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**Food And Faith:
Theology and Burlington's Local Food Movement**

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Abstract:

Within recent years, anthropological scholarship around local food movements has grown significantly. Many anthropologists have looked into the ways in which local food consumers make meaning of their alternative food systems. In this study, I look into one such meaningful contextualization, asking the question: does faith have a place in discussions around local food movements? I argue that faith has a significant role to play in local food projects. To this end, this study seeks to examine the present and potential roles of religion in sustaining the local food movement in Burlington, Vermont. Through an in-depth literature review and ethnographic research, I examine the ideological and worldview-based intersections between religious groups and local food initiatives, uncovering a new language of local food community support. Looking into the past, I use examples of faith sponsored food initiatives to provide historical evidence of faithful engagement in food aid. This historical precedent for faith sponsored food initiatives highlights the benefits and challenges of incorporating faith groups into food initiatives. Finally, through ethnographic research with faith-based groups and local food organizations, the study builds a set of recommendations for how to best integrate local food initiatives with faith-based groups in Burlington, Vermont. Providing logistical information on how to integrate faith-based groups with local food initiatives, I hope to open up a new avenue of community support for local food in Burlington, developing stronger community ties to our growing local food system.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Up early on a Sunday morning, I made my way to church. Far from a weekly ritual, I roused slowly. With the rest of the house asleep, I slipped out into the morning cold, layered thick with clothes. I thought of questions to ask members. I reflected on other faith-based groups (hereafter FBG's) that I had visited before. And, most pressing, I wondered whether I had eaten enough breakfast. My stomach grumbled and I knew I had not. Certain only that Quaker Meetings are quiet gatherings, I had a very real fear that my stomach would turn me into a nuisance. Unfortunately, I was out of food and out of time. Meeting would be starting soon. So I jogged up the hill and found the meetinghouse. Then I quietly went in.

Much to my surprise people were loud and boisterous. And there was food. There was really good food. Seeing a new face, a member welcomed me and offered me some pound cake. I only needed to be offered once. Thoroughly sated, I talked with the man who welcomed me and, after a brief introduction, he ushered me into the next room over. There were chairs sitting in two arcs facing each other. The ceiling was low. The walls sparsely decorated. There was even a support beam in the middle of the room, obstructing my view of all the members. Unlike any church I had been in, I watched for a moment to figure out what to do. Surprised again, I saw people really settle in. Some took their shoes off. Some kept their coats on. One lady even cuddled her dog, which I first mistook for a fluffy grey scarf until it moved. So I sat down too and settled in.

The room was very, very quiet. Only the wind sweeping against the meetinghouse walls and the occasional cough or snuffle broke the silence. Trying to soak in the details, I looked around, but quickly saw everything of note. In the quiet, I forgot my role as a

participant observer and my mind began to drift. I thought about my friends asleep at home and my plans for the week. I thought about upcoming assignments and wondered whether my economics professor would ever return a paper. I thought about home, and my grandmother's house. The meetinghouse seemed to creak like hers and it smelled similar too. She really would have liked the meeting and its quiet, thoughtful atmosphere. She probably would have appreciated the minimalism. Then someone spoke. Snapping out of my thoughts, I listened to a voice. Though it felt loud and startling at first, I quickly realized that her voice was soft. I opened my eyes to find her standing with eyes closed. She talked about another meetinghouse she attended before moving to Vermont, and she remembered the happy way that members greeted each other week after week. She commented on how gladly they received newcomers, and wondered whether the Quaker meeting here in Burlington, VT welcomed new people as kindly.

As the silence settled again, I could not help but wonder whether she had seen me, a newcomer, and my presence had channeled her reflection. After a bit of reflection myself, I decided that I probably caused her comment. Later on, after drifting briefly back into thought, I again heard another voice. Looking up, I saw a man had risen. He began talking about Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO's) and how Monsanto was preparing to sue Vermont for passing a bill requiring GMO labeling. He brought up environmentalism and organic foods and how we care for the earth. Then he wondered aloud whether food is just an economic and environmental issue, or if faith has a place there too. Answering his own question, he said, "Yes. I feel it does." I had not told anybody about my research yet. My presence as a researcher was not affecting the quality of data I received. The comment was simply serendipity.

After the worship had ended, I rose to introduce myself to the members and I explained my role as a researcher interested in food and faith. Seeing the connection with worship discussion, most of the members laughed, amused by the coincidence. Some said it was meant to be and I count myself amongst them. Slowly, we all meandered back into the entrance room to talk amongst ourselves and share a bit more food. For the next half hour people approached me to happily discuss their opinions on faith, food, and exciting local food projects in Burlington.

Though not my first participant observation session, my time at Quaker meeting was by far the most exhilarating. Talking with members, I found that many people relate their faith with their food choices. Connecting with their social outreach, Quaker members told me of their partnership with farmers abroad and their work feeding hungry people within Burlington's local community. One member even likened environmentalism and food systems activism to a form of quasi-spirituality for her children. Much like the man discussing GMO's in Vermont, I found that many FBG members in Burlington are concerned with conventional agriculture, and see the local food movement as a way a meaningful way to reconnect with their community as well as with the earth.

Stepping back, the connections which FBG members referenced between their faith and local food fit within two broad sections of Anthropological scholarship: religion and food. Over time, many different theoretical understandings have come to dictate how anthropologists research religion. Most recently, anthropologists have come to understand religion as "A symbolic system that is socially enacted through rituals and other aspects of social life" (Welsch and Vivanco 2015: 347). This approach works to

understand the symbolic and cultural aspects underlying religion, but also focuses on the performed ways in which FBG members enact their faith within the world. It analyzes both the beliefs involved in religion and the ways that people enact them within their everyday lives. Notably, one key way that FBG members preform their faith is through food.

When studying food from an anthropological perspective, researchers follow two distinct approaches. Investigating methods of food procurement, processing, and consumption, some anthropologists work to understand “modes of subsistence” amongst different cultures. Research regarding “modes of subsistence” often focuses on the material processes through which humans generate food. More pertinent to this research, however, is the second approach, which focuses on the cultural and moral interpretations of food. As Welsch and Vivanco explain, “food is a rich source of meaning, and people use it to communicate specific messages” (Welsch and Vivanco 2015: 164). People use food to sooth homesickness or fuel passion. They use it to start friendships or reconcile old ones. Every society uses food in unique ways to do social work. Understanding food as an material object steeped in social meaning, this thesis investigates theology as one framework through which people make their food meaningful.

In the past, anthropologists and closely related human scientists have examined the ways in which theology informs the process of food production, distribution, and consumption. Anthropologist Mary Douglas examined the Judaism in her work “Abominations of Leviticus” to understand how dietary restrictions connect with and communicate faith (Douglas 1966). Further, Priscilla McCutcheon examined the intersections of faith and community food security in her examination of the Nation of

Islam and the Pan African Christian Church (McCutcheon 2013). Nevertheless, there are few ethnographic studies primarily focused on the researching food and religion together. Theological understandings of food, however, can provide exciting insight into the practice of faith. As Anthropologist E.N. Anderson explains: “religions almost always use food to mark and symbolize matters of communion and theology” (Anderson 2005: 156). Food often functions as a medium through which theological concepts regarding the world are materialized.

Knowing that food plays a large role in religion, often as a physical representation of faith, this thesis examines how FBG’s might connect with local food movements. With this in mind, many questions arise. First and foremost, given the interest that Quakers expressed during meeting in connecting with local food initiatives, I ask why FBG’s and local food movements seem to share common goals for the US food system. By extension, I wonder what ideological and worldview-based connections there are between FBG’s and local food initiatives. Moreover, it questions under what conditions FBG’s have already integrated with local food projects as well as why some FBG’s remain disconnected. Next, looking to Burlington, this thesis investigates whether ideological connections between FBG’s and local food initiatives bear out on a local scale, and, if so, how these connections might be transformed into successful faith-sponsored local food projects. Finally, this thesis seeks to conclude whether the integration of FBG’s with local food efforts benefit the sustainability of the Burlington’s local food movement.

In response, this thesis will argue that FBG’s and local food movements share much in common in terms of ideologies and worldviews, thus laying the groundwork for resilient partnerships. Through joining efforts with FBG’s, local food movements can

uncover a new language of support for their cause, helping to root local purchases and projects within meaningful and life-affirming theological worldviews that prove less susceptible to market forces. Finally, this thesis contends that ideological and worldview-based connections between FBG's and local food initiatives appear within Burlington's faith community, leaving great opportunity to integrate faith and local food efforts to make Burlington's local food movement more sustainable.

To examine these claims, I first look into the ideologies informing local food activists, discussing critiques of conventional agriculture, reactions to modernization, and rejection of traditional capitalism. Next, I discuss some critiques of local food movements highlighting areas in need of support, and I suggest faith activism as a potentially beneficial mechanism for addressing these needs. Moving onward, I review the ideological intersections between FBG's and local food movements to glean whether FBG's might make valuable partners with local food initiatives. I then analyze FBG involvement in food initiatives to establish a historical precedent for FBG-food work, and I place emerging FBG partnerships with local food initiatives within a historical context. Finally, I discuss my ethnographic research in Burlington to explore whether the ideological connections I developed bear out within a local context. Looking to the future, I provide some preliminary suggestions of how FBG's in Burlington might begin connecting with local food initiatives.

As will be shown through the chapters to come, local food movement advocates would do well to contact their local faith communities, opening lines of communication and finding common ground. Using the voices of the faith community to re-contextualize and amplify their cause, local food activists could create a unique new avenue for local

food community building and support. Better yet, FBG's could enliven their mission work through connecting with local food projects. Though certainly an emerging connection, FBG's and local food initiatives have much to offer each other and will likely continue to grow intertwined in the years to come

Chapter 2: Methodologies

“I have yet to see a piece of writing, political or non-political, that doesn’t have a slant. All writing slants the way the writer leans, and no man is born perpendicular, although many men are born upright” (E.B. White 1956)

To research the role of religion in the Burlington local food movement, this project used a variety of methods. My first method of inquiry for this research was a literature review, looking to uncover and analyze writings on the local food movement, food advocacy programs, theological understandings of food systems, prior religious involvement in food initiatives, and current faith-sponsored food initiatives. For this literature review, I looked to academic journals and books written by authors across the social sciences. I also looked to the writings on specific local food initiatives, such as the mission of the Intervale Farm in Burlington. Finally, I researched writings on specific faith sponsored food initiatives such as “Hazon,” a Jewish Retreat Center educating towards sustainable communities, and “Faith in Place,” an interfaith organization striving to create a sustainable food system. I obtained all of the resources for this literature review through the Bailey Howe Library at UVM as well as through various Internet sources for primary information.

Through this extensive, cross disciplinary literature review using academic work as well as primary source data, I was able to build a thorough understanding of the local food movement, theological perspectives on food production, and the ways that these discourses intersect. The literature review thus helped me to establish functional base of information and understanding upon which my ethnographic research could be based and within which it could be placed to draw broader conclusions about the various potentials of faith sponsored food initiatives.

The study also used ethnographic methods of inquiry to ground the literature analysis in the Burlington community. Before beginning my ethnographic research, however, my study went through the process in Institutional Review and I took a brief online course on research ethics. As my research study only utilizes interviews and participant observation, it presents no more risk to research subjects than would be encountered in a normal day. For this reason, I applied for “Exempt Review” and received my Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval on October 22, 2014.

To collect ethnographic data, I primarily used interviews with local food initiative leaders and FBG leaders in Burlington, VT. Though my original intention was to conduct five interviews with FBG leaders and five interviews with local food initiative leaders, I encountered difficulties around scheduling that prevented me from meeting with a desired FBG leader. Further, some unexpected enthusiasm generated from research participants talking to other members of the congregation led me to conduct two extra interviews with FBG members. In total, I interviewed eleven individuals for this project: six FBG leaders/ members and five local food initiative leaders.

The FBG’s involved in this study are the First Congregational Church of Burlington, the First Church of Christ Scientist Burlington, the Ohavi Zedek Synagogue, the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Burlington, and the Burlington Friends Meeting. I intentionally chose to study the FBG’s listed above because they span many denominations, religions, and cultural ideologies. By including various denominations and religions, I hope to draw conclusions that can be applied to broader theological and geographical contexts, allowing my results to inform larger discussions on food and religion. Importantly, however, sampling only from Christian and Jewish faiths, my

research does not reflect a complete picture of Burlington's faith community. Home to many refugee populations from across the world, Burlington has a growing Islamic community with a Mosque in Colchester, VT as well as a large Hindu population working to establish a temple in the area. Unfortunately, without a car I was unable to access the Mosque in Colchester, and without an established place of worship I could not find an appropriate venue in which to study the Hindu community. Nonetheless, I have worked throughout this research process to arrive at conclusions that apply to all faith groups.

For this study, I also interviewed representatives from the Joint Urban Ministry Project (Hereafter JUMP), the Intervale Food Hub, the Vermont Community Garden Network, Ben and Jerry's, and a local farm in Burlington. I chose these local initiatives to research because of their involvement in food activism efforts in the greater Burlington, VT area.

During the interviews, I asked the interviewees' questions regarding their faith, local food initiatives, the ideological connections between food and faith efforts, and logistics surrounding specific potential faith sponsored local food initiatives in Burlington. The most commonly used questions are: How would you define faithful living? What do you believe are the long-term goals of local food initiatives? What passages might you cite in a sermon about food justice and sustainability? And, do you believe the goals of FBG's and local food initiatives align? Though all the interviews followed a general arch of questioning as detailed above, each interview had a slightly different set of questions, tailored to the specific interviewee. To record these interviews, I used a used an electronic audio recorder supplied by the Bailey Howe Library. During

the interviews I also took short notes when appropriate to add additional contextual information. I conducted all of the interviews between the months of November of 2014 and January of 2015.

I transcribed and hand coded all interviews looking for general connections and trends within and among them, which I used as the foundation of my ethnographic data and interpretations to come in Chapter 7. After transcribing and hand coding all the interviews, I erased the original audio copies. Moreover, all interviewees were de-identified and appear as such in the data to follow.

To collect complementary ethnographic data, I also conducted multiple sessions of participant observation conducted at local food gatherings as well as FBG gatherings. My original intention was to conduct five sessions of participant observation during and directly after FBG gatherings in Burlington, and to leave two other sessions open to accommodate any presently unknown, yet relevant gatherings. Through the process of research, however, I found it much more valuable to conduct multiple sessions of participant observation at each FBG examined. Consequently, I conducted roughly 25 hours of participant observation. For these sessions, I attended FBG gatherings and talked with members at reception about food and faith, provided there was a reception at all. I also attended a Vermont Interfaith Thanksgiving Service and met with volunteers at the JUMP, conducting participant observation in these settings. I recorded all of my data gained during participant observation sessions in a personal notebook. I chose to record all data in my notebook directly after conducting each participant observation session, so to keep the information as fresh as possible. I refrained from writing notes during the

sessions, however, because I found that note taking both prevented me from giving my full attention and frequently made people feel uncomfortable.

Finally, it is important to note that I will present this research to the Burlington Food Council to detail specific steps towards integrate FBG's and local food initiatives in Burlington, VT. I also intend to post my findings in the UVM Food Feed Blog where they might be found online. From there, my findings and recommendations will hopefully open a much-needed dialogue between FBG's and Local Food Initiatives that might inspire the creation of new faith-based local food projects.

Due to the cross-cultural nature of ethnography, I believe that it extremely important to recognize my own positionality and to examine any potential effects that it may have taken on my study. My own positionality (my traits, characteristics, and background) has certainly influenced the way I conducted my research, the way my research subjects responded to me, the way I interpreted my data, and even what data I may have failed to see. Since my identity affects the character of the research I have conducted, it becomes absolutely essential for me to name my potential influences and biases outright.

First and foremost, it is important to know that I am a tall, white, college-educated male. For this reason, I have been born into a life of privilege. This privilege may have affected the ways in which my research subjects engaged with me. Moreover, this privilege has made me a relative novice to discussions on structural and physical oppression, which I have only engaged with in class settings. With a less personal knowledge of hardship, I am decidedly new to discussions around food advocacy and issues of hunger, which will be discussed later on.

Second, by growing up in a middle-class home that strongly emphasized home cooking and nutrition, I fit the traditional demographic for local food advocates. Moreover, through living in Burlington, VT, a notable hub of local food activity, I have received a great deal of exposure to local food initiatives. On account of my class background, my family influences, and my current residence in Burlington, VT, I have grown to appreciate and support local food initiatives over my four years attending UVM. This personal bias in support of local food initiatives has likely played a role in the questions I have asked and the ways which I have interpreted some of my data.

Third, it is important to acknowledge that I was raised a Congregationalist. Consequently, I felt most comfortable conducting research in a Congregationalist setting. I am also, quite logically, more versed in Christian scripture and spirituality than I am in the texts and theology of other religions. Due to my differing levels of comfort and familiarity with the FBG's I study, my research and analysis may be affected, making conclusions more relevant to Protestants than other faith groups. Despite this potential for error in my understanding and analysis of faith traditions, it is my earnest goal to make the results of this research applicable across faith groups.

Chapter Three: A Constellation of Ideals

If you were to ask most any customer at the Burlington Farmer's Market why exactly they choose to shop there, you would most assuredly hear some common responses (Esrich 2015). For many people, local food options such as those sourced from farmers' markets and CSA's are valued for their reduced carbon footprint, low inputs, better taste, freshness, and presumably sustainable agricultural practices. Notably, these culturally informed values often used to characterize local food only touch the surface of the local food movement and the complex intersection of ideologies that inform it. Moving beyond these common consumer sentiments that drive local purchasing, I will argue that the local food movement traces its origins to three key emergent ideals in the US: a critique of the conventional agricultural system, a reaction to globalization and modernization, and a rejection of traditional capitalism. In the space below, I will discuss each ideal in turn, detailing how each concept forms a key part of the local food ideological system.

Before discussing the ideals informing the local food movement, however, it is first important to discuss just what local food is, and why it eludes one easy definition. For most people, local food is defined as food grown and procured from within some specific radial distance. For example, many people today try to live on a 100-mile diet, and many books and blogs have been written on the experience (Smith and Mackinnon 2007). The specific distance of "local," however, remains undetermined and nearly impossible to measure in earnest. Any calculation regarding the food miles of an "average food item" will be "so laced with assumptions and compromises as to render it all but meaningless" (Schnell 2013: 617). Moreover the location of a farm relative to its

consumers holds no effect over the quality of goods produced. In other words, proximity does not necessitate sustainability (Born and Purcell 2006). To this effect, consumers must be careful to avoid the “local trap” of accidentally conflating scale with desirable growing practices (Born and Purcell 2006). Nonetheless, supporters of local food, or locavores, value production factors beyond mere proximity, such as nutritional content, sustainable production methods, and worker equity (Schnell 2013: 621). For this reason, the term “local” must not be taken too literally. Locavores certainly look for products nearby that require less shipping, but they also look for products that meet their standards of morals and ethics. The term “local” thus serves as more of a verbal shorthand for a host of values regarding agricultural production, not simply for location (Schnell 2013: 617).

Regardless, the question remains: What is local food? The answer, it would seem, is that it depends. There is no uniform set of goals uniting local food projects into one cohesive movement, but instead there are a multitude of overlapping projects rooted in specific places and striving towards specific community goals (Nonini 2013: 270; Schnell 2013: 616). Though one succinct definition of the local food “movement” and its goals proves impossible, this reality does not come to the detriment of local food movements. Instead, as local food movements grow in popularity, it becomes absolutely essential that they remain disparate, set in particular places and intent on empowering specific communities (DeLind 2010). National homogeneity would only challenge their regional effectiveness. As will be discussed further in chapter 4, local communities united around specific goals give local food movements their resilience; one homogenized local consumer base opens the movement to re-appropriation by market forces. Despite their

many particularities, locally based food efforts all share a set of similarly constructed, though varying, ideals about how food should be produced and distributed. As I will discuss below, modern critiques of conventional agriculture have significantly contributed to advocates' conceptualizations of an ideal local food system.

Critiques of conventional agriculture:

Perhaps the most obvious ideal informing the local food movement is the critique of conventional agricultural practices. Across most of the United States, critiques of conventional agriculture have become standard portions of cultural dialogue. Movies such as “Food Inc.”, “Supersize Me”, and “King Corn”, as well as books such as “The Omnivore’s Dilemma” and “Fast Food Nation” all contribute to a cacophonous uproar against conventional agriculture. Recurring food scares, increased understandings of dietetics, and animal cruelty scandals all helped to cultivate a general distrust our rather unregulated conventional agricultural system, sparking a reawakening of public interest in the effects of food production on personal health, local communities, and the environment (Bubinas 2011: 156; Vileisis 2008: 223-35). Popular books have been written on the multitude of ways that the conventional agricultural system generates negative environmental, social, and economic effects. For my purposes here, I will only name a few: overdependence on and overuse of oil, erosion of soil, corruption and depletion of water, animal cruelty, loss of biodiversity, corporate consolidation, farmworker injustice, and climate change (Ayres 2013: 10-30; Rodale Institute 2011).

This list, though short, details many of the key points against which the local food movement defines itself. Nonini highlights some of these issues as central to the construction of the local food movement when claiming:

For these [local food] activists, the [agro industrial] system cannot be trusted because it is too big, too complex, too fragile, and too vulnerable to disruptions that arise from its dependencies on fossil fuels, the labor of unknown immigrant workers, fertilizers and pesticides applied to crops in massive, unregulated quantities, and logistical transport structures that are under stress and overextended. (Nonini 2013: 271)

Largely in response to growing criticism of conventional agriculture, local food efforts paint themselves as fresh, sustainably grown, pesticide free, highly nutritional, and equitably produced. Local food supporters shop “armed with this knowledge [of their food’s production process], or at least the confidence that it is readily available” (DeLind 2006: 124). Thus, much of the local food movement acts as a form of informed, activist consumerism. It lauds the alleged transparency that local food systems afford. This transparency of production, arguably absent from conventional agriculture (Vileisis: 2008), empowers consumers to make informed food choices that influence the quality of products available in the local marketplace (DeLind 2006:124).

Through their informed food choices, locavores attempt to create a “new politics of consumption” rejecting conventional agricultural systems, as their purchases slowly incentivize a new, socially and environmentally just local food system (Bubinas 2011). Put quite simply: “Intentional locavorism as a phenomenon is quite recent, and only exists within and against the context of the globalized corporate food market” (Zeller 2014: 298).

A reaction to globalization and modernization:

Moving beyond these well-voiced, more rational critiques of conventional agriculture by local food advocates, many locavores acknowledge a less easily defined desire for “place.” In the space below, I will argue that the processes of modernization and globalization generate feelings of social alienation from local communities and from the process of food production. Responding to these feelings of anomie, the local food movement offers an opportunity to reconnect with lost communities and with the process of food production, re-rooting people in a place-based and food-centered community.

Before unpacking this claim, it is first important to define modernization and globalization. According to Nonini, modernism is: “the optimistic vision of an orientation by citizens towards an increasingly prosperous and ‘developed’ commercial and productive order made possible by a state that is predictably expansive and increasingly inclusive in its provision of goods” (Nonini 2013: 268). Throughout the economic boom years of the 1980’s and 90’s, the project of modernization, fueled by neoliberal economic policy, dominated political and economic thought. Resounding support for modernizing projects muffled dissenting opinions. By the 21st century, however, growing economic instability and inequality has brought the modernist project into question (Nonini 2013: 269). From the faltering of the modernist system, no longer able to provide an increasing number of goods to an increasing number of people, an important question arises: If globalization and modernization, the dominant discourses of today, have wrought significant damage on humans and the environment alike, then shouldn’t they be resisted (Major 2011: 177)? Shouldn’t we amend our clearly broken conventional food system?

As might be expected, dissenting voices to the modernist project have again begun to receive audience. A new critique of modern life has agglomerated, and this critique finds modern society woefully lacking in authentic relationships and community spaces. Through trade blurring the boundaries of the state, careers encouraging hypermobility, people increasingly depending on market-encrusted relations, and the virtual world coming to dominate social interaction, the ways in which we occupy space and interact with people have shifted dramatically (Lavin 2009; DeLind 2006: 129). Local spaces appear to have been “thinned-out” by our modern world (Casey 2001: 684), creating a sense of cultural anomie. In economic terms, social capital has been largely traded in for economic capital as workdays extend and previously capital-rich social functions such as childcare become commodified (Robbins 2011: 342-3). To this effect, one interviewee and local food organizer explained, “It [community gardening] creates a sense of togetherness that we have lost in our society, in the digital age where we are staring at screens and mini computers” (Hyman 2015). In our modern world characterized by distance, both spatial and temporal, intimate human relationships seem to have disappeared, traded in for highly mobile careers, virtual environments, and commodity goods produced at the other end of the world. Food is no exception here. Better yet, food proves an extremely effective case study for further articulating this vague cultural unease with modernization and globalization.

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, the American food system, much like many other modern productive systems, went through a process of internationalization and corporate consolidation (Vileisis 2008). By ceding control of food production to large, multinational companies, food procurement has never been

easier for local consumers but food has also never been more distanced, both temporally and physically, from those same consumers (McKibben 2007: 91). Large, blurry chains of custody between producers and consumers create anonymity in the food production process, removing people from the often unsavory aspects of industrial agriculture (Chase and Grubinger 2014: 60). The conventional food system, like many systems influencing our modern world, has become abstract and foreign, something occurring far away from our local spaces, and perhaps out of our control. Removed from the process of growing, many people have become completely unaware of the agricultural process, and, more profoundly, of food as a product of the earth. Aghast by this ignorance, one interviewee commented, “It just blows my mind when I realized that some kids have no idea where a carrot comes from” (May 2015). Modernization of the food system has shifted from agriculture from producing local, socially embedded foods to producing simple consumable objects (Esteva 1994: 6; Robbins 2011: 158). Though certainly not a universal opinion or reality, many people in the US have come to see conventionally grown food as food “out-of-place” (DeLind 2006: 132), no longer socially meaningful beyond its flavor and nutritional content.

More than losing connection with the growing process, consumers have also, to a large degree, lost control over their food’s production and quality (Allen 2004: 170). Importantly, growing critiques of conventional agriculture have made the danger of our ignorance painfully obvious, and this understanding is truly troubling (DeLind 2006). Looking back, it would appear that anxiety around conventionally grown food results from an increasing feeling of dis“place”ment from the process of food production, and, moreover, an increasing awareness regarding the environmental and social implications

of this displacement. In extension, those who are unperturbed by conventional agriculture critiques probably don't feel the need to reconnect with their food or purchase locally produced goods.

Responding to feelings of alienation and anxiety generated by our modern food system, local food movements promise a new type of community. Believing local communities to be more genuine arenas of social interaction than modernized, often-virtual spaces, locavores attempt to build new, locally specific food communities (Allen 2004: 179; Born and Purcell 2006). These communities promise a more authentic relationship with nature, agriculture, and humans in general. Local food thus becomes a great project of “social and ecological reconciliation” (Lavin 2009), rebuilding connections broken through the process of modernization. Expressing this feeling of reconciliation, Bill McKibben reflects, “In my role as an eater, I was part of something larger than myself that made sense to me—a community. I felt grounded—connected” (McKibben 2007: 94). Similarly, many farmers' market shoppers report that increased conversations while shopping and a stronger connection with their food's production are the main drivers for their attendance (McKibben 2007: 105; Allen 2004: 67). Many US citizens feel desperate for community, and local food offers a clear solution. Simply put, local food movements offer a means to redress feelings of alienation in the modern world by restoring cohesive bonds among people, their community, and the land (Zeller 2014: 301). Within this model of reconciliation, locally produced food becomes a central part of people's place narratives, providing a unifying point about which people to weave themselves into broader community narratives of the places they inhabit (Schnell 2013: 625).

Moreover, the local food movement acts as a form of empowerment, allowing consumers to take responsibility for the quality of their food as well as its social and ecological implications (Schnell 2013: 623). Voicing this sense of empowerment, a Christian Scientist interviewee reflected, “I can go to the grocery store and have labeled, ‘Okay, this is grown by a Vermont farmer,’ and I can choose whether I am going to buy that” (Sowles 2015). It offers a way out of our forced participation in destructive conventional growing practices which many concerned consumers gladly embrace.

Looking back, it would seem that the local food movement simultaneously re-socializes the marketplace by embedding it within a visible local community (Bubinas 2011:164) and reclaims authority of individual consumers over the process of their foods creation. To this end, local food movements attempt to redress feelings of social alienation and problems of environmental destruction wrought by our modernized conventional food system.

A rejection of traditional capitalism:

This new politics of consumption, one centered about meaningful food grown and consumed by a local community proves a drastic shift from more traditional systems of capitalism. Though not a complete rejection of capitalism, the local food movement calls for substantial shift in the way that people purchase goods. I will argue that, instead of putting faith in rational self-interest and the “invisible hand” of capitalism, local food efforts call for food purchases to be informed by a moral and ethical ethos grounded in social, environmental, and economic concerns.

Before understanding why local food strives for a pattern of consumption, it is first important to describe, in brief, the way in which neoclassical economics conceptualizes the market, and humans, to function. Essentially, neoclassical economics presumes that all human beings operate as perfectly rational, self-interested individuals with an insatiable number of desires (Daly and Farley 2011: 233). From here, “broader economic behavior is simply the aggregation of decisions by rational, self-interested individuals” (Daly and Farley 2011: 234). Problematically simplified conceptions of human behavior aside (Gowdy 2002), neoclassical economics presumes that the aggregation of rational self-interested behavior will construct a perfectly efficient market, allocating necessary goods to all individuals through the “invisible hand” of the economy (Daly and Farley 2011: 262). Presuming the market to most efficiently allocate resources, neoclassical economists argue that the government should play a limited role in market regulation for fear that efficiency be compromised (Harvey 2005). Finally, the central and uniting goal espoused by neoclassical economists is that continued and infinite economic growth must always be sought (Daly and Farley 2011: 23).

Though this “invisible hand” of capitalism provides an elegant model of the economy and of humanity, it is not without its flaws. Certainly, more discussion on the intricacies of neoclassical economics is necessary for nuanced understanding and critique, but it is neither the place of this paper nor my field of expertise, so I will take its fallibility as given. Should more explanation be needed, see Daly and Farley 2010, Farley et al. 2014, and Harvey 2005. What remains pertinent, however, is the wide and growing cultural belief that the models of neoclassical economics are imperfect. Schnell is quick to criticize neoclassical thinking, claiming:

Unfettered capitalism in agriculture encourages short-term extractive thinking, leads to increased food insecurity, results in exploitation of the labor force, discounts or ignores ecological realities in pursuit of short term profit, and views environmental damage as an externality, a cost to be borne by someone else. (Schnell 2013: 619)

This fixation on infinite economic growth and individual profit, so central to our current economic system, continually creates negative environmental and social effects. Now, thankfully, the critics of the dominant neoclassical system are again receiving attention.

Knowing that the local food movement strives to reorganize our food system from one large, conventional system into many small and deeply communal ones, it appears only logical that locavores should also take issue with neoclassical economics. Calling for a morally informed economy, local food advocates believe that social equity and environmental sustainability, more than simply price, should drive food purchasing (Chase and Grubinger 2014: 31). Instead of using a neoclassical perspective, valuing individualistic ends and low prices, the local food movement calls for its customers to pay extra money to ensure that their food is produced in a socially equitable and environmentally sustainable way. Moreover, by opting out of the corporate system of farming, which siphons profits into the hands of corporations, the local food movement enables money to be recycled into specific community, stimulating local economies (Peterson 2013: 424). Local food rejects traditional economics, which values price based purchasing, instead calling for a moral economy that forgoes issues of cost to ensure equity and sustainability.

Looking back, it seems clear that the local food movement, in its many and varied iterations, sprung from three emergent ideals in the US today: a critique of conventional

agriculture, a reaction to globalization and modernization, and a rejection of traditional capitalism. These three new concepts, dynamic and interconnected, have formed the ideological groundwork on which the many local initiatives dotting the country have grown. Appealing to core values of sustainability, community, and equity, these key tenants critiquing conventional agriculture, modernization, and traditional capitalism inform the wholeheartedly new (and yet old) process of a local food system. They call for a reorganization of values, putting the environment and community before profit. They call for a complete restructuring of the way we grow and consume food.

Chapter 4: Comparative Critiques of Local Food

Chapter three looked into three key ideals that form the ideological groundwork for local food movements. Reactions against conventional agriculture and modernization have led to a rejection of traditional capitalism, calling instead for a morally driven economy. The local food movement, in its many iterations, has arisen in an attempt to construct an alternative food system, one that strengthens the environment and improves equity by rooting itself in a socially conscious local community. It attempts to re-root food systems in specific places, sustained by tight-knit community bonds. Importantly however, local food movements are not without their flaws, and they are not the only form of advocacy working for food systems change in the United States today. In this chapter, I will critique local food movements for their overreliance on consumptive activism. Next, I will discuss local food movements alongside larger movements for food security, comparing and critiquing both. Finally, I will attempt to propose a way in which to combine both forms of food advocacy, working to build a more holistic and sustainable approach to food systems change.

Before engaging in this discussion, it is essential to highlight that both local food movements and broader movements for food security are not discrete causes, but rather can and do intersect. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I will treat these two forms of activism as separate so to more easily compare and critique both. Finally, in the chapter's conclusion I will problematize this dichotomy as I work to reconcile local food movements with food security movements.

The Trouble with Consumptive Activism:

Perhaps the most important characteristic of the local food movement is its sense of “place” or, the idea that food systems change occurs first in local spaces, driven by particular communities with their own set of goals. The concept of a moral economy driven by social and environmental concerns provides a general ideological backdrop for most of these place-based movements. Through re-localizing and re-socializing food systems, local food movements attempt to create a new politics of consumption; however, one important question remains. Will simply changing consumption patterns, making them more morally informed, be enough to create long-term, sustainable change to our industrial food system? Here I will claim that the local food movement predominantly relies upon consumptive activism, yet consumption driven food systems change is neither an efficient model for reform, nor a significant enough break from traditional capitalism to create lasting, positive change.

To unpack this claim it is first necessary to understand what I mean by “consumptive activism.” This key concept is inextricably bound up in the desire for a moral economy and the understanding that traditional, neoclassical economics lacks an efficient mechanism of accounting for social and environmental costs (Chase and Grubinger 2014: 54). Unable to account for externalized social and environmental costs, our economic system has a clear need for reform. Importantly however, many US citizens have lost faith in the ability of the US government to create effective policy (Lavin 2009; Riffkin 2014). This lack of faith in the democratic process has given rise to a growing trend of consumer politics, in which the market and its invisible hand are presumed to most effectively drive food systems change (Glickman 2009). By “voting with your

fork,” individuals believe that the cumulative affect of their food choices will reduce the profitability of unethically produced foods, thus driving change in agricultural methods. For this reason, local food movements call upon the ethics of individuals as the primary method of restricting unethical and unsustainable productive methods (Chase and Grubinger 2014: 31). Individuals serve as a primary locus of change in local food movements, and their consumption, aided by the invisible hand of the market, becomes the most effective medium of activism. Thus, consumptive activism can be characterized as effort of individuals to create food systems change through their purchases.

Though this form of activism may make sense at first glance, problems quickly arise. Below I will show that economic inequality and market re-appropriation hinder the effectiveness of consumptive activism, challenging the long-term sustainability of local food movements. First and foremost, economic inequality limits the effectiveness of consumer activism. Living today in a world of massive and growing economic inequality (OCED 2014), it seems prudent to consider how “one dollar, one vote” differentially privileges wealthy and poor citizens. If people are to create change through purchases, then the power to affect change will scale according to purchasing power. With consumptive activism as the primary mode of local food advocacy, some economically disadvantaged citizens become unable to support the often more expensive locally produced goods (Mares and Alkon 2011: 69; Hinrichs 2000: 301). Concerned consumers often face the troubling decision of whether to buy affordable goods or more socially rooted goods. I encountered just this concern during my fieldwork when a church pastor reflected, “I have a lot of empathy for people who are stuck in that much lower place economically who want to do the right thing [purchasing local foods] and simply cant”

(May 2015). Moreover, wealthy individuals and corporations receive disproportionately large amounts of power in this consumer activist system (Cook 2013). Though purchasing local food may provide valuable market incentive for growing food sustainably and ethically, consumptive activism alone cannot adequately address the economic constraints that sustain conventional agriculture. By locating political action exclusively within the market, many poorer individuals become unable to affect change while wealthier parties gain the power to create or deter food systems change as they please. We should be careful not to trade in “one vote per citizen” for “one vote per dollar” (DeLind 2010: 296; Levin 2009).

Curiously, despite the affect of economic inequality on consumptive activism, local food movement advocates do little in the way of national lobbying for food policy change. Instead of mobilizing communities, running for office, and encouraging voting, local food initiatives center principally about ethically motivated consumption (Lavin 2009). By mainly attempting to buy change, locavores firmly set themselves within the capitalist system and create another danger to the sustainability of local food: re-appropriation.

Perhaps the most problematic element of consumptive activism is the danger of re-appropriation. To best understand this concept, it is helpful to look to the history of the organics movement of the 1960's. Rising out of anxieties around the use of pesticides and their effect on human health, the organics movement attempted to create a new style of agriculture, less reliant on ecologically deleterious agricultural inputs (Lavin 2009). Though the organics movement had a strong back-to-the-land ethos, characterized by small farms and “pure” foods, the movement eventually integrated its efforts into the

more conventional capitalist market (Lavin 2009; DeLind 2006; Guthman 2014).

Through this integration, organic food availability has skyrocketed, but it has also opened the movement's moral command, its back-to-the-land ethos, to cooptation by larger corporations. Redirecting the consumptive activism that fueled the organic movement, larger companies capitalized on the moral power of the "organic" label by rebranding their products as such. Simultaneously, agribusinesses shifted government definitions of "organic" to fit large-scale agricultural methods. By the early 2000's, the US government had created organic certifications that were a pale image of the original organic vision (Jaffe and Howard 2010). Chad Lavin describes the unfortunate fate of the organic movement, commenting:

Like the 1960's itself, the story of organics is by now a well-rehearsed narrative of dashed hopes, capitalist cooptation, and corporate corruption, such that, by 2006, retail leviathan WalMart was selling organic produce and organic spinach that had been tainted by *E. coli* 0157, a toxic bacteria that owes its very existence to the industrial farming practices that organics ostensibly opposed. (Lavin 2009)

By relying on consumer choice as the primary force for change, the organic movement left its moral high ground and its vision for a wholeheartedly new agricultural system open to cooptation by larger corporations. What was supposed to be an alternative option to conventional agriculture became largely re-appropriated back into the system of conventional growing. Political goodwill was successfully rerouted back into the hands of the primary offenders. Today, agribusinesses can grow on large scales using some capital-intensive inputs yet still be deemed "organic" (Jaffe and Howard 2010: 391). Moreover, 14 of the 20 largest food processors in North America have bought organic brands or made their brands organic (Jaffe and Howard 2010: 391).

Looking now to the local food movement, we can see a similar picture developing. Much like the organic movement, local food movements have arisen in response to concerns around food safety and environmental degradation that result from conventional growing. As discussed in Chapter 3 and above, local food movements strive to create place-based networks of farmers supported by morally guided consumers. Though this moral economic system may be a far cry from neoclassical economics, which presumes price alone should dictate purchases, we must wonder whether consumptive activism challenges the market strength conventional agriculture enough to insulate local food systems from re-appropriating competition by larger agribusiness.

Knowing the unhappy tale of the organics movement, it seems fair to question whether larger corporations might again rebrand their products and coopt the definition of “local” food to fit conventional standards. I believe that local food movements are especially susceptible to cooptation because the term “local” does not have a specific definition (Nonini 2013; DeLind 2010). Perhaps more importantly, the term “local” does not necessarily require food to be grown sustainably, just nearby (Born and Purcell 2006). Since “local” lacks a specific metric and proximity does not necessitate sustainability, larger companies could easily rebrand their products as “local” and siphon concerned consumers away from their place-based network of farmers. As might be expected, WalMart has already begun this process by profiling local growers and marketing their stories publically (DeLind 2010; Chase and Grubinger 2014). Anthropologist Laura DeLind explains the danger of local food re-appropriation quite succinctly when claiming, “Commerce and those who control it increasingly set the popular limits for what is and isn’t reasonably local” (DeLind 2010: 278). By rallying for

change through predominantly consumptive activism, local food movements leave their unique farming networks open to competition within the larger capitalist system. Thus, local food movements leave their moral command and community based ethos open to re-appropriation by larger market forces.

By now it seems clear that consumptive activism, though a valuable stimulant for local farmers, cannot be the predominant form of local food activism. Issues around economic inequality and re-appropriation make consumptive activism at best a troubled solution to problems in our food system. To make these tight-knit, community based food systems more sustainable, we need to commit not only our money, but also our bodies, our time, and our definitions of self to the process of local food production (DeLind 2006: 143). We need to build a community culture, not just a consumer culture, around our small networks of food production and consumption. Otherwise, larger market forces are likely to re-appropriate local food movements, much like the Organic Movement before it.

Local Food and Food Security Activism:

As many academics have noted, advocates for food systems change tend to operate in two relatively separate camps: local food movements and the food security movements (Ayres 2013; Allen 2004; Nonini 2013). These two movements, which “might otherwise agree that we have a broken food system” (Ayres 2013: xii), divide over what problems they choose to solve first. Below I will argue that food security activism differs from the local food activism by centering about distribution and consumption issues, rather than sustainable farming. In consequence, production-concerned local food activists who attempt to create a livable wage for farmers receive

criticism for economic insensitivity. On the other hand, consumption-centered food security activists attempting to feed countless hungry citizens receive critique complicity with the conventional agriculture system.

Local food movements primarily support sustainable farming methods and fair wages for farmers, striving to create change through the development of an alternative, community based food system. When accounting for the environmental and social costs of agriculture, however, the price of local food often rises above what many consumers can afford. Consequently, many consumers must choose between foods they can afford and foods that have more direct social ties (Hinrichs 2000: 301). Appearing unaware of this conflict, locavores are frequently caricatured as wealthy and ignorant of real economic constraints limiting purchasing power (Schnell 2013: 619). A Congregationalist pastor touched on this topic perfectly, explaining, “you are pretty much giving 70% of your income to rent. How much is left for food? [Speaking as another] ‘Oh, now lets buy organic vegetables! Gee, when I have \$250 of discretionary income to buy for an entire family.’ So it [local food] has an annoying quality” (Cook 2014). A prior coordinator for the Burlington Food Shelf also commented that, “The limitations [to local food] are cost because there are certain populations who are not able to indulge in or have access to that food” (Hines 2015). During my participant observation, I also found the wealthy and ignorant locavore stereotype reaffirmed when two people referred to City Market, Burlington’s Co-Op market, as City “Mark-up.” It seems clear that local food movements attempt to create an alternative, sustainable, and equitable food systems in the midst of our larger conventional system, but prices often make these systems appear exclusive, even gentrified.

Much to the contrary, food security activists take up food access and affordability as their primary concern, complicating their ability to provide sustainably produced, yet often more expensive food. These activists are primarily “focused on providing food access to large numbers of poor (‘low income’) people and racial minorities who face various levels of food ‘insecurity’” (Nonini 2013: 272). Attempting to alleviate issues of hunger and poverty, food security activists such as those who work with non-profits and local organizations must often engage with the state and quasi-state institutions to gain access to funding and food aid. Local activists, serving as the front line of hunger relief, work through programs such as food pantries, WIC offices, and school lunch programs. In turn, by working with and through state institutions, food security advocates tie themselves strongly to national institutions, constraining their efforts by bureaucratic regulations (Nonini 2013: 273). Moreover, most of the surplus food given to food security efforts comes from retailing conglomerates such as ConAgra, SYSCO, and Monsanto (Nonini 2013: 272). Though these large agribusinesses are not ideal food donors, given the many problems of conventional agriculture, the cheap price of conventional goods helps to increase the quantity of food provided to people in need. To this affect, one interviewee and FBG member reflected, “Everyone is trying to stretch those aid dollars to get as much food as possible” (Barker 2015). It would seem that food security activists live in a much different world from locavores, one tied inextricably to nationalized government programs and conventionally grown food.

Dependent on assistance from the government and large agribusiness, food security activists are placed in a difficult situation. They cannot easily critique the process of conventional food production without condemning their key donors of food. Should

they question the ethics and sustainability of conventional agriculture, food security activists would bring into question most of the goods they distribute. More importantly, no other system of agriculture currently produces enough food at a price suitable to their mission. Thus, many food security activists receive critique themselves for their complicity with the conventional agricultural system.

By now, it should be clear that local food movements center predominantly around production centered issues such as environmental degradation and farm worker justice, while food security activists primarily center around distribution and consumption issues (Allen 2004: 2). The key insight to be gained here is that both production and consumption issues must be addressed if we intend to create new, sustainable food systems. Farmers need to make livable wage using sustainable practices and consumers need a livable price for nutritional goods. The production-centered goals of local food advocates must be reconciled with the distribution-centered goals of food security activists. The question then becomes how.

Stepping back, it is important to again problematize the dichotomy created above between local food efforts and food security efforts. One effort, above all others, stands out as a reconciling force between local food and food security interests: community food security (CFS). The Community Food Security Coalition defines community food security 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” (Berman 2011). Integrating producer and consumer interests within a community empowerment framework, CFS does much to

unite efforts of local and food security activists (Mares and Alkon 2011: 73; Allen 1999). Falling within the bounds of CFS, some local food initiatives such as community gardens and gleaning offer examples of preliminary ways in which local food and food security projects can be integrated. They combine concern for sustainable production and community building with the need for affordability and access. Moreover, these efforts step outside the realm of consumptive activism, calling communities spanning class backgrounds together to grow and harvest food for personal use and charity. Unlike more consumption-based forms of local food participation like Farmers Markets and CSA's, these efforts bring communities together through group engagement in the growing process. They offer affordable local food to those with the time and means to grow it.

Though these more involved projects of local food participation do much to integrate concerns around production and consumption in our food system, not everyone has the time, ability, and personal interest needed to invest themselves so intensely in the growing process. To this end, it becomes necessary to build a system of local food consumption rooted in morals and unable to be coopted by larger market forces (Major 2011: 191). There needs to be some common language through which a group of individualized consumers might be transformed into a cohesive food community rooted in place (DeLind 1999: 8). The food we buy must transform from a simple consumable object to a source of nourishment for the body and soul (Esteva 1994). More importantly, this nourishing food must be affordable. So the question remains: how can we reconcile producer and consumer interests within a local, place-based food system, while still avoiding the market trap of re-appropriation?

In the chapters to come, I will argue that faith communities have the potential to root local food movements within a grounded moral framework, specific to particular communities and irreducible by traditional capitalism. Making the mundane sacred, faith has the potential to transform simple food consumption into a rewarding and life affirming process. Moreover, FBG's have the potential to provide comprehensive food aid in partnership with local food initiatives as well as the ability to bring untapped community support to local food initiatives.

Chapter 5: A Theological Food System

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it”
(Genesis 2:15 ESV)

In an inspired, yet rather idealistic attempt to practice engaged anthropology, Laura DeLind set out with some friends to create a not-for-profit CSA. She had hoped to share the burden of production with her members and was sorely let down when few people came to help (DeLind 1999). The hope was to construct a community deeply invested in their farmers and in the growing process, but members simply wanted to pick up their shares and return home. She then began to question, “with no sense of mutual responsibility around which to build a collective identity, how do we realize community and loyalty to place?” (DeLind 1999: 7). How do you build a cohesive local food community when people only participate insofar as their consumption? To this question, one interviewee of DeLind responded, “When I want community I can go to my dance community, or my church community, or my teacher colleagues, or I can email my high school buddies” (DeLind 1999: 7). Clearly, you cannot construct a local food community out of thin air; it needs a common language connecting people together. I believe that FBG’s might help to contextualize local food movements within preexisting local communities, creating meaning and involvement beyond the capacities of traditional consumerism. In this chapter, I will argue that FBG’s and local food movements share a common goal for ecological and social sustainability in our food system, and that theological contextualizations of this goal will help to construct cohesive and active local communities in support of local food initiatives.

Before beginning this discussion on the intersections between faith and local food it is again important to remember that this project focused primarily on Jewish and Christian faiths. Moreover, my personal familiarity lies more with Christianity than with Judaism. Despite these limitations, it is my express intention to create more generalizable conclusions from this data that might apply to multiple faiths in a variety of contexts.

The Local Food Religion?

To start a discussion on the moral intersections of faith and local food, it first helps to look at the rather religious nature of local food movements. As discussed in chapter 3, local food movements strive to create meaningful food communities in response to growing alienation from our food system and anxiety over the destructive implications of this disconnection. It proposes a grand reconciliation between individuals, their food, their community, and the earth. Much in the same way, “scholars of religion have defined their subject as a response to anxiety and an attempt to overcome the anomie of human life” (Zeller 2014: 299). Religions thus imbue life with meaning by building “a symbolic system that is socially enacted through rituals and other aspects of social life” (Welsch and Vivanco 2015: 347). Like any religion, local food movements offer their practitioners a systematic understanding of the world around them and their place within it (Zeller 2014: 302). They attempt, as best they can, to build meaningful and sustainable food communities around which people can orient their lives. In this sense, local food movements form part of a broader eco-spirituality (Ayres 2013: 152). Far from regular or institutional, this philosophy of sustainability and community uses a loose morality to guide people through their food system and it endows this journey with social

meaning. Moreover, local food movements provide no grand story of creation or prediction of ultimate end, yet they certainly attempt to build intergenerational meaning. Connecting back to a bygone agrarianism (Lavin 2009; Major 2011) and forwards to a dream of a sustainable future for our children, local food movements provide a temporal context within which to meaningfully contextualize local food communities. Through certainly not a formalized religion or even a complete theology, local food movements respond to feelings of anomie with a community-based philosophy that helps guide peoples actions within the marketplace, endowing the otherwise mundane process of food consumption with rich social meaning. It offers a new philosophy through which to make life meaningful.

Much like a religion, local food movements use a common, yet dynamic set of ideals through which to contextualize peoples' movement through food systems. It allows people to more meaningfully connect with the process of food production, with their neighbors, and with the earth in general. Regardless, the problem remains that consumption alone may not sustain desired local food communities; issues of economic inequality and re-appropriation still loom. Thus, other sources of meaningful contextualization must be sought out and imbued in the project of local food to add to its sustainability. Given the preexisting similarities between local food movements and religion, it seems only logical to consider the ways in which formalized faith might connect with and support the moral and community based goals of local food movements. It seems plausible that, through integrating food and faith, we might discover a new symbolic language through which to understand and interact with local food movements.

Theology and Food: An Introduction

Below I will attempt to answer one central question: does faith have a role to play in local food movements? To do so, I will analyze scripture in the Old and New Testaments about agriculture and I will develop the interfaith concept of “membership.” First however, a quick note on theological interpretation is necessary. As Horrell explains:

The engagement between ancient text and modern context is one in which similarities are *made* by bringing certain motifs, ideal, or themes to the center, in a way that unavoidably ‘distorts’ the text, making of it something new, prioritizing some aspects of it and interpreting them in a particular way, and marginalizing or ignoring others (Horrell 2010: 47)

Any attempt to contextualize local food movements within scripture will necessarily run into contradictions. Not all aspects of scripture apply to or even support the goals of local initiatives. Modern interpretation of ancient texts is a dance, constantly moving between texts to fit modern concerns. Rather than corrupting religious integrity, the adaptability of religion only strengthens faith by keeping it relevant in changing times. As a Rabbi I interviewed explains, “Judaism is always reflecting the culture in which it is living... That is how we have survived for thirty-five hundred years. The problems of the day in the greater community end up being negotiated through the toolbox that is Judaism” (Salzman 2015). As I begin to analyze religious text below, working to connect it with modern local food movements, we must recognize that this process is inherently imperfect. There will be no clean applications; however, this reality by no means dilutes the value of interpretation itself. To the contrary, religious interpretation of modern culture keeps faith alive and well. Finally, it is important to note that though many

progressive religions engage in this process of adaptation, not all religions embrace an active reading of texts, and thus not all FBG's will cohere as easily with local food ideals.

Agriculture in Scripture:

Agriculture appears in the Old and New Testaments on countless occasions. Written by people of a deeply agricultural society, the Testaments tell countless stories about farmers and shepherds, landlords and gleaners, agriculture and labor (Wirzba 2011: 132; Ayres 2013: 3). Exodus 23: 4-5 commands that you must help any overburdened donkey, even if owned by your enemy. From this, many Jewish members believe that we must not oppress animals or leave them to suffer (Salzman 2015). Leviticus 19:9 instructs that good farmers must not "reap to the very corners of your field," but rather leave the gleanings of the harvest for "the needy and for the stranger." From this, Christians and Jews alike recognize the need to provide food to the poor. It shows that the literal fruits of labor are not only for you, but must be given freely to those in need. Leviticus 25: 2-5 even explains the need for crop rotation, claiming that the land itself must receive a year of Sabbath every seventh year. In Jewish tradition, every Sabbath year for the land is called a Shmita year, and 2014 was one such year.

Countless agriculturally founded excerpts from scripture relate to goals of local food movements. Opposing animal cruelty, leaving gleanings for the needy, resting the land so it might recover: all these commands found in scripture fit easily into the local food movement goals of animal welfare, food access, and environmental sustainability. Through quoting and interpreting passages like the above, FBG's enter into current discussions around agricultural practice and attempt to envision what a morally informed

food system might look like. The innumerable sum of passages discussing morally informed agriculture help to contextualize and ascribe meaning to specific aspects of the local food movement such as gleanings and animal husbandry. Still, the true root of a theologically based food system lies beyond these more self-evident agricultural mandates. “Membership” is the key concept that centers a theologically informed food system.

Scriptural Roots of “Membership”

Below I will explain the concept of “Membership” through examination of scripture and its various faithful interpretations. Thereafter, I will look into the radical implications of faithful “Membership” as they apply to local food efforts.

The concept of Membership enters scripture from the very beginning with Genesis. Through the story of Creation, scripture sets up a holistic perspective of the world and locates man within it as both a member and a steward. Presented as a gardener (Gen. 2:8), God plants the Garden of Eden and, after planting, makes man from the dust of the ground. Not just any ground, God creates man from “adamah,” the soil of arable cropland (Fick 2008: 18). Connecting man not only to the land, “adamah,” but also to his fellow creatures, Genesis explains, “So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens” (Genesis 2: 19). God formed all living things from the same arable soil, “adamah,” and breathed life into their nostrils, thus implicitly connecting mankind to the rest of Creation.

Unlike other members of Creation, however, God tasked mankind with a crucial job. As the Old Testament explains, “The LORD God took the man and put him in the

Garden of Eden to work it and keep it” (Gen. 2:15). From the land man was created, and to the land he is forever bound. Though many people interpret man’s “dominion” over the earth as lease to alter and destroy the earth, examples in scripture clearly speak otherwise. The parable of the vineyard told in Matthew 21:33-45 shows that farmers practicing poor stewardship will lose their land and their lives (Fick 2008: 23). Instead of permitting man to “dominate” the land, scripture shows that men must protect it and care for it. Negligence of this duty comes at great cost. Warning, “what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over beasts” (Ecclesiastes 3:19), scripture highlights the interconnectedness of all creation, tying the wellbeing of humanity inextricably to the wellbeing of the rest of creation. Failure to tend the land will bring on mankind’s destruction. Rabbinic Midrash further corroborates mankind’s duty to tend the earth, explaining:

When God created Adam, God led him around the trees in the Garden of Eden and said, “See how beautiful it is! Everything I have created has been created for your sake. Think of this and do not corrupt or destroy my world, for if you corrupt it there will be no one to set it right after you” (Kohelet Rabbah 7:13; Salzman 2015)

As scripture shows us, man is not a superior being ruling over the rest of creation, but rather an integral member of creation blessed with the arduous task of tending the world. The concept of “Membership” in Creation has far-reaching implications throughout the rest of scripture. Proverbs highlights man’s duty to his fellow men claiming, “Those who shut their ears to the poor will be ignored in their own time of need” (Proverbs 21:13). The book of Romans goes further by commanding men to feed their enemies, thus overcoming evil with good (Romans 12: 20-21). Time and again, scripture calls mankind

to love and preserve Creation, despite all worldly dangers and conflicts. As one interviewee reflected, “There is one Creation and we are really all brothers and sisters” (Sowles 2014).

The Christian Eucharist beautifully reflects this concept of “Membership” with creation as well. The Eucharist constitutes a complete act of gathering, prayer, reading holy scripture, and remembering the life of Jesus Christ through eating bread (the body of Christ) and drinking wine or juice (the blood of Christ). Through remembering the life of Jesus, Christians join in a “*re-membering* of a world dismembered by sin” (Wirzba 2011: 150). They reconnect themselves with the Jesus, God, and the whole of Creation through the sharing of a meal. Pairing the physical process of eating with the philosophical process of creation, we see a strong connection between food and membership. As Wirzba illuminates: “The food we consume is God’s creation, a vast and unfathomable deep community of creatures that is sustained by God’s sacrificial love” (Wirzba 2011: 134). Eating acts as the ultimate reflection of mankind’s interconnectedness with God and Creation. Inextricably bound, we must consume a piece of Creation every day. Thus, through eating the Body and drinking the Blood of Christ, individuals physically embody their membership with gathered community as well as with the many communities, both social and environmental, which sustain life. The meal provides Christians with a taste of the abundance of God, and, having tasted the abundance, Christians are sent from the Eucharistic table to distribute God’s gift throughout the world (Ayres 2013: 60-1).

Quite similarly, the Jewish tradition of the Sabbath reflects the idea of “Membership.” Despite common misconceptions, the Sabbath on the seventh day, not the creation of man, reflects the climax of Creation (Wirzba 2011: 45). In the Sabbath,

faithful observers find rest in the completeness and joy of Creation. They celebrate the fullness of God’s creative work. A Rabbi whom I interviewed excitedly explained the Sabbath to me, exulting:

You take twenty-four hours a week off from consuming, from doing, from changing the world, and just really absorb what is there. And taking great joy from being alive, and eating with friends, and making love, and studying Torah, and just taking a walk, and you take a nap, and ugh! It’s just wonderful. (Salzman 2015)

The Sabbath is one delightful day in which faithful people embrace and enjoy their connection to the world. It is a profound celebration of Creation and all its members. Looking back, however, one integral question still remains: How does faithful “Membership” relate to the local food movement?

The Implications of “Membership”

Called to love and care for all Creation, mankind has been endowed with a sacred responsibility. Today, however, we live in a world of rampant ecological degradation and growing economic inequality, so it appears that we are not doing a very good job of stewardship. Below, I will show that the concept of faithful “Membership” demands the negative effects of conventional agriculture be redressed, and, in the process, decries modernization and capitalism for dismembering community bonds that remind us of our duty to “work and keep” the garden.

Treating the world as a gift and a responsibility, faithful individuals should logically take issue with the ecological degradation wrought by conventional agriculture. Anything that harms the environment reflects a failure by mankind to care for Creation. One Christian Scientist whom I interviewed touched beautifully on the connection

between membership and conventional agriculture. As she explains: “The whole natural way that food is grown is much more harmonious, and when we try to do it on an industrial level, and add these chemicals, I don’t think that is good for the environment. I don’t think it is good for the animals. I don’t think it is good for us either” (Sowles 2015). In her opinion, the use of pesticides and other agricultural inputs disrupts the natural harmony of Creation, and the resultant negative environmental externalities reflect this discord. To this end, she argued: “You have large scale agriculture that is utilizing some things to allow them produce more, but they are not looking at those side effects as if they matter... And that is not sustainable. It is not really in accord with, you know, loving all Creation” (Sowles 2015). Similarly, a Quaker interviewee commented, “I see it [local food] as a very spiritual issue for me to be a good steward of the earth... I know that the impact is definitely lessened when you consume locally” (Matchette 2015). Recognizing man’s inherent connection with and duty to Creation, the negative externalities of conventional agriculture become unacceptable affronts to our fellow members. Local food, highly concerned with redressing these production-centered issues, thus becomes a logical cause for faithful members to support. Still, the implications of “Membership” go deeper than a simple rejection of conventional agriculture for the environmental harm it creates.

Much like the locavores discussed in Chapter 3, many people of faith have taken issue with trends of modernization and unfettered capitalism for breaking down community ties, instead encouraging self-centered individualism. Theologian Norman Wirzba contends, “Economists do not consider how extreme forms of individualism undermine the development of communal relationships” (Wirzba 2011: 97). Promoting

competition rather than community, the neoclassical market system encourages isolated living and social disconnection (Sack 2000: 62). Indeed, many studies have corroborated that studying economics inhibits cooperation and encourages selfish behavior (Frank et al. 1993; Bauman and Rose 2011) . Hence, capitalist engendered individualism distances people from their social and ecological communities, removing a sense of mutual responsibility and replacing it with a doctrine of self-salvation. This doctrine slowly erodes the understanding that individuals are altogether connected to Creation. Wirzba strongly critiques capitalist endeavors, sermonizing:

What we don't understand is that as long as we try to live like gods we banish ourselves from the garden. We don't need God to drive us out. We go willingly in a desperate search for a limitless, carefree life we cannot have, while the land of nurture and delight beneath our feet suffers the neglect and destruction of our anxious ways. (Wirzba 2011: 76)

Striving for infinite economic growth, unfettered capitalism creates massive environmental harm while simultaneously removing the sense of community and communal obligations. Quite insidiously, this individualism functions in support of hegemony by depicting social problems as individual failures, thus absolving individuals of their responsibility to address structures of violence (Allen 2004: 126). In reflection, the concept of “Membership” and interdependence stands in direct contrast with contemporary patterns of alienation and individualization resulting from modernization and capitalism (Ayres 2013: 72). While a dismembered and individualistic society may be able to “turn a blind eye” to social and environmental injustices, faithful individuals recognizing their true membership in Creation are forced to look.

This narrative of community dis-membering also follows within the context of food systems. Distancing consumers from their food, both spatially and temporally,

through obscure bonds of relationship along the industrial food chain challenges the moral obligation to seek interconnectedness (Ayres 2013: 57-8). Incapable of journeying with their food from the farm to the table, consumers become unable to easily recognize and embrace the many communities involved in the productive process. Conventional agricultural systems thus dismember consumers from their food system, limiting, if not removing, any sense of obligation to the many communities involved in producing food.

Responding to the socially dislocating nature of modernization and capitalism, many faithful individuals have come to support local food movements as spaces of reconciliation and re-membering with Creation. With the deliberate goal of improving the environment and growing a local community, local food movements connect perfectly with the faithful understanding of stewardship over and membership within Creation. A Congregationalist interviewee reflected on this connection claiming:

I do believe that the Local Food movement and a lot of the dimensions of what I think of as the Good Food Movement, fair trade, organic, non-GMO, biodynamic, all of those kind of things I really do believe are coming out of an intention to grow food that is healthier for people and healthier for the planet. And for me that sense of stewardship really does tie into that idea of faithful living. And so it is an implicit connection for me. (Barker 2015)

A Quaker interviewee touched on this connection as well, explaining that her participation in local food efforts implicitly reflects a desire to honor and care for the earth as a gift (Matchette 2015). Movements towards equity and sustainability in our food system clearly mirror the faithful call to connect with and tend Creation. Spiritually speaking, local food efforts help to re-member a food system dis-membered through modernization and capitalism.

More than simply supporting local food efforts, faith based understandings of local food movements may help to address the challenge of re-appropriation threatening local food efforts. The theological perspective of “Membership” might help to meaningfully contextualize local food movements by touching on a shared basis of motivation (Fick 2008: 42). They both touch on a desire to connect with and steward over the many communities comprising Creation. Faithful interpretations thus augment “intellectual knowing” in support of local food initiatives with affective and embodied knowing rooted in deep, personal spirituality (Ayres 2013: 77). Moreover, this theological contextualization of local food may help call people to action, harnessing emotional understandings towards the benefit of specific community projects. In this way, faith may help us disentangle ourselves from the curse of conventional agriculture, a system that forces our complicity with structures of violence through economic need and a dearth of viable food alternatives. Put quite simply, “Faith communities have immense capacities to change the regional food system” (Ayres 2013: 94).

Looking back, faith clearly has a “place at the table” in discussions about local food. In response to the alienating and individualistic trends of modernization and capitalism, faith and local food movements share common worldviews that strive to root people in place and improve environmental health. Building off of the concept of “Membership” alongside the many other agricultural references in scripture, FBG’s can construct a valuable theological framework contextualizing local food movements. Through this contextualization, FBG’s possess the ability to strengthen local efforts by imbuing them with new layers of meaning far beyond that of simple activist consumption. In this way, they help to insulate local food movements from re-

appropriation by conventional markets. The process of local consumption could become a sacred act honoring the communities of Creation and helping to locate people in the world. Faithful understandings of local food take one small step in the process of developing new, resilient food communities, united by a common language and resistant to re-appropriation by larger agribusinesses.

Chapter Six: A History of Faithful Food Activism

As we have seen in chapter five, FBG's and local food movements share much in common ideologically. With only a few exceptions, both strive to create strong local communities in the face of modernization and to protect the environment against degradation and misuse. However it remains to be seen how FBG's might utilize their ideological connections with local food initiatives to create strong community initiatives. For this, some history is necessary. In this chapter, I will show that faith-based food activism, rather than being a new or novel concept, is actually quite common throughout US history across time. Through an examination of past and present faith-based food activism, this chapter will place faithful food activism in a historical context and highlight a few preliminary ways in which FBG's have connected with local food movements today.

Before beginning a discussion on the history on FBG food activism, it is important to recognize that this chapter has been predominantly informed by researching Christian food activism. As the discussion moves towards present day, however, many more FBG's are reintroduced into the discussion.

FBG Emergency Food Aid:

Food and faith have shared a rich history in the US. Faith-based groups have used food as a portion of their mission, or social outreach, for centuries. Below, I will look into faith sponsored and supported emergency food aid to show that, far from a unprecedented connection, FBG's have been engaging with and supporting food movements for over a century.

Emergency food aid can be defined as food supplied over a short period of time to individuals and families who find themselves suddenly in need (Poppendieck 1998: 3). Churches have been involved in the dispersal of emergency food aid in an informal manner for centuries. Tracing Christian social outreach back to its very beginnings, Daniel Sack explains that, “In the urban environment, churches were just one competitor in the free market of entertainment. . . . In this competition, the church had to use every tool it had, including food” (Sack 2000: 65). Meals, along with games, clubs, and other social events became a primary mechanism by which churches maintained their parishioners as cities began to urbanize in the late 1800’s, offering secular forms of socializing and entertainment. As Christian social outreach moved help mitigate social ills of poverty, drunkenness, and thievery, food became an increasingly important part of church missions. Speaking of their outreach, the Atlanta Union Mission noted: “you can’t talk to a man about a new beginning when he is starving” (Sack 2000: 101). People cannot reform when they are hungry. Consequently, churches began to offer emergency food aid in the early 1900’s. Though church social outreach started as a form of community development and recruitment, missions slowly changed to a model of simple Christian goodwill and charity (Sack 2000: 135). The overt Christian message was downplayed as faith based groups expanded their emergency food efforts. Assistance, not conversion, became the ultimate goal of churches distributing emergency food aid.

After World War II, Christian churches followed a general trend of “ecumenism and bureaucratization” as they coordinated and centralized their efforts to meet the international crisis of post-war recovery (Sack 2000: 140). Adding to the efforts of church initiatives, Congress passed the “Food for Peace” bill provisioning churches with

surplus food for distribution overseas (USAID). This bill simultaneously maintained stable food prices in the US by redistributing surplus and aided in European rehabilitation (Sack 2000: 141, 151). Importantly, this intertwining of FBG and government efforts began a long and complicated history of partnership that extends to the present day. The partnership between FBG's and the US government has allowed international and domestic changes to affect the hunger policies of mainline churches (Sack 2000: 156). As discussed in Chapter 4, the entangling of food security aid with the US government and large agribusiness still constrains food security activists like those involved with churches as they try to feed the hungry with nutritional food without discrimination.

Today, FBG's of all religions play a significant and growing role in the provisioning of emergency food aid to US citizens and communities abroad. Harnessing spiritually founded goodwill, FBG's provide emergency food aid to countless hungry individuals every day (Tiehen 2002). A massive 65% of all emergency kitchens and 67% of all food pantries in the US are affiliated with a FBG of some sort (Tiehen 2002). This desire to feed the hungry springs from the central idea of "Membership," the understanding that we are responsible for all members of creation. Passages of scripture more specific to food aid drive home the need to feed the hungry. Deuteronomy 26: 12 commands all people pay a tithe to "the stranger, the orphan and the widow, that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied." This demand from the Old Testament calls Jews and Christians alike to feed the hungry in their towns. Christians also look to the story of Jesus feeding the 5000 (Matthew 14: 13-21) as a common source of food aid inspiration. Islam's third pillar, *zakat*, also demands that all financially stable Muslims pay money to charity. Thus, in connection with core principles and tenants of their FBG, members

provision food aid as a way to enact their faith. Through the distribution of food, they preform their duty to care for creation and they reconnect with fellow members through the provisioning of a meal.

Despite the emphasis on charity as personal enactment of faith, however, FBG food aid still holds rather political implications for aid recipients. While most contemporary FBG efforts towards food security maintain that charity is a simple performance of their faithful duty to care for creation, it remains important to note the many ways that proselytizing still integrates itself into aid. Conversion may not be the central goal of FBG food aid, but regardless, it affects the food's social meaning and the space through which it is provisioned. The intention of the food providers affects the feelings of the recipients. To this end, food given as an enactment of stewardship and a recognition of mutual membership in creation contains notably different social meaning from food procured at a supermarket. It acts as an "olive branch" of sorts, extending faithful goodwill and community implicitly within the food given.

Though FBG food aid contains a subtext of proselytizing, FBG's have nonetheless inspired countless individuals to volunteer, forming an essential front line in the war on hunger (Nonini 2013: 273). Currently, FBG emergency food aid comes on many scales, from the local to the global. On a local level, FBG's provide food to hungry people through food pantries and soup kitchens. Programs like JUMP, the Joint Urban Ministry Project, offer comprehensive social services and food to those in need five days a week in Burlington, VT. On the national level, FBG's also speak out in defense of food aid. For example, in 2013 the multid denominational Christian organization "Bread for the World" spoke out against Farm Bill cuts to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

(SNAP) benefits. On the international level, FBG's also provide food aid through organizations such as "Christian Aid" and the "Christian World Service" (Christian Aid Mission; CWS).

It is important to recognize the ever-increasing degree to which the US government relies upon FBG's and other charitable organizations to "pick up the slack" and care for those the government no longer decides to support. As Poppendieck explains: "charity food is increasingly substituting for adequate public provision, both in the benefits obtained by individuals and at the overall level of social policy" (Poppendieck 1998: 6). FBG's must increasingly shoulder the burden of supplying emergency food aid as cutbacks like the \$5 billion slash to SNAP benefits in 2013 continue (Plumer 2013). Highlighted in a study by "Bread for the World," the 2013 cuts to SNAP benefits will require every congregation in the US to spend an extra \$40,000 each year to feed people the government no longer assists (Bread for the World). What is most troubling about FBG's shouldering government expenses for food aid is that it sets a precedent. It says that responsibility for the poor lies not in the hands of government, but in charitable volunteer organizations (Poppendieck 1998: 6).

Rather than a novel and unprecedented connection, FBG's have been connected with food activism for decades through emergency food relief. FBG's have played an essential role in the provisioning of emergency food, and of late this role has continued to grow. The institutionalization of FBG emergency food aid has simultaneously increased the volume of food provided and entangled FBG's in bureaucracy. And now, as the US government continues to unburden itself of its responsibility for hungry citizens, the

provisioning of emergency food aid will increasingly fall in the hands of FBG's now scrambling to pick up the slack.

Despite the continued efforts of FBG's to stem the flow of hunger, levels of extreme poverty in the US continue to grow (Shaefer and Edin 2014). In response to unremitting conditions of hunger in the US, many emergency food aid providers have developed a common parable. Though slightly different with each telling, the story depicts:

[There is] a village on a river. One day a resident of the community sees a baby floating down the river. She rushes out to save it, and, with the help of her neighbors, finds dry clothing, a crib, a blanket. The next day two babies are rescued, and the day after that several more. Soon babies are arriving in large numbers, and they become a regular feature of life in the village...Finally, one of the villagers suggests making an expedition upstream, to see how the babies are getting into the water in the first place. The villagers, however, are afraid to take time and energy away from the immediate rescue project, afraid that babies will drown if they are not there to save them. (Poppendieck 1998: 288)

With the ranks of the poor and hungry swelling, FBG's providing emergency food aid reach a difficult choice: address and visibly help each hungry person, or forge upstream towards the root structural causes of poverty and hunger in the US. Surely, a combination of both efforts is necessary.

Faith-Based Food Systems Change:

In the section to follow, I look into FBG activism towards food systems change seeking to add historical and contemporary precedent for FBG involvement in faith sponsored local food programs. Moreover, I argue that FBG efforts towards food systems change track closely with periods of broader social critique. Thus, today's preliminary

connections between FBG's and local food initiatives can be seen as a logical reaction contemporary critique of conventional growing and modernization.

Forging upstream, some FBG's came to question the role of U.S. society in the 1970's. During a period of political upheaval, which President Carter called the national "malaise," growing political activism came to critique the U.S.'s role in creating poverty. Many religious food campaigns struggled with the guilt of U.S. abundance in a world of scarcity. As Sack explains, "Americans were no longer [seen as] the cultivators of the world's breadbasket but the consumer of all the world's bread" (Sack 2000: 198, 212). Problematically, many individuals facing structures of oppression as vast and systemic as those creating hunger are likely to feel some "paralysis of scale" (Poppendieck 1998: 290). Feelings of despair at the scale of endemic hunger encroach upon faithful goodwill, making the rout "upstream" seem impassable.

Books like Francis Moore Lappé's *Diet for a Small Planet*, however, provided more consumption-based solutions to structural problems of poverty. Weaving together dietary and environmental arguments into a strong social critique, Lappé called for political and economic changes that would make the food system responsible for feeding people and not just for generating profit (Lappé 1991). To create change, the book called Americans to shift their diet towards vegetarianism, thus reducing first world overconsumption of meat and freeing extra food and funds for hungry people in the US and abroad (Sack 2000: 201-3). Though certainly not written with FBG's in mind, the message of *Diet for a Small Planet* was taken to heart by many FBG's during the 1970's "Lifestyle Movement" (Sack 2000: 202).

The Lifestyle Movement of the late 1900's called for Christians across the US to change their eating habits and, to a broader degree, their habits as consumers. As Sack explains, "For mainline American Protestants in the 1970's, 'lifestyle' meant living so that you consumed resources responsibly. It meant eating less meat, decreasing one's energy use, and spending less on luxuries" (Sack 2000: 202). The movement proposed a Christian dietary reform in response to growing scarcity, focusing primarily upon reorienting their consumption under more moral standards. Supporting the Lifestyle Movement, Ronald Sider published his work *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, which called for structural changes in US foreign economic relations and personal habit changes for US citizens (Mark 1979). The book claimed, "simple personal lifestyles are crucial to symbolize, validate and facilitate our concern for the hunger" (Sider 1978: 170). As Christians increasingly took up the cause, churches developed curricula for their members, teaching about world hunger and condemning wasteful American lifestyles and most especially meat consumption (Sack 2000: 206). Many faithful individuals took the "Shakertown Pledge," committing to a simple, ecologically sound and politically active life.

Nevertheless, the Lifestyle Movement did not last. Members uninterested in forsaking meat critiqued the heavily vegetarian agendas of churches. Moreover, the return to neoliberal policy under President Regan returned confidence in in America's alleged abundance (Sack 2000: 216). With newfound certainty in the efficiency of the market system, citizens came to again trust in the plenty of the U.S., worrying less for its effects domestically and overseas. In consequence, the Lifestyle Movement, born in an

age of discontent, disappeared as faith in the U.S. resurged. After years of “malaise” it was again “Morning in America.”

Looking to the present, it would seem that the US is again entering a period of “malaise.” Critiques of conventional agriculture, modernity, and traditional capitalism abound, bringing about what seems to be a second wave of the 1970’s organics movement: local food. As follows, modern FBG’s strive to contextualize critiques of conventional agriculture and unsustainability from within a faith perspective. As a Rabbi explained to me, “The problems of the day in the greater community end up being renegotiated through the toolbox that is Judaism” (Salzman 2015). Faith always works to make sense of the world. To this end, contemporary FBG discussions around food systems can be seen as part of the continued process by which FBG’s adapt to shifting cultural environments, keeping their message meaningful.

FBG’s across the US have now begun exploring partnerships with local food initiatives, as these initiatives coincide more closely with FBG worldviews than do conventional methods. “Faith in Place,” an interfaith organization in the Chicago area, works towards the goals of environmental, social, and economic sustainability through many initiatives such as faith sponsored winter farmers’ markets and youth urban agriculture classes. Through their initiatives, “people of faith are discovering the goodness of sustainable agriculture, and the religious responsibility to support these efforts” (Ayres 2013: 91; Faith in Place). Moreover, the Jewish organization Hazon works towards creating sustainable Jewish communities through a variety of educational and community based projects (Hazon). Among the educational projects run by Hazon is a program teaching organic farming methods to Jewish youth called “Adamah.” Much

like the goals of local food growers, “Adamah” strives to use “sustainable and organic methods” and to “grow people by creating hands-on experiences with ecology, food systems, spiritual practice, a vibrant evolving Judaism, and intentional community” (Hazon). Further, some Jewish individuals are developing a new form of certification called EcoKashrut, or EcoKosher, which seeks to identify foods that are sustainably and ethically grown as well as meeting Kosher standards (Salzman 2015: 2-3). Burlington, VT has even shown some preliminary integration of FBG’s with local food goals. Recently published by Vermont Interfaith Action, the policy document “Movement Towards a Moral Economy” highlights the key interfaith goals for an economic system that respects the earth and respects the most vulnerable among us (Clergy Caucus of Vermont Interfaith Action).

Far from an unprecedented and extraneous, the connection between FBG’s and local food initiatives has existed for decades. Since before WWII, FBG’s have worked to provide food to “the least of these” (Matthew 25: 40), for those in need amongst us. Emergency food aid has formed a central part of FBG missions, and, like other food aid providers, churches have felt the call to “look upstream” and undermine the unjust structures causing hunger. Much like the lifestyle movement of the 1970’s, modern FBG’s are looking at food system issues with a critical eye, and many have decided to support local food programs that strive for more moral and sustainable systems of production. Though only on a preliminary level, FBG’s in Burlington have begun exploring connections with local food programs as an extension of their missions. In the chapter to come, I will discuss in detail the social climate of FBG’s in Burlington regarding the many ways in which they might to connect with our local food movement.

Chapter 7: Theology and Burlington's Local Food Movement

“The service begins after the worship” (Unknown Quaker During Meeting)

Armed with the knowledge that FBG worldviews and local food movement ideologies intersect as well as the understanding that FBG's have a rich history of food activism, it seems clear that faith has a place at the table in discussions around local food systems development. Still, it remains to be seen how these ideological and historical connections transform into specific development-oriented actions. In this chapter, I will attempt to move, as smoothly as possible, from macro level discussions around food and faith, to the specific locale of Burlington, VT. Using the bulk of my personal ethnographic research, this chapter will explore the social landscape in Burlington, uncovering how the macro connections between local food and FBG's bear out within a local setting. To do so, I will first explore levels of interest amongst different FBG's in Burlington around the idea of faith-sponsored local food projects. I will also detail how FBG's envision their future participation in the local movement and I will engage with instances of disinterest. Second, I will discuss preliminary action steps that may help to open communication between FBG's and local initiatives. I will also outline some preexisting FBG projects in partnership with local food, illuminating places to grow support and take inspiration for future projects. Third, I will discuss some potential faith sponsored local food programs, highlighting barriers to implementation, logistics, and specific steps to get these projects started. Hopefully, by identifying interest and outlining specific steps for integrating local food and FBG initiatives, this research will inspire members of Burlington's faith and local food communities to reach out and build new, deeply meaningful partnerships.

Is there interest?

Much like this text itself, I built a strong ideological and worldview-based argument for connecting FBG's with local food initiatives before delving into the specifics of how faith-based food programs might look in Burlington, VT. My research process moved from literature review completed predominantly in the fall of 2014, to ethnographic research done predominantly in the spring of 2015. With a leap of faith, I began to research FBG's and local initiatives in Burlington, hoping that the ideologies and worldviews I found in books and articles would be corroborated in my ethnographic data. I was elated to find that, to a large degree, FBG and local food initiative leaders whom I interviewed as well as FBG members with whom I conducted participant observation met my prompts with enthusiasm and input, instead of confusion and disinterest. That said, not every person supported faith-sponsored local food initiatives, but their disapproval informed me as much as their approval did. Moreover, due to methodological constraints discussed in Chapter 2, I was unable to sample from Islamic and Hindu populations present in Burlington. For this reason, my conclusions regarding Burlington's faith community reflect a large, but incomplete portion of the full group.

Below, I will discuss how FBG leaders and members whom I sampled theologically connect faith and local food. I will claim that many faith leaders and members in Burlington support faith-sponsored local food projects, but that these projects are by no means a large portion of most FBG missions due to a lack of widespread member support. Finally, I will propose some potential causes for member disinterest and highlight future visions of FBG participation.

Many of my interviewees saw a strong connection between local food initiatives and the goals of their ministry. On a basic level, all of my interviewees understood problems in our current food system as moral and ethical questions. Simply put, a Unitarian Universalist reverend explained, “There are huge ethical questions in our food” (Dowdall 2015: 2). Moving forward, many FBG leaders whom I interviewed reinterpreted the moral problems of our current food system, such as community dislocation and environmental degradation, through their own theological perspectives. Re-contextualizing food systems issues through the lens of their faith, FBG leaders frequently referred to the concept of “membership,” discussed in chapter 5, as a point of connection between FBG’s and local food initiatives. Strongly connecting “membership” with sustainable agriculture, an associate pastor at the Congregational Church in Burlington explained, “you are always in communion with humanity and with Creation,” noting that, “the whole communion thing is really the scriptural part that I tie into the sustainable food and agriculture” (May 2015: 8). A rabbi in Burlington similarly associated sustainable food with Judaism, describing *EcoKashrut* as the Jewish response to moral and ethical problems in our current food system (Salzman 2015: 2). I also encountered many voices of support during my participant observation sessions that further corroborated this connection. During a Quaker meeting, a member rose to discuss recent GMO labeling in Vermont and asked the meeting, “Does faith have a place in these discussions,” to which his answer was “yes.” (Fieldnotes: 11/09/14) Moreover, one synagogue member told me with a big smile of remembrance how the Intervale Center, a hub of local farms and community initiatives, is his favorite place to be in Burlington (Fieldnotes: 01/23/15). Looking back, many people with whom I spoke shared a similar

sentiment to my Congregationalist interviewee who claimed: “We [FBG’s and Local food initiatives] really have a lot in common. I mean we have a lot of similar goals” (Barker 2015: 4).

Recognizing moral and ideological links between FBG’s and local food initiatives, most of the FBG leaders I interviewed embraced the idea of partnerships between the two in Burlington. Speaking in support of FBG sponsored local food projects, interviewees made comments like:

“I think that this is a really interesting project that you have done tying the local food initiatives with faith based thought and action. I think that it definitely has a lot of merit” (May 2015: 10)

“I think that it is a really interesting way to bring together some different justice issues, with the issue of hunger in our state and in our community” (Dowdall 2015: 5)

“I think about faith-based goals, or Quaker based goals as being like...there is this whole umbrella. And I feel like food systems...local food systems are one part of that” (Matchette 2015: 4)

Would I like to see our church take that on and connect to the local food economy, and connect that to our mission? Absolutely...it could breath a lot of life into how we think about mission. (Barker 2015: 7)

These FBG leaders perceive faith-sponsored local food projects as an exciting new way for their missions to approach issues of hunger and environmental destruction. They provide avenues through which FBG’s might connect with their members, the Burlington local food culture, and people in need (Dowdall 2015). One local food initiative leader noted how faith sponsored local food projects could positively benefit FBG’s, explaining “Through having a faith-based garden there might be people from the community who weren’t involved prior who could get involved. It could be a good recruiting tool” (Hyman 2015: 6). By joining with Burlington’s local food movement, FBG’s open a new

way to engage with the public. Moreover, faith-sponsored local food programs could encourage people to consider their spirituality in terms of practical everyday activities, helping them expand the ways in which they live faithfully (May 2015: 7). Finally, these faith-sponsored local food programs have the potential to augment Burlington's local food movement. A Unitarian Universalist reverend said it best, claiming: "I think when it comes to any kind of community effort or justice issue, or anything to make the community better, then I think that having the voices of the faith community can amplify it, and kind of bring a different lens to it" (Dowdall 2015: 4). As discussed in chapter five, FBG's have the potential to strengthen the local food movement by connecting with the public in a theologically grounded way, adding new layers of meaning to local projects. Looking back, these initiatives show clear potential to support both FBG's and Burlington's local food movement. Still, many leaders seemed uncertain as to how these connections might be pursued.

The largest and most commonly referenced barrier to faith-sponsored food initiatives is that local food is simply not a centerpiece of any FBG's mission. Corroborating this point, a Congregationalist pastor voiced the common perspective that, "I haven't seen it [local food] as part of the culture of any church I have been a part of, as a real connecting issue, a keystone issue that people come around" (May 2015: 4). When asked why local food initiatives have not formed a centerpiece of any FBG mission, answers were again much the same. There simply is not a large demand among members for these faith sponsored local food initiatives. As one interviewee explained, there isn't "critical mass" driving these local food projects forward (Barker 2015).

During my research, I found that the lack of enthusiasm and demand among FBG members stems from two main causes. First, I found that many FBG members simply do not support local food initiatives. Many members explained to me, sometimes vehemently, that they have no interest in shopping at farmers markets or gardening to grow food. Much to my surprise, one avid gardener repeatedly insisted that his garden work was “only ornamental,” nothing was intended for consumption (Fieldnotes: 11/02/14). Moreover, one Congregationalist reverend critiqued local food efforts rather harshly, criticizing them as gentrified, economically exclusive spaces. Later on when I discuss potential projects, I will further consider the implications of this characterization on project design. Importantly, these instances of opposition to FBG local food programs occurred infrequently, likely due to the fact that, “There is a culture here [in Burlington] of, kind of, doing our own growing of food and gardening and the farmers market” (Dowdall 2015: 3). Moreover, I did not encounter any direct opposition to faith sponsored local projects at the Quaker meeting.

Though instances of disinterest and disdain proved quite disenchanting, I found that other FBG members simply had not made a conscious connection between their faith and their food choices. After being prompted with the question, “Does faith affect the way you eat?” one Christian Scientist interviewee explained:

“Without thinking about a deeper context. My initial answer would be, ‘No it doesn’t affect it.’ Because I don’t pray before I eat...Any yet, I think at a deeper level, I definitely, my faith definitely affects my food choices even though I’m not aware of it and conscious of it. And so it was really interesting when we were talking the other day when you came in. I think that what was really interesting to me that came up was, ‘Oh, that really does affect it more than you realize.’” (Sowles 2014: 3).

Some FBG members simply are not interested in local food projects, yet others simply have not made the mental connection between the morals driving their food choices and the morals instilled through spiritual faith. Knowing this, it seems reasonable to conclude that faith sponsored local food programs could grow to become a viable portion of many FBG missions. As an active member of the Congregational church explained, “I think it [FBG local food initiatives] is the kind of thing that could bear a lot of fruit. That could develop and be a part of the mission of the church. But I think that there is a lot of work to get there” (Barker 2015: 4).

Despite uncertainty as to whether a “critical mass” of faith community members are interested in pursuing FBG sponsored local food initiatives, many FBG leaders share a common belief that their role in food systems reform will only grow in the future. FBG leaders see food systems issues as “emerging issues” for their communities, noting that a few people who have begun to “plant the seeds, so to speak, for more environmental action” (Barker 2015: 7; Salzman 2015: 6). Predicting the rising role of Judaism in food systems reform, a rabbi explained to me, “That [*EcoKashrut*] is in development and it is definitely something that is happening and will come more” (Salzman 2015: 3).

Moreover, the Joint Urban Ministry Project (JUMP), which acts as a social services emergency room provided through the centralized effort of 26 Burlington FBG’s, believes that it can play a rising role in Burlington’s local food efforts (Hines 2015: 2). Clearly, there is a strong interest amongst Burlington FBG leaders to increase their participation in the local food movement.

Before moving on, however, it is important to recognize that some FBG’s in Burlington will not participate in local food initiatives, namely the Church of Christian

Science. As a Christian Scientist interviewee explained to me, “each member would individually live like I have been discussing with you out from whatever is coming to them. But there is actually no discussion among members about worldly issues” (Sowles 2014: 8). Though individual members may support local food initiatives, it is not the place of the Church of Christian Science as a community to involve itself in local food initiatives. This avoidance of “worldly issues” may extend to other churches as well. If a large number of FBG members perceive involvement in local food projects as “politics” than whole FBG’s may decide to avoid participation. As a Congregationalist interviewee explained, “Any kind of social justice is politics, but that could be a fence for some people or some congregations” (May 2015: 8). Though the barrier of local food as “politics” certainly constrains some FBGs, many others will likely not find this to be an issue for their communities.

Though many FBG leaders and members have made strong ideological links between faith and the goals of local food initiatives, few FBG’s in Burlington have made local food a centerpiece of their missions. Lacking a broad base of active member support due to disinterest or disconnection, most FBG’s have not worked to integrate with the local food movement. Nevertheless, faith sponsored local food programs show the potential to support and enliven both FBG’s and Burlington’s local food movement. As FBG’s leaders look to the future, many of them share in the belief that local food will become a larger portion of their ministry. They predict that FBG’s will play a rising role in reforming our broken conventional food system into something more sustainable and equitable. The question now becomes how.

Preliminary Action Steps and Existing FBG Projects

To begin connecting local food initiatives with Burlington's faith community, my interviewees identified two preliminary action steps that must be taken. First, FBG's must open an explicit dialogue within their communities regarding faithful engagement in local food. Second, FBG's must work, preferably in coordination with JUMP, to identify all current efforts in Burlington through which FBG's engage with the local food movement. I will discuss each step and its motives below. Finally, I will discuss the faith sponsored food projects that I have encountered in Burlington during my research.

Through my research, I found a clear need for FBG leaders to open an explicit dialogue with their members regarding faith sponsored local food initiatives. The need for a clear conversation stems from one simple truth spoken by nearly all my interviewees: change must come from within. Members must call for their FBG to engage with local food, not the leaders themselves. For any project to be sustainable it cannot depend on one impassioned leader, but must be supported by many members of the FBG. Local food activism must become a central part of the FBG culture. Nearly all of my interviewees stressed this. At present however, FBG leaders seem to have a mostly anecdotal understanding of their members' interest levels in local food projects. A Unitarian reverend noted her partial understanding of member interest when commenting:

I know that a number of folks in congregation are interested in, kind of, food justice and hunger issues, and I think that is all interconnected. And my sense is that some people are definitely involved in efforts like that on their own. So I think that we would definitely be interested to explore that more. (Dowdall 2015: 4)

Though the anecdotal evidence may be promising, there needs to be a clearer understanding of member interest before any given FBG can begin to work towards

creating a local food project. As one Quaker interviewee explained, we must find out if FBG local food initiatives are a “leading of someone in the meeting or of the Meeting?” (Matchette 2015: 6). Of course, the only way to begin understanding member interest is to broach the question. Therefore, FBG leaders must open the doors of communication and ask their members whether they would be interested in working more actively with the local food movement. Hopefully, through discussing the ideological and worldview-based connections between FBG’s and local food initiatives, FBG leaders will be able to convey the exciting potential of these programs and generate interest among members. From there, FBG leaders might find the programs best fitting to their members and the capacities of the FBG itself.

Before attempting to begin new efforts, FBG’s should also coordinate through JUMP to identify existing programs that link FBG’s with local food initiatives in Burlington. As the coordinator of JUMP explained to me, “My first action step would be, we have twenty-six faith entities, I would probably do a survey and say, ‘Which of you right now have contact with an existing garden or a garden that is a part of your mission?’” (Hines 2015: 3). By doing an inventory of current initiatives, FBG’s will be able to identify whether or not they even need to build their own projects, or if they could simply grow an existing one in partnership with another FBG nearby. With comprehensive information regarding existing faith sponsored local food initiatives in Burlington, FBG’s can effectively share experiences, work together, pool resources, and build more resilient programs at a cheaper cost of all groups involved.

By organizing all current FBG-sponsored local food programs through a central body like JUMP, local food organizations would be able to conduct outreach to

Burlington's faith community and harness their support. This centralization of efforts will greatly help local food organizations like the Intervale Center who have already expressed an interest in "doing outreach advertising, [and] kind of spreading the word through church groups" in an attempt to deliver local products to more publically accessible spaces (Frost 2015: 4). By utilizing JUMP, local food initiatives like the Intervale Center would be able to easily reach out to FBG's and convey new opportunities for those looking to get involved. As a member of the Vermont Community Garden network explained to me, "[JUMP] is such a great outreach tool. So say if we were offering a grant for faith-based gardens, getting the info to JUMP, they could get it out from there" (Hyman 2015: 7). By doing an inventory of all current faith sponsored local food initiatives and connecting them together through JUMP, FBG's would be able to open clear lines of communication amongst themselves and local food initiatives, helping to identify areas in need and areas of opportunity.

Beginning this process, I identified a few existing faith sponsored local food efforts in Burlington, VT. Currently, I have encountered three main types of faith sponsored local food initiatives existing in Burlington, VT. First amongst these are education-centered programs for children. For example, the First Congregational Church in Burlington integrated sustainable food into one of their religious education classes a few years ago. Unfortunately, the associate pastor explained to me that, "we didn't get much further than that," and that she was not sure how long ago this topic was last taught (May 2015: 6). A Quaker interviewee also explained to me that she teaches Children's Religious Education for her meeting and one of their prior topics was "Sustainable

living.” In the class, she talked with the children about agriculture, as well as equity and fairness (Matchette 2015: 4).

Second, a few FBG’s have started gardens on their grounds. The Quaker Meeting in Burlington started a garden for the tenants occupying the second story of their meeting house as well as for the members of the meeting itself. Explaining her reasoning for starting a garden, my Quaker interviewee reflected, “I probably intentionally made the choice to have a garden at the meeting not just because it was fun and available, but also as a form of community building there” (Matchette 2015: 2). The garden helped her to build her faith community, but also helped her focus on her spirituality. She later explained, “I found it very centering to listen to podcasts while I weed. But then like go and sit in the grass, or kind of lie in the grass and have a centered moment too” (Matchette 2015: 3). Unfortunately, I was unable to find other examples of FBG gardens in Burlington. Nonetheless, the director of the Vermont Community Garden Network explained to me that a small number of the gardens registered with them are run by FBG’s, but she suspects, “that there are a lot more faith-based groups out there doing gardens than we know about” (Hyman 2015: 3). Though the Vermont Community Garden Network would like to contact with the unrepresented faith-based gardens, she regrets that “We are just not connected super well” (Hyman 2015: 3). This disconnect simply adds to the need for a central body linking all existing FBG local food efforts in Burlington.

Third, a number of FBG’s in Burlington have hosted CSA drops on their grounds for their members as well as other members of the public. The Ohavi Zedek synagogue hosts a CSA every week in their facility. A Rabbi explained to me that, “We make our

space available for free as a drop. So they set up their little farmers market and their subscribers come and get their food” (Salzman 2015: 5). The Unitarian Universalist Church also hosted a CSA in the summer of 2014. The reverend explained that she was, “delighted to do that,” and clarified, “We certainly advertised it, [but] I think a lot of people who were coming weren’t necessarily members” (Dowdall 2015: 3-4). Similarly, the First Congregationalist Church hosted a CSA a few years ago through a partnership with a program called New Farms for New Americans as a way to “support immigrant communities” (Cook 2014: 3). Importantly, however, the Congregational Church stopped hosting the CSA in recent years. Explaining why the CSA stopped, the Congregationalist reverend commented, “It was sort of a CSA...But we did not, we didn’t build that into the center of our ministry and I don’t think that many people took advantage of it” (Cook 2015: 4). It would seem that, though many FBG’s in the area have happily hosted CSA’s, the members of the FBG’s themselves have not yet embraced local food efforts as a centerpiece of the FBG culture.

Before FBG’s attempt to grow their role in Burlington’s local food movement, they must first open lines of communication within their communities to ensure member support. They should also identify all the current faith sponsored local food efforts in Burlington so to better share resources, grow support, and interact more easily with local food initiatives. Through my research, I have begun to identify some existing faith sponsored local food efforts in Burlington, but my findings have been by no means comprehensive. Moving forward, all FBG’s in Burlington would benefit from coordinating through JUMP to generate a list of current efforts so that they might connect together and grow a network of faith based local food programs.

Potential Faith Sponsored Local Food Programs

When I set out with my research in the fall of 2014, I had a clear goal in mind: to identify ways to build FBG sponsored farmers markets and CSA memberships. Through my research, however, my enthusiasm was quickly curbed. Like most ethnographic work, my conclusions were far from my original expectations, yet now far closer to reality. Below I will discuss some potential projects that FBG's in Burlington can implement in the near future should their individual communities wish. More importantly, I will discuss projects to avoid pursuing, at least for the time being.

Before entering into a discussion on potential FBG local food programs, it is again important to consider the political implications of aspects of faith sponsored initiatives. Though not the explicit intention of any FBG leader looking to connect with Burlington's local food movement, faith sponsored food initiatives may assume a proselytizing appearance. For this reason, every faith-sponsored local food initiative must take care to remain inclusive to all peoples, considering thoroughly the ways in which programs might alienate some otherwise interested volunteers.

Inspired by the program "Faith in Place" which developed a faith-sponsored winter farmers market in Chicago (Faith in Place), I asked my first interviewees about their opinions on a faith sponsored farmers market in Burlington. Much to my surprise, my interviewees found the idea laudable, but unfeasible. One local farmer explained to me that, "Challenges come to mind first," because many farms don't have the capacity to do more markets and because farmers' markets require lots of infrastructure (Martin 2015: 7). Issues such as identifying a market manager, obtaining market insurance, getting an EBT machine, and training an EBT machine operator all add to the difficulty

of establishing a new market (Martin 2015: 7). More importantly, no given FBG has a membership large enough to make a weekly or even one time farmers market viable. As a Congregationalist interviewee explained, “We don’t have enough people even on a Sunday to make it worthwhile to create a market” (Barker 2015: 5). Many of the members of the FBG’s would also likely leave after the service, further decreasing the total attendants of a faith-sponsored farmers market. If faith sponsored local food programs are to be viable they will need to have more modest goals. Speculating what a more modest program might look like, a local farmer suggested to me, “What comes to mind that is more appropriate, is like a congregation that has a CSA” (Martin 2015: 7). So next I turned my sights to a faith sponsored CSA.

Looking to design an FBG-sponsored CSA, I asked my interviewees to explain the logistics involved in such a partnership. A local farmer explained to me that, while one FBG would not provide enough business to entice a host of farmers, it could certainly entice one farm (Martin 2015: 8). As my research has showed, some FBG’s have already begun this process, opening their space for CSA drops. FBG’s like the Ohavi Zedek synagogue already allow farmers to set up and distribute shares to their subscribers on FBG grounds. Simplifying the process even more, a local farmer whom I interviewed posited:

If it was a guaranteed sale...you know if a CSA, or maybe its not a CSA, but they set up a thing where they can order online what they want. Then it’s just a box. Something like that could be more simple and make it more worthwhile. (Martin 2015: 8)

Working with a specific local farm, FBG’s would be able to choose a farm that best suits the needs and desires of the FBG members. More than just hosting a CSA on its grounds,

FBG's could also purchase a CSA share themselves, providing farmers with the benefit of a large institutional buyer and providing the FBG with nutritious, local products to serve to their members and to the needy. Supporting this idea, one community organizer and Congregationalist member noted, "I think that there is a really obvious connection to make between the food that is being served or given away to be coming from the community" (Barker 2015: 6). Importantly, institutional constraints make faith sponsored CSA's difficult to implement.

The most important institutional constraint is funding. Using a rather stark metaphor, one associate pastor emphasized:

Churches are really struggling to maintain or to recreate or do whatever they have to just to stay alive, so I see a lot of this like a person who either has a chronic illness or a possible terminal illness, and asking them to take on something else. (May 2015: 7)

Another FBG leader made a similar comment, claiming:

I think that everything should be organic and local, but that is hard to achieve at an institutional setting. So the more you do the better. It's more expensive so we are kind of caught in some ways. (Salzman 2015: 5)

Though faith groups are hopefully not in such dire condition, the lesson rings clear: for faith-sponsored local food projects to be successful, they cannot be expensive. Adding a layer of hope, another interviewee noted that some institutions have successfully provided local organic foods at an affordable price point, so, "There are ways to get healthy and local and organic foods at a very low price point to people in need" (Barker 2015: 7). Faith-sponsored CSA's are certainly an option for local FBG's, but affordability will certainly be a constraint. Looking forward, the best projects will be revenue neutral or revenue positive for churches.

Perhaps the best-suited projects for FBG's to pursue are projects working towards community food security because they integrate a common FBG goal to mitigate hunger with local food movement goal for agricultural sustainability, while still remaining affordable. To this end, I encountered a significant level of support for gleaning and gardening projects. Many research participants expressed support for a gleaning program run through FBG's. One interviewee really embraced the idea of gleaning for youth education, explaining, "I think that the gleaning is a great idea because...even just that first basic step of identifying plants and what vegetables look like is really big" (Matchette 2015: 5). A local farmer at the Intervale Center also confirmed with me that they would welcome a gleaning program so long as it is coordinated through the Intervale Center itself, thus removing the burden of organization from their shoulders (Martin 2015: 5). More than an educational tool, FBG gleaning programs could help provide healthy revenue neutral sources of food to their kitchens. Notably however, gleaning can be a very physically strenuous. As a Christian interviewee noted, "We have a lot of people in the second half of their life, shall we say, gleaning can be hard work and a full day" (Barker 2015: 5). Navigating these challenges of labor and funding, FBG's could also source local food through either a purchase or through gleaning by those able, and then make value added projects for sale to simultaneously support local projects, support their FBG, and provide a fun, community building activity (Barker 2015: 5).

Working towards goals of community food security and affordability, FBG's could also pursue community gardens. Though only a few FBG's expressed interest in building gardens on their property due to uncertainty regarding member support, FBG gardens have a great opportunity to use their land towards productive ends. Highlighting

exactly this idea, a member of the Vermont Community Garden Network excitedly commented, “We are just not connected super well, and I would love to be because churches have *land* and they have this social mission and interest in serving the community” (Hyman 2015: 3). Through creating faith based community gardens, FBG’s have the potential to source cheap nutritious food for their ministry work at little cost to the FBG itself. Mitigating the potential difficulties of starting and coordinating a garden, the Vermont Community Garden Network has a number of programs that could facilitate starting a new garden. One such program, the “Grow It” Workshop that teaches individuals to become garden leaders (Hyman 2015: 7). With these gardens, FBG’s also open up a tremendous opportunity to provide nutrition education to their members and to the public, creating teaching gardens. Though certainly requiring effort and organization, FBG community gardens present an amazing opportunity to combine goals for community outreach with goals for agricultural sustainability at an affordable price point, provided they have the sufficient member support.

Throughout my research process, I encountered a great deal of interest and excitement in faith sponsored local food initiatives. Research participants largely corroborated my understanding that FBG’s and local food movements share common ideals and would benefit from partnership. Excited about joining efforts with the local food movement, many FBG leaders desired to connect their community to local efforts as a form of community building and community development. Still, a general lack of interest among members has prevented local food from becoming a keystone issue in most all the FBG’s I encountered. Regardless, many FBG leaders saw their role in the

local food movement as emerging, with more integration of efforts forthcoming. To begin connecting FBG efforts with Burlington's local food movement, I suggest that FBG's open a clear dialogue with their members and assess levels of interest in different programs. I also highlight the importance of coordinating via JUMP to uncover and grow existing FBG sponsored local food efforts. This will help to strengthen existing efforts and also act as a tool by which local food initiatives might disseminate information to Burlington's faith community. Finally, I highlighted some existing efforts that I encountered and proposed some potential projects such as CSA's, gleaning, and community gardens. Through my research, I uncovered a great deal of support for local food amongst Burlington's FBG's. Now, we must harness the goodwill of the faith community, taking small steps towards a more sustainable local food system.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

“This battle, like any great moral battle, will be won, if won, not with some easy corrective tidal wave of Total Righteousness, but with small drops of specificity and aplomb and correct logic, delivered...by many of us all at once”
(George Saunders)

Though written about the slow erosion of media credibility in the United States, I think that George Saunders touches perfectly on a central truth about cultural change. While the system of conventional agriculture in the United States may loom above us like a storm cloud extending to the horizons, seemingly impenetrable by the efforts of individuals, small projects towards sustainable local food systems act like tiny rays of light, slowly breaking apart the clouds above. Though not as satisfying as a swift and righteous shattering of the unsustainable and often unjust conventional agricultural system, local food projects slowly and methodologically shift the nature of our food system towards sustainable and equitable ends. Only by allowing these small efforts to grow and connect will our current food system become more sustainable and more locally rooted. With the goal of helping to sustain local food movements, I set out researching new spaces for local food community support. Through a conversation with the head of the Burlington Food Council, I landed on the topic of faith, and through my research I discovered that FBG's in Burlington show immense potential to support local food initiatives. Expanding outward, my research shows that FBG's could play a large role in the development of local food movements across the U.S., and it highlights many preexisting FBG-sponsored local food initiatives working slowly every day to build more resilient, morally grounded local food communities.

Looking first to the constellation of ideals informing local food initiatives, I have shown that local food movements across the U.S. have formed in response to three main

social trends: a growing critique of conventional agriculture, a reaction to modernization and globalization, and a rejection of traditional capitalism. Directly opposing the methods of conventional agriculture, local food movements highlight the fresh, nutritious, quality of their sustainably grown food. In contrast, local food movements paint conventional agriculture as less fresh, less nutritious, and requiring an unsustainable level of environmentally degrading inputs. Going further, local food movements become spaces of reconciliation, where people can reconnect with and regain control over their food system. Through local purchases, consumers are empowered with the ability to disentangle themselves from a conventional system that they believe to be harmful. To a larger degree, local food movements offer space for people to rebuild community, which they believe to have slowly disappeared through the process of modernization and globalization. Farmers' markets, CSA's, community gardens, and gleaning all act as community building activities that slowly reconnect people with their local landscape, with their food, and with each other. Finally, local food movements reject traditional capitalism, which contends that high profits should be the primary concern for agribusinesses. Instead, local food movements appeal to consumers on a moral level, calling them to pay more for sustainable, equitable, and fresh products.

In chapter four, I discussed some critiques to the local food movement that limit its sustainability and its effectiveness. First and foremost, I critiqued local food movements for relying predominantly on consumptive activism to support their cause. Though morally driven consumptive activism diverges significantly from models of neoclassical economics, it alone may not be enough to sustain and grow local food efforts. Relying on morally grounded purchases to generate social change through market

forces, consumptive activism creates a system of empowerment that scales according to purchasing power. This system simultaneously empowers the wealthy to create or stifle food systems change and it disempowers poorer citizens who may wish to purchase local food, but cannot afford it. In other words, “voting with your fork” does little to challenge conventional agriculture because many local goods are at prices that poor citizens cannot afford. I also showed that consumptive activism threatens the sustainability of local food movements by opening them to competition with larger agribusiness. When moral purchases are the main system of local food activism, large corporations are able to co-opt the moral value of the term “local” by rebranding their products as such. By commandeering the term “local,” which currently lacks a specific definition, large agribusinesses can redirect consumer goodwill towards their products and slowly siphon support away from alternative, local food systems. Afterwards, I compared local food with food security activism to show that local food movements pay too little attention to economic constraints affecting consumers, instead focusing on issues in food production such as farmer wages and pesticide use. I also showed that food security activism emphasizes consumer issues such as food prices and hunger, while paying less attention to production issues. Finally, I looked to community food security as a space of reconciliation, where production and consumption concerns are both intentionally addressed within a local food context.

In chapter five, I examined the ethical intersections between FBG’s and local food initiatives, looking to uncover whether FBG’s might connect ideologically with local food movement goals for sustainable agriculture and the regrowth of communities dismembered by modernization and globalization. To begin, I highlighted the many ways

that local food movements act like a religion, helping people navigate their food system in a meaningful way that connects them to a place and community. Knowing the rather religious nature of local food, I examined formally-established FBG's as a mechanism for augmenting the embodied ways that people locate themselves within a local food community. Thus, I worked to uncover faithful interpretations of local food as a method through which to add new layers of social meaning to local food purchases. Through a brief examination of the Old and New Testaments, I emphasized many passages pertaining to local food concerns such as animal welfare and environmental sustainability. Finally, I delved into the concept of "faithful" membership. I argued that when recognizing the inherent connection between mankind and the rest of creation, it becomes the moral obligation of all faithful people to protect and steward over the natural world. From there, I claimed that people of faith, recognizing their duty to the members of creation, should likely take issue with the environmentally and socially destructive practices of conventionally agriculture. Similarly, I claimed that FBG's should probably take issue with the socially dismembering nature of modernization and globalization as it erodes the very understanding of mankind's connection to the rest of the world. Armed with the knowledge that both FBG members and local food activists often oppose the destructive nature of conventional agriculture and the dis-membering nature of modernization and globalization, I claimed that faith clearly has a place in discussions around food systems change.

Moving on to chapter six, I reviewed the ways in which FBG's have engaged with food aid projects and food systems change, setting a historical precedent for FBG involvement in local food initiatives and contextualizing current FBG-sponsored local

food efforts. First, I looked to FBG involvement in food aid programs. Involved in food aid since the beginning of the 20th century, FBG's have a long history of food work in their missions. Today, FBG's still deliver a significant portion of food aid through food shelves and soup kitchens, and their role as food providers has only grown as the U.S. government continues pass the burden of feeding hungry citizens onto local organizations. Next, I looked to FBG involvement in efforts towards food systems change. Looking to the 1960's, I examined the Christian Lifestyle Movement, which called for shifts in American diets so that additional food might be available for needy people in the U.S. and abroad. Finally, I noted that FBG programs towards food systems change track closely with periods of broader social critique of the U.S. food system. Thus, current FBG efforts in partnership with local food initiatives logically arise as the U.S. enters another period of strong social critique of our conventional food system. Knowing that FBG's have a rich history of food work and that they share similar goals with local food initiatives, I conclude that faith may have a significant role to play in local food movements.

Finally, I turned to Burlington in chapter seven, examining whether FBG's recognize the ideological and worldview-based connections that I encountered in my literature review. From there, I outlined how FBG's might best connect with local food efforts in the area, should they wish to. Through my research, I found that some FBG's leaders and members in Burlington do recognize the connection between their mission and the goals of the local food movements. Unfortunately, there remains a great deal of uncertainty as to FBG member interest and few FBG's have made local food a centerpiece of their missions. Regardless, many FBG leaders see their role in food

systems change as growing, promising hope for future FBG involvement in Burlington's local food movement. Next, I recommended that FBG leaders open a dialogue with their members regarding faith sponsored local food programs so that member interest may be more accurately gauged. Moreover, I urged FBG's to coordinate with the broader Burlington faith community to establish clear lines of communication whereby existing projects can be supported and new ones grown. I also highlighted a few existing FBG-sponsored local food initiatives existing in Burlington, but stress that there are certainly more initiatives I failed to find. Finally, I discussed some potential new FBG-sponsored local food programs, stressing gleaning and gardening projects as the most viable as they merge longstanding FBG goals to feed the hungry with the rising FBG goal for local food system sustainability.

Looking back, it seems quite clear that FBG's have a part to play in Burlington's local food movement. Helping make the mundane sacred, FBG's have the potential to invest local food efforts and local food itself with new forms of embodied knowing that unite individual consumers into a faithful local food community. It could transform simple local purchases into daily acts of faith. Though faithful local food activism will not appeal to all members of the Burlington community, or any local food community, it represents one more ray of light, helping to slowly break apart the system of conventional agriculture and lead the way towards more sustainable local food systems. Looking forward, there remains much to be done. Many questions have yet to be answered, leaving a need for future research. As this thesis centered mostly around Christianity and Judaism, there is a pressing need for research regarding how other faiths might interact with local food movements. Notably, since my project did not engage with Burlington's

Islamic and Hindu communities due to methodological constraints, more research must be done to investigate their connections with Burlington's local food movement. An exploration of faithful activism in other regions of the US will also add to new layers of understanding to how diverse FBG's connect with the many local food movements across the U.S. As for Burlington, there remains much work to be done assessing member interest, building local food into FBG missions, growing existing projects, and developing new ones. Far from extraneous or unrelated, FBG's and local food movements share much in common. As a former food shelf coordinator said to me: "Right now we have the beginning of something here" (Hines 2015: 5). Right now, the role of faith in local food movements is small, but with time will likely grow, adding new layers of meaning to local food and uniting local communities with a common moral language. Through the help of small, supporting efforts by FBG's, local food movements interwoven across the United States can continue to move us slowly towards a sustainable future, re-rooted in community and a local food system.

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