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Growing Communities: Urban Agriculture In Post-Katrina New Orleans

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GROWING COMMUNITIES: URBAN AGRICULTURE IN POST-KATRINA NEW ORLEANS

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Southern Studies
The University of Mississippi

by
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ABSTRACT

The city of New Orleans is known for many things, from Mardi Gras and jazz music, to the rich union of French, Spanish, southern and Creole cultures. Recently, urban agriculture has come to the city as part of the rebuilding process following Hurricane Katrina. Many groups have sprung up across the city to create communal and private spaces aimed at growing food. Urban agriculture in New Orleans has been looked to as a panacea for a myriad of issues. Activists around the city tout the importance of farms and gardens in city beautification, economic development, education, and making food more accessible. Examining the groups and individuals operating in the city, it is evident that all of the positive externalities are generated from gardens, the most impactful result comes from the social capital generated throughout the city. Moreover, as the alternative food movement in the city gains ground, it has become increasingly inclusive, rather than exclusive. Unlike other US cities with urban agriculture, New Orleans urban agriculture affects a multitude of people in the city rather than catering solely to a white, middle class consumer base.
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Urban gardens and farms used to strike me as an oddity. Coming from an area where the suburban sprawl was mixed with agricultural land, I grew up seeing farms and orchards and even worked on a cattle ranch. Farms had a semblance of structure and homogeneity that made me scoff at the unruliness of urban farms that defied space constraints to create a small, but vivacious, patch of green in a cityscape. Urban farmer and author Novella Carpenter writes, “Unlike a rural farm, a secret place where only a few lucky people may visit, an urban farm makes what seems impossible possible.” Agriculture in the city, although coming in unconventional forms, brings food production to a population that has yet to experience the same connection with food that I have had. It creates a holistic view of food, rather than simply consumption.

This project began as a short study of the impact of two urban farms in the Mid-South. What struck me were the different models these farms operated under in addressing food concerns in the city. One large farm and one small garden patch were able to reach community needs in different manners and on different scales. The variety of operations led to further investigation of urban farms around the south and the rest of the United States. Urban agriculture is well established on the east and west coasts, and had become a rally point for grassroots movements in the Rust Belt. In New Orleans, Louisiana, however,

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urban agriculture was in still in its nascent stages, with a wide array of projects that are only a few years old. Backyard gardening is not new to New Orleans, but following Hurricane Katrina, community groups, non-profit organizations, and entrepreneurs alike, began to realize the potential for growth of the urban agricultural sector.

Programs throughout the city articulate a multitude of goals ranging from beautification efforts, community development, local economic growth, to food access. How can so many things be accomplished simply by growing food in a city? What are the ways farms and gardens accomplish these goals? In the following chapters I will illustrate that as the urban gardening movement develops in New Orleans food production, economic development, and beautification are all positive externalities to the social networks that are being built around food production in New Orleans. The city may never be able to sustain its food demand with urban agriculture, but the relationships constructed around these spaces are vital to rebuilding the social bonds in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and creating a markedly diverse alternative food system in the city.

I begin with an oral history from Macon Fry, a gardener and educator who saw the transformation of the gardening community in the city after the hurricane. His insight on New Orleans, before and after Katrina, serves as a benchmark for beginning a deeper investigation in the complex role of gardening has in the city.

Chapter 1 discusses the nature of the rebuilding process in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. Beginning with a brief history of urban planning in the city, I examine the role of farming and gardening in New Orleans as tools for revitalizing and rebuilding neighborhoods. After the storm, many plans were proposed to city hall that would recreate New Orleans, but were struck down. The lack of a citywide redevelopment program gave
non-profit organizations and private citizens the opportunity to transform vacant lots into community growing sites, or expanded backyard gardens. Finally, I address the small but timely role the city government has in planning for an increase in urban agriculture programs.

In Chapter 2, I investigate the alternative food system in New Orleans, and how it addresses or neglects food access around the city. A great deal of scholarship critiques the alternative food movement for not addressing food access and creating an overtly “white” consumer base of locally sourced goods. But in New Orleans, with a population consisting of about 60% African Americans, markets and farms are located in racially and economically diverse communities. Analyzing data from the United States Census and the American Community Survey, I discuss the programs used by markets and farms to increase equal access to fresh and local food in their spatial and sociodemographic contexts.

Chapter 3 examines the educational and economic development benefits of urban agriculture in New Orleans. Many programs espouse the ability for gardens to create a new generation of urban gardeners who have the power to create an economy around agriculture. Some even go far as to say that as the urban garden and farm community develops in the city, there is an opportunity for jobs to be created ancillary to food production, such as in compost. Although educational programs can teach skills well beyond farming, they cannot be relied on to continue urban farming in a city.

Chapter 4 delves into the effects non-profit organizations have in recreating the city in what I refer to as “contested space.” Development organizations must constantly evaluate their position in the community and use outreach methods to address
neighborhood concerns, rather than simply taking up vacant space in the city. Further, I examine the role of social capital in farming and gardening programs and how it is manifested at different locations. Creating social capital is vital to building strong communities and must pervade the missions of farms and gardens in New Orleans to address and solve the issues of the city.

Finally, I end with a brief discussion of the future of urban farming and gardening in the New Orleans and the rest of the United States. Although relatively small farms currently in New Orleans, as technologies around food production evolve, the alternative food movement appears likely to experience a drastic shift, moving large operations into cities that resemble factories more than they do of community gardening spaces.

Community and food activists see great potential in urban agriculture in New Orleans. Many organizations have already garnered success in the city both in food production and community development. While highlighting the accomplishments of these groups, I also critique specific issues of the urban agriculture movement in New Orleans that diminish the potential impact of the urban farms and gardens can make. Contemporary urban agriculture projects tout the myriad of results that can arise from the presence of gardens and farms in the city, but they rarely see the vast networks of relationships they foster in the city.
Macon Fry is known in New Orleans as the "Garden Guy." He has worked on countless urban agriculture projects throughout the city and currently works at the Hollygrove Market and Farm, overseeing the farm and running the internship program. Fry's insight on urban agriculture in New Orleans is valuable to understanding the projects developed after Hurricane Katrina and their respective roles in rebuilding the city.

Macon Fry: I started out with Parkway Partners and [it] still [is] the largest and primary community garden program in the city. And then began market gardening in a Parkway Partners garden, a very large Parkway Partners garden over by Xavier University that had become depopulated after Hurricane Katrina. And then when Hollygrove opened in 2009, Hollygrove market, they were looking for a mentor farmer to teach people how they could develop their own market garden on a vacant lot, because there are so many vacant lots in the city. I still have the garden over by Xavier and am now working as a market gardener here and as a consultant with Grow Dat Youth Farm in City Park. Three very different projects, that sort of reflect a little bit of what’s going on here in New Orleans. A fourth project that is running concurrent with these that I’m no longer involved in is the New Orleans Food and Farm Network (NOFFN), has a project that’s the Farm Yard project. That’s a project where they build gardens in people’s backyards and that’s a program that I
founded when I was on the board of directors at NOFFN. So those are the four primary programs in the city.

Pre-Katrina was... New Orleans had a much larger African American population percentage wise. In fact, in absolute numbers I’m sure, before Katrina, and most of the gardens in the city were operated by Parkway Partners who got the lots from the city. They were vacant lots that people had walked away from, for the most part, had walked away from in the 80s after there was a big oil bust and the New Orleans economy went down the sewer in the 80s when the oil industry collapsed. And people, much the same as after Katrina, only I guess on a smaller scale, but... people walked away from mortgages, walked away from taxes, just left. So Parkway Partners, at this time when the city was falling apart at the seams, was developed as an organization to beautify the city. Parks and Parkways job is to maintain the neutral grounds, it’s a city agency, and to maintain city controlled property. So Parkway Partners said, “well great, we’ll start and adopt the neutral ground program and get private citizens to help maintain the city. Beautification, right? So part of that, a very visionary person Chris Potharse, came along and she founded the community garden system at Parkway Partners which was saying, “Look, we can find people in the neighborhood, in these distressed neighborhoods, that have these vacant lots where investors just walked away. We can find groups to garden them, and start community gardens on them, if you promise that you won’t develop them out or sell them out from under us.” And there was a tacit agreement. Well over a hundred gardens were developed, mainly in neighborhoods with a lot of distressed properties, predominantly African American neighborhoods. So most of the gardening in the city was taking place in those neighborhoods. But it was an aging population. I’m not going to say that there weren’t
young hippies or whatever that were into community gardening Uptown and the neighborhoods they lived in, and urban pioneers in those neighborhoods. But the vast majority of gardeners were African Americans; the majority of them were over 60. They brought a great deal of knowledge with them because a lot of them were people that moved here or their families moved here after World War II, when there was a big influx of African Americans to the city and they came from rural areas. North Louisiana, Mississippi, plantation country, a lot of them had really great growing skills. Natural, they had grown up doing it. However, there was no new, young crop of gardeners in those neighborhoods, so the program was very hard to sustain in those neighborhoods. It was very demanding of resources in terms of getting volunteers to help an aging garden population and a dwindling garden population; every year, fewer and fewer. And a lot of the gardens had been built, I wont say willy-nilly, but there was a lot of energy in the project initially, a lot of vacant lots, and everybody wants to have their picture in the newspaper holding a shovel with a lot of little people of color, having a good time, it’s like a sexy project, and a lot of gardens were built. When I started at Parkway in 2000, my job was to figure out how many gardens do we really have. Where are they? What’s going on now? All of the sudden, they told me they had 140 gardens and I couldn’t find 40. Well, I could find them but they had reverted to blighted lots, a lot of them. Some of them had been sold, the ones on more in-demand land despite this supposed agreement with the city, had been developed. So we retrenched and we found the ones still with people in them and started over. But before Katrina, there were... the gardens had already taken a huge hit, from over building from an aging garden population, etc. After Katrina, a lot of those older people, well a lot of people in general, but especially the elderly African American population in the city, a lot of them
did not return. The few gardens that were left immediately after Katrina were of course in mainly the poorer neighborhoods flooding, so a lot of them had been underwater, they were distressed. That was the state of things then, few gardeners, distressed properties, flooding. The 45 or 50 or 55 that we had managed to rejuvenate and get going, again took a hit. So we're back to square one or maybe below that because in the Lower Ninth Ward, there weren't any houses. The houses had been moved around, I couldn't even find a couple of the gardens. Literally, they were erased. Houses were erased. So you can imagine a lot that just had a hose bib and crops on it, which lot was that? What's the address where I am? I guess the other key thing that's going on, I said it was mainly an elderly population, I'm sure there have been studies by this, but why in African American populations or white populations, why there was dwindling interest in farming I think, in agriculture probably, in the... 60s, 70s, 80s. I think that in the African American population, here in the south, there probably is still sort of a looming shadow of slavery, of agriculture work being a menial [job] and its not very profitable. There were multiple lost generations between those people that came here after World War II. This is not just in New Orleans I don't think. And later on, we lost generations of growers. And then after Katrina, we lost generational knowledge when those people didn't come back. So that's the landscape up to 2009 in a nutshell.

Post-Katrina there's been a lot of people, a lot of young people, a lot of energy has come to the city. People saw New Orleans as a place of opportunity, and an opportunity to do good work. New Orleans, became... instead of people going into the Peace Corps, they came to New Orleans. So both as a destination and a service place, so a lot of people would work on houses, and they would take two days. A college group would come in, and we're
going to work on six houses in a month, and we’re going to work with parkway partners every weekend and rebuild a garden. Certainly the influx of people really helped in terms of saving the infrastructure, recreating the garden infrastructure in the community gardens here. A lot of those people have stayed. If you look at people around you here, you’ll ask them, “Where were you?” you’re going to find people, young people that came here after Katrina. I’m sure there are local people here that have a resentment, maybe there are some people that have a guilt, “We’re in these neighborhoods, and where are the people that were here. We’re serving a bunch of you know, young Caucasian kids.” But from someone that’s seen the whole trajectory of the gardens and how they were taking these hits and how they were losing people, I can’t see it as anything but really great that people have come and brought that interest in gardening.

Conclusion

Fry illustrates that as these agriculture projects grow in the city they have taken on many roles in a variety of neighborhoods. Although urban agriculture existed in pre-Katrina New Orleans, it found a resurgence following as a portion of the post-Katrina rebuilding process. The neighborhoods hit the hardest by the storm had primarily low-income, minority citizens. Thus, urban agriculture in New Orleans beautifies neighborhoods, and affects a diverse population throughout the city.
Hurricane Katrina left a lasting impression on the physical and psychological makeup of New Orleans. The void that Katrina left on the landscape is still visible today as abandoned homes with collapsed roofs litter neighborhoods throughout the city. Along with the 1833 deaths caused by the storm, the city also faced a massive population loss from 2005 to 2006 of about 250,000 residents.\(^2\) As of last year, about 100,000 people had returned or moved to New Orleans.\(^3\) The flooding caused by the storm left parts of the city covered in over 10 feet of water.\(^4\) “The Army Corps of Engineers reported on October 11, “43 days after Katrina’s landfall, that all floodwaters had been removed from the city of New Orleans.”\(^5\) Portions of the city hit hardest by the flood still have sparse rebuilding among barren lots. The damage caused by the storm, while not only creating a physical void on the city, disrupted a sense of place among the citizens of New Orleans. Sociologists DeMond Shondell Miller and Jason David Riviera write, “The loss of a home, community, and security during a natural disaster such as Katrina only magnifies the loss of a sense of

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\(^4\) Knabb, Rhome, and Brown, 9.

\(^5\) Ibid.
place.” Lives, communities, and New Orleans were irrevocably changed by the damage caused by Hurricane Katrina. Architect Christopher Day writes that places affect “how we feel about, hence define, ourselves,” and continues, “Places hold memories.”

The profound destruction brought about by the storm resulted in renewed efforts among non-profit organizations and private companies alike to redevelop and rebuild New Orleans. Rather than focus solely on the built environment, community development organizations utilized agriculture to combat blight in neighborhoods throughout the city. Urban agriculture was adopted to revitalize New Orleans in the 1980s. According to Macon Fry, “when the city was falling apart at the seams” following the oil bust in the 1980s, Parkway Partners was “developed as an organization to beautify the city.” Although some homes and business may never return to New Orleans, community gardens and urban farms have the opportunity to revitalize neighborhoods by replacing vacant lots. Historical urban planning endeavors in New Orleans, as well as those following Hurricane Katrina, implemented public green spaces to beautify the city.

Urban Planning in New Orleans

Green urban space began in New Orleans in the mid 19th century with the creation of New Orleans City Park, located in the Mid-City neighborhood. Otherwise known as City Park, encompasses 1300 acres, and is one of the largest urban parks in the country. At the turn of the century, the park was taken over by the City Park Improvement Association,

8 Macon Fry, interview by author, New Orleans, LA, February 1, 2013.
following the City Beautiful Movement. Landscape architect Laura J. Lawson argues, “the period’s faith in environmental determinism—the belief that an improved physical environment would influence social behavior—led designers, politicians, social reformers, and civic-minded individuals to propose new order in the American city” as a way to confront issues facing urban areas. In 1894, the city hired John Charles Olmsted, son of Fredrick Law Olmsted, to design Audubon Park, located in the Uptown Neighborhood. Following the City Beautiful objective, “park systems shaped the land larger city, with elegant pastoral parks in the civic area, connecting parkways, and more intensely programmed neighborhood parks and playgrounds.” Parts of New Orleans still resemble this romantic past, most visible in the live oaks that line the St. Charles streetcar line. However, “between 1950 and 1975, the built-up area of metropolitan New Orleans had doubled in size.” City Planner Kristina Ford argues, “in terms of planning, New Orleans is most certainly like other places: it has ignored citizens who were displaced by single-minded economic development schemes; it has failed to prevent wasteful residential and commercial development, and it has allowed nuisance land uses to elbow into quiet neighborhoods.” Ford, who had worked as the New Orleans Director of Planning from 1992 to 2000, also saw the blank slate that Hurricane Katrina had created: “In the face of this destruction, rebuilding and reuniting the city’s absent population were now

13 Lawson, 94.
unarguably necessary. By this disastrous stroke, city planners were given an opportunity to do the jobs they were trained to do—to devise how to use the city’s lands more to the city’s betterment.”

The first group assembled to rebuild New Orleans was the Bring New Orleans Back Commission (BNOBC). Hired by Mayor Ray Nagin, BNOBC was made up of “planners, developers, and bankers.” In January of 2006, the BNOBC proposed a plan (See Figure 1) that would focus on rebuilding a New Orleans that followed the New Urbanism movement of focusing on “the creation and restoration of diverse, walkable, compact, vibrant, mixed-use communities composed of the same components as conventional development, but assembled in a more integrated fashion, in the form of complete communities.”

The BNOBC plan for the city included reducing the city’s footprint and increasing residential density while transforming devastated portions of the city into parks. Kristina Ford points out the flaw of the plan, which advocated for a smaller, denser city, but represented “what New Orleans could eventually become, and had created an end-state plan: long on vision, but short on time frame and specific details,” most importantly being the fates of those displaced by the new park space. The Charter of the New Urbanism reads:

The Congress for the New Urbanism views disinvestment in central cities, the spread of placeless sprawl, increasing separation by race and income, environmental deterioration, loss of agricultural lands and wilderness, and the

16 Ford, 4.
17 Ibid., 30.
20 Ford, 32
erosion of society’s built heritage as one interrelated community-building challenge.²¹

New urbanism, while rooted in notions of reducing sprawl and increasing economic and racial integration, fails to recognize the individual who may reject the city plans and rebuild on his or her land. The plan proposed by the Bring New Orleans Back Commission was met by community uproar, especially neighborhoods that were to be turned into green spaces. When the BNOBC plan was repealed, both public and private interests were able to address blighted neighborhoods in a variety of ways. Overnight, non-profit organizations could promote urban agriculture as a part of the rebuilding process.

**Figure 1** Parks and Open Space plan, by Wallace Roberts & Todd for the Bring New Orleans Back Commission, presented January 2006

Gardening Against Blight

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the population was slowly declining, leaving sprawling, low-rise communities rather than a dense city.\textsuperscript{22} While the BNOBC proposed to make New Orleans smaller and abandon vacant lots, historian Catherine Tumber argues that, “new urbanists’ caution against ‘ruralizing’ the city is misplaced.”\textsuperscript{23} She continues, “In cities that aren’t doing so well, however, and have vast quantities of vacant land to prove it, agriculture on a larger scale—farming—is not only appropriate, but it can be part of a faltering city’s salvation.”\textsuperscript{24} Parkway Partners uses urban gardening to combat blight in the city while also addressing the deforestation after the storm. Last year marked the planting of their 10,000\textsuperscript{th} tree in New Orleans since Katrina, as well as beginning a project centered on planting trees along St. Claude Avenue, which extends from downtown to the Ninth Ward.\textsuperscript{25} From March of 2008 to March of 2012, blighted and vacant properties in the city decreased from about 65,000 to 35,000.\textsuperscript{26} As people have returned to New Orleans, cleanup and restoration of lots has increased.

Community organizations like Parkway Partners and the city government are addressing blighted areas and vacant lots in New Orleans by incentivizing lot redevelopment, while making the process to access these lots more transparent. The New Orleans Food and Farm Network (NOFFN) works as a community organizer and support group, offering urban farming classes and connecting farmers throughout the city to

\textsuperscript{24} Tumber, 66.
\textsuperscript{25} Mark Schliefstein, “Parkway Partners of New Orleans undertakes new 10,000-tree planting effort,” \textit{The Times-Picayune}, August 21, 2012, \url{http://www.nola.com/environment/index.ssf/2012/08/parkway_partners_will_plant_15.html}.
\textsuperscript{26} Alison Plyer and Elaine Ortiz, “Benchmarks for Blight: How much blight does New Orleans have?” \textit{Greater New Orleans Community Data Center} (August 21, 2012).
markets. A key resource provided by the NOFFN is the *Farm This Now!* Map, which maps the vacant lots in New Orleans that are owned by the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority (NORA). Nicola Krebill, NOLA City Farms Director at NOFFN, stated that the project arose out of NORA shuffling their feet with available lands. “We just ended up, through frustration, publishing all of this information so that it’s now in the public domain,” so that a potential farmer “can search a map of available land mostly owned by the city.”

The New Orleans Redevelopment Authority started the Lot Next Door Program in 2007 following an ordinance from City Hall. The program “provides residents living adjacent to NORA-controlled properties the first opportunity to purchase and redevelop these properties,” with anticipation that neighborhoods remain residential while also beginning a beautification process that will inspire others to do the same. However, the damage is most likely more than private citizens can restore. In the Lower Ninth Ward and New Orleans East “there is more destruction than there are number of people that returned.” Krebill believes, “there really needs to be some kind of bigger program to help beautify and, in our case, we want to see some of those lots go to growing food.” Until that time, the NOFFN will be instrumental in providing information on available land throughout the city to prospective farmers. With the recent popularity of urban agriculture, the city of New Orleans has gradually recognized it as a potential way to rebuild the city with other positive externalities.

29 Ordinance M.C.S 22643, Office of Recovery Management, City of New Orleans (passed May 3, 2007).
31 Krebill, interview.
32 Ibid.
Urban Agriculture, City Hall and Beautification

As community gardens and urban agriculture programs become increasingly visible in New Orleans, City Hall is slowly beginning to take notice. While offering incentive programs to rebuild on vacant lots, New Orleans Mayor Mitchell Landrieu also began the Fresh Food Retailers Initiative (FFRI) to “increase access to fresh foods in traditionally underserved neighborhoods in the City.”\(^{33}\) As rehabilitation and food awareness come to the forefront in New Orleans, the city remains reticent to wholly support large-scale urban agriculture. While politicians readily back community gardens, the city remains at an exploratory phase in pursuing policy on urban agriculture.\(^{34}\) In 2010, the city commissioned a city planning effort known as *A Plan for the 21st Century: New Orleans 2030*, led by the Goody Clancy Architecture and Planning firm and the City Planning Commission. The plan advocates for the creation of sustainable communities and access to healthy foods that lead the zoning ordinance changes to facilitate the creation of more food production spaces in the city.\(^{35}\) Although the city has not actively fought against urban farms, they have yet to directly address the policy recommendations of the plan. Inevitably, policy changes are required that would allow for a sustainable future for farms and gardens throughout New Orleans.

Rebuilding New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina remains a slow process. Home demolition and lot restoration continue, but the damage also created an opportunity that demanded new ways of imagining public and private space in the city. In turn, urban farms and gardens grow throughout blighted neighborhoods. At the Sankofa Vegetable Farm in

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\(^{34}\) Fry, interview.

the Lower Ninth Ward, a worker remarked that when people saw the orderly plots, they might go home and fix up their yard. Beautification is a deliberate process, but a very symbolic one. It signifies the revitalization of neighborhoods hit hardest by Katrina as well as residents reestablishing a sense of place.\(^\text{36}\)

With the correct city intervention and support, community gardens and urban farms can bring about change to New Orleans that goes well beyond vacant lot restoration. Peter Ladner writes, “Studies have shown that the presence of vegetable gardens in inner-city neighborhoods is positively correlated with decreases in crime, trash dumping, juvenile delinquency, fires, violent deaths, and mental illness.”\(^\text{37}\) Transforming vacant lots to maintained spaces benefits both small neighborhoods and communities, and the city at large. Law professor Jane E. Schukoske writes, “[vacant] lots contribute to the physical debilitation of a community, diminishing its quality of life... [and can host] criminal activity, trash accumulation, and safety hazards.”\(^\text{38}\) Gardens, on the other hand, are “a viable alternative to vacancy, and has often led to increased safety, beautification, and cooperation within the community.”\(^\text{39}\) As urban agriculture beautifies blighted neighborhoods, it contributes to transforming local food systems by making food more accessible for communities afflicted by vacant lots.

\(^{36}\) Miller and Rivera, 134.
\(^{37}\) Peter Ladner, The Urban Food Revolution: Changing the Way We Feed Cities (Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 2011), 190.
\(^{39}\) Ibid., 361-362.
Understanding the New Orleans Food System

Food systems within the United States are slowly redeveloping a regional link between producers and consumers. Farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, and urban farms all bring consumers closer, or more culturally invested, in the food they eat. However, the term “culturally invested” should not denote the increasingly problematic “foodies,” but rather a citizen who builds and maintains relationships between producer and consumer rather than rely on the global market for produce. Unfortunately, these connections clash against the forces of the economy that are rooted in modernization and globalization.

But agriculture in the United States was not always a global trade. As transportation technologies improved, agriculture operations could expand operations and reach new markets. The market thus became national. Author Brian Halwell cites the example of fruit growers in California, who “in the 1930s, began to explore the possibility of capturing fruit markets in major cities around the United States.”[^40] Though “most states still had farmers who were raising a range of fruit for locals.”[^41] But with the help of subsidies and advertising, California rose to dominate the market, and pushed out smaller operations that were not able to compete with large distributors. As farms grow and consolidate, they have more buying power for larger equipment, and “since large elaborate machines are

[^41]: Ibid.
expensive they do not pay unless large amounts of goods are produced.”\textsuperscript{42} Anthropologist and economist Karl Polanyi asserts that this change in the notions of an agrarian society “implies a change in the motive of action on the part of the members of society; for the motive of subsistence that of gain must be substituted.”\textsuperscript{43} Inevitably, as the shift in approaches to the market occurs at the production level, it changes the consumer experience as well. Halwell argues, “Once this process begins, it can develop a sort of momentum of its own, like the trend towards larger farms, larger food factories, and larger supermarkets.”\textsuperscript{44}

Supermarkets, like large farms, absorb smaller operations while providing few locally sourced items. Meanwhile, the supermarket disconnects consumers from the larger system, providing prepackaged and disinfected products. Author Wendell Berry, in his impassioned monograph \textit{The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture}, argues, “The consumer withdraws from the problems of food production, hence becomes ignorant of them and often scornful of them; the producer no longer sees himself as intermediary between people and land—the people’s representative on the land—and becomes only interested in production.”\textsuperscript{45} As the market follows a mobile population, supermarkets follow the middle class, operating largely in suburban areas. Nathan McClintock writes, “During the 1980s and 1990s superstores took over the helm of food retail, spatially

\textsuperscript{42} Karl Polanyi, \textit{The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 43.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Halwell, 49.
\textsuperscript{45} Wendell Berry, \textit{The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996), 37-38.
concentrating food access in locations often only accessible by car.” Thus, people in the inner city are left with few to no options for purchasing fresh produce. Low income, urban dwellers are doomed to have little access to food options other than fast food restaurants, and are increasingly marginalized within the current food system.

However, this marginalization is not limited to the major food industries in the United States. The alternative food movement, which I will define as a conglomeration of farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, sustainable agriculture practices, and minimal distances between producers and consumers, also has an exclusive consumer base that is largely white and middle class.

Critiques of Alternative Food Systems

Alternative food systems, unintentionally, are markers of privilege and exclusivity. The rhetoric surrounding the movement places a social imperative on eating local and supporting local businesses, but rarely does it address social issues that plague the United States. In fact, it does “not stray from a market oriented model.” Like other markets, the alternative food system provides goods to consumers, often at higher prices than supermarkets. Meanwhile, the same “local” marketing tools that can price out some groups, can also serve as an ideological block to other groups. One of the most problematic issues of the alternative food movement lies in the rhetoric of whiteness that surrounds the movement.

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48 Jarosz, 232.
Simple economics play a large role in the accessibility of the alternative food movement in the United States. Geographer Julie Guthman writes, “With some exceptions, farmers’ markets... tend to locate or distribute to areas of relative wealth.”

Farmers must turn a profit to continue their businesses and can only do so at viable markets. Anthropologist Lisa Markowitz argues that there is a “distinct contradiction between the needs of farmers and customers.” Food Activist Mark Winne also recognized the importance of the meeting the low-income urban residents needs.

He recalls the opening of the Hartford, Connecticut farmers market:

> The idea was simple: connect local farmers and urban consumers, especially lower-income families, for both groups' mutual benefit. This could be done by developing higher-return retail outlets for small and medium-size farmers, while providing more high-quality outlets for produce-starved urban consumers.

However, making this connection is easier said than done. In many cities farmers markets have become part of the urban social experience rather than addressing a marginalized portion of the community.

Sociologist Thomas A. Lyson’s exploratory book, *Civic Agriculture: Reconnecting Farm, Food, and Community*, addresses many issues surrounding the food system in the United States while also providing valuable insight on implementing policies and projects to bringing communities closer to agriculture. He writes, “large-scale, absentee-owned, factory-like fruit and vegetable farms that rely on large numbers of migrant workers and

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51 Mark Winne, *Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008), 38.

sell their produce for export around the world would not be deemed very civic.”\(^{53}\) While the sales occur outside of the region where the goods are grown, pointing out migrant workers as not benefitting civic ventures is vastly misplaced. Agriculture workers, migrant, legal, and undocumented alike, bring necessary labor to agriculture operations of all sizes. Moreover, by classifying labor as local or not, he runs the risk of dismantling local inclusion. “Localism” can be applied to communities in which everyone living there recognizes the term as their own, but when the message is not passed to minority groups or groups on the fringe of the community, it becomes increasingly exclusive. While localism can inhibit some growth of alternative food systems, the greatest obstacle lies in the whiteness of the alternative food movement.

Julie Guthman writes, “Existing research suggests that African Americans especially, do not participate in alternative food institutions such as farmers markets and CSAs proportionate to the population.”\(^ {54}\) Wendell Berry’s “romanticized American agrarian imaginary erases the explicitly racist ways in which, historically, American land has been distributed and labor has been organized.”\(^ {55}\) While the many white Americans that attend farmers markets and support local farmers see the benefits of buying local and engaging in community gardening, minorities may see a connection to a not so distant past of labor exploitation and second-class citizenship.\(^ {56}\) Geographer Rachel Slocum attributes the whiteness of these alternative food spaces to the fact that “whiteness is hegemonic in the US; it is dominant regardless of the number of bodies in a certain place.”\(^ {57}\)

\(^{54}\) Guthman, 2011.
\(^{55}\) Ibid.
\(^{56}\) Ibid.
Taking Slocum’s argument into account, the prevailing alternative food system must be defined in terms of whiteness, but what about alternatives that were created by racial and ethnic minorities? Historian Priscilla McCutcheon studied the work of the Nation of Islam and the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church and their programs surrounding food. She writes, “Food is a part of a larger ideology of Black Nationalism, in which self-reliance and the individual achievements of blacks are linked to the ‘black community’ at large.”

The work being done at these organizations began out of exclusion from mainstream white society and provide for those solely in the black community. Likewise, a large portion of the New Orleans Vietnamese population has been growing vegetables in market gardens since the 1970s. Rather than prepare food for the entire New Orleans community, gardeners grow food for the household then sell excess goods “to other enclave residents or through the Saturday wet, or fresh-produce, market and to enclave restaurants and grocery stores.”

Minorities are not excluded from the alternative food movement. On the contrary, racial and ethnic groups in the United States constitute an important piece of the food system that exists outside of the mainstream. New Orleans urban farms and markets face the task of bringing together racial and ethnic groups across the city to create a cohesive community surrounding food, while subverting the conventional industrialized food system.

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Demographic and Socioeconomic Analysis of Markets and Farms in New Orleans

New Orleans has a vibrant food culture that intersects Creole, Cajun, and southern cuisines and draws millions of tourists a year to restaurants. However, access to good food throughout the city is lacking. According to a 2011 report conducted by NewsOne, New Orleans is the worst food desert in the United States, with “only 20 grocery stores in [the city].”

New Orleans is not alone in this. Cities throughout the Untied States, home to large low-income, predominantly minority populations are recognized as food deserts. In 2009, the United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service reported before Congress on the presence of food deserts in America, which were defined as “an area in the United States with limited access to affordable and nutritious food, particularly such an area composed of predominantly lower income neighborhoods and communities.”

A study prepared by the Tulane School of Public Health measured food deserts in New Orleans by distances from specific census tracts to supermarkets and small stores, as well as income levels of those census tracts. The study concluded that, “Citywide… food desert rates ranged from 17% to 87% depending on the operational definition.” It is clear that disparities exist throughout New Orleans when assessing food access. Markets and farms within the city begin to provide an accessible and inclusive food culture, and also create a visible juxtaposition to tradition food systems.

Access to farms or farmers’ markets is often determined by proximity. Locations of these sites vary, as do the economic and demographic makeup of the population.

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surrounding them. In a statistical examination of the locations of these markets and farms, the census tract, a unit for population data, was used to create a cross-comparative analysis. While the analysis does not reflect the consumers at the markets and farms, it does show the immediate neighborhood the organization is part of. Figure 2 represents the racial makeup of alternative food sites throughout the city. Hollygrove Market and Farm are located in the Hollygrove neighborhood, in the western part of New Orleans. Along with the Sankofa Vegetable Farm in the Lower Ninth Ward, it is located within a predominantly African American community. The Sankofa Market and Good Food Farm are located in the Upper Ninth Ward, and the Treme respectively. Both are historically African American neighborhoods, but they are slowly being gentrified, and have demographic and socioeconomic statistics that are similar to the city average. Crescent City has three total locations, an Uptown Market held on Tuesday, the Mid-City Market held on Thursday, and a Downtown Market held on Saturday. These markets are situated in predominantly white neighborhoods, varying greatly from the rest of the city. As Figure 3 illustrates however, the demographics of these specific census tracts does not determine the poverty levels.

Figure 3 illustrates the percentage of families living below the poverty line at the chosen sites. New Orleans has about 20% of families living in poverty. The Sankofa Vegetable Farm and the Crescent City market in Mid-City have similar averages to New Orleans, but according to Figure 2, they have a distinctly different racial makeup. The Sankofa Market and the Uptown location of Crescent City have the lowest percentage of families in poverty, both around 10%. They too have very different census tract demographics. Lastly, the Hollygrove and Good Food Farm have the highest average,

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around 30%, and they also have a discernable difference in racial makeup. Community members receiving in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistant Program (SNAP) or food stamps is correlates to poverty levels in the city. Figure 4 represents the percentage of households receiving SNAP benefits in New Orleans, and the selected sites. Hollygrove, the Sankofa Vegetable Farm, and Good Food Farm all have percentages similar to the city average, around 20%. The Sankofa Market and Crescent City Downtown locations have about 15% of households receiving these benefits, while the remaining Crescent City locations have about 5% of households receiving SNAP benefits and food stamps.

The data surrounding these selected tracts does not necessarily correlate to a more inclusive food system. However, due to the varied demographic and socioeconomic makeup of the communities surrounding the alternative food sites in New Orleans, these organizations have made food more accessible, allowing for more consumers to support their ventures, and creating an inclusive local food system.

Farm and Market Food Access Programs

As presented above and illustrated in Figures 2 through 4, the city of New Orleans has a large minority population along with about 20% of its residents living in poverty, with another 20% receiving SNAP benefits or food stamps. Farms and markets must make their food accessible to consumers out of the traditional affluent and white base to sustain their businesses. When markets and farms reach out to underrepresented communities in New Orleans, they also generate more demand within their respective neighborhoods. Crescent City Farmers Market has been in operation since 1995, and offers local and regional foods to New Orleans. The markets were designed as “a creative economic engine
that would channel the city’s unique heritage in music, food, and conviviality.”

While operating in predominantly white neighborhoods, Crescent City has developed innovative programs to create an inclusive environment. Crescent City received a grant for "$100,000 annually in the WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program,” which allows the market to create subsidized prices and attract low-income shoppers. The markets also use creative measures to ensure customers return to the market. The “MarketMatch” Program matches up to $20 in markets vouchers for purchases made with SNAP benefits. The program increased SNAP spending by 424%, and brought more low-income and minority customers to the market.

Sankofa Market began as a community development organization serving the Ninth Ward to address issues of food access and public health. It is the only fresh market in the neighborhood, and one of the few on the eastern side of New Orleans. The neighborhood surrounding the market has about 15% of households receiving SNAP benefits, which they can use to buy produce at the market (See Figure 4). Sankofa also began the “Veggie Power Dollars” program, which gives “Dollars,” or vouchers, for fruit and vegetables at community centers throughout the Ninth Ward. The Sankofa Vegetable Farm evolved into a “u-pick” operation that serves the immediate community, which has over 20% of households receiving SNAP benefits, while also providing produce for the market (See Figure 4). At Hollygrove, over 20% of households in the census tract receive food stamps and over 30%

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64 Winne, 44.
65 Ibid.
live below the poverty line, but the market prospers due to middle class customers coming to the market from all over the city (see Figures 3 and 4).69 Steps are being taken to create a more inclusive market, such as accepting food stamps, and the market has more low-income shoppers “than they did a year ago, and a lot more than two or three years ago.”70 Moreover, the market has begun to implement outreach programs to bring in more low-income customers including discounts for Hollygrove residents and purchases made with a Louisiana Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card.71 Programs aimed at low-income populations combat the traditional food system while creating an inclusive and diverse community surrounding alternative food practices. As New Orleans recovers and evolves, the role of urban agriculture becomes increasingly important into creating a shift in the city’s food culture.

The presence of a vibrant local food system with programs aimed at creating a wide-ranging consumer base can generate strong demand for locally grown food throughout New Orleans. While still a newer phenomenon in the city, urban agriculture has been growing steadily in post-Katrina New Orleans. By locating in diverse neighborhoods throughout the city, and creating community outreach programs, the alternative food spaces in New Orleans become more inclusive, while also growing the movement. The Sankofa Market, located at the Dr. Charles Drew Elementary School in the Upper Ninth Ward, can market to young students and their parents. Likewise, the Sankofa Farm in the Lower Ninth Ward may inspire residents to clean up their yard, and perhaps even create a garden of their own. Although the alternative food movement may have a predominantly

69 Fry, interview.
70 Ibid.
white, middle-class following in New Orleans, more and more proactive steps are being taken to create an inclusive and just food system.

As food access programs reach more people within the city, the demand for local food slowly increases, and enables market expansion resulting in more upstart farmers and ancillary projects around urban agriculture. In addressing the food deserts throughout the city, farms, gardens, and markets increase the viability of urban agriculture in New Orleans. Citywide recognition of New Orleans’ farms and gardens has created economic and educational opportunities that have the potential to expand the alternative food movement to new heights within the city.
Figure 4: Percentage of Households receiving SNAP Benefits/Food Stamps in New Orleans and Specific Tracts (2006-2010)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010 American Community Survey.
Figure constructed by Roy Burton.
Growing the Local Economy

Small farms and gardens are historical sites of subsistent agricultural production. Built around the household, the gardens and farms would provide first for family consumption, and then excess goods were taken to the market. James McWilliams describes gardening in colonial New England “as important as building the roof over a family’s head.”\(^2\) He continues, “A garden had to be properly situated, adorned, and arranged in order to maximize its productivity.”\(^3\) Kitchen gardens sustained families while cash crops were grown for trade. In the Carolinas, slaves used their time in the field to grow food of their own, and perhaps exercise some economic agency. Slaves were charged with growing food for themselves as well as their masters, and “when the stars aligned and the crops did especially well, slaves found themselves in a position to bargain.”\(^4\) Whether for household production or entrepreneurial ventures, gardening occupies an important place in American history.

At the turn of the 20\(^{th}\) century, charitable organizations utilized gardens to create new employment opportunities in cities faced with large numbers of unemployed day laborers. These organizations devised work programs around agriculture to address unemployment and vacant lots that had gone undeveloped. Following an economic

\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^4\) Ibid., 162.
downturn in 1893, Detroit implemented a program that gave laborers vacant lots cultivation where they “used their produce for both home consumption and cash sales.” The first year of the program yielded an estimated “$14,000 worth of produce” and the concept began to spread throughout cities in the United States. Through the advent of gardening programs, cities could address blight that resulted from depression, and pull families and individuals out of poverty. However, as prosperity returned, a majority of participants would leave the programs and “leave the city for the country or suburbs, where, through their own resources, they would acquire their own land.”

During the World Wars, household and community gardens sprang up across the country as families and cities attempted to relieve the loss of foodstuffs to the war efforts. In 1918, New Orleans produced an estimated $125,000 in crops in gardens throughout the city. During World War II, the U.S. government took about 25% of the food produced in the United States for the war effort, and heavily marketed Victory Gardens to the public. By 1945, the government set a goal to have 20,000,000 gardens operating throughout the country to aid in the post-war rebuilding. Although urban gardens and farms lost mainstream notoriety after World War II, the popularity and effectiveness of these gardens helped grow almost 40% of the United States’ food supply during the war. Through patriotic marketing, the backyard garden became a cultural icon, signifying self-reliance and community solidarity.

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75 Lawson, 25.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid., 50.
79 Lawson, 200.
Small gardens and farms provide food for families as well as primary or secondary incomes sources for some. Although agriculture is not a panacea for all urban economic woes, the entrepreneurial aspect of these gardens allows for unparalleled expansion. As the demand for locally sourced produce increases in the city, the alternative food movement can breed new businesses and jobs.

Entrepreneurial Gardening

Alternative food organizations in New Orleans take advantage of the middle and upper class demands for local food to create new job opportunities around the city in the urban agriculture industry. Thomas A. Lyson writes, “Urban gardens can teach entrepreneurial skills and spawn and sustain a broad range of new employment skills.” The New Orleans Food and Farm Network adopted this ideal and implemented job training into its programming. The New Urban Farmer training program takes a holistic approach:

If urban farming is to grow in NOLA, aspiring and novice farmers need to be trained to become our future farmers. They require both classroom and hands-on training on comprehensive business planning raging from goal setting to marketing to the legal aspects of a running a farm business, as well as farmer-to-farmer education. To facilitate this process, NOFFN and partners are initiating a New & Beginning Urban Farmer Training Program that will provide training as well as linking Apprentice Farmers both formally and informally with more experienced Mentor Farmers.

The systematic education of new farmers is imperative for creating a network of urban gardens and farms that can benefit from a large knowledge base and work together to suit the demand of the surrounding communities. Because cities “attract smart people and enable them to work collaboratively,” agriculture in New Orleans can develop from

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81 Lyson, 96.
within the city, benefiting from an extensive support network and formal and informal education.\textsuperscript{83} The NOFFN, while creating a network of urban gardeners and farmers, translates backyard growing and vacant lot cultivation into viable economic opportunities. Farmers, young and old, have the opportunity to bring food they have produced to markets and local restaurants, all while providing their households with a source of food. Cory Ashby of Good Food Farm states clearly, “We are creating economic opportunities by growing food.”\textsuperscript{84} As the farming network spreads through the city, an economy grows around it, creating a need to build up a new generation of farmers that continue the work done by development organizations.

Urban agriculture has a historical and mutually beneficial connection with education. At the turn of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, “child development theories of the day criticized the classroom format as inhibiting children’s natural inquisitiveness” and reformers began to incorporate gardening into curriculum.\textsuperscript{85} More recently, Alice Waters championed the Edible Schoolyard program, which has gone from Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School in Berkeley, California to schools throughout the United States including five FirstLine public charter schools in New Orleans.\textsuperscript{86} Directors of the New Jersey Urban Ecology Program, Michael W. Hamm and Monique Baron write, “Many urban youth are denied access to educational or practical experience in growing food, as well as being denied an

\textsuperscript{84} Corey Ashby, interview with author, New Orleans, LA, January 31, 2013.
\textsuperscript{85} Lawson, 57.
appreciation of local ecosystems.” Extracurricular programs are developing alongside school curriculums to provide further outlets for students to explore urban agriculture, and grow the next generation of urban farmers. The Grow Dat Youth Farm seeks do to just that. Their mission statement reads:

The Mission of the Grow Dat Youth Farm is to nurture a diverse group of young leaders through the meaningful work of growing food. On our farm we work collaboratively to produce healthy food for local residents and to inspire youth and adults to create personal, social and environmental change in their own communities. Grow Dat is a place where people from different backgrounds and disciplines come together in research and practice to support public health, local economies and a sustainable food system in South Louisiana.

Organized on a 4-acre site in New Orleans’ City Park, the farm employs students from the city in a 19-week internship program. The farm recruits “a mix of students: 20% of whom have already demonstrated leadership skills inside or outside of school, 20% of whom are at-risk of poor performance at school, and 60% of whom are students that are neither excelling nor failing at school.” Jabari Brown, the Volunteer and Educational specialist at Grow Dat, sees the farm impacting the city in three ways, “teaching our youth and neighbors how to grow and cook food, employing our youth, and providing fresh produce to our city.” Students, while being taught to grow and cook food, are also given lessons in economics, community health, and team building. As students gain job training, they leave the program with the ability to reach out to their respective communities, and

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91 Jabari Brow, e-mail message to author, March 19, 2013.
92 “Grow Dat Program,” accessed April 1, 2013.
start agriculture ventures of their own. Likewise, the Sanfoka Community Development Corporation began the Health, Education, Agriculture, and Leadership (HEAL) Program to build student leaders that participate in an internship program that, along with farming, aims to send students back to their communities with an in-depth knowledge of nutrition and community health initiatives. As more people, both young and old, turn to urban agriculture, the local economy can expand and necessitate the expansion of the industry and enable secondary jobs within the local food system to be created.

Urban agriculture’s primary goal is to produce food. Whether for a single household, a community, or sale in the market, growing food is the end goal of New Orleans farmers and gardeners. A farm or garden can quickly adopt an entrepreneurial spirit by providing niche vegetables for restaurants, or breeding heirloom chickens. The alternative food movement brings a local context to urban gardening and farming which create local and regional trade networks that ameliorate the local economy. Since food production builds the local economy, it can also develop ancillary jobs. By producing food, opportunities beyond consumption and market sales are derived from a creative, production driven economy. UNOLA Green Roots, an urban garden development organization, has expanded to include a composting and community garden construction element that has created more jobs around the alternative food movement. Inevitably, food production leads to an entrepreneurial economy that can produce a wide array of employment opportunities or a source of income, while also moving towards creating a community that is no longer reliant on large grocery stores and agribusiness for food sources. Nicholas Krebill believes that,
"we can enable people to start jobs in growing food, compost jobs, all these potential local industries that can start... and create jobs.”93

Food hubs are one of the most visible results of the demand for locally and regionally produced food. A food hub is defined as a “business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand.”94 These locations become job incubators in distribution, marketing, and retail. As more consumers and producers are attracted to the space, the need for jobs increase. At a recent visit to the Hollygrove Market and Farm, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan cited how “food hubs can offer services such as cold storage, processing, and transportation” along with direct marketing of produce.”95 The possibility for job creation is vast. Green For All, an organization focusing on “green,” or environmentally sustainable, jobs points to production, processing, distribution, retail, and waste as sectors for substantial economic growth. When the food system changes, there is an “opportunity for holistic community economic development that... promotes the health of people and the environment.”96 “The goal of a community food system is to maximize sustainable outcomes in every way—environmental, social, and economic—“ to create a self-reliant community.97

93 Krebill, interview.
96 Green for All, Green Jobs in a Sustainable Food System (2010), 3.
97 Ibid., 8.
Self-Reliance and Urban Agriculture

Will Allen, founder of Growing Power in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is a firm believer in self-reliance. His work in urban agriculture earned him a Macarthur Genius Fellowship and educates others in farming and gardening. He recalls, “The educator and agriculturalist George Washington Carver has long served as an inspiration to me. Much of Carver’s life was devoted to the cause of increasing the self-sufficiency of black farmers.”98 Urban gardens and farms can develop from entrepreneurial ventures, or a desire to provide to food for a household. Organizations like Growing Power and NOFFN promote self-sufficiency to households, communities, and entrepreneurs. Families can supplement their “food budgets by $500 to $1200 worth of produce annually” with consistent access to urban gardens or farms.99 Allen remarks, “Not least, planting a garden in your yard can provide the self-respect of being a little more self-sufficient.”100 After the physical and emotional damage of Hurricane Katrina, these created spaces can be vital to the reasserting notions of community within the city, and rebuilding networks of self-reliant neighborhoods.

The New Orleans Vietnamese population arrived in the city in the 1970s and settled in the Versailles community, in New Orleans East.101 The elderly population of the community quickly turned to growing traditional Vietnamese crops; in one family, the grandmother took to gardening “from the moment she moved in, she began planting

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99 Green for All, 13.
100 Will Allen, 249.
101 Airriess and Clawson, 16.
traditional herbs and vegetables, many from seeds sent from Vietnam.”102 The older population of the community grows these crops as a “purposeful strategy to maintain traditional dietary habits by that segment of the enclave population least able to adjust to popular American food tastes.”103

Retaining cultural traditions is at the core of the gardens in the Vietnamese neighborhood, but they quickly turned into sites of economic self-sufficiency in the community. “Because they are otherwise economically redundant and more welfare-dependent than are the younger segments of the enclave community, gardening increases their sense of economic self-worth.”104 The neighborhood is built around the Catholic Mary Queen of Vietnam Church, and following Hurricane Katrina, the clergy members actively sought to preserve the gardening tradition of the Vietnamese population, while rebuilding a historically self-reliant community.

Rhetoric versus Reality

On her visit to Hollygrove, Deputy Secretary Merrigan remarked, “The country is undergoing a huge farmer transition. The average age of farmers is near 60, and a third are over 65.” To alleviate the capital needed in farming she sees that “the way to do it is have a high value crop on a small acreage” while marketing directly to consumers. This system of small farming can create “an economy viable for young people.”105

As auxiliary businesses develop around local and regional food systems, and food hubs are created, organizations assume that a sustainable economy will arise. The steps

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103 Airriess and Clawson, 20.
104 Ibid.
being taken in New Orleans through focused youth education have the potential to create a new generation of farmers. However, food production is a volatile market. While sustained by consistent demand, it remains dependent on inconsistent variables such as weather or crop failures. Macon Fry is sure to illustrate, “There is very little money in growing vegetables. You do it because you love doing it, but you have to make something.”106 The economic insecurity of farming does not guarantee that students will rush to jobs in the agricultural sector.

Likewise, as the market for urban agriculture expands in New Orleans it has the potential to attract corporate development. Thomas Lyson writes, “Industrial agriculture as opposed to civic agriculture, is geared toward producing relatively standardized, uniform, and homogenous commodities that can be freely traded in the global marketplace.”107 But industrial agriculture can also serve a local economy, but they can also push out small operations, as they create modernized, large farms. Currently in Detroit, local businessman, John Hantz, purchased 140 acres of vacant lots owned by the city on which at least 15,000 trees are to be planted.108 The land was met with uproar from the urban farming communities in Detroit, with many activists referring to the project as a land grab.109 Although it is not a grassroots project, the Hantz Woodlands has the potential to create the same economic opportunities as small farms do. Barring economic growth in a city that could benefit from it illustrates the complex nature of economic development surrounding urban agriculture.

106 Fry, interview.
107 Lyson, 72.
Self-reliance is a highly touted result of the urban agriculture movement, but it has meanings that differentiate among groups. Allen sees self-reliance stemming from George Washington Carver, who taught at Tuskegee under Booker T. Washington. The goal of these educators was to create an economically productive and independent black citizenry through hard work and an “up from your own bootstraps” mentality. In an article titled “Self-Reliance,” Washington expressed dismay over seeing a young woman, recently returned from boarding school, playing a piano. He writes, “Despite the fact that her parents were living in a rented cabin, eating poorly cooked food, surrounded with poverty, and having almost none of the conveniences of life, she had persuaded them to rent a piano for four or five dollars per month.” Washington saw an “atmosphere of business, Christian influence, and a spirit of self-help” as the proper way to elevate his own status, and “realize what it meant to be a man instead of a piece of property.” By discounting artistic and creative development, he sees the only way to become truly free is to provide for oneself in the market economy by offering a service to others. Moreover, the ideas of self-help in the black community assume that people can simply get out of a dire situation with hard work. Someone working two jobs, and being able to purchase food at Wal-Mart may also feel self-reliant.

While many outcomes are plausible for the prevalence of urban agriculture in New Orleans, they all work to build communities. Brennan Dougherty at Good Food Farms states, “In urban agriculture its different... its having a different sense of obligation. You have to evaluate what you’re doing in a different way.” The educational programs and

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111 Ibid.
economic development surrounding New Orleans’ farms and gardens would be impossible without relationships being forged throughout the city. Urban agriculture may never create a self-sustaining city with food production, but it can generate economic growth in neighborhoods that were hit hard by Hurricane Katrina. As these locations of the alternative food movement have developed in minority and low-income communities, organizations have promoted economic growth while creating an increasingly diverse community around local food and promoting networks of social and economic bonds throughout the city. The social capital developed around sites of urban agriculture bonds communities is fundamental to the alternative food movement in New Orleans. Whether between neighbors, or a chef and a farmer, the connections made in the city create a more cohesive and vibrant population.
Growing Social Capital in the Big Easy

New Orleans was permanently altered in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Houses, businesses, and landmarks were wiped from the landscape. Some residents who made it out of the storm returned to their homes, while some left the city entirely, leaving behind the communities they lived in. After the storm, the evacuees who returned to the city faced the task of rebuilding the landscape and collective identities of these communities and neighborhoods. But as the water covering the city retreated, corporations, non-profit organizations, volunteer groups, and community activists undertook a large portion of the rebuilding process. Government funded rebuilding efforts were slated for the state, but the Bush administration believed that “lasting recovery come not with federal help but through entrepreneurship and private enterprise.”\textsuperscript{113} Thus, federally funded, city and state government rebuilding and relief efforts were replaced by an amalgamation of corporate and grassroots interests. Within this context, urban agriculture could be seen as a response of these seemingly incongruous actors working in the city. Political scientist Cedric Johnson writes, “The longer-term recovery effort has been characterized by privatization carried out through more benevolent actors—grassroots organizations, neighborhood associations, and charitable groups like Phoenix of New Orleans, Catholic charities, Contemplatives in Action, Habitat for Humanity, and many

The current state of urban farms and community gardens in New Orleans illustrate the dichotomy between economic development and community development. Some organizations, such as NOLA Green Roots and Hollygrove, see the economic opportunities in small gardens and farms, but have preceded community work with establishing their businesses. On the other end of the spectrum, the Backyard Gardener’s Network seeks to rebuild the social ties that were lost in the storm. As seen in Figures 2 and 3, the alternative food movement serves both low-income and minority communities, while serving to rebuild the social networks within these neighborhoods.

Contested Space

When redevelopment efforts began, the city’s elites dreamed of a “radically different New Orleans.” As evacuees attempted to return to their homes, “unvarnished expressions of antiblack and antipoor sentiment and plans for gentrification were given an air respectability as various social scientists and planning technocrats entered the public conversation.” Previously mentioned in Chapter 1, the BNOBC’s plans to reduce city’s footprint was met with resistance from the community, and although it was sensible to move the centers of the city on higher ground to prevent further flooding, Mayor Ray Nagin, going with public resentment and eyeing his own political aspirations stated, “I have confidence that our citizens can decide intelligently for themselves where they want to build, once presented with the facts.” Cedric Johnson points out that this decision

116 Ibid., 191.
117 Ibid., 198.
“ensured that those very neighborhoods, with the greatest damage and most economically and politically marginal residents would face a steep uphill climb toward reconstructing their lives and communities.”

Communities struggled to rebuild, as “almost overnight, New Orleans became a full-scale neoliberal experiment.” These experiments resulted in spaces throughout the city that had been transformed by outside forces. I refer to these developments as “contested space,” as they were acquired by non-profit organizations and real estate developers, and may in fact be regarded as unconstructive in the surrounding community. Author Barbara Allen points to the work done in the Holy Cross neighborhood of the Lower Ninth Ward, and how “green” corporations, employing rhetoric of environmental justice, were able to transform the rebuilding efforts into a laboratory for sustainable housing practices. By providing building materials and “linking social and environmental harms,” members of the Holy Cross community readily adopted new building practices and corporate sponsorships to rebuild their homes. But as these new homes are built, they are changing the landscape of the neighborhood. In their study of place attachment and community planning, psychologists Lynne C. Manzo and Douglas D. Perkins argue, “proposed development projects can be perceived by some community members as a threat to place attachments because they will change the physical fabric of the neighborhood.” As these new spaces are created in the community, it is vital for the organizations behind them to continue community outreach. Mazno and Perkins add:

118 Johnson, 198.
120 Barbara Allen, 234.
For some, proposed changes to the neighborhood signified an erasure of their particular cultural history and identity, and they consequently resisted the neighborhood plan. However, once these place meanings were acknowledged and discussed, community leaders and planners made more concerted efforts to include the concerns of the different stakeholders and incorporate strategies that acknowledged those attachments.\footnote{122}{Manzo and Perkins, 338.}

Community development strategies must go hand in hand with addressing the desires of the neighborhood. When public or private gardens are constructed on vacant lots, there is little discussion on behalf of the gardeners of the site they are replacing. To a community member, however, it may be replacing a lot owned by a family member or an important landmark in the community. Cedric Johnson writes, “Because of its geographic isolation and decades of municipal neglect, the Lower Ninth Ward developed a vibrant neighborhood culture of mutual aid and self-sufficiency.”\footnote{123}{Johnson, 201.} Development organizations, while attempting to aid the Lower Ninth Ward, can be viewed as intruders, especially in a location characterized by its autonomy. Consequently, the organization will be ineffective in a neighborhood they hope to serve. But, “if place attachments can be used to foster a partnership approach as different parties find common interest in their health and their neighborhood.”\footnote{124}{Manzo and Perkins, 340.}

No matter how altruistic the venture, contested spaces such as gardens, farms may be accepted with open arms within the community they are attempting to serve. Neighborhood organizations must build or re-establish social ties within the disaster community to move forward with creating effective communal spaces. By building social capital around community gardens, urban agriculture has the opportunity to flourish in New Orleans and reaffirm social bonds within the community context.
Social Capital in Community Gardens

In his landmark 1946 study, anthropologist Walter Rochs Goldschmidt, using two rural farming communities in central California, examined the impact of large versus small farm operations on the social and economic lives of the communities. Arvin, located outside of Bakersfield, was made up of predominantly large-scale farm operations, while Dinuba, located in Tulare County, was a small farm community. Goldschmidt noted that Dinuba had better living conditions, more religious and social institutions, more opportunities offered to the younger portion of the population, and less social segregation. He points out that Arvin had a higher degree of tenancy on farms, more absentee ownership, and a more temporary, migrant labor force. Dinuba was an incorporated community with a local government, “indicative of the spirit and motivation of the community.” He further asserts that local government creates a “spirit of community solidarity,” building social capital amongst community members. The entrepreneurial spirit in Dinuba kept the economy afloat while strengthening the local businesses. In effect, by creating a small, self-supportive township, Dinuba built communal bonds that also bolstered the economic well being of the city.125 Dinuba was able to construct and retain social capital within a community based on small farming industries. Social capital is vital to promoting urban agriculture in New Orleans, and must drive the missions of the organizations that have sought to reinvigorate the city with small farm and garden operations.

Political Scientist Robert Putnam defines social capital as “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise

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from them.” Putnam cites many arenas in which social capital is vital in a highly functioning and interconnected society. Community gardens and urban farming programs have a considerable capacity to rebuild the social frameworks within New Orleans while ameliorating the physical and economic landscape of the city, and improving the lives of its citizens.

Jenga Mwendo, a native to the Lower Ninth Ward, returned to New Orleans from in 2007 to help rebuild her childhood community. Working along side the elderly portion of the neighborhood, Mwendo heard stories of the history of backyard gardening in the Lower Ninth, and was inspired to turn to gardening “as a means to build community.” Instead of viewing gardens as an umbrella solution to the complex dilemmas facing the community, Mwendo recognizes the importance of recreating the social ties surrounding gardens. In his study on social capital in community gardens, leisure scientist Troy D. Glover writes, “As a source of social capital, [the garden] strengthened social ties and facilitated further social connections among neighbors, which in some cases led to socializing that extended beyond the garden and encouraged residents to watch out for one another.”

Community involvement in gardening leads to a greater degree of neighborhood connectedness and “collective activity.”

Mwendo began her first efforts to bring gardening back to the Lower Ninth Ward by revitalizing the Ernst Garden in 2007, a small community plot owned by Parkway

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130 Ibid., 159.
Partners. What began as a small project to rebuild the patch evolved into a garden committee and regular meetings, and other projects Mwendo “started doing around urban agriculture in the Lower Ninth Ward.”

The Backyard Gardeners Network was developed by Mwendo to formalize the growing group of community farmers in the Lower Ninth and provide support for new gardeners in the neighborhood. She states, “The idea was to find ways to link experienced gardeners with inexperienced gardeners and to link gardeners with resources around the city.” Troy Glover argues that the network surrounding the gardens is “an intangible source of social capital produced when residents joined together to build a community garden that presumably benefited each member of the group directly, as well as other non-participating residents of the neighborhood indirectly.” Community spaces and networks that build social capital lead to a greater feeling place attachment. Putnam argues, “The best evidence available on changing levels of neighborhood connectedness suggests that most

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132 Crossfield, 2011.
133 Ibid.
134 Glover, 156.
Americans are less embedded in their neighborhood than they were a generation ago.”135 In her mission to improve the Lower Ninth Ward, Jenga Mwendo sees the “gardens as opportunities to come together, work together, and do things that are going to be beneficial for [the] neighborhood.”136 She continues, “We need to find ways to build social capital... to sort of fortify ourselves as individuals and as a community.”137 Although gardens cannot single-handedly revive a neighborhood, the ripple effect of community building and redeveloping social ties can positively influence the rest of the neighborhood. Community gardening is so vital to the Lower Ninth Ward “precisely because poor people (by definition) have little economic capital and face formidable obstacle in acquiring human capital (that is, education), social capital is disproportionately important to their welfare.”138 Small community gardens do not produce enough food to feed New Orleans, but they can act as a catalyst in building social capital in blighted and distressed neighborhoods.

In the New Orleans East, also know as Village de L'Est, the Vietnamese community was able to translate the social capital built prior to Hurricane Katrina around a close-knit gardening and religious neighborhood into a cohesive rebuilding effort. A study conducted by Karen Leong, Christopher Airriess, Wei Li, Angela Chia-Chen Chen, and Verna Keith states, “Because migration [to America] occurred within the past three generations and under the conditions of war, the community has sustained strong social networks that operated during the refugee and migration experience as well as confidence in the efficacy

135 Putnam, 312.
136 Crossfield, 2011.
137 Ibid.
138 Putnam, 318.
of those networks.” As Vietnamese immigrants came to New Orleans, they were concentrated in Village de L’Est, and as mentioned in Chapter 3, which is characterized by a large Catholic and gardening community. “The preexisting leadership structure [around the church] was one of the most important community resources in the rebuilding process,” in which “the priest serves as the primary leader not only of religious life, but also the parish community.” Robert Putnam stresses, “Faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America.” The Catholic leadership, along with strong community ties, allowed for a rapid response in bringing neighbors back to the village after Katrina, and in so doing was listed “among the top seventeen neighborhoods that will receive further assistance as a result of the recognized high return and rebuilding rates.”

Although the community was quick to return to New Orleans, the ecological damage impaired the revival of the vibrant gardening community in Village de L’Est. My Tran, the youngest daughter of Vietnamese family states, “Since Katrina, we have found that the ground here is not so fertile.” The cultural and social ties to gardening in the community evolved into the planning of the Viet Village Urban Farm, which would create a shared space where both older and younger gardeners can continue the tradition of community gardening. Gardens once dotted the backyards and vacant lots around the levees around New Orleans East, but rather than retain these spaces, Reverend Vien The Nguyen believes, “We would be better off having [the areas around the levees] become green space, with

140 Ibid, 775-776.
141 Putnam, 66.
143 Peck, 2008.
walking paths and trees.”\textsuperscript{144} Viet Village would allow for gardeners to grow vegetables for their families and prepare some for market in a controlled environment, rather than gamble on possible flooding or contaminated soil. Sadly, the plans to go forward with the revolutionary urban farm were stymied by excessive costs, and a separation between original desires of the community and moving into more market production.\textsuperscript{145} Allison Truitt writes, “The Viet Village Urban Farm, which was a community garden that was later expanded to connect residents to the corporate foodworld of New Orleans and promote sustainability... ultimately proposed a very different vision of sociality in the neighborhood.”\textsuperscript{146} Thus, the community aspect of the farm was transformed into what Barbara Allen refers to as another “neoliberal experiment.”\textsuperscript{147} However, the strong social network in the Vietnamese community has been able to leverage its collective power in the city to “forge multiracial cooperation in the rebuilding [process]”.\textsuperscript{148} Social capital created around a network of gardeners without a formal setting retains the power to positively affect the community, outside of a specific racial group. Truitt writes, “Visitors and residents still enjoy the early morning Saturday market where elderly Vietnamese lay out greens and herbs to sell to their neighbors.”\textsuperscript{149} Continuity in the gardening community of New Orleans and the rebuilding of that in the Lower Ninth Ward illustrate important points in developing successful agriculture programs in New Orleans.

Success in gardening programs is measured in a variety of ways. Hollygrove Market and Farm operates as business that delivers produce to New Orleans. Its popularity as a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{144} Peck, 2008.
\item \textsuperscript{146} Truitt, 334.
\item \textsuperscript{147} Barbara Allen, 225.
\item \textsuperscript{148} Leong, et al., 778.
\item \textsuperscript{149} Truitt, 334.
\end{itemize}
consumer destination has enabled the market to expand its producer list to include both urban farmers in New Orleans, as well as growers in rural Louisiana and Mississippi. Although a significant community presence is still lacking, the niche role the organization occupies as a food hub is vital to local and regional food producers and consumers. The network of commerce that is derived between food producers, distributors and consumers at Hollygrove stimulates social capital. And as Robert Putnam argues, “Cooperation among economic actors might be a better engine of growth than free-market competition.”\(^{150}\) The economic growth at Hollygrove led to expanded programming to include educational programming, in hopes of creating more community involvement at the farm. But, the true strength in farming education at Hollygrove comes from within the organizations. Macon Fry believes, “They are growing growers in a real sense here... In a small city like New Orleans, you could say that’s a tiny impact, but if I have three or four interns, and two of them start market gardens... that’s a visible, commendable impact.”\(^{151}\) The group of farmers with experience at Hollygrove take their knowledge to other projects throughout the city. Largely successful in both food distribution and creating a network of knowledgeable farmers, is Hollygrove required to extend community outreach? As the Viet Village Urban Farm illustrates, it is crucial that programs are not created that stray from the successes of the past.

Rather than providing a myriad of services to the city, urban farms and gardens can operate at a greater efficiency and aid in the redevelopment of New Orleans. Good Food Farm in the Treme neighborhood currently sells vegetables to local restaurants, and are

\(^{150}\) Putnam, 323.

\(^{151}\) Fry, interview.
available for purchase at Hollygrove. The farm’s mission statement is broad, and expresses the complex nature of urban agriculture and community outreach:

All in all, we’re about food sovereignty, sustainability, solidarity economies, participatory democracy and all kinds of Irresistible Deliciousness. On the ground level, that looks like growing food, working with other growers, and feeding people. We’re excited to keep on growing food and working with others to figure out what role urban [agriculture] and cooperative development can play in making the world a better place.152

In an interview with Brennan Dougherty, she expressed how the farm continually faces internal questions of what the overall goal should be other than growing produce. “We struggled with that a lot here in the past six months. What we do is not irresponsible…it’s the existential question of the urban farmer: what is our purpose?”153 Founded in 2011, the small plot hosted a summer program in 2012 for local students, while also providing Brennan and fellow farmer, Corey Ashby, with a steady stream of income.154 Inevitably, they are faced with the decision of devoting more time to grow market vegetables, or relying on grant funding to pursue more educational endeavors. Good Food Farm is part of a network of growers and restaurateurs that interact and help build a community of their own, although apart from the larger Treme neighborhood, still creates vital social and economic ties in the city. Dougherty believes urban farmers, as opposed to their rural counterparts, have an obligation to the communities that surround them.155 Even as they contribute to the local economy and create social capital among the service industry that is vital to the city, the farmers see the dichotomy of either serving the community where they farm or the larger economic prosperity of local food systems.

152 Good Food Farm’s Facebook page, accessed April 10, 2013, https://www.facebook.com/GoodFoodNOLA.
153 Dougherty, interview.
154 See Good Food Farm’s Facebook page and Ashby, interview.
155 Dougherty, interview.
The Garden Network

Examining the existing community and food production organizations in New Orleans, it is clear that as the urban agricultural movement was popularized in the city, these groups have attempted to grow with it. But operations that reach a wide array of people in different ways are not always the most successful. Likewise, creating a viable, community-wide gardening system to result in an alternate economy is far from happening, if not impossible. However, budding interest in gardening, whether for community purposes or entrepreneurial gain, augments the network of knowledge and social ties throughout the city. As the urban food movement evolves in New Orleans, upstart farm and garden programs must evolve into niche operations that demonstrate a focused development plan.

Just as not all community gardens produce as an abundance of food to be brought to a local farmers market, not all market gardens can be adopted for grassroots community movements. Although community focused organizations, such as the Backyard Gardener’s Network, with both geographic and cooperative specifications are recognized for their propensity to build social capital, urban agriculture in a commercial sense build social networks to generate local resources and mobilize the local economy. “The number of people that are touched [by urban agriculture] grows like a plant,” says Macon Fry, “You don’t start by planting your whole field; you start by planting a bed. I think the programs that you see germinating like this are really going to have a big impact [on the city].”¹⁵⁶

Putnam argues that social capital is generated in a multitude of ways through community connectedness and social interactions, a final result being a happy and healthy

¹⁵⁶ Fry, interview.
citizenry with stakes in a participatory democracy.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, farm or garden success should not be measured in the food they produce or even the community they serve, but rather the extensive social and economic networks that are developed around them. As the mainstream food system creates large, technologically advanced operations that separate consumers from producers, it also severs bounds of social capital that are vital to building communities. The rebirth of urban agriculture in New Orleans comes at a critical time in the development of the community and national food systems, in which large-scale food production is being reimagined to address both local and ecological concerns.

¹⁵⁷ See Putnam, chapter 21.
-Conclusion-
The Future of Urban Agriculture in New Orleans

The New Orleans urban food movement is largely successful in the connections it has built between local gardeners, urban farmers, regional producers, and distributors in diverse manners. Programs and operations, both large and small, adapt to the changing consumer demands or working to create more inclusive communal spaces. But as these were taking hold in the city, technologies were moving ahead, and reimagining urban farms, not as small plots tucked into the city, but rather large hydroponic systems that occupy warehouses or rooftops and can produce large quantities of food in controlled environments. A study conducted by city planners Sharanbir Grewal and Parwinder Grewal found that hydroponic yields were more about 3 times greater than that of intensive urban farming, while using about threes times as less land.\footnote{Sharanbir S. Grewal and Parwinder S. Grewal, “Can cities become self-reliant in food?” Cities 29 (2012): 1-11.} Although highly specialized and not built for a community experience, hydroponic systems have the ability to feed more people, while using less space. James McWilliams, author of Just Food: Where Locavores Get it Wrong and How We Can Truly Eat Responsibly, insists that “there are more productive, creative, and global ways [than localism] to think about the complicated problem of eating an ethical diet.”\footnote{James McWilliams, Just Food: Where Locavores Get it Wrong, and how we can Truly Eat Responsibly (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009), 3.}
On top of the Rouse’s Supermarket in downtown New Orleans is a hydroponic herb farm developed by the New Orleans based company, Vertifarms. “Parsley, basil and cilantro are among the herbs the company is growing to package and sell on the building’s ground floor.” Although it is a small operation, the transition from traditional farming methods to hydroponic systems is a very symbolic one. Produce is not only sold directly from producers to consumers, Rouse’s is also able to cut out distribution costs, lowering costs for consumers. Dickson Despommier’s landmark work, The Vertical Farm: Feeding the World in the 21st Century, outlines the manners in which large, greenhouse and hydroponic farms can produce more food in a controlled environment and alleviate environmental degradation. He writes, “For countries that routinely run out of food, it would mean no more starvation or malnutrition, and for those more fortunate ones it would mean less farming outdoors and more land available to return to nature.”

Vertifarms is not the only alternative growing organization in New Orleans. In 2012, the Recirculating Farms Coalition and New Orleans Food and Farm Network have joined to create a center dedicated to urban farming research while also furthering aquaponics systems—a water based method that incorporates fish into a circulating system, along with hydroponically grown plants—to the New Orleans community. The urban farming center and Vertifarms have the capacity to greatly alter the food system in New Orleans by creating a sustainable and inexpensive production cycle that yields more produce to

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address current concerns of food access and growing concerns over the future supply of food throughout the world.

However, these projects are not entirely suited to help build communities. Thusly, urban agriculture programs in New Orleans must choose between production and community-based ideologies. Laura J. Lawson argues that as gardens have become more and more permanent in the urban imaginary, they must have realistic ideas of what they can accomplish. She writes, “While a community garden may serve as a rallying point for community organizing, it cannot by itself solve the bigger problems facing urban communities.”\textsuperscript{163} Whether community gardens and urban agriculture will remain permanent fixtures in New Orleans remains a mystery. In the short term they provide a unique public space in which community members can interact and rebuild relationships broken by Hurricane Katrina, while cultivating new ones.

The resurgence of urban agriculture following Hurricane Katrina came along as part of the larger rebuilding process. Macon Fry describes the initial redevelopment of gardening programs in the form of beautification efforts, which evolved into a myriad of projects surrounding urban agriculture in New Orleans. From beautification, farms and gardens have turned into entrepreneurial ventures that bring food to traditionally underserved communities. The lack of equal access to locally grown food is a major critique of the alternative food movement, but in New Orleans that is not the case. Alternative food programs must cater to minority consumers as they make up a majority of the city’s population (See Figure 2). The local food movement in New Orleans brings together citizens from all neighborhoods of the city to grow, buy, and sell produce. These

\textsuperscript{163} Lawson, 293.
relationships, whether economic or social, rebuild the bonds that were severed after Hurricane Katrina. The resurgence of urban agriculture in New Orleans is not just a fad surrounding locally grown food, but rather the return of city’s vibrant community.


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