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Food sovereignty in US food movements: radical visions and neoliberal constraints

Alison Hope Alkon · Teresa Marie Mares

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Abstract Although the concept of food sovereignty is rooted in International Peasant Movements across the global south, activists have recently called for the adoption of this framework among low-income communities of color in the urban United States. This paper investigates on-the-ground processes through which food sovereignty articulates with the work of food justice and community food security activists in Oakland, California, and Seattle, Washington. In Oakland, we analyze a farmers market that seeks to connect black farmers to low-income consumers. In Seattle, we attend to the experiences of displaced immigrant farmers from Latin America and their efforts to address their food needs following migration. In both cases, we find that US based projects were constrained by broader forces of neoliberalism that remained unrecognized by local activists. In Oakland, despite a desire to create a local food system led by marginalized African Americans, emphasis on providing green jobs in agriculture led activists to take a market-based approach that kept local food out of the economic grasp of food-insecure neighborhood residents. In Seattle, the marginalization of the immense agroecological knowledge of Latino/an immigrant farmers rendered local food projects less inclusive and capable of transformative change. Taken together, these very different cases suggest that a shift towards food sovereignty necessitates a broad acknowledgement of and resistance to neoliberalism.

Keywords Food sovereignty · Food justice · Community food security · Social movements · Neoliberalism

A. H. Alkon (✉)
Department of Sociology, University of the Pacific, 3601 Pacific Avenue, Stockton, Sacramento, CA 95211, USA
e-mail: aalkon@pacific.edu

T. M. Mares
Department of Anthropology, University of Vermont, 509 Williams Hall, 72 University Place, Burlington, VT 05405, USA
e-mail: teresa.mares@uvm.edu

Introduction

Food sovereignty is the International Peasant Movement's demand that all people have the right "to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (Via Campesina 2009). In many parts of the global south, and in some regions of the global north, it has become a rallying cry against the ways that the global agribusiness system devastates the livelihoods of smallholder farmers. In contrast to a corporate food regime characterized by monopolistic control of production, governance by multilateral organizations and nation-states in the global north, vast reliance on chemical inputs, and increasing disparities in food access amid growing food production (Holt-Gimenez 2011; McMichael 2005), the food sovereignty approach prioritizes production for local and domestic markets, demands fair prices for food producers, and emphasizes community control over productive resources such as land, water, and seeds (Desmarais 2007; Bello 2008). Food sovereignty moves beyond a focus on food security—access to sufficient food—to advocate for communities' rights to produce for themselves rather than remain dependent on international commodities markets. Food sovereignty activists such as those affiliated with La Via Campesina, the International Peasants Movement, claim that commodities markets controlled by rich nations

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and subject to speculation cannot provide for the food needs of the poor in sustainable and self-reliant ways.

In the US, efforts to make the food system more socially just have cohered under the banners of community food security and food justice. Community food security combines an emphasis on sustainable, local production with an anti-hunger perspective, arguing that all communities should have access to safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate, and sustainably produced diets (Community Food Security Coalition n.d.). Examining access from the community rather than individual level invites more structural analyses and efforts to reform both the industrial food system and food movements. Building on this framework, the concept of food justice speaks to the multiple ways that racial and economic inequalities are embedded within the production, distribution, and consumption of food. Activists working from these two perspectives often create local food system alternatives such as farmers markets, CSA programs, urban farms, and cooperatively owned grocery stores in low-income communities of color. Additionally, food justice activists tend to emphasize the need for these projects to be created not only for, but by members of these communities.

Recently, Schiavoni (2009) has argued that there are striking parallels between global struggles for food sovereignty and US food justice activism. Despite their different origins—in the global north versus the global south, and in urban versus rural communities—these frameworks share common political objectives and desired material outcomes. In this paper we take Schiavoni's argument as our hypothesis, asking to what extent the food justice and community food security projects that have been the subject of our ongoing investigations embody a food sovereignty framework. Our cases are a West Oakland Farmers Market working to create grassroots economic development for low-income African Americans and a network of Seattle urban agriculture organizations that aim to include Latino/a immigrants. In asking about the ways these projects reflect a food sovereignty framework, we aim to (1) Understand the various constituencies that comprise the food movement, and (2) Speculate about the possibility of building a joined-up global movement that can challenge and transform food and agricultural systems.

Through our ethnographic work, we found many areas of overlap between these three approaches including support for local production, consumption, and control over food and agricultural systems. However, we also found that only a food sovereignty framework explicitly underscores direct opposition to the corporate food regime. Both of our US cases can easily coexist with industrial agriculture, and in some ways even serve to relieve the state of its duty to provide basic services. As such, they fail to challenge a neoliberal political economy in which services that were once the province of the state—such as the provision of food to those who cannot afford it—are increasingly relegated to voluntary and/or market-based mechanisms. These examples suggest that the community food security and food justice movements have not wholly embraced a food sovereignty approach that would explicitly oppose neoliberalism. Such opposition is paramount because neoliberalism constrains the ability of the West Oakland Farmers Market and Seattle's urban agriculture projects to provide fresh, healthy food to the low-income citizens they seek to serve.

Food movements and neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a political economic philosophy that asserts the primacy of the market in attending to human needs and wellbeing, and re-orients the state towards the facilitation of market mechanisms (Harvey 2005, p. 2). It represents a decisive break with the Keynesian approach to economics that characterized the political economy from the 1930s through the 1970s. The ultimate goal of a Keynesian approach was the avoidance of subsequent Great Depressions, and to that end, the market was regulated under a system of fixed exchange (Harvey 2005; Peck 2010). In contrast, neoliberalism's ostensible objective is increased efficiency, which its adherents believe is derived from the free flow of capital (Shah 2010). Some of neoliberalism's most important components include deregulation (the removal of laws restricting the ways that markets can function, or that favor one industry or product over another), trade liberalization (the removal of protectionist tariffs designed to foster local consumption), and the privatization of state enterprises and public services (Williamson 1990). Each of these practices results in the market's growing influence over various aspects of social life. Indeed, scholars and critics use the term neoliberal subjectivities to denote the ways that this market logic increasingly pervades individuals' and communities' everyday thoughts and practices as we embrace such ideals as individualism, efficiency, and self-help (Del Casino and Jocoy 2008; Stephenson 2003).

This wide variety of strategies and mechanisms leads Brenner et al. (2010, p. 182) to describe neoliberalism as a "'rascal concept,'—promiscuously pervasive, yet inconsistently defined, empirically imprecise, and frequently contested." Given this complexity, it is essential to highlight three aspects of neoliberalism that are most relevant to the food movements described in this paper.

Most fundamentally, the liberalization of trade for agricultural commodities was essential to the formation of a corporate food regime (McMichael 2005). Often mandated by international agencies such as the World Bank and

International Monetary Fund in exchange for loans (Balassa 1982), the removal of tariffs and state assistance that once protected farmers in the global south forced them to compete with subsidized exports from industrialized countries and land grabs by multinational corporations (Vorley 2001; Shiva 2005). This devastated the economic livelihoods of peasant farmers and also yielded the consolidation and corporatization of the food industry worldwide (Chossudovsky 2003; Smith et al. 1994).

Secondly, neoliberalism often refers to efforts to shift functions once held by the state to both the private sector and community groups (Rose 1999). These include market-based approaches to social problems like the privatization of prisons (Gold 1996), the delegation to subcontractors of essential public services such as the military (Krahmann 2010), and the use of public–private partnerships for development and infrastructure creation (Clarke 2004). However, privatization does not only refer to the private sector. An increasing array of community groups has cropped up in attempts to fill the holes left by a shrinking state. While these groups have often effectively served their communities, when they trumpet their abilities to do so, they implicitly argue that it is their role, and not the state's, to provide such services. US food movements attempt to address an array of social problems—environmental degradation, economic centralization, and poverty among them—through the creation of "alternative" markets for local, slow, and organic foods. In addition, community food and food justice organizations have taken responsibility for the provisioning of food in low-income and communities of color, which helps to justify the dismantling of entitlement programs.

Lastly, scholars have argued that neoliberalism creates subjectivities privileging not only the primacy of the market, but individual responsibility for our own wellbeing. Within US food movements, this refers to an emphasis on citizen empowerment, which, while of course beneficial in many ways, reinforces the notion that individuals and community groups are responsible for addressing problems that were not of their own making. Many US community food security and food justice organizations focus on developing support for local food entrepreneurs, positing such enterprises as key to the creation of a more sustainable and just food system. The belief that the market can address social problems is a key aspect of neoliberal subjectivities. In addition, Guthman (2011) argues that obsessions with individual health are a form of neoliberal subjectivity. Not only do they depict health as a measure of personal responsibility, but accepting this responsibility, rather than calling for a publicly accessible healthcare system, becomes the key to one's wellbeing.

In her introduction to a special issue on neoliberalism and food activism in California, Guthman writes "How it is that current arenas of activism around food and agriculture seem to produce and reproduce neoliberal forms and spaces of governance, at the same time they oppose neoliberalism writ large?" Many US food system reform efforts arose in opposition to the above-described trade liberalization, which has fostered the centralization of agricultural production and the emergence of the corporate food regime. However, the community food security and food justice frameworks tend to be quite sanguine toward other aspects of neoliberalism, particularly privatization and subjectivities. Only the food sovereignty approach remains focused on opposition to neoliberalism and transformation of the corporate food regime.

Food sovereignty

Opposition to trade liberalization is a core tenet of the food sovereignty approach. Supporters of food sovereignty advocate for the dismantling of the monopoly power of the corporate food regime in favor of democratically controlled, regionally based food systems in which peasant agriculture can create a greater distribution of wealth while relinking agriculture, citizenship, and nature (Wittman 2009). The concept is most commonly associated with La Via Campesina, the International Peasants Movement, though it is also advocated by other organizations including the International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty and the Global March for Women (Holt-Gimenez 2011).[1] Beyond recognizing food as a human right, La Via Campesina's seven principles of food sovereignty include agrarian reform (though it directly opposes the market-based initiatives of the World Bank), the protection of natural resources, the reorganization of food trade to prioritize local and domestic markets, social peace, democratic control, and opposition to the influence of multilateral institutions and speculative capital on the food system. La Via Campesina is particularly notable for its emphasis on the rights of women, indigenous people, and racial minorities.

While those working for food sovereignty operate across many scales and geographic locations, they tend to share an analysis highlighting the ways that the centralization and globalization of agriculture undermines the abilities of agrarian peoples to produce food for self-reliance. More specifically, they argue that the technological advancements of the green revolution established a capital-

[1] The above-described Community Food Security Coalition has recently instituted a food sovereignty prize, demonstrating both an evolving blurriness between food movements and a desire by the more reformist strains to embrace at least the discourse of the more radical ones. We maintain, however, that the food security movement works mainly to re-entrench the dominant food regime, food justice highlights racial inequalities within the global north, and food sovereignty holds the broadest and most transformative vision.

intensive agricultural system that devastated the livelihoods of smallholder farmers. This was compounded by World Bank and International Monetary Fund's policies that demand privatization, thereby preventing national governments from making these advancements available to small farmers. This trajectory, activists argue, has led to the increased consolidation of land ownership at the expense of small farmers and landless peoples. Responses to these circumstances have taken a wide variety of forms including programs promoting self-sufficient sustainable agriculture and agroecological principles (Holt-Gimenez 2006), advocacy for local and national policies designed to increase food access (Wittman 2009), and national and transnational social movements opposing the World Trade Organization and calling for an alternative system of global agriculture that benefits small farmers and landless peoples (Desmarais 2007; McMichael 2009). It is largely through such protests that activists have worked to transform the corporate food regime, rather than merely creating space to work alongside it. Indeed, protests led by Via Campesina are responsible, at least in part, for the collapse of the WTO agriculture ministerial talks during and since the 2003 meetings in Cancun.

Academics have been quite celebratory of food sovereignty. Anderson (2008) argues that it is an integral part of a food system that is not only local and community based, but also guarantees economic, social, and cultural rights. Others acknowledge that food sovereignty moves beyond the local food trend that is increasingly popular in the US and Europe to include "issues of social justice and equity that once again link the production and distribution of food at scales involving, but extending beyond the local" (Chappell and La Valle 2011, p. 16; see also Breitbach 2007). And perhaps most practically, Rosset (2008) promotes food sovereignty as an antidote to global food crises caused not by lack of food but by extensive and increasing economic speculation (Burch and Lawrence 2009).

Community food security and food justice

In contrast to food sovereignty activists' critiques of neoliberalism, Julie Guthman (2008) has presciently observed that many US food movements oppose neoliberalism in the abstract, but also reproduce it through their responses. The opposition she mentions focuses on the trade liberalization and undermining of smallholder agriculture described above. In contrast, she and others are critical of food movements primarily for their failure to resist the shifting of what were formerly state responsibilities to individuals and market mechanisms (and therefore positioning the market, rather than the state or civil society, as the locus of reform efforts) and for reproducing subjectivities applying the logic of the market to social life. The latter results in an emphasis on individual responsibility and self-help, even among progressive reform efforts (Pudup 2008; Allen and Guthman 2006).

Community food security combines a concern for environmentally sustainable production with the responses of anti-hunger advocates to decreasing public sector support (Gottlieb and Fisher 1996; Allen 1999). The Community Food Security Coalition, the most prominent organization deploying this discourse, defines their goal as " … a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice" (Community Food Security Coalition n.d.). Building on the community food security's approach to food access as a social, rather than individual concern, food justice activists emphasize the role of the built environment and longstanding patterns of racial and class-based inequalities in producing inadequate access to healthy food. Rather than posit the workings of capital in the food system as racially neutral, food justice activists argue that institutionally racist policies—such as discrimination against African American farmers by the US Department of Agriculture, the appropriation of Native American lands, and laws that deny labor rights to Latino/a immigrants—are responsible for high rates of food insecurity among communities of color (Alkon and Agyeman 2011).

The community food security movement has been criticized for reproducing neoliberalism in placing the economic needs of producers above food provisioning, for turning to market mechanisms to increase food access rather than demanding it of the state, and for promoting an ideology in which low-income people who cannot provide for their own food needs are viewed as less-than or in need of transformation. In her 2004 book *Together at the table,* Patricia Allen argues that the movement's decision to address hunger solely through the creation of markets is problematic. Community food security projects, she argues, are dependent on farmer participation to continue. For this reason, despite their laudable goal of increasing food access, they tend to prioritize farm owners' needs for profit over those of low-income consumers, and to not consider the needs of farmworkers. Allen also asserts that many community food security projects view themselves as more empowering alternatives to food assistance programs, which they often label as "dependence." In contrast to furthering this kind of neoliberal subjectivity, food could alternately be viewed as a *right* to be fulfilled by the state if the market fails. Supporting this position, Allen had written earlier that "(t)here will always be people who need food assistance as long as there is underemployment, unemployment, poverty-level wages, and inadequate pensions and access to food is based on ability to pay" (1999, p. 126). While little has been previously published about

neoliberalism and food justice, our findings below evidence a similar neoliberal subjectivity emphasizing self-help, entrepreneurialism, and personal transformation rather than guaranteeing entitlements.

In contrast to market mechanisms, some community food security and food justice activists attempt to improve the quality and health of public food programs such as school lunch. While acknowledging that the public context moves beyond many critiques, Allen and Guthman (2006) nonetheless found that farm-to-school programs reinforce the neoliberal ideal that addressing social problems is the domain of individuals and the market, rather than the state. They demonstrate how neoliberalism pervades farm-to-school programs' funding sources, labor practices, framings of academic performance and obesity, and emphasis on consumer choice. Additionally, they note that such programs have been far more successful in wealthier school districts.

Like farm-to-school programs, community gardening projects are a strategy common to both community food security and food justice projects. Such projects, according to Mary Beth Pudup (2008), can create neoliberal subjectivities, in that they are " … spaces in which gardening puts individuals in charge of their own adjustment to economic restructuring and social dislocation through self-help technologies centered on personal contact with nature" (2008, p. 1228). She is particularly critical of garden projects characterized by an "ethos of personal responsibility," arguing that "non-state and quasi-state actors deliberately organize gardens to achieve a desired transformation of individuals in place of collective resistance and/or mobilization" (2008, p. 1230). These projects are often geared toward transforming the lives of marginalized people rather than explicitly challenging the systemic conditions that produce marginalization. In this way, they are very different from the food sovereignty efforts described above.

Although they are best known for projects that expand local food markets in low-income communities, the community food security and food justice movements also engage with policy, often through helping to build and participate in food policy councils. However, a recent assessment of food policy councils found that many of them are coalitions of project-oriented organizations, and have very limited, if any, engagement with policy (Harper et al. 2009). When they do engage with policy, these councils often work to create increased opportunities for market-based local food systems. The Oakland Food Policy Council, for example, is currently spearheading that city's efforts to craft zoning policy that permits the sale of local organic produce and meat raised on urban homesteads.

These kinds of local policy efforts do not oppose neoliberalism. Rather, they illustrate what Peck and Tickell (2002) call "roll-out neoliberalism," in which the state creates conditions to foster the free movement of capital. However, larger-scale policy efforts that have the potential to reform neoliberalism do exist. The Community Food Security Coalition, for example, is very involved in campaigns to reform the farm bill. Through efforts such as the Live Real program, which engages youth of color in organizing work around food issues, the much younger food justice movement is beginning to do the same. Nevertheless, these efforts make up only a small portion of community food security and food justice work.

If Schiavoni (2009) were correct in her assertion that striking parallels between the food justice and food sovereignty movements exist, we would expect to see much more explicit resistance to neoliberalism, and to the corporate food regime more generally, among US based food justice and community food security movements. However, while there are other similarities between the three movements, a comparison of our extended case studies reveals the reproduction of neoliberalism in very much the manner described by Guthman, Allen, and Pudup. This reproduction constrains the ability of activists in our field sites to fulfill even their more immediate food provisioning goals. Given these constraints, we maintain that deeper engagement with the ideas and practices of food sovereignty may help to radicalize community food security and food justice projects, creating alliances capable of transforming the corporate food regime.

Methods

The data presented here are the result of two ethnographic studies. Alison Hope Alkon investigated food justice activism in West Oakland through 2 years of extensive participant observation between 2005 and 2007. Her primary research site was the West Oakland Farmers Market, though she attended meetings and gatherings of other organizations as well. She also conducted 18 interviews with farmers market managers, vendors, and regular customers, a survey of 100 customers, and 5 focus groups with a total of 67 individuals who identified as low-income and food-insecure, but did not participate in any food justice projects. In addition, she examined secondary sources such as the founding documents of various food justice organizations, minutes of meetings that preceded the start of her work, and newspaper and magazine articles about food activism within and beyond West Oakland. During her fieldwork, she took copious notes, which she later expanded. Interviews lasted approximately 1 hour on average, and were audio-recorded and transcribed. She then coded this wealth of qualitative data by hand, examining it for patterns and allowing insights to emerge from the data as is consistent with grounded theory (Glasser

and Strauss 1967). However, her goal was not just to understand the social world of the farmers market, but to create an account that can aid our understanding of the roles of racial and economic identities and inequalities on the politics of food, as is consistent with Burawoy et al.'s (1991) extended case method. In the years since the research was conducted, Alkon has kept in touch with many of the participants in her study, often by attending events of various Oakland food justice organizations.

Teresa Marie Mares was likewise inspired by the extended case method in conducting ethnographic research between 2005 and 2009 in Seattle, Washington. Her study investigated the ways that Latino/a immigrants living in Seattle attempted to address their food needs and how nonprofit, civil society, and governmental organizations conceptualized and responded to the needs of the diverse Latino/a community. This ethnographic project included the use of participant observation, ethnographic interviews, and archival research on primary and secondary sources on issues pertaining to food and immigration at the local, state, and national level. Participant observation was carried out at day labor centers, community centers, urban farms, community gardens, food banks, neighborhood meetings, and the offices of government and nonprofit agencies working with the policies and day-to-day realities of food. Interviews were conducted with representatives from 13 agencies active in food systems work, in order to gain an understanding of the mission and goals of the organization and the understandings of individual staff members of the food needs of the Latino/an immigrant community in Seattle, as well as 46 first-generation Latino/a immigrants over the age of 18. To recruit this second set, Mares distributed recruitment flyers to several community organizations (including those working in urban agriculture) and presented the project at two large meetings run for and by members of the Latino/a community—one at a day labor center and one at a weekly family support group for Latina mothers. This recruitment strategy made it possible to reach individuals residing in multiple areas of the city who had different levels of involvement with community food projects. The primary goal for this second set of interviews was to gain an understanding of the experiences of Latino/a immigrants when attempting to address their food needs and desires in Seattle and how these experiences differ from those in their home countries.

Both authors began working with organizations active in the food movement because we believe in the potential for low-income communities of color to improve their circumstances by working towards greater autonomy and control over their roles as growers and eaters. However, as we spent more time in the field, we began to realize that the promises of democratically controlled food systems that could provide safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food across lines of race and class were largely unfulfilled. It is only due to our in-depth qualitative approaches that we could move beyond the goals of these organizations to analyze their everyday practices and the complex ways that the efforts of food activists and organizations were constrained by the broader forces of neoliberalism, which limit the possibilities of food system transformation.

Visions of food sovereignty

West Oakland is one of the key sites in the US in which a food justice approach to local food has been developed and articulated. Held every Saturday afternoon, the West Oakland Farmers Market works to support black farmers, who have experienced egregious discrimination by the USDA (Gilbert et al. 2002) by providing a market through which they can sell fresh chemical-free[2] produce to residents of a predominantly black, low-income neighborhood. The Seattle area has become a hotbed for alternative food movements and urban agriculture, as seen in the growing number of neighborhood farmers markets, the 2008 passage of the Local Foods Action Initiative, the formation of the Puget Sound Regional Food Policy Council, and the cultivation of more than 80 community gardens coordinated by Seattle's P-Patch Program. What unites these two cases with visions of food sovereignty is the desire of food activists to empower marginalized communities to create local, culturally specific food systems that can meet their needs.

West Oakland: creating a black farmers market

Casually and commonly referred to as a "black market," the West Oakland Farmers Market seeks to create a local food system in which marginalized African Americans can satisfy one another's food needs. While non-blacks are welcome in a variety of supporting roles, managers, vendors, and customers' collective highlighting of black identity articulates with the food sovereignty movement's emphasis on community control. For example, the West Oakland Farmers Market draws attention to the systemic discrimination faced by black farmers, discursively tying the resulting diminished numbers of black farmers to the lack of available fresh food in many black neighborhoods. An example can be seen in the following excerpt written by the market founder on his website:

[2] West Oakland market farmers sell produce they label as chemical-free because they cannot afford expensive USDA organic certification.

> Who grows the food? Who owns the land? Who determines the fate of both? Where does that food go? And who gets it? These simple questions have the same answer: not us!

This statement links West Oakland residents' lack of food security—access to adequate, nutritious food, to their lack of food sovereignty—control over their local food system. It suggests that the only way that blacks will be fed is when their local food system is comprised of and controlled by African Americans. Indeed, the founder's newsletter is called "Feeding Ourselves." Here, "ourselves" refers not to the geographic community of West Oakland residents, as farmers travel from several hours away, but to African Americans. The belief that a local food system is essential to black empowerment is also exemplified by one market farmer, who claims, "This market fights the systems that are in place to keep down sharecroppers like my father and grandfather." The development of a food system created and controlled by marginalized groups is integral to the concept of food sovereignty.

The West Oakland Farmers Market seeks to expand economic opportunities for black farmers by connecting them to a community in need of fresh food. It also creates a venue for home-based entrepreneurs, such as producers of canned goods, soaps or paintings, to sell their wares. The market founder views the farmers market as having the potential also to create entrepreneurial opportunities for West Oakland residents, so that they "don't have to only be consumers in [their] own community." His vision, which is widely supported by market vendors, is one in which black youth can see farming as a legitimate career path, particularly given the lack of economic opportunities in West Oakland. "Farming is a 38 billion dollar industry in California," the market founder is fond of saying. "We need to see that as an opportunity."

Discussions of race and anti-racism permeate many aspects of this farmers market, including both its social change goals and the everyday practices it supports. Not only do market managers and vendors publicize the circumstances faced by black farmers, but they use racialized language to understand the widespread absence of grocery stores from black communities. Drawing on the racist history of banks denying mortgages and home equity loans to the neighborhoods in which blacks could live, market participants referring to the absence of grocery stores as supermarket redlining (Heany and Hayes n.d.; McClintock 2011). Race also informs casual conversation at the farmers market. For example, one particularly warm afternoon, a middle aged black woman approached a stand selling homemade canned goods. "Hot enough for you?" the customer asked the vendor, a black woman in her 50s or 60s. "Better than in Africa," the vendor responded quickly before going on to discuss, among other things, the then-recently released film, *An Inconvenient Truth*. Additionally, market vendors and managers regularly discussed issues of race and racism, such as the government's response to Hurricane Katrina, which occurred about halfway through Alkon's fieldwork.

In order to attract black consumers to the farmers market, managers and vendors create and display a positive, healthy performance of black culture. Vendors often specialize in items that reflect the African American cuisine commonly known as soul food. Farmers cultivate greens, okra, and other vegetables that are staples of this diet. When they are available, one farm hangs a large sign that exclaims, "We have black-eyed peas!" In another setting, that farmer emphasized the importance of healthy African American cuisine, stating, "the food that fortified the men and women who built this country were black-eyed peas, okra, and greens." Non-food items are also geared toward black consumers. Customers are familiar with the shea butter products sold by Dis_Scent Natural Healing Body Products, which is derived from a seed native to Africa and common in beauty products marketed to African Americans. Indeed this business name, coined by its 20-something, black, female owners, is based on speech patterns common to many urban blacks, as well as an allusion to subversive politics. Additionally, a local artist sells portraits of famous African Americans, ranging from Malcolm X to Snoop Dogg. The West Oakland Farmers Market specializes in food and other products widely considered culturally appropriate to African Americans.

Music and special events also celebrate blackness. During the farmers market, the "Hungry DJ Posse" spins soul, funk, reggae, and jazz in order to "create an atmosphere that brings out the community" (mobetterfood nd). Stevie Wonder classics are on regular rotation, and one memorable afternoon, Michael Jackson's Thriller prompted one farmer to moonwalk down the double yellow lines that run through the center of the market. The farmers market hosts celebrations for Black History Month and Juneteenth, which commemorates the day, nearly 7 months after the 13th amendment was to have taken effect that Union soldiers came to Texas and announced to the slaves that they were free. The latter featured a performance of capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian martial art, as well as food from a caterer specializing in "vegan soul food." The farmers market's emphasis on these kinds of food, music, and special events connote a local food system designed to privilege the needs and tastes of black customers and vendors. This vision of a marginalized community creating a local food system where they can feed themselves is very much aligned with the food sovereignty framework.

However, the West Oakland Farmers Market had trouble attracting customers in large enough numbers to sustain it, and closed in 2008. This occurred despite valiant advertising efforts by the market manager, including many instances of door-to-door flyering and conversations, as well as a fair amount of positive local and national press. Based on interviews with market customers, as well as five focus groups with low-income neighborhood residents who did not shop at the farmers market ($n = 67$), Alkon believes that the primary reason for low attendance was that the low-income black residents of West Oakland whom the farmers market sought to serve cannot afford the fresh local produce it provides. Focus group respondents revealed high regard for the farmers market, at least among those familiar with it, but also that respondents' choose their food provisioning strategies primarily based on cost. Despite the fact that West Oakland Farmers Market produce is deeply discounted compared to other Bay Area farmers markets, it remains more expensive than the canned and processed goods provided by the industrial food system. In addition, although Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT), an electronic form of public assistance, was available at this farmers market, it was rarely used. It is possible that neighborhood residents did not know funds would be accepted, but more likely that EBT funds could be stretched further at supermarkets. During the focus groups, residents described the various strategies, including taking multiple busses, they relied on to access large-scale supermarkets and/or discount grocery stores. A study conducted by The People's Grocery, another West Oakland food justice organization, found that West Oakland residents spend approximately 20% of their food budget on transportation to grocery stores.

On the other hand, Alkon's survey of market customers revealed that most black attendees were middle class, with incomes in the $50,000–$60,000 range and held college and advanced degrees. These respondents cited support for black farmers as the most important reason for their farmers market attendance.[3] Although market managers and vendors featured products and programs catering to blacks, white customers are present as well, confirming one vendors' statement that "We're [African Americans] putting it on for us, but everyone is welcome." Interestingly, white customers too cite support for black farmers as the most important reason they shop at this farmers market, indicating market managers' success in sympathetically publicizing the circumstances faced by black farmers. However, neither of these groups came in large enough numbers to sustain the farmers market. Low sales created high turnover among vendors, which made the market even less attractive to customers who were less and less able to find a wide variety of products there. Low sales also destroyed any hopes that the farmers market might hold entrepreneurial or economic opportunities for West Oakland youth.

The farmers market created by West Oakland's managers, vendors, and customers certainly coheres with a vision of food sovereignty in which a community defines its own food and agricultural system. Food is sustainably produced and culturally appropriate, and the market aims to provide economic benefits to black farmers and consumers. However, while advocates of food sovereignty tend to contextualize their demand in a critique of the political economy of the corporate food regime, the West Oakland Farmers Market is more aligned with the food justice paradigm, in which a critique of institutional racism is central.

Like other US food movements, the West Oakland Farmers Market can be viewed as (re)producing neoliberal practices and subjectivities. Indeed, simply positing a farmers market as a way to address social problems like racism and lack of access to healthy food names the market, rather than the state or civil society, as the site of reform. Instead of calling on the state to provide food, or even more radically, to assuage the conditions responsible for food insecurity (such as unemployment, underemployment, poverty-level wages, and inadequate pensions) the activists who founded this farmers market as a way to improve the lives of black farmers and food desert residents seek their solution in local economic exchange. Relying on the private and voluntary sectors to provide public goods is an essential component of neoliberalism, as the state has "rolled-back" many of its essential functions (Peck and Tickell 2002). In this way, farmers markets with social change goals are among those organizations "demanding that individuals, families, communities, employers take back to themselves the powers and responsibilities that, since the nineteenth century, have been acquired by states, politicians and legislators" (Rose 1999, p. 2). However, individuals and markets prove inadequate to the task of addressing racial disparities in food access. As was shown above, market-exchange is incapable of providing food to low-income people, who, by definition, do not have the means to afford it. By adopting market-based approaches to racism and food-insecurity, farmers market participants unwittingly exclude those whose needs are most dire. While West Oakland residents are largely sympathetic to market managers' attempts to empower African Americans to create a local food system, several focus group participants revealed that what they felt they needed was access to food they could afford.

In addition, the idea that the market is the place through which to solve social problems affects the ways that those involved in the West Oakland Farmers Market see

[3] Other options included location, good quality food, good prices, fun atmosphere, and other.

themselves and their social change goals. Neighborhood residents are not envisioned as citizen-activists capable of forcing concessions from the state, nor are they and their families a unified group of the working class who could potentially unite and transform an economic system that has so thoroughly marginalized their community. Instead, they are generally constructed as potential entrepreneurs, who, through involvement in local food systems, can devise new ways to improve their economic livelihoods and provide services for their communities, or as consumers of those services. Alternately, some residents, particularly youth, *are* conceptualized as activists, though their activism is limited to changing their own eating habits in favor of local organic food, gardening, and educating their communities to do the same. This emphasis on personal transformation, rather than systemic transformation, is reminiscent of Pudup's (2008) earlier-described findings.

The West Oakland Farmers Market is typical of the food justice movement in that it emphasizes the effects of institutional racism on the industrial food system, and attempts to create a local food system by and for a low-income community of color. The striking parallels that Schiavoni (2009) theorizes between food justice and food sovereignty can be seen in the farmers market's emphasis on local production and control, as well as its attention to structural inequalities. However, the West Oakland Farmers Market fails to adopt a food sovereignty framework with regard to opposition to neoliberalism. Indeed, the farmers market reproduces neoliberalism through its reliance on free market exchange to address social problems. This approach excludes low-income people who, no matter how sympathetic, cannot afford to participate in this form of local exchange. In addition, the farmers market creates neoliberal subjectivities by conceptualizing those it seeks to serve as (potential) producers and consumers rather than citizens and activists. This leaves residents without the tools necessary to challenge the structural conditions of their marginalization. The West Oakland Farmers Market, and the food justice movement more generally has done a remarkable job of educating local residents, and many other food movement participants, about the struggles faced by black farmers and food desert residents. Perhaps by engaging with the idea of food sovereignty, it can also help others to understand the limits of market-based approaches and to push for something more radical and transformative.

Seattle: the potentials and limitations of urban agriculture as food activism

In February 2010, newly appointed Seattle mayor Mike McGinn and the City Council announced that the coming year would be the "Year of Urban Agriculture." However, with its mild climate, exceptional soils, and abundant rainfall, Seattle has a much longer history of urban food cultivation and distribution (Lawson 2005). Urban agriculture projects currently take various forms, including community gardens, community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, farmers markets, and school gardens, and are created both through top-down systems of governance and grassroots mobilization. These projects are largely guided by the values and principles of the community food security movement, although the discourse of food justice has entered into activist discussions as well. In this recent turn, there is great potential for mapping onto current food activism the insights and values of food sovereignty with the aim of deepening and extending the food movement's trajectory. Through investigating and participating in this food activism, Mares was particularly interested in whether, and to what degree, Latino/a immigrants living in the city were involved with urban agricultural initiatives and markets.

Despite the exciting ways that the local food system is being transformed for *some* Seattle residents, the numerous organizations active in the various food movements are far from creating inclusive paths for Latino/an involvement, especially in urban agriculture. This lack of inclusivity is important in thinking through questions of food justice and integrating a food sovereignty approach could bring with it a potential to forge more meaningful connections with the broader food movement. Food sovereignty transcends the boundaries of the local to demand consideration of the impacts of industrialization and centralization on local food economies everywhere. Given this emphasis, Mares became intrigued by how integrating a food sovereignty approach could enable those working to strengthen local food systems in Seattle to consider how immigrant communities often bring with them a wealth of knowledge of place-based food systems and how their displacement and subsequent migration to the US is often related to broader political economic forces that devastate rural livelihoods in the global south.

Using convenience sampling, posters hung in day-labor centers, community centers, and food banks that served the Latino/a community, and word of mouth recruitment, the sample for this study included a broad and diverse group of Latino/a participants that interacted with the local food system in various ways. Of the 46 Latino/an interviewees, 35 were from Mexico, three were from Peru, two were from Honduras, two were from El Salvador, and one participant each came from Guatemala, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Ecuador. While income data was not collected, the vast majority of participants spoke about economic troubles, inconsistent and underpaid employment, and trouble accessing adequate and culturally meaningful foods. When

able to secure employment, most worked in various service sector jobs, as domestic workers, or as day laborers in construction and landscaping projects.

Within the sample only four participants were currently growing food in the city, and an additional three were growing herbs. Only eight mentioned shopping at the farmer's markets, even while many shared memories of doing their daily shopping at open-air markets close to their homes. None of the Latino/a participants mentioned CSA programs. However, interviews also revealed that the majority had grown food in their home countries and the memories of the gardens and farms they cultivated at home often brought smiles to their faces and prompted stories of time spent with their parents and grandparents. Of the 46, 37 had grown food before migrating to the US, including those who had moved from rural and urban areas, from northern Mexico to the highlands of Peru. Several participants mentioned seeing the numerous community gardens in the city, however, none of these participants were aware of how to become involved. The low participation in urban agriculture, despite a high level of agri-food knowledge and experience in their home countries, signals multiple barriers preventing people from being engaged in urban agriculture projects.

For example, it became clear through fieldwork that the institutions working in urban agriculture are full of staff members who are both committed to building more just food systems and see the potential in working more with Latino migrants who have deep knowledge about growing food. However, their ability to carry out these commitments is often constrained by the histories and structures that govern the institutions for whom they work. This demonstrates one of the essential problematics of the community food security approach. Ruth, who works with Seattle Tilth, had this to say:

> I mean, I guess you could say, it seems kind of obvious, and I don't want to jinx us, but there is the challenge of being a historically white organization … But our world is changing at a very rapid pace, and a lot of things that are historically white are changing … Well, like, any white, historically white place, it's a monoculture! And we teach about that, but we're not even following our own curriculum to diversity! Because that's what we teach, that any biological system is a stronger one if it's more diverse, so honestly, I think the organization will fail if it's not able to diversify! … [B]ecause, it practical terms what it might mean is a lot of new growing techniques, new crops, new solutions to problems, new approaches to food production in an increasingly urbanized area. I mean, we are all kind of inventing a whole new thing together, really.

Ruth understands that diverse involvement in urban agriculture projects would mean an infusion of new knowledge and new solutions. This infusion could contribute to the transformation of the local food system into something more relevant and meaningful for marginalized communities. While this recognition of the need for diversity aligns her with the community food security paradigm, adopting a food sovereignty paradigm could extend this recognition into a broader critique of the political-economic forces that displace farmers in Latin America. This deeper knowledge could potentially create more concrete and grounded strategies for understanding and overcoming the unique challenges that Latino/a residents face in articulating with urban agricultural programs as they are currently configured.

An additional barrier was revealed through interviews with Latina women participating in a weekly family support group, who discussed the relatively high costs associated with utilizing urban agricultural markets. Many women in this group had received farmer's market vouchers for use at their neighborhood farmers market. While everyone who had shopped at the farmer's markets had very favorable impressions about the quality and variety of produce available, the high perceived and actual costs prohibited all of them from doing a significant amount of the shopping there. Cristina, who had lived in the Seattle area for 7 years, exclaimed:

> I have gone but it's very expensive! It's so expensive, but I went because Maria gave us coupons to buy things there, but you can only buy a very little, because it's so expensive. More than the supermarkets. But I think it's more organic, and healthier. But for example, right now, I am not working because I have to take care of my children and there are many legal issues that we have to resolve, and also with doctors.

Cristina's comments demonstrate the value she sees in farmers markets in terms of the quality and nutritional value of the food that is available. However, the use of a market-based system to provide culturally appropriate and nutritious foods limits access. Organizations distributed vouchers in order to encourage Cristina and her neighbors' participation in the farmers market. Their understanding that farmers markets need to attract diverse customers demonstrates an adherence to a community food security framework. However, a food sovereignty approach would also include a critique of the limitations of market-based strategies, allowing activists to imagine broader and more lasting ways that immigrants might make use of local food systems.

The limitations of a market-based system were also revealed by the frustration of many Latino/a participants

over having to buy all of their food in the United States, rather than growing and harvesting it on their own land. Mares asked Arturo, who had lived in several different states over a span of 15 years, if he felt that he was able to afford less fresh food in Seattle than he had in Mexico, to which he responded,

> What happens, for example, in Mexico, in the fields, for example, vegetables are in the fields, or lettuces, tomatoes, all of that. Limes, you cut them from the trees at your house. But here, you have to buy everything. In the city you have to buy everything. It could be cheap, but it's not cheap, because you have to buy everything!

Having been born and raised in a farming family in Mexico City, but with roots in the state of Michoacan, Arturo was one of the few men that tended a garden in Seattle, a small space near his home where he grows tomatoes, garlic, onions, and flowers.

Vanesa, a mother of five children who had lived in the United States for 16 years, saw great value in the knowledge that she had gained through growing food while living in Mexico. Her grandfather had owned 55 hectares of land, but had to sell it when he was no longer able to make a living as a farmer. Living in a small apartment with her children and husband, she has been able to take advantage of the small amount of urban land she has near her apartment and apply (with varying success) the lessons she had learned on her grandfather's land. She related … "I tried last year to garden. I planted some squash, some zucchinis, the big green ones. And I took such good care of them, but nothing! I had to cut them! But it could be so beautiful … the owner said, 'Do what you want! If you want to grow something, do it! Whatever you do, it's fine!"'I've been there for 12 years! And I grew tomatoes, and corn, but the corn cobs were so tiny!!" When asked if she missed her family's farm in Mexico, Vanesa replied, "Yes. I think that it really educates you, it educates you a lot. You learn about other things, you learn other things that now … Not even in school do you learn this!" This deep appreciation for the land and knowledge of growing food that Vanesa and other participants shared is quickly becoming lost and displaced as the reach of industrialized agriculture and neoliberal trade agreements devastate the livelihoods of small farmers in Latin America.

Even as these barriers persist, a shift towards food justice has begun to take root in Seattle, pushing community food advocates to devote more attention to the inequalities and disparities that pervade even the most localized or "secure" food systems. With this increasing attention to food justice, the time seems right for developing a more radical political standpoint that would push the movement forward through addressing the needs and contributions of all residents in the city of Seattle, particularly the working class and communities of color. Integrating a food sovereignty approach would bring important points for movement activists to consider.

In challenging the devastating impacts of unregulated trade and agricultural policies that privilege behemoth agrifood corporations, food sovereignty seeks to fundamentally rework the politics of food and agriculture and protect the rights of those who are actually working the land. It draws attention to the political and economic forces that displace small farmers in Latin America and other regions of the global south, many of whom have no other choice than to migrate in search of work. Through integrating a food sovereignty framework into the growing food movement in Seattle, the struggles of displaced Latino/a famers like these interview participants could potentially be better understood and their food and farming experiences better acknowledged. This would not only apply to Latino/a immigrants living in Seattle, but also to the many other groups of immigrant farmers that currently make their home in the city. As Ruth emphasized, diverse growing practices and sets of food-related knowledge could only improve the likelihood of transforming the local food system into one that is more inclusive and resilient.

Discussion and conclusions

Mapping a food sovereignty framework onto US food projects reveals the complexities that must be negotiated if alliances between these movements are to be created. A prominent feature of the food sovereignty analysis is that neoliberal capitalism has led to the centralization of land ownership and disaccumulation of peasant landholdings, creating a peasantry dependent on agribusiness for its survival. Food justice organizations, on the other hand, while rightly critical of the role of institutional racism in producing hunger among communities of color, tend to be less aware of the role of capitalism. In the food justice analysis, government, not capitalism, is largely responsible for the racist policies and programs that produce hunger. Because the government is not seen as an ally, food justice organizations tend to choose social change strategies that work through the creation of alternative markets rather than political transformation or even reform. Even food policy councils, which would seem a likely venue for policy advocacy, tend to function as support for local, market or sufficiency-oriented projects, rather than fill this lacuna (Harper et al. 2009).

In West Oakland, a group of predominantly African American activists created a farmers market in order to link a food insecure black community to struggling black farmers. In doing so, the farmers market constructed a

notion of black identity that is both celebratory and uplifting through its food, music, and special events, as is consistent with the food sovereignty movement's focus on locally controlled food systems. However, in creating a market-based solution to issues of food insecurity, racism, and poverty, the farmers market ran up against the constraints of neoliberalism. Despite the best intentions of market managers and vendors, goods sold there are largely inaccessible to the neighborhood's low-income residents. Although food and other products are much cheaper than at other nearby farmers markets, they remain more expensive than processed foods. Because the farmers market fails to draw large numbers of consumers, it cannot provide economic benefits to vendors. The food justice movement has done well to highlight the role of institutional racism in both the food system and local food movement. However, it has not engaged the critiques of capitalist agriculture that distinguish the food sovereignty movement, which would suggest a more radical strategy aimed at transforming, rather than providing alternatives to, the corporate food regime.

The experiences of Latino/a immigrant community in Seattle reflect the costs of neoliberal agricultural policy in that their migration is often the result of the dumping of US commodity crops that devastates rural livelihoods in the global south. Yet the stories of these immigrants, as well as their tremendous agri-food knowledge, are yet to be fully embraced by Seattle's community food security activism. Activists acknowledge the need for diversity, yet non-profit food movement organizations remain predominantly white. While Latino/a immigrants appreciate the bounty and quality of produce available in local farmers markets, the high costs of local and organic food prevent them from regularly making use of this food provisioning strategy. However, the small number of interview participants who grow some of their own food provide a complex array of reasons for doing so. Some see homegrown food as an alternative to the need to purchase all of their food. Others invoke the senses of education, connection, and place that are typical of local food advocates, but mobilize these narratives to describe a trans-local connection to the landscapes from which they migrated. Each of these examples demonstrate how, despite the often quite radical visions of the food justice movement, neoliberal constraints prevent organizations from embodying key aspects of a food sovereignty framework.

This exercise in mapping the concept of food sovereignty onto US food movements leads to questions about the kinds of projects and policies that could be advanced by a food sovereignty framework. In West Oakland, a greater understanding of the constraints of neoliberalism might lead activists away from market-based solutions such as farmers markets. Instead, some activists have created local food projects that aim to empower and provide supplies to urban residents who want to produce their own food. Others have advocated that local food banks and other food charities include more locally grown food. These entitlement and self-sufficiency-based approaches come closer to a food sovereignty framework. In Seattle, an understanding of the ways that corporate food regime policies contribute to immigration might lead local food advocates to seek out the expertise of new immigrants, and to provide clearer pathways for lasting participation in local food systems that goes beyond the occasional distribution of farmers market coupons. Additionally, attention to the diverse agri-food knowledges of immigrant communities might further foster efforts to match new immigrants with the land and tools they would need to cultivate food. In addition, a food sovereignty approach would also use these projects and relationships to build power and eventually mobilize for a broad-based transformation of the corporate food regime.

In addition, within a framework of food sovereignty, it is of central importance that food sources are consistent with cultural identities and embedded in community networks. Focusing on food sovereignty would allow food activists in both Oakland and Seattle to move beyond questions of access to a more comprehensive focus on entitlements to land, decision-making, and control over natural assets. This would necessitate reaching beyond the framework of "cultural appropriateness," to consider the cultural importance of food in sustaining social relationships as well as the ways that food can be implicitly used to erode social relationships, cultural meanings, connections to place, and the exercising of rights. In sum, a food sovereignty approach would allow food activists to truly locate sources of injustice in the corporate food regime and its intersection with local, national, and global policy. This understanding could lay the foundation for a more collective approach to food politics capable of limiting the power of the corporate food regime, eventually transforming the food system into one built on foundations of ecological production, community control, and the multiple meanings of justice.

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Author Biographies

Alison Hope Alkon Ph.D., is assistant professor of Sociology at University of the Pacific. Her research examines food systems from an environmental justice perspective, focusing on issues of food access, racial identity formation, and inequality. She is co-editor of *Cultivating food justice: race, class, and sustainability* (MIT Press 2011) and author of *Black, white and green: farmers markets, race and the green economy*, due out in 2013 from UGA Press.

Teresa Marie Mares Ph.D., is an assistant professor of Anthropology at the University of Vermont. She received her PhD in 2010 from the University of Washington in Sociocultural Anthropology. The title of her dissertation is *We are made of our food: Latino/an immigration and the practices and politics of eating.*