we are seeing across American cities – typically centered on control, ownership or allocation of land - reveal deep tension regarding power within this institutionalizing process.

The next section will explore land disputes in three American cities – Boston, Detroit, and Philadelphia. The circumstances are widely different in each of these three cities, both regarding the ways in which food movement ideology is being institutionalized and the varying impetuses for disputes within each context. There is nevertheless a sense of cohesion in this diversity, as it illustrates common threads throughout the circumstances of institutionalization. The vignettes will outline the various food movement projects being integrated in to municipal frameworks. They will go on to describe concurrent land-based struggles taking place. Together, the narratives of each city serve to illustrate the ways in which food movement-based policies act to reform aspects of society – for instance, re-defining legitimized land uses in urban contexts – but perhaps fail to embrace deeper structural change. While municipal policy may be contributing “to progressive, if not radical return of the means of production to urban residents,” (McClintock 2013, 13) these stories reveal that they are not necessarily addressing the core goal the transformative threads of the food movement advocate – a restructuring of power imbalances in society.

Finally, it is necessary to move beyond a critique and explore the transformative potential of urban agriculture to better address this core goal of food sovereignty. According to Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck, “clearly, the transformation of society is a task beyond the scope of food movements. However, if food movements can play a radical role in food regime change, they may go a long way towards driving the social transformations needed to ensure broader systemic changes” (Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck, 2011, 136-7). I would suggest that the extent to which land and power are connected both within the food system and without naturally leads to the hypothesis that shifting land control structures may play a role in “driving social transformation,” by in part addressing the dispossession of people from resources and power.

The final section of this work will then investigate alternative ownership models and potential systems of land re-distribution in the American urban context. This investigation explores models that attempt to create some version of the commons, in a country founded on private property rights. At the very least, the investigation seeks to address frameworks that increase community-based power in the face of neoliberal systems. An analysis of strategies being employed in different cities, ways in which these strategies might be combined, and recommendations regarding holes in the system that if filled, could facilitate context-appropriate land re-distribution will comprise a system-based model for both activists and municipalities to consider.

SECTION 2.

URBAN VIGNETTES: A LOOK AT LAND DISPUTES IN THREE AMERICAN CITIES

INTRODUCTION

The practice and narrative of urban agriculture is gaining rapid momentum across the country. Lauded as “an innovative solution to increase access to healthy food while, at the same time, revitalizing the economic and social health of communities,” (Hagey et al, 2012, 8) cities clamor to integrate this celebrated and multivariate strategy into their municipal toolkits. In fact, there is significant historical precedent for this, as in times of economic crisis cities across America have encouraged and facilitated urban food growing among their populations for centuries.

In the economic depression of the late 19th century, Detroit Mayor Hazen Pingree, “urged owners of vacant lots to allow the urban unemployed to grow food,” in what were known as Pingree’s Potato Patches (Hanna and Pikai, 2000). During both WWI and WWII, the government urged people across America to plow their yards and public spaces to grow their own food as part of the war effort (Lawson, 2005). Boston, MA bears a living legacy of this urban growing, boasting the country’s only remaining, and continuously operating World War II victory garden (Fenway Victory Gardens, n.d.).

Though rooted in food movement discourse rather than inspired by the government encouragement characteristic of the World War II era, and embracing

commercial farming as much as community gardening, the most recent urban agriculture renaissance is nevertheless being swept into policy across America. For example, in October of 2012, Los Angeles mayor Antonio Villaraigosa issued an executive directive introducing a good food purchasing policy for all city departments (Villaraigosa, 2012). In 2008, the city of Seattle introduced the Local Food Action Initiative aiming to improve the local and regional food system. Seattle followed this up first with the development of the Food Interdepartmental Team, created to coordinate food systems work across departments, and then with the Seattle Food Action Plan in 2012 (Lerman, 2012).

The stories presented here focus on food system developments in Boston, Detroit and Philadelphia. They use urban agriculture as a lens through which we can assess the transformative nature of food systems policy. The narratives seek to illustrate the steadfast power imbalances inherent in these policy changes. They exemplify tendencies towards the reinscription of hegemonic frameworks where there is potential for deeper structural change. The stories underscore the continual importance of land control in power structures, and finally, they highlight the ways in which communities continually persist in their demand for more just systems.

CHAPTER 2. BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Boston, Massachusetts is a city with a long, rich history of community activism. The city boasts strong networks working for more equitable housing and transportation systems, environmental justice, and racial justice. The city also bears a tradition of food systems advocacy on both municipal and community levels. As mentioned, the city hosts the longest continually running victory garden dating back to World War II. Though not a key municipal focus in the latter half of the twentieth century, more recently, the city has reasserted [its](#) interest in building stronger food systems throughout the city. Discussed in more detail later in this chapter, in 2010 Boston established an office within its governing framework devoted specifically to food initiatives throughout the city.

Simultaneously, communities throughout the city have been working towards healthier food systems for decades. Projects span conservation-based land preservation for urban gardens to youth engagement with sustainable agriculture through training, leadership development and vacant lot takeover and rehabilitation. For instance, in the late 1970s, organizations like the Boston Natural Areas Network and Dorchester Gardenlands Preserve began working to protect green space and build community gardens in neighborhoods throughout the city (Dorchester Home and Garden Trust Collaborative, n.d.; Boston Natural Areas Network, n.d.). In the early 1990s The Food Project then developed a model engaging young people in social change and justice work through sustainable agriculture (The Food Project, n.d.b). In more recent years, organizations with long histories of community activism focused in other arenas

have begun incorporating food systems work into their programming. The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), an organization founded in the 1980s and focused on neighborhood revitalization in one of Boston's most disinvested neighborhoods, now works with The Food Project, strengthening the capacity and network of both organizations (Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, n.d). In 2011 the youth program at Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE), an organization launched in 1993 with a focus on environmental justice, began a campaign called Grow or Die (Alternatives for Community and Environment, n.d.). Through the project youth take over vacant lots in their neighborhoods and transform them into community gardens (D. Jenkins, Personal Communication, March 20, 2013). Finally, social enterprises focused on economic development continually spring up throughout the city, including urban farms, food delivery services and a growing number of farmers markets.

While much of this work spans the entire city, a good portion – particularly efforts focused heavily on equity and social justice – are concentrated in some of Boston's most poverty stricken neighborhoods. While these neighborhoods have suffered decades of disinvestment there continues to be a strong voice for change and a persistent effort to enact it.

The Roxbury and Dorchester Context

Having endured historical disinvestment and consistent poverty, Roxbury and Dorchester are two disproportionately low-income neighborhoods of color in Boston. According to DSNI, the neighborhoods struggle to overcome histories

characterized by arson, disinvestment, neglect and redlining. Designated blighted communities after World War II, Roxbury and Dorchester fell victim to bank redlining that precluded residents from securing home loans (Agyeman & Alkon, Forthcoming). The Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston maintains that during this period, between 1934 and 1968, race and ethnicity were widely used to determine mortgage eligibility (The Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston). The situation then worsened in the 60s and 70s when banks began specifying neighborhoods in which African Americans could obtain federally insured home loans. Where these aligned with predominantly white communities, systemic racism provoked street violence, block busting and “white flight.” The result was increased vacancy and decreased property values (Hall, 2004; Wright, 2002). Eventually this led to tactical arson in widespread attempts to obtain insurance payments on burned down homes. Now not only vacant homes, but also an abundance of vacant land can be found in both Roxbury and Dorchester. See **Figure 5** for demographic details of these communities.

Figure 5. Roxbury and Dorchester Demographics

Category	Roxbury	Dorchester
Total Population	58,462	116,088
Race/Ethnicity		
Black	59%	41.50%
White	8%	27.20%
Hispanic or Latino	24%	15.80%
Asian	2.30%	7.80%
Percent Foreign Born	26%	30.30%
Percentage of population 25 years or older with high school education or less	>50%	>50%
Unemployment for those 16 years & older	36.40%	32.30%
Median Household Income	\$30,654	\$41,878
Families Below the Poverty Line	27.40%	22%
Percentage of Vacant Homes	13%	12.30%
Percentage of Occupied Homes Renter-Occupied	72%	64.10%

Data from:

Boston Redevelopment Authority. (2011). *American Community Survey 2005-2009 Estimates - Roxbury Planning District*. Retrieved from

<http://www.bostonredevelopmentauthority.org/pdf/ResearchPublications//RoxburyACSPD.pdf>

Boston Redevelopment Authority. (2011). *American Community Survey 2005-2009 Estimate - Dorchester Neighborhood*. Retrieved from

<http://www.bostonredevelopmentauthority.org/pdf/ResearchPublications//DorchesterACSNBHD.pdf>

Grassroots Efforts

Despite this chronic disinvestment, Roxbury and Dorchester are also home to some of Boston’s most thriving social movements and grassroots organizing.

Nestled into the decades-long history of community activism described above, there is currently a growing interest and investment in food systems change.

Between 2008 and 2010, various community organizations and residents approached Mayor Thomas Menino with interest in building urban farms on blighted land throughout these neighborhoods (G. Lloyd, personal communication, March 25, 2013; Read, 2013). Specifically, at least two separate neighborhoods - Tommy's Rock and Garrison Trotter - advocated for urban agriculture projects on vacant land in their communities. Initially, in 2008 a coalition of people from Garrison Trotter approached the city with their ideas. This effort included representatives from the neighborhood association, the community and individuals who would become the founders of City Growers, a burgeoning urban farming business based in Roxbury. Despite widespread community interest, the vacant land, owned by the Boston Redevelopment Authority, was not made available for their use (G. Lloyd, personal communication, March 25, 2013).

By 2010, a growing conversation between City Growers and the neighborhood association in Tommy's Rock resulted in a meeting with the Mayor at which the community explained their interest in urban farming and advocated for building a project that had already garnered significant community support (G. Lloyd, personal communication, March 25, 2013). In fact, the neighborhood association in Tommy's Rock had long been in dialogue with the Boston Redevelopment Authority regarding a parcel of land that had been vacant since urban renewal. They had been advocating for incorporating an urban farm in to their community for several years, to no avail (Toney, 2013).

Municipal Action and Community Reaction

No direct action was taken regarding the parcel of land in Tommy's Rock. However, fostering a growing reputation for being a municipal leader in urban food and agriculture systems (Agyeman and Alkon, Forthcoming), the Mayor supported the concept in general (Read, 2013). In June of 2010 Menino initiated the Mayor's Office of Food Initiatives to which he dedicated one full time staff member. The goal of the Office is to "engage the Boston Food Council, partners and City departments to address directives set forward by Mayor Menino." These directives include:

1. Increase access to healthy and affordable food in schools, farmers markets, and stores, educate the public about healthy choices, and promote food benefits to reduce hunger and obesity,
2. Expand Boston's capacity to produce, distribute and consume local food through urban agriculture and distribution models to supply schools and local businesses,
3. Build a strong local food economy through financing and supporting local food retail and distribution businesses, and
4. Expand private and public partnerships to advance the food agenda. (City of Boston, 2010)

Among other things, these directives have fostered the development of the Mobile Food Truck Ordinance, the Bounty Bucks program providing dollar for dollar matching incentives for SNAP benefits spent at farmers markets, and networking sessions for food entrepreneurs and investors to build relationships (Office of Food Initiatives, City of Boston, n.d.; The Food Project, n.d.a). The Mayor's second directive is of particular interest, garnering significant attention due to the establishment of an Urban Agriculture Rezoning Initiative intended to allow urban gardening and commercial farming within the city. According to John Read of the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), over time there has been an increasing separation of uses built in to Boston's zoning code. Agriculture has

been zoned out over time, de facto becoming a forbidden urban land use (Read, 2013).

Under current zoning, developing a site for a farm requires a variance permit – requiring at minimum extensive paperwork and a public hearing. The Mayor approached the BRA and requested that they look at ways to amend the zoning code to remove barriers to urban agriculture and streamline the process for aspiring gardeners and farmers (Read, 2013). In the fall of 2010 a collaboration between the Mayor’s office, the Department of Neighborhood Development and the Boston Redevelopment Authority rolled out the first phase of the Rezoning Initiative - the Pilot Urban Agriculture Rezoning Project (Boston Redevelopment Authority, n.d.).

The pilot involved the creation of an Urban Agriculture Overlay District on four separate residentially zoned parcels owned by the Department of Neighborhood Development in Boston’s Dorchester neighborhood – 131 Glenway Street, 18-24 Standish Street, 23-29 Tucker Street and the parcel between 94 Ballou Avenue and 116 Ballou Avenue (Dumcius, 2011, 5). According to city officials, the creation of the pilot district included five community meetings and extensive attempts to communicate with abutters to the proposed properties (Boston Redevelopment Authority, n.d.; Dumcius 2011, 5).

Despite these attempts, community residents harbored great resistance to the project for a number of reasons. Of concern were material issues around soil contamination, increasing rodent populations, and animal-based nuisance. Primarily, concern centered on the decision-making process and the lack of

community participation in project development. Abutters to the four lots felt particularly unengaged with the process and conveyed apprehension about who might be leasing the land and how they would interact with the community. This resistance was shared by a number of city councilmembers, including Charles Yancey. Though a supporter of urban farming, Yancey condemned the administration for moving forward with the project without proper community support, declaring “this is not a plantation...these are residents who deserve respect,” (Dumcius, 2011).

Interestingly, none of the targeted parcels coincided with those of interest to the previously mentioned urban agriculture advocates who had initially engaged the Mayor. Further, community residents had long been advocating the development of a playground for neighborhood children on one of the lots. The idea that this parcel might instead become an urban farm around which the community had little knowledge, inclusion or interest was disconcerting to residents who had been working with a community development corporation to petition for the playground for some time (Agyeman and Alkon, forthcoming). Finally, the start-up cost for transforming a vacant lot into a farm was presented to the community as falling between \$5,000 and \$10,000 (Agyeman and Alkon, forthcoming) and have since been estimated to potentially reach \$20,000 (G. Lloyd, personal communication, March 25, 2013). These costs, prohibitive to residents of a low-income community, quickly gave rise to the assumption among residents that the city’s plan must be to invite outside groups (Agyeman and Alkon, forthcoming).

It is important to consider the situatedness of this community resistance. As mentioned, historically, the relationship between the city and the community of Dorchester is one filled with strife. Having experienced systemic disinvestment, levels of distrust in the municipal government run high in this neighborhood (Agyeman and Alkon, forthcoming). This history, combined with the implementation of development projects absent appropriate community process predictably led to discord.

Eventually, the level of community outcry slowed the process and prompted a reevaluation of the city's pilot project. The community was given further opportunity for comment, and two of the four parcels set for urban agriculture development were subsequently omitted from the plan. The projects underway on both of the two remaining parcels each deeply engaged with the community and once the importance of resident involvement garnered respect, there was increased neighborhood participation and support (G. Lloyd, personal communication, March 25, 2013; Revision Urban Farm, n.d.; Agyeman and Alkon, Forthcoming). Readjusting in response to community frustrations, the City's continued development of formal zoning amendments has become a slower and ostensibly more inclusive process. The BRA is developing the amendments with monthly public meetings for commentary and citizen engagement. Once the recommendations are complete, they intend to fan out to the neighborhoods to give residents the chance to vet the proposal (Read, 2013).

Nevertheless, urban agriculture advocates in the community still maintain that the city simply did not engage in this process appropriately (G. Lloyd,

personal communication, March 25, 2013). The level of trust continues to be characterized by significant apprehension. In commenting on the situation in Tommy's Rock, neighborhood association member Bette Toney reveals the frustration and confusion that remains. This community had the vacant land, had the neighborhood support and was able to bring the BRA to the table years before the re-zoning initiative even began. Toney explains that it was wonderful to have meetings, and to be given the opportunity to share one's point of view. However, she questions whether or not 'people' are really listening. She questions whose voices are actually being heard and maintains a level of incredulity – they went through the necessary processes and engaged the appropriate officials. Their intention and commitment was clear – the idea for an urban farm was born over five years before the pilot project at the city level got underway. The land they wanted to revitalize has been vacant since the days of urban renewal. Yet, as she puts it, with regards to the pilot they were “overlooked and it happened someplace else...you have the feeling of not being heard,” (Toney, 2013).

Glynn Lloyd, the owner of City Growers, who now farms one of the two final parcels in the pilot project, contends that it truly is first and foremost about the neighborhood. Not working with communities that have prior interest in integrating urban farming in to their landscape means fighting unnecessary battles. The people closest to the land must want agriculture in their community. The ideas and energy must come from them. In fact, both Lloyd and Dave Jenkins, community organizer at Alternatives for Community and Environment, assert that it is communities that can best identify vacant land and then decide

what they want to do with it in the first place (G. Lloyd, personal communication, March 25, 2013; D. Jenkins, personal communication, March 20, 2013). This is particularly true in neighborhoods where vacant land has proliferated for decades. Communities are, in fact, already doing this across the city. Community organizations, neighborhood associations and youth continue to identify parcels, advocate investment, and enact change through grassroots mobilizations continually (G. Lloyd, personal communication, March 25, 2013; D. Jenkins, personal communication, March 20, 2013). Once identified, if communities desire the development of open space or urban farming, an organization or social enterprise like City Growers can help facilitate and build those ideas (G. Lloyd, personal communication, March 25, 2013).

Discussion

In considering the pilot overlay district in Boston, Agyeman and Alkon remind us of the two predominant models researchers have found in looking at urban and alternative agriculture in low income communities and communities of color. While this may provide too simplistic a divide to truly represent what happens on the ground, it is nevertheless a useful way to frame our understanding of the Dorchester circumstances. In the first scenario, outsiders (typically white and wealthy) come in to communities, develop projects, and attempt to “invite others to the table” (Agyeman & Alkon, Forthcoming citing Guthman 2008b, Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy 2010, McEntee 2010). In the second scenario, Agyeman and Alkon explain that,

...efforts initiated by community members tend to be conscious of what Norgaard, Reed and VanHorn (2011) call “racialized environmental histories,” political, economic and ecological processes that have determined what roles communities can, cannot and have been forced to play in both industrial and alternative food systems. These efforts are not only explicitly concerned with community participation, but leadership is comprised of community members at every stage and scale of development (White 2010, McCutcheon 2011, Morales 2011).

Despite its national popularity, the imposition of municipally-developed urban agriculture projects on municipally-selected parcels with insufficient community participation was nearly fatal to the re-zoning initiative. Particularly peculiar was the way in which the city in effect ignored prior requests communities made regarding specific parcels and specific projects – the dialogue around these parcels having ostensibly been an impetus for the urban agriculture initiative in the first place. Agyeman and Alkon remind us that the resistance characteristic of the pilot overlay project introduction in Dorchester is to be expected when assumptions of urban agriculture’s universal popularity proliferate and subsequently diminish the level of community engagement and decision-making (Agyeman and Alkon, forthcoming). As Glynn Lloyd maintains, “communities need to be *more* than at the table” (G. Lloyd, personal communication, March 25, 2013).

With regards to the zoning changes specifically, there are important things to keep in mind. According to John Read at the BRA, the changes in Boston do not deal with ownership of public land. He explains that with regards to publicly owned land, the zoning changes consist of “5-year leases, extendable for another 5 years more, perhaps up to a total of 15 years. Those sites are eventually targeted for public housing, but until the market is there, it will be agriculture” (Read,

2013). Read alleges that if the projects running on publicly owned land are successful and supported by the community, the city will likely allow the work to continue. Community response to this varies – some believe that once a farm is established, evicting such a project in favor of development will prove to be difficult for the city (anonymous, personal communication 2013). Others maintain that while the re-zoning is a positive change, the insecurity of five to fifteen year leases is insufficient (Toney, 2013). The perpetual possibility of development-based eviction renders the community development potential around urban farming wholly inadequate.

In the end, the re-zoning initiative changes allowable land uses available to Boston residents. With regards to private land this will create a simplified and streamlined process for building an urban farm. With regards to publicly owned land, it will create the possibility for temporary or interim use in lieu of continued vacancy. Legitimizing agriculture as an urban land use is, however, all the re-zoning initiative changes.

Despite the progress made in this process regarding community participation, the re-zoning still begs the question of whether or not it facilitates deeper structural transformation. Urban agriculture may bring tremendous benefits, and facilitating its legality is certainly a significant step in realizing those benefits. This is not to be underestimated and is arguably a cornerstone of increasing urban agriculture and healthier urban food systems.

However, if we accept the contention that transformational change necessitates shifting power structures, some concerns arise regarding the Boston

narrative. For instance, only changing allowable land uses in Boston may act more to temporarily placate interested food movement actors rather than make necessary strides towards deep institutional change. Structural change for low-income, disinvested communities, and real support for urban agriculture arguably require policy developments that engender more systemic shifts. As it stands, politically embedding urban agriculture as an interim use through temporary lease agreements may not represent real transformation. Rather, while making the practice of agriculture a legal activity, it also institutionalizes the status quo. Evidenced by the dismissal of community efforts to develop farms on clearly identified vacant land, residents still lack power. The temporary nature of projects that *are* able to develop on city-owned vacant land reveals the way in which the communities are still at the mercy of development agencies like the BRA, in their own neighborhoods.

Finally, the speculative preference for leaving land vacant and potentially blighted rather than transferring ownership – and thus power - to those willing to properly steward it confirms the unyielding strength of embedded power structures in the city of Boston. It makes more sense in a capitalist economy for development agencies to wait until development pressure ensures the highest possible exchange value for the land. In this way the interests of the development agencies continue to be prioritized over community needs.

The final section of this work will explore ways that Boston can build on or shift the systems they are institutionalizing. It will include a deeper look at burgeoning grassroots activity that, coupled with stronger municipal systems, has

potential to foster more systemic change in marginalized communities throughout the city.

CHAPTER 3. DETROIT, MICHIGAN

The story of land struggle in Detroit represents an extreme case in modern urban America. Once a thriving industrial center of nearly two million residents, Detroit lost more than half of its population between 1950 and 2010 (DFPC, 2012a). Considered one of the country's most racially polarized cities, Detroit's current underdevelopment is in many ways attributed to a long history of discrimination and racial tension (White, 2011, 406-407). Scholar Monica White synthesizes this history, explaining,

Scholarship on the underdevelopment of Detroit has attributed its decline to housing discrimination and racial segregation; business, tax and capital flight to the more affluent suburbs (Sugrue, 1996); hostile race relations, especially in residential segregation (Darden et al., 1987); and a combination of race relations and urban and labor conflict (Thompson, 2001). The recent transformation of the automobile industry, which no longer employs armies of Detroit residents, along with the subsequent shrinking of the working and middle classes, have left Detroiters mired in poverty-induced challenges, including reduced city services, poor-quality education, and high rates of unemployment, crime, and housing foreclosures, with little to no access to healthy food (White 2011, 406-407).

According to the US Census, the late 1950s marked the start of a mass migration of affluent white residents out of the city and into the suburbs. A similar wealth exodus characterized the early 2000s when middle class African Americans migrated to those same suburbs (White 407). The effect of out-migration is a racially segregated region in which 82.5 percent of the urban populace is Black, while the suburbs remain predominantly White (United States Census Bureau, 2013; Iceland, Weinberg, and Steinmetz, as cited by White, 2002). Furthermore, it left Detroit the "poorest big city in the United States," (DFPC 2012b, 3) where 36.2 percent of the population lives below the poverty

line and 15.8 percent – twice the national average - are unemployed. See **Figure 6** (DFPC 2012b, 3; United States Census Bureau, 2013).

Figure 6. Detroit Demographics

Category	Detroit
Population in 2011	706,585
% African American	82.7
% Below Poverty, 2007-2011	36.2
Median Household Income, 2007-2011	27,862
% High School Education or less	49.8

Data from the US Census Bureau, QuickFacts Selected Social Characteristics in the United States 2007-2011, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/26/2622000.html> and American Community Survey 5-year Estimate, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>

In fact, the city and its residents are in such dire financial straights that in March of 2013 Michigan governor Rick Snyder appointed an emergency manager to bring Detroit back from the edge of financial collapse. This decision created severe outcry among Detroit communities who question the state of democracy in their city, likening the appointment of a manager who supercedes the power of elected bodies to that of a dictatorship (Yakini, 2013; Davey, 2013). This is particularly salient considering “Detroit is a mostly black city dominated by Democrats in a mostly white state where Republicans, including [governor Rick] Snyder, control the capital,” (Davey, 2013). Nevertheless, despite widespread resistance from both the Detroit government and the city residents, the emergency manager is tasked with rectifying the cities financial problems.

Detroit's Land Crisis and the Food Movement

Today, one of the most poignant illustrations of Detroit's distress is the city's 139 square mile footprint. Built up during the city's post WWII heyday, Detroit's geographic infrastructure is meant to accommodate two million people (Christenson, 2011; Detroit Food Policy Council 2012a). Now home to just over 700,000 residents, 20 square miles of this land – 103,000 parcels comprising 12,800 acres – are vacant. 60 percent of these vacant parcels are owned by the city, which in turn collects no property taxes, but instead harbors maintenance costs for each one (Detroit Food Policy Council 2012a, 2).

The combination of municipal economic crisis, widespread poverty and the abundance of vacant land has fostered a thriving urban food movement in Detroit. Led by the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DCBFSN), grassroots organizing around healthy food access, urban agriculture, and community food security flourishes. According to Malik Yakini, the leader of the DCBFSN, there are 1350 urban gardens in Detroit. He maintains that as the urban agriculture capital of the US you will find more urban agriculture projects in Detroit than anywhere else in the country (Yakini, 2013). The DFPC suggests that on top of the 1350 community gardens registered with the Detroit Agriculture Network, there are “thousands more family, school and church gardens in the city” (Detroit Food Policy Council 2012b, 23). Many of these agricultural projects are defined by vacant land stewardship - residents and communities taking over vacant and blighted lots throughout the city. This proliferation of urban land

reclamation and management is rooted in an urban historical context rich with agricultural tradition. According to the DFPC,

Detroiters have always turned to growing food during tough economic times — from the 1890s with Pingree’s Potato Patches, Victory Gardens during wartime and Depression Gardens during the Great Depression. Mayor Coleman Young Jr. promoted Farm-A-Lot as more and more land in the city was left vacant due to suburban flight.

In the 1980s the Gardening Angels and others took up the cause of growing food and were joined in the 1990s by such efforts as Detroit Summer, the Foundation for Agriculture Resources in Michigan, and Earthworks Urban Farm began developing more skillful and sophisticated growing operations. In the past decade organizations such as The Greening of Detroit, the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network and the Detroit Food Policy Council have taken steps to integrate gardening with local economic development, feeding the hungry, education, and social justice efforts. The DFPC has worked with the Detroit City Council in developing land-use legislation for the city that will allow urban gardening to thrive. The DFPC has also worked with Eastern Market Corporation to develop market locations to improve access to fresh, nutritional food, and to support development of a local food system that allows and encourages Detroiters to create entrepreneurial opportunities in food production, processing, preparation, cooking, and sales.¹⁰ (DFPC 2012b, 28)

As seen in many cities, earlier efforts at urban growing were developed and encouraged by government entities. The city continues to convey their support.

Currently, this includes the city’s approval of and participation in the Detroit Food Policy Council (DFPC). According to the council,

The Detroit Food Policy Council (DFPC) was established by the Detroit City Council in a resolution passed in March, 2008 as a result of two years of community driven and community led efforts to identify challenges and solutions to food access, food justice and food sovereignty issues in the food system in the city of Detroit. The DFPC is governed by a twenty-one member board consisting of six community residents, twelve members from various sectors of the food system, one appointee each from the City of Detroit Department of Health and Wellness, the Mayor’s Office and the Detroit City Council. (DFPC, 2012a)

The city went on to adopt a food security policy drafted by the council, and urban agriculture is one of the key areas addressed by the policy. According to the DFPC,

This food security policy was developed to affirm the City of Detroit's commitment to nurturing the development of a food secure city in which all of its citizens are hunger-free, healthy and benefit from the food systems that impact their lives. This policy also affirms the City of Detroit's commitment to supporting sustainable food systems that provide

¹⁰ For more details on these programs, see pages 15-28 of the DFPC Detroit Food System Report 2011-2012, available at http://www.detroitfoodpolicycouncil.net/uploads/2011_2012_Annual_Food_Report.pdf.

people with high quality food, employment, and that also contribute to the long-term well-being of the environment. (Detroit Food Policy Council, n.d.)

The city's support further includes programs like Adopt-a-Lot and White Picket Fence. Most recently it includes the development of urban agriculture zoning, being rolled out in 2013 as this research was being conducted.¹¹

Coupled with this municipal support, land reclamation and urban farming efforts have nevertheless been primarily promoted through grassroots action. DBCFSN was founded in 2006 in response to the growing trend of white-led organizations initiating work within communities of color. The network is comprised of a coalition of organizations and individuals who came together with the goal of ensuring that black communities were not just participants but leaders in the food justice movement (Yakini, 2013). With a mission to “build self-reliance, food security and food justice in Detroit’s Black community,” (Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, n.d.) the DBCFSN explains that their strategies are

1) influencing public policy; 2) promoting urban agriculture; 3) encouraging co-operative buying; 4) promoting healthy eating habits; 5) facilitating mutual support and collective action among members; and 6) encouraging young people to pursue careers in agriculture, aquaculture, animal husbandry, bee-keeping and other food related fields (Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, n.d.).

DBCFSN runs a 7-acre educational farm in Detroit called D-Town farm.

According to Yakini,

We consider ourselves to be a model. Rather than trying to start gardens all around the city, what we’re doing is creating a learning institution where people who are interested in doing this work can come and learn various techniques and strategies that they can take back to their neighborhoods. So we see ourselves as a catalyst (Wallace, 2011).

¹¹ For more details on Detroit engagement with urban agriculture and the food system, the Detroit Works project conducted a policy audit of urban agriculture and food security in the city. It can be found at: <http://detroitworksproject.com/policy-audit-urban-agriculture-and-food-security/>

In other words, developing self-reliance through changing the economic and social landscape in Detroit's communities of color must necessarily build from within the communities themselves. The DBCFSN sees urban agriculture as a key means to achieving these goals.

A Land Dispute in Detroit

It is not just communities that see promise in developing urban agriculture in Detroit. John Hantz, a money manager worth over \$100 million and the CEO of Hantz Group, a 500 person financial services firm managing over \$1.3 billion, has developed a business plan to help mitigate the financial and geographic crisis plaguing Detroit (Christenson 2011, 242). With the amount of city owned property rapidly expanding, Hantz contends that a land extensive business venture that will remediate blight while paying for itself over time will help mitigate the vacancy problem (M. Score, Personal Communication, March 16, 2013). Further, Hantz states that creating scarcity is key to stimulating the economy. With these ideas he conceived the idea to build the world's largest urban farm, as a means to make neighborhoods in Detroit more livable while simultaneously increasing land values (Whitford, 2009; M. Score, Personal Communication, March 16, 2013).

According to journalist David Whitford who interviewed Hantz,

Hantz thinks farming could do his city a lot of good: restore big chunks of tax-delinquent, resource-draining urban blight to pastoral productivity; provide decent jobs with benefits; supply local markets and restaurants with fresh produce; attract tourists from all over the world; and -- most important of all -- stimulate development around the edges as the local land market tilts from stultifying abundance to something more like scarcity and investors move in (Whitford, 2009).

Willing to invest \$30 million in the project, Hantz describes a landscape resembling a system of lakes throughout the city – large swathes of farmland, each surrounded by valuable frontage property, attractive to developers (Whitford, 2009). Mike Score, from the Michigan State’s agricultural extension program joined Hantz, becoming the president of the newly created Hantz Farms. He produced a business plan calling for the integration of the latest in farm technology and plans to focus on high-margin edibles like heirloom tomatoes, fruit and exotic greens. The plan incorporated goals around local hiring and full-time employment, while making requests for agricultural tax breaks and price breaks for delinquent land (Whitford, 2009).

As this idea developed and Hantz Farms engaged in meetings with city officials, residents and critics of the project, it became clear that produce farming was not a feasible plan. The business proposal shifted to one focused on growing “oaks, maples and other high value trees planted in straight, evenly spaced rows,” (Hantz Woodlands, 2013). According to Score,

We shifted from food to woodland based on feedback from our critics, from city officials, and from the residents of the development zone where our work will move forward. We needed to select a type of production that would make the neighborhood more livable. Based on the interests of our neighbors our production could not rely on use of pesticides nor fertilizers. Mixed hardwoods work well under these conditions (M. Score, Personal Communication, March 16, 2013).

Score explains that the \$30 million that Hantz will invest is intended for a farm up to 10,000 acres, beginning with 200 in 2013 (Hantz Woodlands, 2013). They believe that soon other communities will encourage them to develop in their neighborhoods as well. According to Score they intend to expand based on this demand. He also explains that, “if our neighbors change their preferences over time we could shift toward food crops. If not, we are fine with a woodlot,” (M.

Score, Personal Communication, March 16, 2013).

Important to note, until February of 2013, urban agriculture was not a recognized use in Detroit's zoning code. This prompted concern when, on July 5, 2012 John Gallagher at the Detroit Free Press published a story called "Farm Plan Close to Reality for Detroit," detailing the pending sale of 1900 city owned lots for approximately \$300 per lot to the Hantz Farms project now known as Hantz Woodlands. At the time the proposed land transfer was through a purchase agreement rather than a development agreement, imposing fewer restrictions and obligations typical of such a large-scale project (Detroit Food Policy Council, 2012a).

Concerns arose from the City Planning Commission (CPC) who had not been consulted regarding the project. They warned that the project would set a precedent for future large-scale land sales. In addition, without an urban agriculture ordinance in place Hantz's project could jeopardize any future ordinance, as well as the city's ability to exercise home rule. The CPC pointed out that "any agricultural projects initiated before the passage of an urban agriculture ordinance would be subject to state Right to Farm laws that override any local ordinances that conflict with the state law,"¹² (Detroit Food Policy Council, 2012a).

¹² According to David Whitaker at Detroit's Division of Research & Analysis, The Right to Farm Act (RTFA) implements a comprehensive statutory protection policy for farming, especially in areas where suburban sprawl abuts traditional agricultural lands. It does this primarily by protecting farms that use 'generally accepted agricultural and management practices' (so-called GAAMPS, established by the state commission of agriculture) from adverse claims by neighboring property owners, and by favoring existing agricultural uses over new, neighboring residential ones who are 'coming to the nuisance.' In a concentrated urban setting, the basic policy of the RTFA could have major unintended consequences, potentially authorizing the creation of new nuisances – smells, spillover effects on

There were further concerns about the lack of community process, both from the CPC and from communities themselves. This included distress around the fact that property owners adjacent to lots included in the sale were not contacted and given first right of refusal to purchase the lots. This was particularly offensive when, according to residents, many community members' past efforts to purchase properties they were already stewarding had been met with barriers¹³ (DFPC, 2012a, 12). Robert Anderson, Detroit's planning and development director, acknowledged the legitimacy of resident's frustration saying,

Maybe there's a lot of issues from the past. We didn't do a good job of selling land in the past; we said no to an awful lot of people... I think there's a lot of people angry, who for years tried to buy stuff and they couldn't. I see that; I understand that. When I took over the department, I saw how decisions were being made internally. It's a big ship to turn around – even the inertia within the organization, how people make decisions. We're making progress, but we have a long ways to go (Lacy, 2012).

These initial concerns prompted the Detroit Food Policy Council to schedule a public listening session in August of 2012. The goals of the session were to discuss and clarify the city's process around land sales, hear the CPC's Urban Agriculture Workgroup's¹⁴ recommendations on large-scale land

neighborhoods, cultural and social disruptions, etc- that may be inconsistent with urban residential zoning and quality of life.” (Whitaker, 2010)

¹³ At a public listening session organized by the DFPC, two community members made presentations about their experience trying to buy vacant land that they had been stewarding for years from the city. For brief accounts of these cases, see page 11 of DFPC 2012 publication “Public Land Sale Process in Detroit: A Community Perspective,” and Larry Gabriel's August 29, 2012 article ‘Money Talks’ in *metrotimes*, available at <http://prod-admin1.scranton.atex.cniweb.net:8080/preview/www/2.2349/2.2253/2.2176/1.1365113>.

¹⁴ “In 2009, as a result of issues raised by CPC staff regarding the need for policy and codes to facilitate and regulate agriculture in Detroit, City Council charged the CPC with the responsibility of moving forward with devising that which was deemed necessary to allow agriculture to take place with certain provisions and protections. CPC staff began to research codes and policies from other cities and in August of 2009, convened the Urban Agriculture Workgroup, to review and give input on proposed codes and policies for the City of Detroit. The initial group of stakeholders for the workgroup included individuals from organizations and institutions having long standing status in the community working to promote urban agriculture and food security in Detroit as well as representatives from City departments...the efforts of the workgroup were stalled for more than a year, when in early 2010, during [research], staff became aware of local authority issues that would arise as a result of the Michigan Right to Farm Act...the workgroup was reconvened in

disposition and give Detroiters the chance to voice opinions and ask questions (DFPC 2012a, 2). 240 people attended the meeting which consisted of a panel informing the attendees of the DFPC position on land disposition, community stories around land acquisition struggles, presentations from the CPC and the Planning and Development Department (PDD) outlining the City's process for selling land and time for both written and oral questions (Detroit Food Policy Council 2012a, 9-12).

The extensive participation in this meeting speaks to the thriving grassroots urban agriculture and land reclamation movement in Detroit which demands changes specifically around land rights and the ways in which land use, control and ownership can empower communities. Activists believe the city ought to engage in policy that fosters change from within the communities themselves. In this context Yakini finds Hantz farm problematic in several ways. He explains,

The first reason is because the city is 77 percent African American (according to the latest Census Data), and the key players in the Hantz project are white men. That's problematic. Secondly, they are not committed to organic agriculture. They propose some type of mixture of the traditional industrial farming model and sustainable techniques. Thirdly—and most alarmingly—they don't have any sense of using urban agriculture to empower communities. They are driven by the profit motive. The current urban ag movement is clearly steeped within the social justice movement and clearly is trying to empower people, communities, and community organizations. And none of that is on the radar of the Hantz project. So that is very troubling (Wallace, 2011).

Yakini also emphasizes that the movement for food sovereignty, the framework in which DBCFSN operates, has to be led by values. The most important, he asserts, is the desire for universal justice and equity. He maintains that these human rights cannot be subordinate to efficiency, profit or expediency (Yakini, 2013). It is

October of 2011, with an expanded membership, to complete its review of, and give input on, all aspects of the ordinance that is now before the commission...the UAW will be an ongoing advisory group (with added members) as the City continues to devise regulations and policies for agriculture..." (City Planning Commission, 2013)

within this framework that the DBCFSN and their allies harbor concerns around John Hantz's plans and his relationship with the city.

Food First's Eric Holt-Gimenez, an ally of the DBCFSN, explains that, "in the short run, the purchase by Hantz cleans things up, puts foreclosed lots back on the tax rolls and relieves the city of maintenance responsibilities. If the tree farm expands, it could provide a few jobs," (Holt-Gimenez, 2013). It is the promise of this in disadvantaged neighborhoods that has garnered support for the project among city officials and some residents. However, Holt Gimenez goes on to remind readers that, "in the long run, however, Hantz hopes his farm will create land scarcity in order to push up property values – property that he will own a lot of," (Holt-Gimenez, 2013) Most importantly, he asserts that,

The Hantz Farms project openly prioritizes creating wealth by appreciating real estate rather than creating value through productive activities. If successful, the urban mega-farm will clearly lead to an impressive accumulation of private wealth on what was public land. It is less clear what this will mean for the low-income residents of Detroit (Holt-Gimenez, 2013).

Yakini maintains that the DBCFSN is acutely aware of the fact that land is the basis for all power. In turn, they find the paradigm in which publicly owned land is used for private profit rather than being disposed of equitably and for the common good to be of great concern (Yakini, 2013). The DFPC elaborates on this, saying,

There is an historical imbalance in economic power based in part on who owns land and who doesn't. Increasingly, land ownership is being concentrated in the hands of a few, while the majority of citizens are landless. Selling large tracts of land to private developers sets a potentially dangerous precedent and will help to define what Detroit looks like for the next hundred years (Detroit Food Policy Council, 2012a, 3).

The Hantz Farm land deal illustrates the way in which power continually moves further and further from the people. The dispossession of power experienced by Detroit communities combined with the relationship between

Hantz as a private investor, and the government, has led many to deem the Hantz Farm land deal a land grab. This is occurring at a time when Mayor Dave Bing is instituting a program called Detroit Works, “a massive neighborhood revitalization effort aimed at condensing the city’s neighborhoods into more densely populated areas to streamline service delivery,” (Neavling, 2012). A tumultuous project that has been scaled back to include fewer improvements for more neighborhoods, the program nevertheless gives speculators a clear roadmap for investment (Nancy Kaffer, 2011; Neavling 2012). According to Holt-Gimenez, “the point of a land grab is to leverage financially-stressed governments in order to acquire large areas of public land under a convenient global pretense (e.g., cooling the planet, feeding the world or ending the world fuel crisis),” (Holt-Gimenez, 2012). With Detroit’s financial crisis, inexpensive land coupled with neighborhoods marked for investment and the Hantz deal as an example, Detroit appears to be at high risk for widespread land grabbing and speculation. In this case, the pretense weaves together goals including blight reduction, tax dollars, job creation and food security. This is particularly poignant considering Score, president of Hantz Farm, states that the company has attracted a lot of attention in the global marketplace, where companies are asking them how they can participate (Score, n.d).¹⁵

In December of 2012, after a review and analysis of the dialogue at the public listening session held in August, the DFPC developed a Statement of

¹⁵ The details of these multinational inquiries are not available to the public at the time of this research. (Score, 2013)

Position on the Sale of City Owned Land.¹⁶ In viewing urban agriculture as a key element in “developing and sustaining a just, vibrant, local food system for a healthy, resilient, food secure community,”(Detroit Food Policy Council, 2012a, 4) the DFPC asserted that,

Repurposing land within neighborhoods is crucial to the advancement of urban agriculture and to members of households and neighborhoods in the Detroit community realizing its many benefits. Hundreds of Detroit gardens and small farms already produce fresh, healthy food for family consumption and for sale at farmers markets, and more and more people are starting agricultural projects each year. How City owned land is sold is important and critical to continuing that growth. Increasing and sustaining food security demands that policies and processes governing the disposition of City owned land be fair, just and transparent and that they reflect the will and priorities of the community. (Detroit Food Policy Council, 2012a, 4)

Figure 7 outlines the Council’s expectations for a fair and just land disposition process – one that is constructed specifically to benefit Detroit residents.

Figure 7. Detroit Food Policy Council’s Land Disposition Recommendations

¹⁶ The full Statement written by the Detroit Food Policy Council in 2012 and titled “Public Land Sale Process in Detroit: A Community Perspective,” can be found at: http://www.detroitfoodpolicycouncil.net/uploads/DFPC_Report-Public_Land_Sale_Process_in_Detroit.pdf

What does a fair and just process for disposition of City of Detroit owned land look like?

- ***The process is accessible***
- ***The process is written clearly using simple text and graphics, outlines roles and responsibilities and is effective and efficient***
- ***The process is performed in a consistent manner***
- ***The process facilitates equal access and treatment, considers public interest and is transparent***
- ***The process assigns value to equity investments and gives priority to Detroit residents***
- ***The process improves from its own experience and the experiences of others***

(Detroit Food Policy Council, 2012a, 5)

The DFPC declared that,

There must be a fair, equitable, transparent process for purchasing City owned land, which does not give undue favor to the wealthy. People around the world are beginning to consider how to recreate commons, areas that are publicly owned and utilized for the common good. We have the responsibility of ensuring good stewardship of land and water resources for the health of the planet and for the use of future generations. (Detroit Food Policy Council 2012a, 3)

Their recommendations insist on prioritizing the thriving grassroots networks of land stewards who, with many fewer resources, have managed to build a thriving urban agriculture community throughout a disinvested landscape.

In response to public outcry, the Detroit administration committed to offering homeowners within the footprint of the Hantz land purchase the opportunity to purchase the parcels they were stewarding through the Adjacent Vacant Lot Program. They also committed to postponing the process until the urban agriculture ordinance was adopted. Detroit's Planning and Development Department reduced the number of parcels from 1956 to about 1500, and created a development agreement by which Hantz Woodlands commits to maintain the

land, demolish derelict buildings and plant 15,000 trees, (Detroit Food Policy Council 2012a, 12-16; Sands, 2012).

On December 12, 2012 the City Council approved the sale of roughly 140 acres of publicly-owned land to Hantz Woodlands. Mayor Bing stated,

Today's City Council approval of the sale of city-owned land to Hantz Woodlands is in line with my vision of transforming portions of Detroit by taking vacant, underutilized land and putting it back into productive use. The sale will result in the elimination of blight — debris, illegal dumping, and vacant structures — on a large parcel of east side property. I appreciate the passion and input of all who have been involved in the dialogue and culmination of this deal, particularly our community and City Council (Sands, 2012).

Discussion

Referencing the city's food security policy, scholar Dana Christenson states,

Detroit exhibits a prime example of urban agriculture as a grassroots movement that shifts how the community thinks about food, where it comes from, and who controls it. Most importantly, Detroit's urban agriculture movement has stimulated the idea of access to healthful affordable food as a human right. (Christenson 2011, 242)

She goes on to say that,

Where urban agriculture in Detroit strives to cultivate food security for those who have little by organizing them for collective power, Hantz's goal to create scarcity for the sake of traditional economic development is antithetical in comparison. (Christenson 242-243)

The thoughts she shares here echo the concerns Yakini described regarding the various ways that Hantz's land project diverges from the community-based goals within the urban agriculture movement in Detroit – those primarily focused on race, community empowerment and value systems. Holt-Gimenez summarizes the value differences when he explains that Hantz's plan “prioritizes creating wealth by appreciating real estate rather than creating value through productive activities” (Holt Gimenez, 2013). He refers here to the idea of the priority given to exchange value instead of use value in neoliberal capitalism. He teases apart the

value differences in Detroit more carefully, revealing that in many ways land sits at the center of the broader questions at hand:

...recognizing that Hantz Farms follows a speculative and private real estate logic and seeks to concentrate wealth, while D-Town Farms [a project of the DBCFSN] follows a community livelihoods logic that seeks an equitable distribution of opportunities and resources, still barely touches the surface of the deep differences in demography, culture, socio-economic status and political orientation of the two urban farming projects.

At the center of this tale of two farms, lies a contentious global question just beginning to resurface in the United States these days: the land question.

Land -- rural or urban -- is more than just land; it is the space where social, economic and community decisions are made, and it is the place of neighborhood, culture and livelihoods. It is home. Therefore, it is more than just a "commodity." While John Hantz's stated objective is to produce scarcity of the land as a commodity, residents living in the lower-income homes of post-industrial Detroit deal daily with scarcity of health, education and basic public services to which they are entitled. The transformation of these public goods into private "commodities," coupled with their scarcity has not resulted in any improvement for residents. Market demand and human needs are not the same, and one does not necessarily address the other. Driving up the price of land in underserved neighborhoods may well put the city on the road to gentrification, but it won't help solve the challenges facing the majority of Detroit's citizens (Holt Gimenez, 2013)

Holt-Gimenez calls to attention the fact that Yakini reiterates - the food movement is not just about access to healthy food:

Our efforts to provide greater access to healthy food in our communities must by necessity boldly address the larger problem of the vastly inequitable power relationships in this country and how race and class help to define those relationships. (Yakini, 2012)

More than ever, land – as a representation of power and control, both as a commodity and as something vastly more intricate - is coming to the forefront of this dialogue. Hantz's land use plan may be progressive. It may even be well intentioned and void of some of the sinister underpinnings attributed to it by its adversaries. Nevertheless, its basic structure is clearly embedded in traditional racial and economic hierarchical systems, and it is thus unlikely to lead to the kind of transformation that grassroots actors seek.

In a the plethora of ways that the city of Detroit strives to support its urban food movement in both rhetoric and policy. Many of their policies even aim to give more power to residents through land acquisition including responding to the public outcry in the Hantz case and giving abutters first rights to land within the Hantz footprint. However, the city's final actions in the Hantz Farm case nevertheless reinforce the hegemonic norms that the city's food justice community works to change. While we may be able to identify various facets of a progressive itinerary – urban agriculture zoning, a food policy council and commitments to widespread food security – bestowing tangible power characterized by significant private land ownership and development rights to a financial investment company in the face of widespread opposition undermines much of the alleged progress the city is counting on for its reinvention.

Before residents and outsiders get too excited about acres of “high value trees planted in straight, evenly spaced rows,” (Hantz Woodlands, 2013) it behooves us to look beyond the cleaned up exterior and examine the power structures embedded in such redevelopment. In the end residents of Detroit may gain cleaner landscapes and more beautiful neighborhoods – and the importance of those gains should not be underestimated. Nor should the crisis currently suffered by the city itself be taken lightly. However the means to those ends – the re-concentration of wealth and power, and in this case of land in the hands of the White “elite” - potentially does little to change the structure in which Detroit residents live. And that structure has fostered poverty and disempowerment. At a time when residents throughout the city are fighting for change and the

redistribution of power, perhaps instead of reinforcing systems as they have stood in the past there exists the opportunity for deeper transformation. The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, the Detroit Food Policy Council and even attempts made by the city to increase land ownership among citizens all act as galvanizing forces that unite community stakeholders into an increasingly powerful force. It will, however, require a deep commitment to structural change both in the municipality and among grassroots actors for Detroit to overcome their current hurdles and achieve the kind of transformation the food sovereignty movement seeks.

CHAPTER 4. PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Philadelphia presents an interesting case with which to analyze urban land use policy. Struggling with blight, the city boasts 40,000 vacant lots, one quarter of which are publicly owned (Econsult, 2010, i). Following the loss of 100,000 manufacturing jobs, the 1970s population declined leading to this vacant land crisis (Vitiello and Nairn, 2009). According to a coalition of Philadelphia organizations called the Campaign to Take Back Vacant Land, in response to this abandonment “decades ago the City took over properties and knocked down buildings in the name of ‘slum removal’ and ‘urban renewal.’ But today, it still owns 10,000 vacant properties, scattered among multiple agencies” (Campaign, citing Econsult, 2010) .

This crisis was the impetus for community mobilization to reclaim abandoned land and initiate garden-based beautification projects with help from Penn State’s Urban Gardening program and the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society’s (PHS) Philadelphia Green program in the mid-1970s (Vitiello and Nairn, 2008, 26-27). However, community stewardship of vacant land has a much longer history in Philadelphia. It in fact dates back at least to the 1897 founding of the Vacant Lot Cultivation Association, a program that, “helped people access land, involved children in gardening, and encouraged adults to start market gardens” (Vitiello and Nairn, 2008, 26). Between its commencement in the late 19th century and the mobilizations of the 1970s, garden-based vacant land stewardship never really stopped.

Land Disputes in Philadelphia

The story of the Central Club for Boys and Girls provides a poignant lens to view the complexities of vacant land management in Philadelphia. It begins in the late 1920s when a woman name Mabel Wilson moved onto Alter Street in a neighborhood now known as Gray's Ferry (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013; US Bank vs. May, 2012). At around this time, the beginnings of de-industrialization were just starting to plague the city (Urban Land Institute, 2010, 8). Having initially begun an urban garden on a single vacant lot, the increasing rates of abandonment and subsequent demolition provided a growing area on which Ms. Wilson developed programming. Originally, what became known as the Central Club for Boys and Girls was an unincorporated entity that worked with youth through established programs including 4-H, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. The program focused on helping children develop life skills from sewing and gardening to leadership development. Eventually, in 1947 the organization incorporated as a non-profit with the state. At times receiving municipal support, Central Club successfully engaged tens of thousands of youth over the subsequent decades (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013; Myers, 2012).

Though an incorporated non-profit running successful programs for over 50 years and, in effect, the only entity in the neighborhood engaging in youth development, the organization functioned with a level of instability. They never acquired ownership of the land on which they worked, consisting of an entire city block. The risks of this precarious land tenure became clear in 2005 when two of

the lots on which Central Club worked were put up for Sheriff's sale¹⁷ and sold. Because the parcels were technically vacant lots, often times accompanied by decades of tax liens, they were on the docket for disposition despite being continually managed by Central Club. At this point, the organization realized that they could actually lose the resource they had been stewarding for over half a century. Their district councilperson advised Central Club to work with pro-bono legal council, who facilitated a quiet title action based on adverse possession.¹⁸ Central Club won the action by default on eight of the lots because no one came to claim rights to the land. Presumably the owners were either deceased or had moved away decades prior (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013; Myers, 2012).

Despite the security formal ownership afforded Central Club, they still faced unexpected hurdles. Having been inadequately informed, in gaining title to the land Central Club also incurred the delinquent tax burden on each parcel. Because they were an incorporated non-profit, they could have requested that the judge alleviate the tax burden, or even clear the title. They also could have applied for a non-profit real estate tax exemption. Having done neither of these things, though Central Club now had legal ownership of the parcels, their land remained on the Sheriff's Sale list as the tax liens were not expunged (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013; Myers 2012; U.S. Bank v May).

¹⁷ According to Nolo's Plain English Law Dictionary, A sheriff's sale is "a sale of property seized by the sheriff pursuant to a court order in order to satisfy a judgment against the property's owner." (Nolo's Plain English Law Dictionary, n.d.)

¹⁸ Adverse possession is, in effect, squatter's rights. It refers to the rights of individuals who steward land adverse to the official owners of the land. The length of time for which one must steward land to qualify for ownership through adverse possession varies by country and state, but in Pennsylvania is 21 years. (Cahn, 2013)

In 2011, again two parcels unexpectedly went up for sale. At this point, the new leader of Central Club, Reverend Stanley Wilson (son of the late Mabel Wilson) began a dialogue with the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia. Attorney Amy Laura Cahn, a food movement leader in the city, took on Central Club's case as one of the first clients of her project, the Garden Justice Legal Initiative. With Central Club's historic grounding in the neighborhood, Cahn's first tack was to engage in dialogue with the city regarding the extenuating circumstances and poor advisement under which the organization had acted. Unfortunately, the social and historical context of the organization was irrelevant. Due to financial crisis the city had securitized tax liens on delinquent properties, in effect privatizing taxes by selling them to US Bank.¹⁹ The city referred Cahn on to Linebarger Goggan Blair & Sampson, LLP who represent U.S. Bank National Association in Philadelphia. At the time Linebarger refused to negotiate, a circumstance over which the city had no control. Cahn was forced to take the matter to court where she obtained a postponement of Sheriff's sale (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013; U.S. Bank v. May, 2012). Meanwhile, she filed for Central Club's non-profit real estate tax exemption status as well as a nunc pro tunc which would act to remove the taxes retroactively.²⁰ After filing

¹⁹ According to the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), "Governments sell or securitize property tax liens to eliminate backlogs of accumulated delinquent tax receivables and convert those receivables into cash. Tax liens, which are attached to properties for nonpayment of property taxes or other assessments, may be bundled and sold directly to investors through a bulk-sale process. They also may be sold to a trust, where the payment stream is securitized. Bonds backed by the delinquent taxes are then sold to investors and the proceeds of the issue are paid to the government that sold the tax liens." (Government Finance Officers Association, 1997)

²⁰ Nunc Pro Tunc - Latin for "now for then," this refers to changing back to an earlier date of an order, judgment or filing of a document. Such a retroactive re-dating requires a court order which can be obtained by a showing that the earlier date would have been legal, and there was error,

several more stays of execution on the Sheriff's sale, Central Club was finally granted non-profit real estate tax exemption in August of 2012. By November the Bureau of Revision of Taxes granted the Nunc Pro Tunc, exempting the organization from the tax burden on the two lots reaching back to 1947. The free and clear ownership of these three parcels represents a victory for the organization (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013; U.S. Bank v May, 2012).

While Central Club's story maintains some case-specificity regarding how long the organization was on the land and their early incorporation as a non-profit, the story is not a unique one in Philadelphia in many ways. In particular, the precariousness of land tenure is a common thread through the urban gardening and farming community, much of which is comprised of "squatter" or "guerrilla" gardens both old and new (Vitiello and Nairn, 2009; A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013).

The 2008 Harvest Report outlined the larger state of urban gardening in Philadelphia. In the report, Dominic Vitiello and Michael Nairn of Penn Planning and Urban Studies, University of Pennsylvania, highlight the story of the Norris Square Neighborhood Project and their main garden, Las Parcelas. A well-established, 25 year old program, Norris Square nevertheless functions with many of the same fragilities that plagued the Central Club – namely, land insecurity.

Vitiello and Nairn tell the story as follows:

Every summer busloads of people arrive to tour Las Parcelas in Kensington's Norris Square neighborhood, to marvel at the murals, gardens, and colorful casita, and to sample the traditional Puerto Rican cuisine prepared by the women of Grupo

accidental omission or neglect which has caused a problem or inconvenience which can be cured (<http://dictionary.law.com/Default.aspx?selected=1360>).

Motivos. Like Warrington [another garden outlined in the report], it is a Keystone Garden and an important social and cultural center. But it is unlike Warrington in most other respects. A group of neighborhood women established Las Parcelas more than twenty years ago on the site of a former open-air drug market. In partnership with Penn State and Philadelphia Green, the women transformed dispersed parcels of vacant land into six-award winning gardens with two outdoor kitchens and fruit trees...Over the years, Grupo Motivos has developed gardens on other vacant parcels near Las Parcelas.

...Las Parcelas is a success by nearly all standards of community gardening. It is often viewed as an especially successful example of community organizing, in which neighbors came together to solve the problems of open-air drug markets, violence, and vacant land in the inner city....But Las Parcelas is not a success in two particular respects: land ownership and funding. The garden is located on 19 separate parcels with 4 different owners including the Redevelopment Authority, the Philadelphia Housing Authority, the Norris Square Neighborhood Project, and one private owner. Although the gardens have helped make the neighborhood safer and more attractive, contributing to a rise in land values and recent speculation heralding gentrification, this unstable ownership pattern raises questions about the future of even this landmark of a garden (Vitiello and Nairn, 2008, 14 -17).

According to Vitiello and Nairn, after declining from 501 to 226 between 1996 and 2008, the number of community gardens and farms in Philadelphia is climbing once again (Vitiello and Nairn, 2009, 3). Vitiello maintains that in 2012 there were upwards of 335 community gardens and approximately 40 market farms. Most of these gardens are concentrated in the poorest neighborhoods in the city, and few have secure tenure status (Vitiello, 2013; A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013). See **Figure 8** for demographics of Gray's Ferry, home of the Central Club for Boys and Girls.

Figure 8. Gray's Ferry Statistics

Category	Gray's Ferry	Philadelphia
Population	12,901	1,526,006
% African American	>50	44.3
median Household Income	\$24,443	\$37,045
Median Rent	\$429	\$666
% High School Education or less	>75	58.74
% of Population below the poverty line	36.5	22.9

Data timeframes range from 2009-2011. Data gathered from: CLRSearch.com. (n.d) *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Demographics*. Retrieved from <http://www.clrsearch.com/Philadelphia-Demographics/PA/Education-Level-and-Enrollment-Statistics>, May 1, 2013.

City Data. (n.d.) Grays Ferry neighborhood in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (PA), 19145, 19146. <http://www.city-data.com/neighborhood/Grays-Ferry-Philadelphia-PA.html>. Accessed May 1, 2013.

Similar to both the Central Club and Las Parcelas, often the gardeners stewarding these plots squat on land comprised of multiple parcels. In many cases these parcels are owned by multiple entities. There are at least four public agencies that hold one-quarter of the vacant land in the city, while the other three-quarters remain privately held. To ascertain the ownership status of multiple contiguous lots that may have been squatted for years remains a daunting task. In fact, some individuals and groups interviewed are hesitant to work within municipal systems to acquire the land they steward. They allude to a lack of trust in the municipal establishment, councilmanic prerogative²¹ and complex

²¹ Committee of Seventy, a political watchdog non-profit in Philadelphia, describes councilmanic prerogative as, “the near-absolute powers wielded by City Council members over land development projects in their districts. Each of the ten District Council members can help advance

processes of disposition as factors rendering an attempt to work within city frameworks somewhat undesirable (Wiener, 2013; A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013). In 2009, Terry Mushovic, then the Executive Director of the Neighborhood Garden Association (NGA – now Neighborhood Gardens Trust or NGT), a land trust for urban gardens in Philadelphia, maintains “neighbors have to get organized and put in the sweat equity first... Getting legal control of vacant land is a long, slow process,” (Loram, 2009, 19-20).

Nevertheless, there is city-wide consensus that the land disposition infrastructure has been wholly inadequate in recent years. The government spends over \$20 million annually maintaining vacant lots from which it garners no tax revenue. Property tax collection in Philadelphia ranks one of the worst in the country, resulting in at least \$2 million in uncollected property taxes each year. There is an estimated \$3.6 billion in lost market-based household wealth resulting from proximity to blight and subsequent property value reduction in many neighborhoods (Econsult, 2010, ii). The rate of doing Sheriff’s sales – a process that, according to food movement leaders in the city, lacks adequate transparency - is painfully slow, as well (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013). This lack of resource management and excessive expenditure in the midst of a fiscal crisis renders vacant land disposition a priority for the city. Likewise, many community organizers, CDCs and residents have a stake in land disposition.

these projects or halt them in their tracks. Though this practice is not written into any law or rule book, each District Council member receives full deference from their Council colleagues when making these decisions about their own district. It’s their prerogative.” (http://www.seventy.org/OurViews_Councilmanic_Prerogative.aspx, accessed 5/1/13)

In 2011, community, faith and labor organizations from across the city came together to form the Campaign to Take Back Vacant Land. Since its inception, the coalition has worked to influence disposition policy and legislation in many ways (J. Feldstein, Personal Communication, March 29, 2013; A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013; Campaign, 2013). Within this cohort, there is a subsector of groups representing the urban farming and gardening community. These groups work to influence policy and legislation to facilitate ownership strategies for residents and organizations across the city. The intersection of the widespread desire for effective land disposition strategies and the growing voice of the urban farming and gardening community creates a complex landscape in Philadelphia, as the city implements various strategies to try and mitigate vacancy, decrease blight, increase the tax base and reduce costs.

City Strategies and Community (re)Action

In 2008, Mayor Michael Nutter announced his goal to make Philadelphia the ‘Greenest City in America,’ adopting sustainability as a key framework for all city operations. The Greenworks program, which articulates the sustainability goals, mandated the creation of a Food Charter as a key component in fulfilling this goal. The Charter in turn

...establishes the City of Philadelphia’s commitment to the development of a coordinated municipal food and urban agriculture policy, and articulates the intention of establishing a Food Policy Council populated by key city and regional stakeholders who can inform and advise the city’s efforts while helping to provide coordination, momentum and support for the significant activities already underway throughout the city and region. (City of Philadelphia, 2008)

The Charter goes on to express a variety of specific goals. Some of the most

pertinent in this discussion include,

- ...facilitating a sustainable food and urban agriculture system that utilizes our land and water resources to foster the growth of community gardens and farming,
- Become a leader in municipal and regional food-related policies and programs
- Coordinate among multiple city agencies to facilitate and promote access to healthy food and foster the growth of urban agriculture,
- Explore the use of City-owned spaces and City equipment to facilitate getting supplies to people who want to grow food locally,
- Overcome barriers created by zoning, irrigation issues and liability insurance in relationship to use of vacant land, equipment, and volunteers for local food production and distribution,
- Create Infrastructure to support urban gardening and farming and large-scale local food sourcing, including distribution facilities, agricultural supply centers, and a reliable, economical water source and processing facilities
- Support the role of community farmers markets and gardens in increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables in neighborhoods, thus increasing food security citywide (City of Philadelphia, 2008)

There is thus an overarching framework calling for support and infrastructural development for the urban food system, in many cases specifically recognizing land as a key component. Greenworks also sets food access targets as part of the city's goal to create more equitable access to healthy neighborhoods (City of Philadelphia, 2009).

There is some skepticism regarding whether or not the City is actually making decisions based on these goals. A food movement leader interviewed in this research conveys doubt regarding whether the City is meeting either the green space or food access targets, and whether it is doing so equitably. Referencing some of the city's land use and development choices the food movement leader asserts, "[the city is] not even looking at [their] sustainability goals when [they're] making these decisions," (anonymous, personal communication, 2013).

They have, however, attempted to "overcome barriers created by zoning...in relationship to use of vacant land, equipment, and volunteers for local food production and distribution," (City of Philadelphia, 2008) and developed the

Mayor's Food Policy Advisory Council. In 2012, after several years of public process, Philadelphia established urban agriculture (including community gardening, market farming, greenhouses and animal husbandry) as a 'legitimate' land use in the city's zoning code. Requiring a variance prior to the new code, community gardening and market farming were especially affected by the zoning changes, becoming a use by right in almost all zoning districts.

In making urban agriculture a right rather than something requiring an application process, some of the control over land use was inherently reduced in city council. As mentioned previously, Philadelphia's government is set up such that councilpersons wield tremendous power in district decision-making through councilmanic prerogative (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013; Anonymous, personal communication, 2013). Before a year had passed under the new zoning code, challenges were made by a city councilor who submitted Bill 120917, an attempt to amend the code and prohibit urban agriculture in commercial mixed-use districts. Food movement activists, led by the Public Interest Law Center, Philadelphia Horticultural Society, and Weavers Way Co-op, mobilized garden and farming advocates from around the city. When the Bill went to committee, nearly 20 individuals and organizations spoke out in favor of community gardening and market farming. The bill was nevertheless voted out of committee, though it contained some amendments, including allowing urban agriculture by special permit, a costly bureaucratic process. Realizing this would impact 20% of existing gardens and farms that worked at least one plot in a commercial mixed use district, a group of advocates came together to form a

coalition called the Campaign for Healthier Food and Green Spaces.²² A group of 31 organizations, the Campaign began mobilizing across the city, garnering significant attention from the media in speaking out against the bill and advocating for the rights of citizens to continue stewarding the city's proliferation of vacant and blighted land. Before the bill made it to the council floor, the councilman announced that he had listened to the community, been educated on urban agriculture, and was restoring urban agriculture to the zoning code (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013; McGoran, 2013).

The zoning code changes represent progress in the city, though ambiguity around the cause for resistance on the part of the council still abounds. Concerns around the level of control the councilpersons will fight to have, potential discrimination against populations practicing urban agriculture in different parts of the city, and what depth of change this zoning will have for vacant land use and disposition remain. As seen in the Boston case study zoning code changes act to legitimize certain uses. The question persists whether or not these changes have capacity to render actual structural shifts. The other components of Philadelphia's landscape are important to consider when exploring this question.

Land Disposition in Philadelphia

Per the Food Charter mandates, the Mayor's Food Policy Advisory Council is an entity internal to the administration that has developed a Vacant Land Subcommittee. Taking the lead in 2012, the Vacant Land Subcommittee

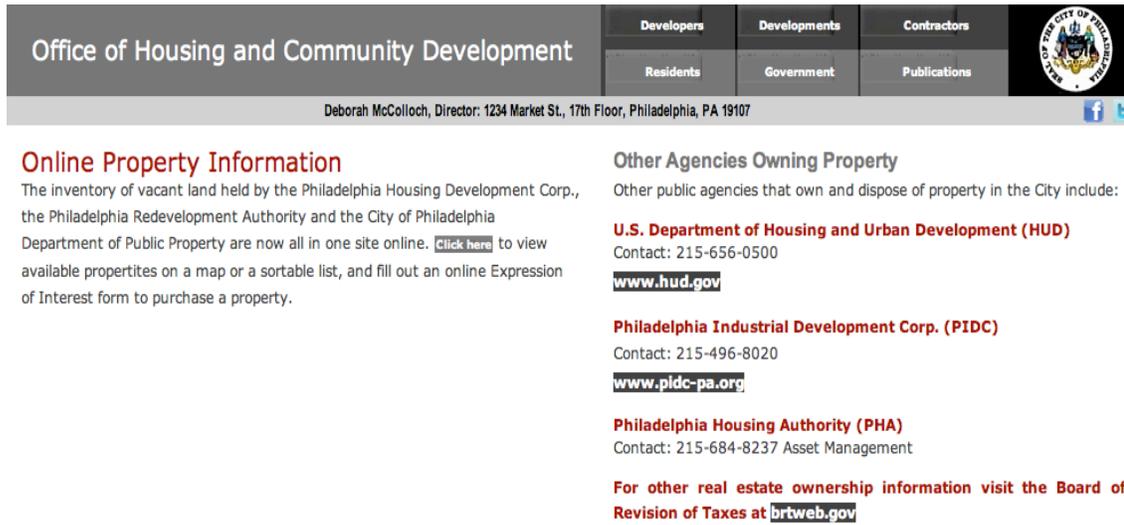
²² For a full list of organizations, see Appendix B.

developed a working group comprised of representatives from the Water Department, the Planning Department, the Office of Sustainability and the Parks Department as well as individuals from Mill Creek Farm, Glenwood Acres, the Federation for Neighborhood Centers and the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia. There has been promising participation from several councilperson's offices, as well. The working group seeks to provide advisement on more accessible, efficient and equitable disposition strategies than those currently employed.

As mentioned, there are four main agencies holding land throughout the city - the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority, the Department of Public Property, Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation and the Philadelphia Housing Authority. According to Cahn, "they've had, historically, four different processes for how land is disposed of - different policies, a different board, you call a different person, and even within those different agencies you might get different stories, particularly in the garden context, of how you access land," (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013). Some of them might offer an Urban Garden Agreement for instance, while others may not.²³ The city's first attempt to streamline disposition for all potential purchasers within this complex, multi-agency ownership structure was to develop what they called "The Front Door." The first three of these agencies compiled a database of all their vacant land holdings and created a portal on the Redevelopment Authorities website for the public to access. Through this portal, the public can request to lease or purchase a parcel of land. See **Figure 9**.

²³ An urban garden agreement is a license to garden granted by the city.

Figure 9. The Front Door



City of Philadelphia, (n.d.) Online Property Information. Retrieved from <http://www.phila.gov/ohcd/disposition.htm>, May 1, 2013

The challenges in this are two-fold. First, while the available land is aggregated on the website, when a request goes through it still diverges to each of the three relevant agencies with the same disparate processes. Second, most urban gardens and farms span multiple parcels, public and private. The process thus remains too complex to work efficiently (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013; Sugarman, Personal Communication, March 29, 2013).

In 2011, as it developed the plan for the Front Door, the city administration was working on a set of internal vacant land disposition policies to aid their process. The policy applied to property inventories owned by the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority, the Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation and surplus inventory held by the City of Philadelphia’s Department of Public Property. According to the policy, the sale of City property “is intended to promote the greatest possible active reuse of parcels in the City’s inventory,”

(City of Philadelphia, 2012). This is meant to be accomplished through open and competitive market sales, listed direct sales and discounted sales. Further, the policy specifically addressed urban agriculture activities.

Though initially not consulted in the process, the Vacant Land Subcommittee of the Food Policy Council obtained a copy of the draft policy. They had concern for the ways in which in addressing urban agriculture, the policy reinforced currently active policy, and in fact made the process more challenging. Though it delineated the importance of economic development, community development and reclamation from blight, its approach was limited with regards to gardening and farming. The policy maintained that individuals and families could obtain an urban garden agreement that was revocable at any time (for development purposes). Community gardens were also permitted to obtain revocable urban garden agreements, but were further required to purchase liability insurance (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013).

In other words, as Cahn explained, this was not only maintaining the status quo, but in fact added new requirements to the process of legitimizing gardens and farms. In doing so it created little incentive for squatters, who are gardening illegally in the first place, to register with the system when their license provides no additional land security. When the Vacant Land Subcommittee first approached the Redevelopment Authority with their concerns at the end of 2011, they were reminded that urban agriculture is not highest and best use, the necessary priority for disposition. In effect, when the Vacant Land Subcommittee first read the policy document, it re-established urban agriculture as an interim use

– something useful in temporarily mitigating blight while the market was left to work.

After meeting with the Redevelopment Authority, the Subcommittee was given two weeks to gather feedback from the urban agriculture community, and produced a set of policy recommendations as well as an informational document outlining the reasons why gardens should not be considered interim use, and why agricultural spaces were something in which the City should invest.

The final policy document was released in June of 2012. It maintained that individual gardens, for individuals and households, are temporary and interim in nature. They play a role in mitigating blight while maintaining development potential. Though not required to get liability insurance, the policy necessitates Individual Garden Agreements that will be applicable for one year and eligible for termination at any time by either the City or the gardener.

The policy expanded slightly for community gardens, giving Community Garden Agreements a five-year lifespan, with renewal potential. It maintained the requirement that community gardens purchase liability insurance. The policy developed a pathway to permanence at discounted pricing for some of the gardens:

Community gardens that have a sustained track record of excellent maintenance, broad community involvement and support and financial capacity may be conveyed to an institution that promises to maintain and care for the property for this purpose subject to a right of reversion by the City. A deed restriction will ensure compliance with this goal. (City of Philadelphia, 2012)

As some of the gardens are situated on very valuable property, this provides opportunity for more established projects while protecting city agency's interest at the same time (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013).

Finally, Market and Community-Supported Farms are eligible for leases of varying terms on an individual basis, requiring both liability insurance and the submission of a business plan and feasibility study (City of Philadelphia, 2012).

When the Front Door and associated policies were launched in June 2012, the Public Interest Law Center, had just undertaken a garden mapping project, looking at garden locations and ownership data. The organization was able to cross reference their database of squatter garden parcels with properties listed for sale by the city – they found almost 70 gardens were growing on purchasable properties. They went through a process of informing all of the gardens of the new policy. During interviews in this process, the Law Center discovered that when asked, most gardeners conveyed interest in purchasing their land, if given the option (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013).

Meanwhile, the City has not developed a thorough system around the sale of lots for gardens. Though applications are streaming in, the Redevelopment Authority does not have a process specific to gardeners, nor do they have a methodology for evaluating criteria. Thus far, their strategy is to offer licenses to gardeners as a way of building relationships with them, despite policies creating opportunities for lease and sale, after which they will decide if a lease or sale makes sense. While many of the applications coming through are undoubtedly for young projects, in some cases applications are from gardens that have existed for upwards of 25 years (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013).

The goal of the Food Policy Council at this stage is to gather feedback from a wide range of stakeholders, from gardeners and farmers to invested

Councilpersons. The Food Policy Council seeks to advise the city in creating a more comprehensive application process and a level of transparency, even in the structure of the lease agreements. This will make the process more accessible to communities (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013).

The Food Policy Council recognizes that while they have the resources to make informed recommendations, the City is under no obligation to heed their advice. Thus, stakeholders seek legislative change that would codify a transparent, more publicly engaged process – something that would be less internal to the government, span administrations, and foster public voice (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013).

In a document produced in 2011 by the Campaign to Take Back Vacant Land, they reiterate that there is a vacant land crisis in Philadelphia, and that the City's vacant land system is broken. The Coalition calls for more investment from the city in vacant land disposition, and the development of a citywide Philadelphia Land Bank, as well as a network of community land trusts (Campaign, 2011). While these strategies will be discussed in more detail in the final section of this work, it is worth noting several things here, particularly because land bank legislation, having recently been submitted by Councilwoman Sanchez, is currently in committee at Philadelphia City Council.

A Land bank is,

a public authority created to handle the acquisition, maintenance, and sale of vacant properties in a timely and efficient manner. Land banks have clear streamlined procedures to clear title, transfer properties to responsible owners, and acquire tax delinquent properties without risking their sale to speculators. Land banks are a best practice that more than 75 governments have adopted, including Cleveland, Louisville, Atlanta, and Genesee County, MI (Philly Land Bank, 2013).

The goal of a land bank in Philadelphia will be to streamline city-owned and private tax-delinquent properties into one municipal agency, to then be made available to purchase through an efficient, equitable and transparent process (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013). In order to truly benefit communities rather than solely streamline purchasing processes for developers, the intention is for the land bank to function with a board of directors that includes community representatives. Additionally, it will be required to report the land it has, when action will be taken regarding a parcel, if a parcel will be sold or gifted and to whom/for what use. The land bank will further be required to comply with neighborhood development plans, being held accountable through annual impact statements (J. Feldstein, Personal Communication, March 29, 2013). In theory, the land bank will function in tandem with community land trusts held by community organizations (of which there are currently only a few). In this way, land will be consolidated and then redistributed in a manner that creates a greater level of community control.

Concurrent with the land bank legislation submission, Councilwoman Sanchez, along with Councilman Green, submitted bill 120054, foreclosure legislation that requires prompt foreclosure of tax-delinquent properties, as well as improved access to payment plans for tax-delinquent homeowners. This will bring tax delinquent and vacant properties under city ownership and into the land bank, while also providing assistance to tax-delinquent homeowners who have not left their land vacant. In theory, these bills will “reverse the depressive effect of widespread tax delinquency,” (Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania, 2013).

Whether or not the land bank legislation will pass, what exactly will be included if it does and where the land bank will live remain questions. How the legislation will include and interact with vacant land disposition *policy* will be crucial. The capacity of communities to develop the infrastructure necessary to fulfill the goals of increased community control remains paramount.

Discussion

The landscape in Philadelphia is complex, even without comprehensively lending voice to the multitudes of individual gardeners, farmers and organizations comprising the city's urban agriculture community. This is in part due to Philadelphia's post-industrial identity, and the challenges that accompany that reality. According to coalition members of the Campaign to Take Back Vacant Land, "for 40 years the City has been unable to create and implement a workable strategy to redevelop 3000 acres of its own land," (Campaign, 2011). Arguably, it is not for lack of trying. Over the last five years in particular, the municipality has set sustainable development goals and constructed various strategies to try and dispose of land in an attempt to reduce blight, increase the tax base, and reduce costs.

However, there is wide discrepancy between the expressed values, policy development and implementation (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication, March 13, 2013). The values purported in the Food Charter indicate that bolstering support and infrastructure for urban food production is a top priority. There is wide recognition that for decades, residents and community organizations have

willingly taken the initiative and acted as vacant land stewards throughout the poorest neighborhoods in the city. Gardeners and farmers, most frequently in low-income communities, take on the responsibility of fending off blight and strengthening community development in the face of disinvestment and disenfranchisement.

Yet despite the desire to dispose of property – made evident through both the Front Door and the city’s own disposition policy - even the Central Club for Boys and Girls, a program functioning continuously for over 75 years, suffers land insecurity. Even as a city with excess amounts of vacant land, Philadelphia prioritizes ‘highest and best use’ based on exchange value, rather than use value. Exchange value dominates, even if that priority acts to the detriment of communities and even if the use value has been proven through decades of land stewardship and community development. Neighborhoods are continually faced either with blight, land insecurity in return for fighting blight themselves, or development that they may find antithetical to their goals as a community.

Arguably, the policies implemented by the city are prohibitive to farmers and gardens. They at the very least reinforce the unstable nature of community control and the interim nature of community led projects. Rather than facilitating community empowerment through ownership and the city’s own explicitly legitimized land uses, the policies as they stand in effect to convey distrust and suspicion of community run urban agriculture projects. Arguably, the heavily bureaucratized processes in place are exclusive and suppress the abilities of residents and organizations lacking legal or professional support to navigate the

system. Instead of rewarding the legacy of neighborhood land stewardship, policies reinforcing interim use and codifying “revocable at any time” policies discourage investment in land over which stewards have no real power.

Nicole Sugerman, from the East Park Revitalization Alliance alleges that in order to shift power dynamics, everyone needs access to land (N. Sugerman, Personal Communication, March 29, 2013). Beyond access, marginalized people need the security and ensuing power that comes with the ‘control’ over their spaces. Leading the charge to, in effect, institute a version of land redistribution in Philadelphia, Cahn explains the spectrum on which she thinks about land use. There is first simply access to land – the ability to step on a parcel, perhaps enact an interim use agreement. Beyond that is some form of land tenure or land security. This may look like a longer-term lease – something that ensures your secure rights to the space for a given period of time. Finally, Cahn considers land sovereignty. A concept rapidly developing in global dialogue, Cahn talks about it in terms of community control. This may mean private ownership within the community, ownership by a community development corporation, land trusting lots and developing uses through community process, or any number of other methods of ensuring community voice and decision-making power.

The land bank legislation and the growing dialogue around land trusts both aim for victory farther along this spectrum. Widespread alliances being built on the community level give the people a growing voice in policy-making around vacant land and food movement ideology. This has meant that where municipal developments do not support more structural change, communities are resisting

placation and are demanding more transformative reforms. Food movement leaders emphasize the development of values as resting at the heart of sought-after transformation. They know there will always be imperfections in the methods employed to shift control, and emphasize the necessity for a multiplicity of strategies. Some of the strategies being employed in Philadelphia and other American cities, and the ways in which different strategies might function together to foster more transformative change, comprise the final section of this work.

SECTION 3.

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS – A LAND REDISTRIBUTION STRATEGY

The following summarizes key findings emerging from an analysis of the land disputes in Boston, Detroit and Philadelphia. They are followed by a brief discussion and then a set of recommendations that address strategies for fostering deeper social change.

Key Findings

- As teased out in chapter 1, food sovereignty and justice advocates seek to change power structures, and land-based resources have historic ties to power. This makes urban land control a growing topic of interest in the food movement of the developed world.
- As revealed through the case studies, new agriculturally focused municipal policies change allowable land uses, reintegrating agriculture into the urban zoning code. These zoning changes are often accompanied by policies establishing urban agriculture as an interim use on public land pending higher value development. In this context land disputes reveal that conflicts stemming from the kind of persistent power imbalances discussed in chapter one are still prevalent.
- As discovered through the case studies, while new agriculturally focused policies are progressive and necessary, they are not sufficient to create structural change. Policy does not, in and of itself, dictate structure. Rather, structure is in part affected by the interplay between interests and their power relations in policy formation, the nature of policy implementation, and who benefits from that which is implemented.

- The perception that new agriculturally focused policies create deep structural change when they do not, means these policies can undermine the goals of food sovereignty advocates by acting only to *reform* the system. Per Holt Gimenez’s Food Regime-Food Movement framework, reformist programs are deeply entrenched in the corporate food regime as, according to Polanyi’s suggestion of a Double Movement, reform strengthens the system by temporarily placating advocates for change. Thus, current events in policy development require more nuanced reflection and analysis in order to make policies that better foster *transformation*.
- As evidenced by the case studies, cities seek to dispose of vacant land and blight. As discussed in both the introduction to this work and chapter one food sovereignty and increasingly food justice advocates seek more land control to meet use values and increase community power. In light of this, facilitating a system of land redistribution that prioritizes community ownership and programming rather than the exchange value of corporate development might further the goals of both parties. Land redistribution is a controversial strategy and is most often discussed within rights-based frameworks in the developing world context. However, with proper incentives and appropriate policies, redistribution systems for currently vacant and blighted land have legitimacy even within America’s strong private property-based frameworks.
- There was a common belief articulated among community advocates interviewed that first and foremost values must be articulated. No system or development will be perfect, but outlining the values by which that system or development functions is of the utmost importance. In light of this, coalition building and communication among community organizations and advocates, as well as increased communication between coalitions and policy-makers is paramount.

Discussion

In their exploration of land sovereignty, Saturino Borrás and Jennifer Franco explain that, “...a peoples’ enclosure campaign²⁴ advocating for

²⁴ “A peoples’ enclosure campaign is one where working peoples pro-actively assert their political control over their remaining lands against potential and actual threats of corporate or state enclosure. It is one that can be done either independently from the central state via community-based enclosure of the commons or in direct engagement with the state.” (Borrás and Franco, 2012, 9)

redistributive and distributive land policies can be carried out through at least three broad strategies, namely, state-centric, social movement or community-led, and state-community driven” (Borras and Franco, 2012, 9). The last several decades have seen strong social movement and community-led action claiming land rights in American cities. As detailed through a look at McClintock’s work in chapter one, this has often taken the form of guerrilla or squatter gardening in disinvested neighborhoods. We continue to see this practice throughout Boston, Philadelphia and Detroit today. The concept of land sovereignty and the growing interest in re-establishing the commons are increasingly applied to these tactics as they are considered tangible mechanisms for exerting human rights to resources. We see people simply *taking* what the need – the result of which is community-based land stewardship in the face of disinvestment and disenfranchisement.

However, Borras and Franco go on to claim that “when mobilizations from below are met by actions from above, more radical state land reform laws can be carried out,” (Borras and Franco 2012, 10). Each city explored in the previous three chapters has a set of broader frameworks in which their shifting land policies are situated. Philadelphia has developed a set of sustainability goals and a city-wide food charter, Detroit has adopted a city-wide Food Security Policy and Boston has built an Office of Food Initiatives. Each municipality is then at some stage in the process of instituting zoning changes that facilitate urban agriculture as a legitimate use.

These policy changes are met by thriving grassroots food movements, and the potential that exists in these forces coalescing rightfully garners energy.

Insofar as Borras and Franco's assertion has promise, the integration of policy language, mandates, declarations, zoning changes etc. represent important steps in the process towards change. Genuine political will could build the urban agriculture movement's ability to move beyond the resistance-based approaches characterizing it in recent years. However, municipal interest in integrating food movement activities into political frameworks is new and complex enough that it remains difficult to say with certainty where it falls on the food regime – food movement framework presented in chapter one. By examining the land disputes in Boston, Philadelphia and Detroit that ultimately characterize these situations in which “mobilizations from below are met by actions from above,” we gain valuable insight.

When considered through the lens of food sovereignty outlined in chapter one, the land disputes depicted in chapters two through four reveal the complexity of changing urban land use policy focused on agriculture. There is a multiplicity of belief systems and sub-movements within what is broadly called the “Food Movement.” With their sights set on deep structural transformation, the movement's subset of food sovereignty advocates would likely deem the municipal actions and resulting land disputes as evidence for the reformist (albeit *progressively* reformist) nature of the policy changes underway

In Detroit, following up the promotion of urban farming and community food security with a large scale land allocation to a wealthy pseudo-outsider illustrates the ways that a grassroots phenomenon can easily be co-opted by those perpetuating the status quo of the corporate food regime, per Cambell's discussion

of the politics of co-optation. In Philadelphia, entrenching the notion of ‘interim use’ into urban agriculture policy when land is abundant and community members take the lead on its stewardship reveals the strength of neoliberal values elaborated on earlier in this work – even at a time when vast amounts of land suffer blight and disinvestment and there are few resources with which to address these problems. The securitization of tax revenue and the ways in which this phenomenon renders social capital and community need powerless, further speaks to the strength and destructiveness of the current economic model. Exchange value prevails over use value once again. In Boston, while civic engagement is now being prioritized in the policy process, the implementation of agricultural pilot projects on parcels of little relevance to the urban agriculture enthusiasts who originally engaged municipal officials reveals the way the city continues to implement changes on their own terms. Despite focusing on community process, whether or not communities themselves are at the heart of policy changes remains debatable, calling on the discussion of power relations that weaves through this research.

While making agriculture an allowable use on urban land is a progressive and necessary step towards realizing changes in the food system, it should not be considered a successful end in and of itself but merely part of a larger process. Zoning changes embedded in rhetorical frameworks of food security and local food systems do not inherently address the social changes food and land sovereignty activists advocate. The changes do, however, act to slightly shift the terrain on which power structures rest, creating a moment of flux in which there

may be potential for greater action. Within this moment, there is promise for the urban agriculture movement to be a transformational force as part of larger efforts addressing America's historical trends of dispossession and the legacy of institutional racism and entrenched power imbalances outlined earlier. In order for the movement to reach this potential, the policies we have seen must be accepted as *first steps*, opening the door for more transformational developments. Communities must be given a stronger voice in developing policies that foster the changes they seek. This is particularly crucial while policies are in the phase of development and flexibility and while the municipal political climate itself is somewhat open with regards to food and agriculture.

The recommendations below and the discussion that follows outline a plausible strategy for achieving some of the food sovereignty movement's transformational goals while also serving the interests of municipalities. These recommendations were developed through an analysis of actions and dialogue taking place in the three cities studied set against the backdrop developed in the literature review section of this paper.

General Recommendations

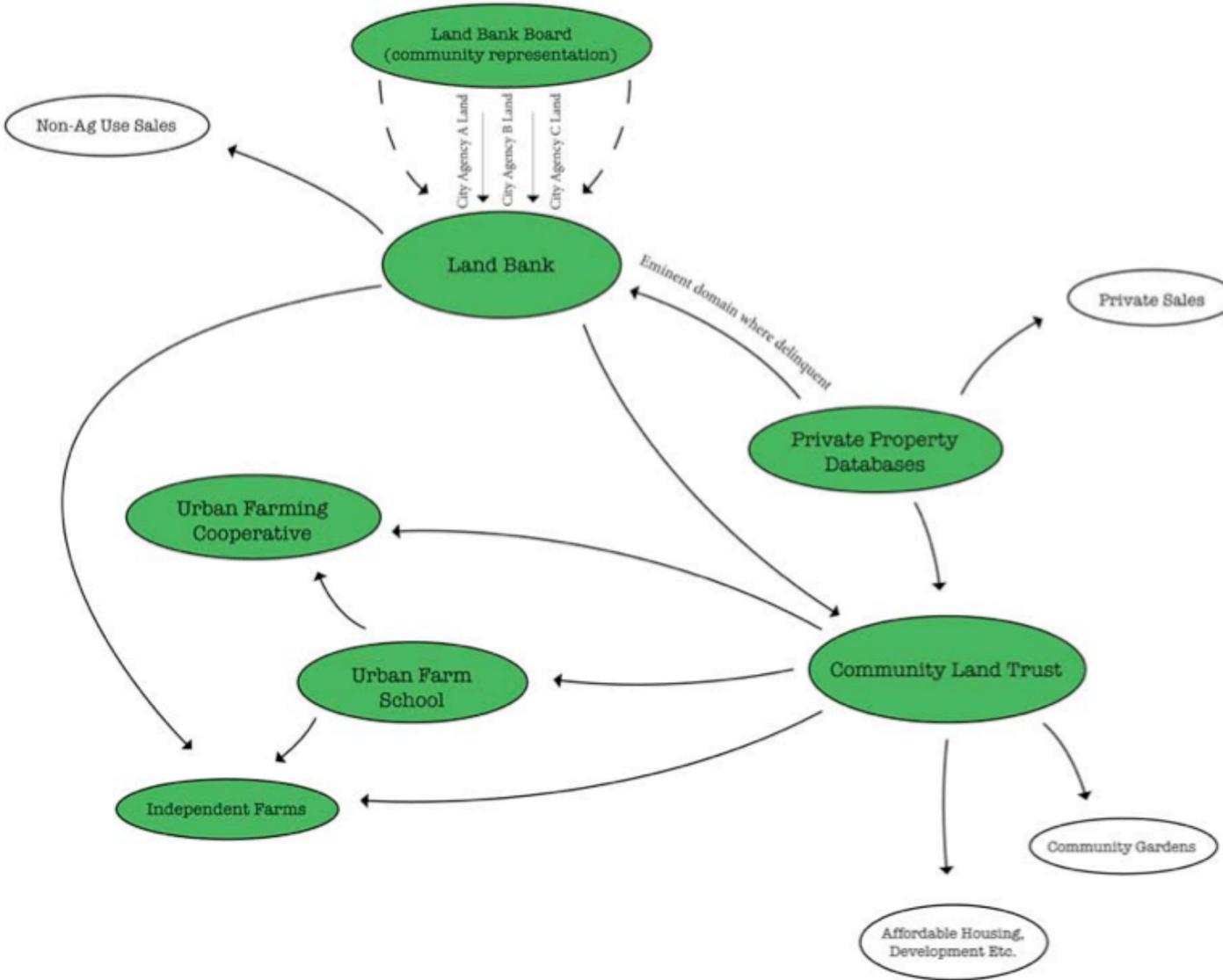
- Particularly in cities or neighborhoods where there is wide-scale vacancy, developing a model facilitating land redistribution can benefit the municipality, aid in redistributing power and potentially help foster social change. This requires action and preparedness on the part of both the city and communities. The concept map provided below provides one model for achieving this.
- Cities should consider consolidating their vacant land (both public and private) into a land bank and/or create one streamlined and accessible land disposition system.
 - Create one inventory of public and private land
 - Utilize university researchers to aid in the process of cataloguing vacancy and ownership as well as (as needed by the communities) analyzing suitability of the land and documenting community desires for the land to see where suitability and interests overlap.
- Communities (including organizations, individuals, Community Development Corporations etc. and in partnership with cities where logical) should consider developing a process for analyzing their capacity to take on ownership of vacant land. Where absent, these entities in the community can consider developing community land trusts to acquire vacant land or protect ‘vacant’ land currently stewarded. This could be aided by the development of neighborhood-wide or city-wide coalitions of invested parties.
- Where there is interest and vacant land is suitable, fostering the development of urban farm schools and affiliated urban farm cooperatives may aid in local economic development and the myriad of other benefits attributed to urban farming while increasing decision-making power that residents/worker-owners have.

Discussion

The policies currently developing around urban agriculture first and foremost address the issues of legitimate *use*. However, the growing dialogue between the policy-makers and communities, as well as continued efforts on the part of food movement activists, point towards the potential for something more

transformational. In each city explored in this paper there is a strong voice for redistributing rights to or ownership of vacant land – much of which exists in low-income communities of color – to those stewarding it. Land redistribution and community control of resources is a deeply controversial subject, especially so in a country founded on principles of private property, and the commoditization of land. However, because of the dire social and economic situations in many American cities – for instance, the plethora of vacant, blighted land in Detroit, Philadelphia and particular neighborhoods within Boston – there are interesting incentives leading municipalities to consider what could be seen or enacted as a form of redistribution. In some cases this dialogue directly engages with the municipalities, and in some cases it still primarily exists within movement-based frameworks. **Figure 10** presents a visual representation of a land redistribution system based on policy actions and food movement activities either already taking place or that are the subject of current dialogue in the cities investigated.

Figure 10. Land Redistribution Concept Map



When considered together, these various strategies point towards the capacity for a land redistribution scenario that could help shift power back to communities that have been historically disenfranchised while simultaneously benefiting economically strapped municipalities. There is a focus on urban agriculture in this concept map. However, redistribution for other unrelated but community-based needs as well as sales inherent in a market economy are acknowledged as well (the hollow bubbles).

The map guides the viewer through a system in which vacant land (either municipally owned, or owned by private but delinquent entities) is catalogued and/or collected under one municipal agency - a Land Bank overseen by a board with strong community representation. The land is then redistributed by sale or donation directly to independent farms, into community land trusts, and for all other non-ag uses generally. For land transferred to community land trusts, the trust then distributes that land based on its system of by-laws and missions. This could mean land is dedicated to any number of things including community gardens and projects initiated by Community Development Corporations (who may either receive land from the trust, or host the trust themselves). A community land trust may also work in conjunction with an urban farming cooperative or an urban farm school that together facilitate the training and business ventures of aspiring farmers throughout urban neighborhoods. Whether transferring the land ownership to the coop or school, or maintaining ownership in the trust, the community retains power over it. Each facet of this land redistribution system is discussed in further detail below.

Land Banks

According to the Philly Land Bank Alliance, “Land banks are a best practice that more than 75 governments have adopted, including Cleveland, Louisville, Atlanta, and Genesee County, MI” (Philly, 2013). The goal behind land bank legislation in Philadelphia is to consolidate land ownership under one municipal agency and create a swift and transparent process for the sale and

purchase of that land. This includes land that is both publicly owned by multiple agencies within the municipality, as well as privately owned, tax-delinquent land. According to María Quiñones Sanchez, the councilwoman who submitted land bank legislation in Philadelphia, a land bank, “will help eliminate blight, stabilize our neighborhoods, and put vacant property back on the tax roll” (Housing, 2013). In other words, there are serious incentives – co-benefits - for both the city government and communities to support creating land bank infrastructure.

However, a land bank in and of itself is not a good thing – it is merely a vessel for holding land. In order for a land bank to be an effective tool in making it easier for communities (and not just developers) to gain control over vacant parcels, the legislation must reflect the community values. In developing the notion of a Philadelphia land bank, a primary point of analysis for the coalition members of the Campaign to Take Back Vacant centered on how to build a strong coalition that was across sectors, across issues and across the city. The goal was to build enough power to successfully advocate a land bank that was fair, transparent and accountable – a land bank that the people could trust (J. Feldstein, Personal Communication, March 29, 2013). As discussed earlier, key mechanisms for accountability include transparent reporting on the acquisition and disposition of parcels and compliance with neighborhood development plans (J. Feldstein, Personal Communication, March 29, 2013). According to the Land Bank Alliance, there are seven critical provisions in creating an effective land bank.

1. Vacant property transfers will benefit community
2. Key approvals are upfront before the buyer incurs significant costs
3. Transparent and accountable transfer process
4. Governed by expert board with community representation

5. Adequate funding identified, authorized and provided
6. Has ability to strategically acquire private properties
7. One owner of publicly owned property²⁵

The effectiveness and necessity of a land bank may vary from city to city.

In Philadelphia and Detroit the sheer amount of vacant land makes a land bank an especially important tool. This may also be the case in other post industrial, shrinking cities that suffer high rates of vacancy. It is particularly salient when a significant portion of vacant land is under municipal ownership, and when the city desires to be relieved of the costs and responsibility associated with that ownership.

The utility of a land bank may be different in a city like Boston, where there is higher development pressure, fewer vacant parcels and a less dire municipal financial situation. However, there are still neighborhoods in Boston that if looked at independently share characteristics with the post-industrial landscape and would benefit from a more clear system of disposition. Roxbury and Dorchester, having experienced historical disinvestment and bank redlining, also suffered a period of time characterized by widespread arson in which private landowners found more value in burning their homes and collecting insurance money than properly disposing of their assets. The results are a plethora of vacant properties owned by not just the public sector, but the private sector, as well.

In Philadelphia while ¼ of the vacant land is owned by city agencies, the largest portion is under private ownership. The scenario is similar in Detroit.

²⁵ For more details on each provision see The Land Bank Alliance's fact sheet: <http://www.phillylandbank.org/sites/phillylandbank.org/files/u3/Land%2520Bank%2520%Fact%2520Sheet%25203-4-13.pdf>

Comprising the bulk of vacant property, private land can thus also play a role in land redistribution.

Private Property

Because of its abundance, private, vacant land provides a key resource in the effort to bring delinquent properties back on the tax role and increase community ownership. One of the first things to consider when developing a plan to pull these properties into a land bank is the incorporation of programs that work with individuals actually inhabiting delinquent properties. Distinguishing between tax delinquent but *in use* properties and chronically *vacant* properties is crucial in not actually undermining the goals of increasing community ownership. Both Philadelphia and Detroit are working to incorporate these kinds of programs in to their policies. Once a system distinguishing these separate situations is in place, a process publicly cataloguing those properties that are appropriate for purchase achieves at least two things. First, it provides a resource for the city to systematically work through, streamlining the process of acquisition and disposition. Second, it provides a resource for residents and organizations interested in a specific lot. Deciphering the ownership status of vacant properties and tracking down absent and potentially deceased landowners can be prohibitive for individuals and organizations lacking adequate resources. For instance, while an organization may run one cohesive urban garden on vacant land in their neighborhood, that land could ostensibly be comprised of multiple lots, all under separate ownership. This creates an unreasonably complex process for under-

resourced organizations or individuals to navigate. Once a public database provides this information, a resident or organization can work with the city to swiftly clear title to the land and transfer ownership.

Because not just organizations but cities themselves are under-resourced, utilizing the academic sector to aid in the research and cataloging of vacant land is one method cities and organizations can employ. This cross-sector approach provides multiple benefits to both university students and the communities in which they reside. Tufts University's department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning has developed curriculum that provides organizations and city departments with a team of student-consultants to work on specified projects. This gives planning and policy students invaluable experience working in the community while providing that community with resources that would otherwise come at a high cost.

Community Land Trusts

An important component in creating a framework for land redistribution is the development of capacity on the receiving end. A city has little incentive to acquire tax-delinquent properties if they are over-burdened managing vacant land already in their coffers. This means the need for residents, organizations and developers ready to purchase and steward vacant parcels. One mechanism being considered to aid in increasing community ownership is the development of community land trusts (CLTs). The Land Trust Alliance defines a land trust as a

nonprofit organization that, as all or part of its mission, actively works to conserve land by undertaking or assisting in land or conservation easement acquisition, or by its stewardship of such land or easements (Land Trust Alliance, 2013)

Citing Polanyi, George, and Swann, Jeffrey Yuen (2012) synthesizes the deeper moral meaning of the land trust concept, explaining that

land - being simply the inherited surface of the earth - is a 'fictitious commodity' (Polanyi, 2001) and a 'natural monopoly' (George, 1975) that cannot be treated as other private property, but needs to be held in 'trusteeship' for future generations (Swann, 2010).

The concept of a *community* land trust attempts to capture this social and moral perspective on land ownership. In 1972, the International Independence Institute defined CLTs saying,

The community land trust constitutes a social mechanism which has as its purpose the resolution of the fundamental questions of allocation, continuity and exchange.

The community land trust is a legal entity, a quasi-public body, chartered to hold land in stewardship for all mankind present and future while protecting the legitimate use-rights of its residents.

The community land trust is *not* primarily concerned with *common ownership*. Rather, its concern is for *ownership for the common good*, which may or may not be combined with common ownership. (International Independence Institute, 1972, 1)

According to John E. Davis's explanation in the CLT Technical Manual (White, 2011) the ownership structure of a CLT is distinctive in several ways:

- Land is treated as a common heritage, not as an individual possession. Title to multiple parcels is held by a single nonprofit owner that manages these lands on behalf of a particular community, present and future.
- Land is removed permanently from the market, never resold by the nonprofit owner. Land is put to use, however, by leasing out individual parcels for the construction of housing, the production of food, the development of commercial enterprises, or the promotion of other activities that support individual livelihood or community life.
- All structural improvements are owned separately from the land, with title to these buildings held by individual homeowners, business owners, housing cooperatives, or the owners of any other buildings located on leased land.
- A ground lease lasting many years gives the owners of these structural improvements the exclusive use of the land beneath their buildings, securing their individual interests while protecting the interests of the larger community.

The community emphasis coupled with the securing of individual interests – the balancing of individual and community wealth creation - provides logical reasoning behind the growing interest CLTs garner in the urban agriculture sector.

Jill Feldstein of Philadelphia’s Women’s Community Revitalization Project (WCRP) explains that while not all CLTs operate in this manner, in theory CLTs have community representatives on the board. This is key to fostering community control and decision-making about the land that the CLT holds (J. Feldstein, Personal Communication, March 29, 2013). Philadelphia already benefits from the Neighborhood Gardens Association (NGA), a community garden and open space-focused land trust resulting from the efforts of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS) and the Penn State Urban Gardening Program (PSUGP) in the 1980s. However, the NGA itself states “the significant inventory of community gardens and vacant land in Philadelphia provides a challenge for NGA in the future” (Neighborhood Gardens Association, 2013). Furthermore, developing *community* land trust infrastructure in an even more localized manner throughout Philadelphia neighborhoods could potentially aid in the role CLTs have in increasing community power. The WCRP has already begun building capacity, having incorporated the Community Justice Land Trust in 2010. While the CLT is not agriculturally focused, it does embrace the principles of community control and decision-making (J. Feldstein, Personal Communication, March 29, 2013). In theory, as the Trust builds capacity, and based on the community leadership’s goals, if agricultural endeavors were appropriate there is potential for projects to be incorporated.

Feldstein is quick to point out that simply incorporating a land trust does not necessarily mean that land will come pouring in. This is one reason that the WCRP has supported the Land Bank legislation in Philadelphia (J. Feldstein, Personal Communication, March 29, 2013). The potential for a relationship between a land bank and a network of CLTs throughout the city is promising.

Urban Farm Schools and Cooperative Farms

Having a plan at the community level for land acquired by CLTs is a necessary component of land redistribution's efficacy. Urban agriculture advocates in Boston are discussing developing CLTs to function in tandem with urban agriculture programs they have begun implementing (G. Lloyd, personal communication, March 25, 2013). The Urban Farming Institute (UFI) is a Boston-based non-profit founded in 2012 whose mission is to "contribute to healthy people and sustainable cities by promoting and creating self-sustaining urban farming enterprises and farming jobs" (Urban Farming Institute, 2013). UFI functions to "[enable] urban farming through farm creation, farmer training, public education and policy change..." (Urban Farming Institute, 2013). The organization's goals include:

1. Train residents from Massachusetts' urban areas to become successful urban farmers;
2. Acquire and prepare land for farming;
3. Educate community, city and state stakeholders in support of appropriate policy changes in regards to land use and urban farming practices.
4. Through research and development, document, map the urban farming industry and its impact on social, economic, health outcomes for both practitioners and the industry as a whole in order to create a new paradigm. (Urban Farming Institute, 2013)

In 2012, UFI initiated its first Urban Farmer Training Program, which combines classroom and farm-based fieldwork. The organization works in collaboration with its partner urban farm, City Growers. After the classroom work is complete, participants in the training program get their hands-on education working at the City Growers farm. Though a private company, City Grower's founder Glynn Lloyd conveys the ultimate goal of turning the company into a worker owned cooperative, which will continue to have a relationship with the UFI and the farmers trained in the program. In theory, farmers coming out of the UFI will have the opportunity to opt in to the coop as a ready-made, built in business model functioning in the city (G. Lloyd, personal communication, March 25, 2013).

In light of this goal, the cooperative and the UFI as a partnership will need a growing inventory of land on which new farmers can establish their piece of the cooperative. Because of this clear need, CLTs present a viable option for consideration – particularly in the Roxbury and Dorchester neighborhoods of Boston where blighted, vacant (and often privately-owned) land is abundant. Whether the UFI or an already functioning CLT like Dudley Neighbors, Incorporated²⁶ would be best equipped to host a CLT that collaborates with a cooperative urban farm remains a key point of dialogue. Were the UFI to host it, the CLT would likely almost solely be for the purpose of agriculture (similarly to

²⁶ Dudley Neighbors, Incorporated (DNI) is a CLT begun in the fall of 1988 that operates in the “Dudley Triangle,” a neighborhood located where Roxbury and North Dorchester meet. The CLT was created by the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, an organization whose mission is to “empower Dudley residents to organize, plan for, create and control a vibrant, diverse and high-quality neighborhood in collaboration with community partners.” (Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, 2013) While initially developed as a tool to construct affordable housing, DNI now also incorporates a community greenhouse, parks, gardens and open space.

Philadelphia's NGA), and may not completely fulfill the potential of a more broadly-minded CLT that more holistically addresses the desires of the community. Conversely, an outside entity may have competing interests at stake within the CLT itself, thus sacrificing land with agricultural potential to other important causes. Either way, the ability of a cooperatively owned farm to collaborate with a CLT creates valuable potential for a truly locally *owned* urban food system.

Urban farmer training programs and urban farm schools are gaining momentum across the United States. Often times they grow out of already existing organizations functioning within communities. In Detroit, the Detroit Black Community Food Security Networks uses its 7-acre farm, D-Town Farm, to facilitate farmer training and social justice education. City Slicker Farms based in Oakland, California provides similar training (City Slicker Farm, 2013). Similarly, community land trusts and land banks are common concepts, but are being repurposed as methods to increase ownership and control of land on the neighborhood level. Cooperative urban farms are less established in practice, but provide a viable business model to function in tandem with the reallocation of land for urban agriculture. Building a networked relationship between these components of a land tenure system could create new capacity for the redistribution of land ownership within urban agriculture frameworks. In order for the model to work, there must be an entity capable of disposing of land, entities capable of acquiring land, and entities capable of stewarding land. The strength in this model exists in each piece coming together with adequate planning,

infrastructure and commitment. It attempts to fulfill Borrás and Franco's call for a truly state-community driven approach to redistributive and distributive land policy fostering more radical state land reform (Borrás and Franco, 2012, 9-10).

With this system of land redistribution in mind, the following are city-specific recommendations for Boston, Detroit and Philadelphia.

City Specific Recommendations

Boston

- Inventory vacant land and perform suitability analyses.
- Develop clear municipal system for vacant land disposition.
- Develop community-based coalition of relevant organizations and individuals with a stake in vacant land management and acquisition..
- Develop Community land trust infrastructure, and/or assess the capacity and suitability of current organizations to house or expand land trusts.
- Where land is vacant and privately held, city should consider clearing title of desired land and transferring it into the land trusts.
- Where land is vacant and publicly held communities should persist in engaging the city in dialogue around future use for the land, community needs, and reasons/consequences of vacancy.
- Move forward in the development of a community-based cooperative farm and farm school through the Urban Farming Institute and develop complimentary infrastructure and relationships with land trusts to ensure available land.

Detroit

- Inventory vacant land and perform suitability analysis.
- Develop clear municipal system for vacant land disposition.
- Develop community-based coalition of relevant organizations and individuals with a stake in vacant land management and acquisition.
- Bolster the capacity of the Detroit Land Bank Authority ensuring strong community representation.
- Develop Community Land Trust infrastructure and/or assess the capacity and suitability of current organizations to house or expand land trusts.

- Where land is vacant and privately held, city should consider clearing title of desired land and transferring it into the land trusts.
- Consider bolstering the capacity of the urban farm school at the DBCFSN to function in relation to CLTs.

Philadelphia

- Inventory vacant land and perform suitability analyses.
- Develop clear municipal system for vacant land disposition, including developing the land bank per the recommendations of the Philly Land Bank Alliance.
- Develop Community land trust infrastructure, and/or assess the capacity and suitability of current organizations to house or expand land trusts. The Campaign to Take Back Vacant Land and the Land Bank Alliance both provide networks for dialogue across the city.
- Where land is vacant and privately held, city should consider clearing title of desired land and transferring it into the land trusts.
- Consider developing urban farm school(s) and affiliated cooperative farm businesses.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Hunger and health disparities – results of a broken food system - are symptoms of inequity resulting from deeply entrenched power imbalances in society. Similarly, Jill Feldstein, of the WCRP and the Campaign to Take Back Vacant Land explains that in a sense, vacant land is a symbol of powerlessness. She believes that part of the reason people think negatively of vacant land is that it undermines a community's sense of self-determination (J. Feldstein, Personal Communication, March 29, 2013). Reallocating this land has the potential to shift power imbalances; however doing so is a tenuous and complex process – and a process that many municipalities may not even entertain.

The most radical thread of the food movement, the food sovereignty movement has its roots in peasant struggles of the developing world. Translating the goals and frameworks developed in those situations to the American context is a delicate and complex task. It requires coalition building with like-minded movements active in the United States and tactics with the practical capacity to have efficacy in a heavily bureaucratized system entrenched in neoliberal values. Where, as a movement, we seek paradigm shifts, we are often handed progressive reforms. Seizing the opportunity to leverage those reforms into something more transformational may provide the most promising avenue for change.

The disputes explored in this paper reveal the deep contention surrounding land control, even in the context of progressive policies and well-articulated goals. Despite declarations regarding healthy communities, local food systems and sustainable development, cities still function within traditional frameworks.

Evidenced by the continual promotion of urban agriculture projects as interim use solutions to blight, the exchange value of property continually overrides the use value per traditional neoliberal ideology. This persists despite documented social, health, economic and environmental benefits of community-based projects. While urban agriculture ordinances change allowable uses, acting to reform policy and promote some shifts in available means of food production, they do not in and of themselves foster the deep transformation advocated by the food sovereignty movement. Municipal progress must not be met with hasty approval. Instead, this moment necessitates deeper reflection and more intentional planning if the opportunities at hand are to be more fully utilized to shift power to urban communities.

This research is just a first step attempting to begin the analysis and reflection on the relationship between food sovereignty and municipal policy changes in the United States. The land redistribution model presented here attempts to provide a tangible mechanism for furthering the food sovereignty agenda and its goals for social transformation within the American context. This research hopes to present an idea that is ripe for critique, reconsideration and reconfiguration among food sovereignty experts and their municipal counterparts. It is one small piece of the larger effort to develop processes fostering more equitable systems.

As several food movement leaders conveyed, no process will be perfect, no solution without flaws. It is first and foremost important to articulate the values by which we want our systems to function (A. L. Cahn, Personal Communication,

March 13, 2013; J. Feldstein, Personal Communication, March 29, 2013; Yakini, 2013). And as Saulo Araujo declared, struggle is necessary for true change (Araujo, Personal Communication, October 25, 2012). Perhaps the disputes we see hold great promise. At the very least, identifying the co-benefits to redistributing vacant land in our most distressed cities and disinvested neighborhoods presents strong incentive for action; beginning to construct frameworks for this action is key. And if these frameworks facilitate the collaboration of mobilizations from below and efforts from above, perhaps this action can truly lead to transformative change.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Subjects

Araujo, Saulo. Grassroots International. Boston, MA.

Bodine, Greg
City Growers. Boston, MA.

Cahn, Amy Laura
Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia. Philadelphia, PE.

Feldstein, Jill
Womens Community Revitalization Project and the Campaign to Take
Back Vacant Land. Philidelphia, PE.

Jenkins, Dave
Alternatives for Community and Environment. Boston, MA.

Lloyd, Glynn
City Growers and the Urban Farming Institute. Boston, MA

Score, Mike
Hantz Farm. Detroit, MI

Sugerman, Nicole
East Park Revitalization Project and the Food Organizing Collaborative.
Philadelphia, PE.

Weiner, Skip
Urban Tree Connection. Philadelphia, PE

Appendix B: Organizational Partners in the Campaign for Healthier Food and Greener Spaces

African American United Fund
East Park Revitalization Alliance
Emerald Street Urban Farm
Farm to City
Federation of Neighborhood Centers
Friends of Saint Bernard Community Garden
Guild House West
HIAS PA
Historic Fair Hill, Inc.
Landmarks' Grumblethorpe Historic House and Garden
Manton Street Park & Community Garden
Merchants Fund
Mill Creek Farm
Neighborhood Gardens Association
Norris Square Neighborhood Project
Occupy Vacant Lots
Overbrook Environmental Education Center
Pedal Co-op
Pennsylvania Horticultural Society
Philadelphia Orchard Project
Philadelphia Seed Exchange
Philly Earth
Philly Electric WheelsPhilly Food Forests
Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia
Walnut Hill Community Farm
Weavers Way
Weavers Way Community Programs
Wyck Historic House, Garden, and Farm
Urban Tree Connection
Village of Arts and Humanities

Appendix C: Campaign to Take Back Vacant Land Coalition Members

Action United
Advocates for West Fairhill Community
AFSCME 1199c Training and Upgrading Fund
AFSCME 1199c
AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power
Arab American Community Development Corporation
Campaign for Working Families
Christ Centered Housing Ministries
Circle of Hope Church
Disabled in Action
District 1199c Training and Upgrading Fund
East Kensington Neighbors Association
East Park Revitalization Alliance
Faculty and Staff Federation of Community College of Philadelphia
Fight for Philly
Firm Hope Baptist Church
Food Organizing Collaborative
Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania
Liberty Resources
Love Loving Love
My Place Germantown
Neighborhood Networks/Philly MoveOn
Norris Square Civic Association
Northern Liberties Neighbors Association
Philadelphia Area Cooperative Alliance
Philadelphia Orchard Project
Philadelphia Unemployment Project
Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign
Port Richmond West Community Action Network
Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia/Garden Justice Legal Initiative
Queen Village Neighbors Association
Service Employees International Union 32BJ
Service Employees International Union Healthcare PA
South Philadelphia EPIC Stakeholders
Temple Presbyterian Church
Temple University Hospital Nurses Association (TUHNA/PASNAP)
Unite HERE
United Communities of Southeastern Philadelphia
United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1776
Weavers Way Co-op
West Central Germantown Neighbors
West Poplar CDC
West Poplar NAC
Working Group for a Grassroots Movement

Women's Community Revitalization Project

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