Navigating Diverse Relationships to Local Food in a Supposedly Homogenous Place

Running Title: Navigating Diverse Relationships to Local Food

Abstract:
Over the past several decades, the state of Vermont has become a national leader in the movements for local and sustainable food. Located along the banks of Lake Champlain, Chittenden County is a hub for the local food movement and innovative food security efforts. This article presents qualitative data from a collaborative research project examining the multiple ways that Chittenden County residents access, prepare, and share food. It focuses in on the narratives of six working mothers from diverse cultural backgrounds. While Vermont is not known for its cultural diversity, this article argues that everyday food practices are shaped by complex intersections of identity and that narratives of food and family are a meaningful site to examine both cultural differences and shared values for food that is culturally familiar, sustaining, and embedded in social relationships.

Keywords: Food Access, Food Security, Local Food, Gendered Labor, Vermont
Introduction

Over the past several decades, the state of Vermont has become a national leader in the movements for local and sustainable food (Conner et. al. 2015, Macias 2008). With hundreds of roadside farm stands, bustling farmers markets, and the nationally recognized Farm to Plate Strategic Plan, Vermont has made impressive steps towards building a more sustainable food system (Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund 2010). These efforts draw upon a long and diverse agricultural history, as the state has seen significant shifts in the production and consumption of food- from being a national leader in butter production in the early 20th century to developing innovative farm-to-school programs in more recent years (Albers 2000). At the same time, Vermont has a sizeable number of households struggling to put food on the table, with 13% of its residents reporting food insecurity as of 2013, including a significant number of households with children (Coleman-Jensen et. al. 2014, Hunger Free Vermont, n.d.).

Located on the banks of Lake Champlain, Chittenden County is a hub for the local food movement and innovative food security efforts. As a mixed urban, suburban and rural region, it is also the best region in the state to simultaneously consider urban, peri-urban, and rural food system issues. Chittenden County has a total of 620 square miles and a population of 161,382 as of 2015 making it the most populous county in the state following a period of rapid economic and demographic growth over the last few decades. Chittenden is also the state’s most ethnically and racially diverse county, with 6.1% of the population being foreign born, largely connected to the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program’s operations in the Burlington area.

As researchers living and working in Vermont, my research collaborators and I were interested in peeling back the layers of the growing local food movement to return to a much more basic question: How are Chittenden County residents feeding themselves? Through
observing the changing demographics of the county and participating in the local food system as consumers, advocates, and producers, we had a strong hunch that refugees from Bhutan and Somalia were undoubtedly shopping and eating differently from the upper-middle class Vermont-born residents involved in local gardening initiatives and picking up their CSA shares on a weekly basis.

The task for our collaborative research team was to examine these differences to inform a richer, more community-based understanding of food security within the local context, even in an area not known for its cultural diversity. In this way, we sought to complicate a somewhat limited understanding of food security, particularly for county residents whose relationships to local food systems stretch from the farm down the road in Vermont to places as distant as the rice paddies of Bhutan. According to the USDA, food security is defined as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life;” a laudable goal, yet at the same time, necessarily vague in its conceptualization (Coleman-Jensen et. al. 2014: 2). The blurry boundaries of this concept suggest that food scholars have an important role in offering nuanced and culturally specific portraits into how people define food security for themselves, and the negotiations they must make to ensure it for their families. The narratives included in this article illustrate these nuanced relationships to and meanings of food security in a region where the food movement is particularly active in shaping local foodways.

The popular discourses engaged in the local food movement often center on reclaiming the values of an idyllic past or returning to foods that your grandmother would recognize, a refrain heard from the likes of bestselling authors like Michael Pollan. Food scholars have critiqued these discourses for the ways they erase histories shaped by inequalities of race, class, and gender while simultaneously depoliticizing and romanticizing the local (Alkon 2012, Gray
2013, Guthman 2007). These critiques are particularly important to consider in Vermont, as the state is one of the least racially diverse states in the nation, with nearly 97% of its residents being white. Despite this relative homogeneity, the state’s residents, particularly those in Chittenden County, have diverse relationships both to the local food system and to their own culturally meaningful food practices. Using the themes of change and nostalgia to examine the ethnographic narratives of six working mothers, this article illuminates the diversity of these relationships and considers how everyday practices related to accessing, preparing, and sharing food are shaped by complex intersections of identity. In doing so, I argue that narratives of food and family are a meaningful site to examine both cultural differences and shared values for food that is culturally familiar, sustaining, and embedded in social relationships.

**A Mixed-Methods Approach to Studying Food Access**

The broader study informing this article involved the author as the primary investigator, with a team of two additional university faculty members, two community members employed by local food-related organizations, and a student researcher. Through this project, we relied mostly on methodological tools of geography and anthropology to investigate the vulnerabilities and resiliencies in Vermont’s food system. Ethnographers trained in these disciplines are particularly adept at collecting and adding qualitative richness to demographic and statistical data, conducting community surveys and in-depth interviews, and examining spatial dynamics. Further, our study design not only benefitted from collaboration across academic disciplines and colleges, but also from relationships we built across sectors with local community-based organizations and agencies. The two staff members from local organizations were were central to

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1 While the research design and data collection was collaborative, the analysis and write up of the data was completed exclusively by the author.
designing the study in a community-based fashion, securing funding, and collecting interview and survey data.

Our team’s use of a community-based, transdisciplinary approach to food systems research – one that draws on ethnographic and survey based methodologies, spatial analysis, and the analysis of demographic data – followed an approach outlined by Pablo Bose (2011). Combining methodological approaches and specific methods – within or across qualitative and quantitative traditions – offers the opportunity to triangulate inquiries and results (Bloor and Wood 2006, Creswell 2012, Denscombe 2014). Whatever the data source, method of collection, or approach to analysis, the overall value of triangulating multiple or mixed methods while conducting community-based research cannot be underestimated (Newbold 2013). Within food systems scholarship, mixed-methods research is especially appropriate for community-based studies of consumption patterns, barriers to food access, and the intersections between food security and social inequality.

In studying food systems from a community-based approach, the nuances and complexities of everyday lives necessitate the triangulation of research strategies. This entails relying on multiple instruments and methods to conduct inquiries with populations that are often difficult to define or demarcate, are differentiated by race/ethnicity, class, and nationality, and are frequently adaptive and flexible in the face of changing circumstances. Triangulation is essential in studying food systems because of the unique, and sometimes contradictory, relationships that people have to food. Human-food relationships are inherently difficult to generalize but are nevertheless marked by patterns and common experiences. Adopting a transdisciplinary and multi-sectoral approach allowed this study to engage a holistic and
comprehensive approach to examine how Chittenden County residents are interacting with the local food system and to tease apart some of these patterns and commonalities.

This article specifically draws upon survey and interview data with a sample of 25 Chittenden County residents, all of whom were affiliated with or relied upon programs and services from five community organizations: The Vermont Community Garden Network, New Farms for New Americans, The Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf, the Visiting Nurses Association (VNA) Family Room, and the Women Infants and Children (WIC) office of Chittenden County. While this is not a statistically significant sample, our aim was to engage with individuals making use of key agencies and organizations in the city’s food system in an exploratory fashion. These organizations were selected because they represent a dynamic cross-section of the local food system, spanning from the local and statewide nonprofit sector to federally administered government agencies. Working in collaboration with these organizations allowed us to refine our survey and interview questions in connection with community concerns and recruit a culturally and economically diverse group of participants. These collaborations were imperative given the exploratory nature of this study, and our desire to use this initial series of interviews as a jumping-off point for developing a more in-depth and longitudinal examination of food security in the region.

In beginning this project, our team set up meetings with staff from each of these organizations to present our research goals and to learn more about how each organization defined and addressed the food security concerns of county residents through their programs and services. These meetings allowed us to add and revise interview and survey questions, resulting in a semi-structured interview guide containing 25 questions, divided into three parts: 1) Household Cooking and Eating Practices, 2) Accessing Food and Shopping, and 3) Accessing
Food and Non-Shopping Activities (See Appendix One). With community-partner input, the project team also designed a brief written survey to collect basic demographic data, including age, nation of birth, self-identified race/ethnicity, highest education level completed, household size and composition, primary language spoken in the home, and usage of various local and federal food security programs. Designing the interview and survey instruments in this iterative and collaborative fashion allowed us to generate data on a wide range of food access strategies, household food practices and labor, seasonal food consumption patterns, food preferences and exclusions, and experiences with food security organizations and programming.

All interviews were completed in person by one member of the research team at a location selected by the interviewee and were digitally recorded and transcribed by hand by a paid research assistant, with the exception of one interview where the participant preferred that the interview was not recorded (in this case, I took copious written notes during and after the interview). Four members of the research team conducted interviews (the author, the student researcher, and our two community-partner researchers) using the same interview guide, with the student researcher and the author conducting the majority of the interviews. All participants were compensated for their time with a twenty-dollar gift card to a local grocery store of their choice. Before each interview, the participant gave their oral consent for participating in the study and received a written summary of the project’s aims and goals. To facilitate interviews with non-US born participants who were not fluent in English, all of whom were resettled refugees, we contracted with a paid interpreter from a local interpretation provider. After each oral interview, subject participants completed a brief written demographic survey, with the interpreter’s assistance if necessary. Interview data was then coded using HyperResearch, a qualitative analysis software package, to identify common themes and outlying perspectives. Per
Institutional Review Board guidelines, the names of all interviewees have been changed in this article.

**Findings and Discussion**

Of the sample of 25 participants, 13 were born in the United States, 6 in Bhutan, 4 in Somalia, 1 in Burma, and 1 in Burundi. Of the US-born participants, 11 identified as Caucasian/White and the remaining 2 identified as Mixed Race/Ethnicity. Participants from Bhutan and Burma reported their race/ethnicity as Asian American, and those from Somalia and Burundi as African-American. The average age of the participants was 41, with a range of 22-65. The sample was overwhelmingly female (23 of 25), which is likely the result of our intent to interview individuals who make the majority of the food-related decisions in their household and the generalized gendered division of food-related labor in the home that persists across cultural lines (Carney 2015, Counihan 2004 and 2009, DeVault 1994, Page-Reeves 2014). Perhaps most striking within the sample characteristics is the intersection of income and household composition. All 12 participants born outside of the United States had household incomes under 30,000 per year, with an average household size of 6.92 individuals. For the 13 US-born participants, a sizable number of households earned less than 30,000 (9 of the 13 participants), but the average household size was much smaller, at 2.38 people per household. These demographic factors and household composition patterns were reflected in the diverse navigations of the local food system that interview data revealed.

Within the broader imperatives of our collaborative study, I was particularly interested in examining how participants balanced their usage of various food-related programs and services with their usage of food access practices like hunting/fishing, gardening, foraging, and sharing
with friends and family in order to maintain a continual supply of food in the household. In our written survey, we asked about 7 specific programs and services, including market-based initiatives that were dedicated to providing local food, like farmers markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) projects, federal programs administered at the state level including WIC and SNAP (the Vermont program being called 3SquaresVT), and local nonprofit initiatives including food pantries and community gardening programs. The number of participants who stated that they had used each program (either at the time at the interview or at any point in the past) is noted in Table One, in addition to the number of foreign-born individuals who indicated utilizing that program or service (See Table One).

From these numbers, it is clear that a greater percentage of foreign-born residents reported using income-restricted programs like WIC, SNAP, and school lunch programs. These same individuals were not utilizing CSA programs at all, but were regularly utilizing both farmer’s markets and community gardening programs. This is likely the result of heavy outreach to resettled refugees within programs like the Visiting Nurses Association Family Room’s community gardening initiative and New Farms for New Americans, which coordinates community gardening programming as well as farmer’s market stands run by refugee farmers.

These figures provide some insight into the use of food security and local food initiatives within our sample of Chittenden County residents and demonstrate the usefulness of the rapid demographic survey we conducted in concert with more extended interviews. Interviews, however, revealed a richer set of data concerning the everyday negotiations that county residents make to ensure food security in their households. These negotiations were guided by cultural and religious preferences, household economics, experience with and knowledge of agricultural practices, and access to land for cultivation. Interviews also allowed for participants to express
their thoughts and experiences with these programs, both positive and negative, and to make suggestions for improvement. Noteworthy across interviews were the nostalgic views that participants expressed about foodways and food systems of the past, and the ambivalence (and sometimes disdain) for the changes they had experienced, or that their children were experiencing, in their own growing and eating habits. The discussion that follows focuses on the experiences and viewpoints of six mothers from different cultural backgrounds who were balancing the care of their children with paid work both inside and outside the home. I have chosen these six narratives as they help to illuminate the economic and ethnic diversity of the county in particularly dynamic ways.

These six working mothers all shared their appreciation for the foods and cooking practices they had been exposed to as young children. Born and raised in Maine, Geri, a single 34-year-old mother of one two-year-old son, expressed her appreciation for her grandfather’s farm: “I mean my, it’s funny because my mom grew up on a farm and like on the coast of Maine so they ate a lot of seafood and shell fish and stuff like that because it was readily available and also they grew pretty much all of their food so my grandfather was kind of a back-to-the-lander.” While her own mother leaned more towards prepared convenience foods in her cooking practices, Geri has harnessed her appreciation for her grandfather’s gardening efforts into a sizeable container garden at her apartment in addition to a large community garden plot where she and her son grow foods that they cook together. She explained that her son takes great joy in helping to cook, and is more likely to try new fruits and vegetables than many of his peers. Geri also expressed the importance of sharing food-related practices with her mother and older sisters, whether through celebrating with foods of her Swedish heritage or cooking a simple meal of roasted chicken with vegetable side dishes. For her, it is less about the actual food that she
consumes than the company she keeps while doing so, and meals with family are much more meaningful than those without. These perspectives underscore the importance of commensality for her and her family.

Growing up on the other side of the world, but now residing within a few miles from Geri, Maano is a 28-year-old mother of four from Somalia who came of age in a refugee camp in Kenya. Rather than missing fresh seafood, she expressed to me her fondness for freshly-hunted giraffe and camel meat, raw cow’s milk, and “moufo,” a corn and wheat-based bread cooked in earthen clay ovens. Needless to say, Maano no longer has access to fresh camel and giraffe in Vermont, even though the presence of one lone camel living at a farm alongside a small state highway is a cause for much excitement among locals. Maanon compared the freshness of the foods in the camp with those in the United States: “In Africa the meat is fresh but here everything is frozen. Like, even sometimes I buy meat from the halal store but it doesn’t, well, the taste is different than what I’m used to because of the freshness and we don’t know how long it was in the fridge.” Also absent from her diet in the United States is a sweet wild green that grew everywhere near her home in Kenya. She has searched high and low for the seeds in Vermont, including at the local food cooperative, to no avail. Maano’s emphasis on sourcing foods that are culturally familiar are entwined with her commitment to halal, which means she rarely goes out to eat because of her concern that the foods she would consume may be made impure by shared cooking implements. This leaves her to balance the reproductive labor of caring of her four children, with part-time employment doing breastfeeding outreach with WIC, and with her studies to become a medical assistant. While Maano is concerned about the preparation of the meat her children consume at school, her limited income pushes her to utilize the free lunch programs to stretch the household food budget and ensure household food
security. In doing so, she trusts that her teachings around the importance of halal carry through to the choices her children make over the foods they place on their lunch trays.

Both Maano and Geri work hard to feed their families with the time and financial resources they have available but do not own land on which they could grow a significant amount of their own food, despite sharing this desire. On the other end of this cultural spectrum is Sarah, a 37-year-old mother of two boys who maintains a very small family farm with her spouse in one of the more rural areas of Chittenden County. While the majority of the farm-grown food is consumed within Sarah’s home, she also sells at the local farmer’s market each weekend to earn extra income. Like Geri, Sarah has made efforts to recapture the foodways of her grandparents after becoming disillusioned with the convenience foods of her youth. In discussing her motivations for doing so, she stated:

“It’s part that we you know want to eat as healthy as we can and the only way we can afford to do that is to grow our own food so, you know, I guess it’s two different parts. But we do have the kind of ideal where you go, ‘Oh, you know it’s just like grandma and grandpa did it.’ But they did it for the same reason! They needed healthy fresh food and that was the only way they could get it.”

Sarah has taken care to sustain her children with foods grown on their farm while farming to earn earning much-needed income, though as she noted, sometimes the values that she holds around the importance of local and sustainable food give way to the need for saving money for other household expenses.

Another Somali Bantu woman, Faaiso, age 38, has become well-known in the local Burlington community for her catering business, focusing on selling *samosas* at several farmers markets. A keen entrepreneur, Faaiso expressed her preference for her foodways in comparison
to those she has observed in the United States and her desire to share her cooking with the broader community, both Somali and U.S-born. She prefers to make her own flat bread, called injera, at home and regularly visits goat farms in the area to obtain, and sometimes help slaughter, halal meat for her family. Like Maano, Faaiso misses the fresh produce that her family grew in Somalia, especially sugarcane, multiple varieties of bananas, mangoes, and the fresh camel meat they regularly consumed. As a child, she and her siblings each tended a small plot of land without the use of tools. This cultivation was overseen by their grandmother, who also encouraged the consumption of camel meat, because it “would make them strong.” Faaiso felt that Americans ate too much cheese and that their diets were not as varied as Somalis’, explaining that in her home, there was a constant rotation between different meals, including those based on muofo (the same bread missed by Maano), injera, rice, pasta, and mandazi, a type of fried bread. These starchy staples were always accompanied by vegetables, and if available, halal meat of some kind. From Faaiso’s narrative, it seems that her children have internalized the appreciation for their mother’s food and carefully select what they eat at school, taking guidance from her even when she is not there to observe.

For Devika, a 35-year-old mother of two children, her experiences growing up in Bhutan, and then living for several years in a Nepalese refugee camp significantly shaped her perspectives on food and agriculture. She explained that while growing up in Bhutan, everyone farmed, first to feed themselves, and then to sell if needed. She explained, “Whatever we grow, on our farm we have to eat that thing. We grow vegetables, we grow rice, we grow wheat. We grow everything and no need to buy everything or everyday”. While she conceded that at times they had to buy sugar, tea, and salt, they also earned income through selling cardamom and citrus fruits, in addition to handmade wooden tools. Along with her husband, Devika acted upon her
love for this nostalgic landscape as she tended two community garden plots and a home kitchen
garden in Burlington, with varying degrees of success. Here, they focused on growing
sunflowers, snake gourds, potatoes, and daikon radish to prepare using a traditional Bhutanese
recipe (a process of drying and fermenting). In their home, Devika and her husband prefer to eat
vegetarian Bhutanese dishes, especially those based around chiura, a type of flattened rice. Their
children do not like this basic staple, despite their parents’ insistence that it provides more energy
than American cereals. Devika explained her preference for vegetarian dishes, “Yes [we] eat a
lot of vegetables: sometimes beans, sometimes spinach, sometimes okra, sometimes small, baby
pumpkins; we made curry from baby pumpkins sometimes. All vegetables, especially because
we can’t eat meat much; we have to eat only vegetables. We eat meat but not regular, only once
or twice a month.” As Devika and her husband explained in a joint interview, there was a
significant amount of tension in the home given one daughter’s preference for American foods,
especially pizza, chicken wings, yogurt, and McDonalds chicken sandwiches. Given this
daughter’s preferences, and some diet-related illnesses that she had recently experienced, Devika
usually ends up making several different variations of each meal to please everyone.

Rekha, a 34-year old Bhutanese mother of two, had capitalized on her cooking skills to earn income from a small informal catering business, in addition to being employed as an interpreter and program assistant for a local organization serving refugees. Explaining that her food habits have closely paralleled those of her parents, Rekha explained that if she is not able to eat rice for a whole day, she feels like she has not eaten at all. She explained the embodied manner of learning to cook, saying, “You know that is what I learned from my mom. I don’t know how, we don’t have spoon and then you know measuring cups. We just put. It’s in our head. Like we just by like seeing: my mom, my grandmom. They look at the time and we learn
from them. Automatically it comes. Like to make that chutney my mom used to do like put olive oil in the pan and then heat and then put onion, and then garlic, and ginger, cilantro, put tomatoes, some chilies. And just cook it. That’s it. So we typically don’t measure anything. We never use measuring cups and all this. I learned from them by seeing. Everyday the cook you know. When you stay here and see like everyday I am cooking, cooking, cooking. You will learn by yourself.” This form of cooking, and learning to cook, closely parallels the embodied practices described by Meredith Abarca (2006) in her study of Latina cooks. As for Devika, Rekha is constantly forced to balance her son’s preferences for American foods with her own preferences, explaining, “nowadays, my son he goes to school and he is saying all the time, you cook food all the time Nepali food. I don’t want to eat rice. I want something different.” In his preferences for pizza or ravioli, Rekha believes that ultimately, the school is to blame for his disdain for Nepali food. An avid gardener, Rekha is deeply committed to cooking vegetarian meals centered on rice as much as possible, both for cultural reasons as well as economic. Yet, to appease her son she sometimes will buy a ready-made pizza to put in the oven or chicken to bake at home.

These six women all emphasized their love and appreciation for local food, but the local to which they referred varied in significant and meaningful ways. While Geri and Sarah grew up appreciating the agricultural and maritime bounty of New England and had the ability to stay closely connected with the geographies and social ties to home, the women from Bhutan and Somalia experienced great upheavals in their relationships to localized foodways as they were moved through refugee camps within their continent and then resettled in the United States as adults. Yet, all the women, to varying degrees, had enacted their desire to cultivate foods with deep cultural resonance in Vermont’s soils, and the diverse fruits and vegetables they grow (or
attempt to grow) are symbolic of placemaking processes anthropologists have described in previous writing on immigrant foodways (Mares 2012 and 2014, Mares and Peña 2011). In this way, these practices represent a desire to feed themselves and their children with foods that transcend the mere consumer-commodity dynamic, even if economic and time constraints sometimes required these women to submit to the McDonalds chicken sandwiches and pizza that their children often prefer.

What united these women was the time and effort they all spent navigating Vermont’s food system and ensuring the food security of their families, a form of gendered labor that typically remains unpaid and undervalued. The fact that each woman was balancing these efforts with paid work is significant, and reminds us that the “double day” persists, even across lines of culture and class. Rather than efficiently purchasing all of the food they needed from a single source, each woman strove to balance food entitlements like WIC, SNAP, and school lunch programs, with food purchasing, and self-provisioning through gardening and farming. Although Sarah, Devika, and Rekha had some assistance from their male partners, all six women took on the majority of the food sourcing and preparation work in their household, leaving them intimately familiar with both the preferences and the disgusts held by their partners and children. For these women, this form of carework is both a source of pride and constraint, and is an obligation that binds their families together even while it sometimes is also a source of frustration, exhaustion, and dissent among family members.

Perhaps the biggest distinction in the foodways of these six women was the rationale underlying their avoidance or acceptance of certain meats, either based on the animal of provenance or the slaughtering practices that were utilized. For Rekha and Devika, their preference for vegetarian-based meals, but particularly the avoidance of beef, resulted in tensions
between their consumption practices and those that their children were developing. For Faaiso and Maano, their strict adherence to halal practices within the home was counterbalanced by the uncertainty of the foods that their children were eating outside their own kitchens, particularly those that were prepared at school. Geri and Sarah on the other hand were not heavy consumers of meat, but their preference for local or sustainably raised meats reflected their appreciation of Vermont’s very active local food movement, rather than religious teachings. While one may argue that the local food movement is developing near-religious significance for its devotees, these consumption preferences and rules not only impacted what was happening outside the home for these women, but also the degree to which they interfaced with the social world of Chittenden county.

**Conclusion**

In my ideal ethnographic world, in the next stage of this project I would bring these six women together over a table to share stories, taste each other’s recipes, and reflect upon their experiences caring and feeding their families. Rather than report out data from distinct interview encounters, I could instead share observations from a place of commensality, of cultural exchange, and of embodied research. While this would not be an impossible task and indeed, shared meals are often the source of the best anthropological detail, my task here has instead been to put these women into conversation through the text, in order to draw out common themes and points of divergence. In doing so, I have emphasized that the narratives of these six women cannot be decontextualized from the food environment in which they live, with its hyper-attention to local food and significant rates of food insecurity. Yet, they simultaneously remain
connected to the food environments they intimately know that are hundreds, if not thousands of miles away.

While these working mothers from diverse backgrounds make highly personalized choices about what they and their families eat, the broader constraints of economics, food availability, and gendered expectations remind us that food security is about much more than mere calories. The experiences of Geri, Faa iso, Maano, Sarah, Devika, and Rekha, in addition to those of the 19 other participants, reveal that food security must be understood in deeper and more complex terms than the narrow quantitative data offered by USDA Food Security measurements. If one defines food security based on regular consumption of rice, or trust in the butchering practices of the meat they consume, we must, as food scholars, think of new and innovative methods to draw out these narratives and connect them with the food systems in which people participate.

Although there is little doubt that the state of Vermont has accomplished a significant number of goals in rebuilding a localized, sustainable food system, the benefits of this system are not yet spread out evenly for all the state’s residents, particularly those without economic means and those living in isolated rural areas lacking in transportation options. Further, the unique cultural and religious needs and preferences of the state’s residents call for a more focused consideration of the diversity of foodways present in the state. Over the past few years, nonprofit and small business initiatives in Chittenden County have begun to celebrate this diversity, developing collective goat farms and rice cultivation initiatives that make the local food system more relevant and familiar for members of the refugee community. The broader goal for our research project was to mirror these developments and offer a deeper understanding of the complex ways that people access, prepare, and share food within, and outside, the household. It
is my hope that I have illuminated some of the cultural diversity that exists within a supposedly homogenous place, while also highlighting the commonalities that households share as they work to sustain their loved ones.
References Cited:


Counihan, Carole M. *A tortilla is like life: food and culture in the San Luis valley of Colorado*. University of Texas Press, 2010.


Table One: Utilization of Food Programs and Services, Total Sample v. Foreign-Born

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program/Service</th>
<th>Total Number (and %) of Individuals Utilizing Program/Service out of 25 participants</th>
<th>Number of Foreign-born Participants (and %) Utilizing Program/Service N=12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WIC</td>
<td>16 (64%)</td>
<td>9 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNAP/3SquaresVT</td>
<td>20 (80%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or Reduced School Lunch</td>
<td>13 (52%)</td>
<td>9 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Pantries/Food Banks</td>
<td>13 (52%)</td>
<td>6 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSA Programs</td>
<td>2 (8%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers Markets</td>
<td>19 (76%)</td>
<td>8 (67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Gardening Programs</td>
<td>17 (68%)</td>
<td>10 (83%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix One: Interview Guide

Household Cooking and Eating Practices

1) Describe a typical day of eating for you. How has this changed since your childhood (or from living in your country of origin)?
   a. Do you have any memories of how this might differ from your parents or grandparents?
2) What is your favorite meal? Tell me about obtaining and preparing the ingredients for this meal.
3) Tell me about preparing and eating a typical meal in your household. How is this different for holiday or special events?
4) Tell me about your cultural or religious food preferences. Are there foods that you either include or exclude because of cultural or religious beliefs or practices?
5) Who does the majority of cooking/food preparation in your household?
6) Do you share foods with other people (outside of the household)? If so, who do you share with and why?
7) Do members of your household have different food preferences and/or needs? How do you address these different preferences/needs?

Accessing Food: Shopping

8) Where do you obtain the majority of your food?
   a. Why do you obtain food from this source?
   b. How do you get there?
9) What is the closest grocery store to your house?
10) What are your most and least favorite places to shop?
11) Who does the majority of food shopping for the household?
12) Where do you obtain your food in the summer? In the winter? Spring? Fall?
13) Do your shopping habits change during the course of a month? If so, how?
14) What other strategies have you used in the past to access food?
15) Have you ever shopped at a farmers market or had a share in a Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) Project?
16) What do you find difficult about accessing food? (Prompt for time, transportation, location, cost)
17) Are there any foods that you have trouble accessing, and why?
18) Do you feel like you have enough money to purchase the food that you need?

Accessing Food: Non-Shopping Activities

19) Do you get any of your food through hunting/fishing/gathering? If so, what kinds of foods do you obtain, and where do you obtain them?
20) Do you maintain a garden or raise any animals for food?
   a. If so, where do you practice this and what kinds of foods do you grow or raise?
   b. Where do you get your starts and seeds?
   c. Can you find the kinds of foods that you want?
d. Where is your garden?
e. If you do not garden currently, would you want to?
f. Is there a community garden near your residence?

21) Do you preserve any of your food through canning, freezing, etc? If so, which foods and how do you preserve them?

22) Do your children utilize school breakfast or school lunch programs?
   a. If so, how often?
   b. What are your thoughts on the program?
   c. Do you access any of the summer food programs offered in local schools?

23) Does anyone in your household utilize senior meal or commodity programs?
   a. If so, which ones? How often?
   b. What are your thoughts on the program?

24) Have you utilized any food pantries or meal programs? If so, which ones? What were your thoughts about the food provided?

25) Have you utilized any other food programs in the community? If so, which ones? What are your thoughts on these programs?
   a. Prompt for specific programs (WIC, 3 Squares/EBT/SNAP, commodity programs), local programs, state programs
   b. If people receive 3 squares, ask if they have used their benefits to purchase starts or seeds for their garden (if they garden)