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Creating a resilient food system in Vermont:
Gleaning, community engagement, and the importance of embracing complexity

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine how the gleaning network in Vermont functions as part of a movement towards disrupting the waste stream, improving food security and individual empowerment, and creating a sustainable food system. Gleaning is the volunteer-based practice of recapturing usable but not sellable food from fields post-harvest. In Vermont, as in other states, this food is then used to improve food access for marginalized populations. Using community-based research methods with the non-profit organization Salvation Farms, this study examines how gleaning in Vermont creates networks between farmers and consumers and how it connects institutions to local farmers. It explains how gleaning shapes people's perceptions of their food system, how it creates and defines community, and what we can learn about increasing personal investment in the Vermont food system. This thesis will also assess gleaning's ability to help create more resilience within the food system overall. The practice of gleaning will be demonstrated to be a highly effective tool to create community and interpersonal ties; this will be done through Bourdieu's theories on social capital and a comprehensive examination of social capital's role in the food system.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“Oh, this one is good! And make sure you don’t forget those two. That one is too small. Oh wait, maybe it’s fine!” The excited words of 5-year-old Eli carried up and down the rows at Dog River Farm, directing me to the cabbages that he deemed were appropriate to be gleaned, and the ones that in his words were “no good”. I could not pick them up fast enough before he would begin directing me to another patch, or hand me a cabbage to peel so he could watch it transform before his eyes from a brown, rotten-looking sphere to a beautiful green cabbage. Occasionally, he would pick up a cabbage, peel off the layers, and find a slug or some bug which would make him yell “Ew!” loudly before rushing around to show us what he had found. After we had all properly admired his find he would give one last thoughtful look at the cabbage, drop it, and hurry on to his next find. The delight that Eli found in seeking out the cabbages was wonderful to watch and his energy was infectious, making the work out in the hot sun feel much easier.

Eli, myself, and a crew of five other gleaners were on our second day working the cabbage patch at Dog River Farm. Cabbage, as it turns out, is a prolific crop, and it took a couple days for us to work through the whole patch. Although Eli was only there one of the days that I was, I was struck by the enthusiasm he displayed for the task. His mother, Allison Levin, who runs a gleaning program in central Vermont, noted his enthusiasm with a smile but said “Just watch, in 10 minutes he’s going to

get distracted.” She was right, and Eli soon disappeared into the car we had out in the field, popping out every once in a while to show a drawing he had done and to note cabbages I had missed, which I dutifully picked up. Rachel Barns, another gleaner that day, noted how fun it was to have Eli out in the field, despite his sometimes-distracting presence. “He’s a handful, alright,” another noted. The whole experience was eye-opening for me, and left me pondering a variety of questions. How many kids usually get to have the experience of going to a farm at such a young age, and what did that do for them? What memories would Eli have as an adult of this time? I left the field that day tired but happy to have had the opportunity to witness such a thing.

My experience with gleaning was fairly limited before I began working on this project, but I quickly became fascinated with it, mostly due to the experiences like the one I described above. Starting my partnership with Salvation Farms in order to write a thesis about gleaning introduced me to a particular subset of kind, generous people whose primary goal in life seemed to be assisting others as best they could, using the resources available. I was drawn to gleaning from my very first contact with Theresa Snow, the founding partner of Salvation Farms, and from the very first time I stepped out onto a field to glean. There is a distinctly intangible and difficult to describe feeling of salvaging crops that nobody else wants, and knowing that they will be put to good use. As one volunteer mentioned leaving the field one day, “I can be in a bad mood when I get here, but I always leave feeling better. Even though sometimes I don’t want to go, if it’s raining or something, I like everyone and the work is still fun.”

Gleaning continues to surprise me, as people from all walks of life find ways to connect with the concept. As will be discussed later in this thesis, gleaning, or food rescue in general, seems to connect with two deeply human instincts: the act of giving, and the desire to not waste. Through gleaning, people are afforded the opportunity to connect with something that, in my experience with the practice, seems to be fairly deeply ingrained. Many people I interviewed and talked to in the fields said that regardless of their interaction with food waste prior to starting gleaning, they gained a new awareness and interest in the way that farming works, and how food is either taken or left behind during the harvest process. When I would tell people that just in Vermont it's possible to glean upwards of 16000 pounds of food, invariably there would be a look of awe and excitement, and frequently quite a bit of disbelief (Our Blog at Salvation Farm - Reducing Vermont's Dependency on Food From Afar n.d.). While many of those I talked to discussed their own food recycling habits (like composting) many had no idea of the scale or potential for food waste recapture on farms. At a recent tabling session at the 2015 Northeast Organic Farming Association conference, every single person I talked to instantly connected with the idea, even if they had never heard of Salvation Farms or gleaning before. One woman, after hearing our spiel about the organization and gleaning in general, said "Well, that makes sense!" Another noted the connection with teaching people how to cook, as she was a Home Economics major in college and said that she felt that was an incredibly important part of feeling independent.

This thesis is my attempt to contribute to a conversation around gleaning and its potential to positively impact social relations, build communities, reduce

food waste, provide alternative pathways for food consumption, and overall become a force for positive change in Vermont's food system, and potentially food systems in other states as well. In doing so, I address a number of issues. Gleaning spans the intersection of social theories that address the construction of communities, value creation, volunteerism, and social and symbolic capital. It raises a multiplicity of questions about what motivates people to become invested in their food system, what encourages volunteerism, and what can be learned about creating a resilient food system from exploring these various topics.

This thesis will address the various complexities of Vermont's gleaning network, as it is a dense and multi-layered network that impacts multiple points of the food system. Through its volunteer nature, it has a distinctly personal and meaningful human component; it also provides an opportunity for people of all walks of life to have a greater stake in the food sourcing and food needs of their community. By virtue of its volunteer-based nature, I argue that gleaning can provide a critical and important place to examine and intervene in the ways that food systems impact interpersonal relationships and community networks. In particular, gleaning can involve greater numbers of people in the food system and offer a greater number of opportunities for various levels of investment. Its informal and non-threatening nature provides a neutral and safe space for education on food insecurity as well as introduces people to the complexities of farming. Its flexibility and bottom-up approach allows it to follow both the supply and demand for gleaned food, which in turn creates a more egalitarian network in which people from all walks of life have the ability to participate.

Through the VT Commodity Program and gleaned food distribution, gleaning has involved members of institutions like prisons in the community food system; they are helping to solve issues of lessened food access during winter. And finally, it provides the perfect place to look at anthropological questions of what builds social capital within the food system, and how that can be used to help build interpersonal and intragroup ties within the greater Vermont area.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Social capital: What is it, and what do we do with it?

Social capital is one of many terms used in the social sciences to describe the various ways that humans construct relationships in the world. Social capital is most often used in conjunction with economic and material capital to describe the three main factors of production, or the three main types of “goods and services” that humans use to construct communities and economies. Depending on the discipline, the specific definition of each of these types of capital will change, but we can broadly define them as the following: Economic capital focuses primarily on the exchange of money and the means of production, while natural capital primarily refers to material resources that can be transformed into goods and services. Modern conceptions of “capital” frequently emphasize economic capital as being the most important; and while it is true that economic capital is often the easiest to measure, it ignores the fundamental way that social relationships impact the flow and accumulation of economic capital. In other words, while economic capital has become the most prevalent way that we measure the accumulation of capital, it has come at the expense of acknowledging the importance of social capital in providing the relationships that allow for that accumulation.

Generally, we can conceive of social capital as referring to “connections between individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam 2000:19). It is these connections that makes community membership beneficial to an individual, and allows people to

“resolve problems and make decisions collectively” (Robbins 2008:396).

Anthropologists find evidence for social capital in the theory of generalized reciprocity, in which the giving of things to someone else is done with the expectation that in the future they will do something for you in exchange. While it is possible that social capital can at times be negative and used to exclude instead of include, it is more often found that it improves lives by building strong social support networks that allow individuals to live healthy, productive lives (Robbins 2008). French theorist Pierre Bourdieu defines it more specifically as being the “sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Pierre Bourdieu 1992:119).

The relevance of examining social capital arises from the way that human beings interact in a given setting—it is not so much that social capital is built through many individual virtuous beings, but instead that they interact in such a way that their interactions build what Robert Putnam, in his book “Bowling Alone” defines as “social potentiality” (Putnam 2000). Social potentiality is built through the “touchstone” of social capital discussed before: generalized reciprocity. This social potentiality is one way to consider the importance of social capital in relation to economic or natural capital: if there is no trust within a community, there is less likely to be economic trust and involvement within that community as well.

Gleaning creates connections within the community that build economic and social trust; this translates to increased social capital and greater community resilience as a whole.

Marx's construction of the social world focused on the role of capital and the means of production as the primary force behind the formation of social relationships and power structures. While this theoretical construction of the social topography has been tremendously useful, Pierre Bourdieu's theories problematize Marx's prioritization of physical and material elements over social relationships. When the social field is constrained to the economic, it ignores the other forms of capital (i.e. social) that can enact change on that economic positioning. Bourdieu defines social position as the place that one resides in the various different systems that make up social topography (Bourdieu 1985). Power relations, then, are not formed solely through economic relationships but instead are formed through the accumulation of additional forms of capital such as social and symbolic. This space of relationships, which he names as being as "real as geographical space", is enacted on an everyday basis by the lived realities of the agents within societal structure (Bourdieu 1985:724). Bourdieu's theory becomes critical to considering foodways and community relationships because of his subsequent conclusions about human agency. He proposed that agents or stakeholders within a community could use social and symbolic capital as a way to enact political struggle against the isolation of capitalism and its intense focus on the accumulation of economic capital. As will be discussed later, this positions gleaning as a critical space in which social capital can be accessed and created with the end goal of ending issues of food insecurity that have intensified with the advent of capitalist modes of food production.

Is social capital declining?

One of the central questions of modern social theory is the concern over declining investment in social groups that have historically been very popular. While the decades prior to the 1960s are often seen as the heyday of social involvement, with rates of participation in volunteering, social groups, and more public forms of social investment at their highest; that trend has largely been reversed in the latter half of the century (Putnam 2000). Instead, the end of the 20th century was characterized by a trend in increased social disconnectedness: the generations studied during that period were found to have a social trust quotient half that of their predecessors—declining from 80% to 40% in the span of half a century (Putnam 2000).

One area of particular interest to my study is how we measure interactions of social capital and volunteer practices. As gleaning in Vermont is primarily considered a volunteer activity (though some of the those involved with the system currently receive a stipend), the potential decline or issues with volunteerism are of central interest to this study and the practice of gleaning. One interviewee, speaking of a glean at a farm in the Northeast Kingdom, said: “I felt badly I couldn’t join her (the gleaning coordinator), because when I tell you we barely touched the spinach that was there, I thought oh my god if there were only 20 of us, and we could go down the rows, we could get 100s of lbs of spinach, and the force is just not out there, you know?” (Whalen n.d.) While volunteering certainly would seem to be associated with the commonsense definition of social capital, the scholarly definition of social capital has to do with the process of “doing with”, not doing “for”

(Putnam 2000:117). This is because the concept of doing good “for” someone else does not necessarily relate to the concrete formation of social networks. That being said, the critical aspect that links volunteerism to conversations around social capital is that dense networks of social connections are most often the ways that people are recruited for volunteer efforts (Putnam 2000). Consequently, increased levels of civic engagement in a community and denser networks of interpersonal connections become a strong predictor for how many people in a community are willing to volunteer, as well as how much time they are willing to put in.

There are a variety of different types of volunteer activities, but the most important to discuss in the context of gleaning is that of organized altruism. While philanthropy is certainly important to discussions of civic communities, gleaning is a particular type of activity in that it requires physical engagement and the input of time and resources. During the beginning of the 20th century the rise of organized altruism was still primarily religious, but towards the end, community organizations and institutions had also joined the field as being primary organizers of community time and effort on the behalf of others (Putnam 2000). Overall, the US demonstrates a higher level of altruism than many other countries: in 1995 ninety-three million people volunteered a total of twenty billion hours. However, in light of recent declines in volunteer efforts, a focus on the intersection of volunteerism and community building is important, since a secondary goal of gleaning and Salvation Farms in particular is to help build a stronger relationship between both local and larger communities and farms which source their food. By far the most important predictor of the rate of volunteering in a given area or community (a term which

will be problematized in a later section) is the level of involvement of an individual with their particular social network. Exposure to social ties, whether through a church, a job, clubs, or organizations, increase the likelihood of participating in the type of organized altruism which is characteristic of a practice like gleaning (Putnam 2000).

Understanding organized altruism and the formation of social ties is crucial to understanding gleaning's importance in creating a more secure and sustainable food system. Research on the problems with current systems of food charity emphasize that many times the link between food consumption and health is not fully understood. While there is limited academic research on gleaning, studies on gleaning's history make the point that gleaning crosses the border between food charity and personal health. In particular, studies of gleaning allude indirectly to Bourdieu's conceptions of types of capital. Badio (2009), in writing on how gleaning has changed from a historical practice, notes that one issue that did not happen historically is that access to food (aka material capital) is now only accessible through participation in consumer society. Because our current food system is structured in such a way that nutritious food access is mediated through consumerism, those who do not have the purchasing power to participate are left marginalized by the system itself. Robbins supports this, saying that "in the culture of capitalism, access to food is determined almost entirely by the ability to pay, not by the need to eat" (Robbins 2008:186). However, gleaning, due to the fact that it collects food that is rendered unusable by the standards of consumer society, is able to circumvent the system entirely (Badio 2009). This creates a new space in which

to mediate the interaction of food, alternative forms of capital, and marginalized individuals. In addition, “these practices can empower individuals to be active in the process of securing food for themselves in a dignified and sustainable manner.”

(Badio 2009:12)

This creation of an alternative space in which to mediate healthier interactions between individuals and their food supply fits in well with other efforts to develop this relationship. As small farms already encourage the development of social capital through their ability to provide personal connection to consumers, they provide ideal sites for the re-negotiation of more isolated and commodified spaces. It is important to note, of course, that even small organic farms sell food, and are thus in a sense participating in a capitalist mode of production and consumption. The critical difference in this case is that they hold the potential to be sites not only to mediate the exchange of goods for money, but also a space for the exchange of knowledge, information, and personal connection. In an assessment done on the growth of gleaning across the country, gleaning’s ability to create social ties on small farms is noted as being important to the volunteers: “Gleaning projects offer a unique opportunity to pair education (food preservation, gardening, and nutrition) with access to nutritious foods in an atmosphere of social support and empowerment.” (Hoisington and Butkus 2001:47) Additionally, volunteers noted that it was “successful in facilitating behavior change with respect to food choices and improving resources for household food security.”

Social Capital and Food Security:

Although there are few studies specifically focusing on gleaning, more research has been done linking food security with increased levels of social capital. In an article focusing on the relationship between social capital and hunger, Martin et al. noted that greater resources are available to individuals through their social behavior and membership in community networks (Martin et al. 2004). This becomes crucial when one considers that the ability to obtain food, particularly for those affected by food insecurity, may be difficult to mediate between childcare, transportation, and work. In a community where social capital, and ties of symbolic capital are readily available, the obtainment of food is vastly easier. However, in a system in which commodification has rendered food separate from social relationships, food security becomes much harder to attain (Martin et al. 2004). Bourdieu support this concept tangentially in his consideration of the gift exchange, which he views as being part of the construction of a community in which there are high levels of social capital. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, he says,

“In the same operation, it (commodified systems) removes the conditions making possible the institutionally organized and guaranteed misrecognition, which is the basis of gift exchange, and perhaps, of all the symbolic labour intended to transmute, by the sincere fiction of a disinterested exchange, the inevitable, and inevitably interested relations imposed by kinship, neighborhood, or work, into elective relations of reciprocity.” (Bourdieu 1977:171)

The role that reciprocity plays in producing an environment in which access to food becomes easier is supported by other studies done on social capital and food access. This is because social capital has been linked with better physical and emotional health, even if other types of capital indicators (such as economic) are lower (Martin et al. 2004). In addition, during times of particular hardship, social capital can play a crucial role in helping alleviate those issues: “Social capital can increase the likelihood of access to various forms of social support during times of need” (Martin et al. 2004:2647).

The discussion around social capital and hunger is particularly important to recognize given the widespread hunger that exists both within the US and across the globe today. The most recent statistics for US food insecurity state that 14.3 percent (17.5 million) of U.S. households were food insecure at some time during 2013. 8.7% of US households had low food security, and 5.6% had very low food security (USDA Economic Research Service - Key Statistics & Graphics n.d.). Globally, 805 million people are estimated to be chronically undernourished (FAO, IFAD, and WFP 2014). It is important to situate food insecurity within economic, political, and social relations. The ability to obtain food is theorized by anthropologists and other scholars to be predicated on the theory of “entitlements”—a socially defined right to food. Regardless of the method of an entitlement (it could range from the purchase of land, to socio-political rights, to welfare or social security programs) (Robbins 2008). Critical to understanding food insecurity, then, is understanding the failure of entitlement. While the tendency of capitalism is to focus on the cycle of production and consumption, the failure of entitlement is much more linked to a failure of

distribution. Placing food insecurity in these terms allows researchers to focus on actions that place power back in the hands of those who have had that “entitlement” removed. Gleaning is an ideal space for this to happen, as it encourages new distribution pathways and places power back in the hands of those who are food insecure.

Defining Gleaning: Recapturing Waste and More

Gleaning is ancient in history, first mentioned in the books of Leviticus, which state “Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. 'Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger” (Leviticus 19:22). Gleaning was legally tolerated during the feudal systems of medieval Europe, but the rise of capitalism and in particular stricter laws codifying the process of getting food from farm to market discouraged the continuance of gleaning into the 19th century and onwards. Since then, it has been represented most famously in the painting by Jean-Francois Millet called “The Gleaners.” Despite this significance and long history, the practice of gleaning has not been examined in extensive detail by food scholars, as many of them have focused on other areas of food system development.

While the most commonly accepted definition of gleaning is the reaping of food after the harvest, recent years have seen a shift in its definition to include the recapturing of food from multiple points along the food chain. Gleaning in Vermont happens primarily on farms and from markets; this food is often characterized by

small imperfections that render it unsellable by the farmer but still perfectly usable (Salvation Farms Programs: Gleaning n.d.). While the practice of gleaning has been around for a long time, the development of a widespread, well-organized gleaning network within the state has not been developed until recently. In addition, the ability for gleaning organizations to successfully form connections with institutions and agencies is another recent development. In particular, this development has enabled gleaning to have a greater impact on decreasing food insecurity as organizations dedicated to the practice begin to collaborate with other organizations with similar goals. This section of the literature review will summarize current trends and projects in gleaning across the country and how it intersects with issues of food insecurity.

Fundamental Wastefulness:

We are currently living in an age of fundamental unsustainability in our food system. To get food from farm to plate costs up to 10% of the US energy budget, uses 50% of all US land and 70% of our freshwater supply, and yet only 40% reaches the home of the average US consumer (Hall et al. 2009; Gunders 2012). Much attention has been given to the issue of poverty and hunger in the US and in the rest of the world, and the prevailing idea about how to address these issues focuses primarily upon maximizing food production and scaling up our agricultural output. This overlooks the ways that we can use food that would otherwise be wasted to disrupt this harmful system and to maximize the food dollars of those who need it.

According to an estimate by Feeding America, roughly 6 billion lbs. of food are

thrown out each year, during a time when one in six people lack secure access to food (Gunders 2012). This food is often not viewed as being a resource, and so has not been the subject of food systems work until the latter half of the twentieth century, when issues of food insecurity began to come to the forefront of social justice efforts. Recapturing wasted food to improve food access and food security is growing the fastest in areas of the US where communities have the ability to participate; gleaning works best with smaller and more local farms (Tschardt et al. 2012). This fact is advantageous to gleaning's growth, since the recent criticisms of industrial farming have led more people to look to smaller, more sustainable farmers as a way to produce food for communities. Gleaning can thus not only address this problem of food waste, but also redirect food to feed those who would not otherwise be able to afford it.

Defining Food Insecurity: What is the Issue?

The concept of food security has developed and changed significantly over the years from just the term "hunger". Within the US, the way that we delineate hunger and food insecurity has shifted significantly, and other countries define it differently. In any discussion of the issue, and in particular for my study, it is critical to acknowledge that the terms food security and food insecurity are highly contested. The 2007 elimination of the word hunger from the USDA's assessment of food security sparked intense debate about the current discourse around the significance of each term. In an article by Patricia Allen published shortly after the change to the definition of hunger, she discusses the supposed difference, saying

that theoretically, hunger and food insecurity are two different things, and that separating them is useful. Food insecurity as a term is more “able” to acknowledge ongoing structural difficulties in acquiring food, whereas hunger is “an individual, physiological condition”(Allen 2007). For the purposes of this study, I use food insecurity precisely because it does take into account the structural inequalities that make it so difficult to acquire food. Food security implies in its definition that its resolution will require a system-based approach to problem solving. Those involved in the gleaning network and Salvation Farms can help address those inequalities through a systems based approach. However, implicit in this acknowledgement is the additional importance of understanding that providing more food to marginalized communities is in many ways a Band-Aid solution to a larger problem. The ways in which gleaning aims to address some of these structural problems is addressed later in this thesis; however, it is worth noting that food insecurity is a much greater problem than just gleaning can fix alone.

In response to the rising attention to issues of hunger, national, regional and state-specific organizations have emerged to tackle this issue, attempting to more accurately track instances of food insecurity across the country. Within Vermont, a definition has emerged which attempts to acknowledge both the structural issues implicated in consistent lack of food, as well as the violence and severity of the reality of hunger.

Hunger Free Vermont defines the issue of food access as follows:

“Households that are classified as food insecure with hunger are those in which adults have decreased the quality and quantity of food they consume

because of lack of money to the point where they are quite likely to be hungry on a frequent basis, or in which children's intake has been reduced due to lack of family financial resources, to the point that children are likely to be hungry on a regular basis and adults' food intake is severely reduced.” (Hunger Free Vermont n.d.)

Perhaps because of Vermont’s reputation for being a hub of food progressiveness, it is easy to become insulated from these issues. Nonetheless, these issues do exist, and are often more difficult to raise awareness about due to their existence in a state characterized by health and emphasis on artisanal food.

Within Vermont, more than 1 in 5, or 21%, of children suffer from hunger and food hardship (Hunger Free Vermont n.d.). 32% of Vermonters cannot afford enough or enough nutritious food, and according to US Census Data, there are roughly 25000 children under 18 in food-insecure households (Hunger Free Vermont n.d.). Perhaps most importantly, 12,290 Vermont children depend on a food bank or food shelf for access to food. This number is critical, since it indicates the importance of providing more high quality food to these institutions.

Across the nation, these higher levels of food insecurity are increasing—the USDA reported that in 2013, over 14.3% of American households were food insecure (Food Security in Vermont | Crosscutting Issues | The Plan | Vermont Food System Atlas n.d.). This was an increase from 1995, in which 11.9% of households reported being food insecure. Although food insecurity has increased from 1995, it has largely remained unchanged for the last several years since the 2008 economic crash. While it is not the goal of this project to explain the complex reasons for the

prevalence of food security, recognizing the need for greater availability of nutritious food is highly relevant.

Various measures have been undertaken in Vermont to address the issue of food insecurity. Multiple organizations, most prominently Hunger Free Vermont and VT Farm to Plate, have undertaken the task of documenting and developing a plan to strengthen Vermont's food system. Gleaning has been growing across the state, and its ability to provide high quality food to institutions continues to be a priority for those engaged in the practice. As increasing numbers of gleaning operations start up in Vermont, the ability of gleaning to impact these institutions will continue to grow.

What is community?

Similarly to discussions of what types of capital are most valuable in a given system, the concept of a sustainable "community" is increasingly tossed out by advocates of alternative food systems as being the most important goal. Widespread use of the word, though, has meant that it has lost any specificity it once had—a community now could refer equally as easily to the 1.35 billion users of Facebook worldwide to a small group of people living in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. Defining the term community is critical to understanding any type of development for a variety of reasons: without it, there is no way to measure progress, there is no way to successfully set boundaries within which you can define goals, and it becomes hard to successfully navigate between "imagined" and "real" communities. Many scholars have written on the problematic increase in "community" as a social science buzzword, perhaps none more so than Miranda Joseph in her book *Against*

the Romance of Community. While Joseph doesn't specifically write on the subject of food systems, her theorizing about what the widespread use of the word community does and doesn't do for a movement is highly relevant to this study. Joseph argues that the word community and the way that we conceptualize it has become less and less helpful over time, and has contributed to the increased risk of the word community becoming appropriated for capitalist and exclusionary uses. Her study, though largely considering it as relevant to her experience as a minority, will be used here as the basis for the critique of the word community, which will be followed by a section detailing how community can then be defined in order to be useful, and how community can become once again an instrument for increased inclusion, social capital, and wellbeing of the populace.

The first thing of importance to note is the way that community has come to formulate boundaries, largely through its increased presence in the American lexicon. "Community is almost always invoked as an unequivocal good," Joseph states, "an indicator of a high quality of life, a life of human understanding, caring, selflessness, belonging" (Joseph 2002:vii). Unfortunately, because community is seen as both unequivocally good and also is rarely the subject of critical thought, its potential as a tool for ill is increased. It is possible to see this in a variety of ways—corporations call themselves "communities" in order to gain empathy and humanity; doing something for the "good of the community" becomes a validating statement regardless of action, and those within any type of movement can use community as a site of identity-based exclusion (Joseph 2002).

In the history of food systems, we can conceptualize, perhaps beginning with Wendell Berry, the idea of the renaissance of community. This was the idea that the loss of small, rural agricultural towns in the 1980s was not just a loss for those people, but a loss of situated knowledge and high levels of social capital. Berry was arguably right, and has found a staunch ally in food writer Michael Pollan. Pollan recently challenged anyone “to find an idea or insight in my own recent writings on food and farming that isn’t prefigured (to put it charitably) in Berry’s essays in agriculture” (Filipiak 2011:175). Even with the popular support of writers like Pollan, his vision of a return to smaller, rural communities hasn’t always turned out as positively as expected. Instead, the food movement has been criticized for its elitist model and inability to enact widespread change (Filipiak 2011). The type of community that Berry so fervently idealized, and one that continues to be idealized by the current system, is one in which communal behavior and the sharing of social capital happened informally, and where the network of social ties was regionalized. Joseph’s critique of our current conceptualization of community states that communal behavior has now become complicit in a series of modulating factors—we participate in communities through “formal sites” that can sometimes undermine the supposed ideals of a community in the first place.

Having shown, then, that community is both a confusing and controversial topic, it is perhaps useful to consider, in the context of this study, what we define as a community, what we define as being useful to that community, and what we can definitively say community is not, or should not be. As much of this work pertains to increasing our understanding of the role that food plays in community building and

increasing social capital, this element is crucial. One particular element of community discussed by scholars, and frequently brought up in conversations about this research, is the idea of reinvestment (Wills and Gray 2001). The inclusion of the word reinvestment in the definition of community relevant to this study both significantly narrows the scope of “community” as well as clarifying the values inherent in the term. In a 1996 study done by the President’s Council on Sustainable Development, the importance of protecting and reinvesting in common assets, be it social, natural, or economic capital, was clearly laid out:

“By recognizing that economic, environmental, and social goals are integrally linked and by having policies that reflect that inter-relationship, Americans can regain their sense that they are in control of their future and that the lives of each generation will be better than the last. Thinking narrowly about jobs, energy, transportation, housing, or ecosystems—as if they were not connected—creates new problems even as it attempts to solve old ones. Asking the wrong questions is a sure way to get misleading answers that result in short-term remedies for symptoms, instead of cures for long-term basic problems”. (Towards a Sustainable America: Advancing Prosperity, Opportunity, and a Healthy Environment for the 21st Century. 1999)

This council on sustainable development is indicative of the increasing recognition that in order for communities to function and properly reproduce relations of social capital, they must be able to reinvest not only economic capital but also social and material capital in their communities. As will be demonstrated later in this thesis,

gleaning and its unique ability to involve people from all walks of life is a prime site for this type of reinvestment to occur. This idea will be supplemented through the ways that other volunteers conceptualize community and use gleaning as a method of this type of social investment.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The primary fieldsite for this research was Salvation Farms, a non-profit organization whose mission statement is to increase the resiliency of Vermont's food system through reducing Vermont's dependency on food from afar. I initially contacted the director of Salvation Farms, Theresa Snow, in the fall of 2013, after it was suggested that they might be a potential field contact for my interest into gleaning. Our initial discussions centered around an unformulated view of what the project would look like, but we agreed to meet in person in the spring to discuss the potentials of the research. After meeting with Theresa in the spring, we began communicating regularly, her keeping me apprised of what was going on with the organization and meeting in person to continue working on the relationship between Salvation Farms and my research. The research aims emerged through this continued conversation, and I learned through Theresa that one of the biggest ways I could be of assistance would be to help them examine the social impacts of the program. I would assist Salvation Farms by looking at the social impact of gleaning through interviews with those involved with the network, as well as those who work with the Vermont Commodity Program in the Southeast Windsor Correctional Facility. As I continued my conversations with Theresa, I learned of Salvation Farm's desire to better understand the less tangible impacts of gleaning as a practice.

In the spring of 2014, I received the UVM Simon Family Foundation Grant, which assisted with my living costs in the summer while working on my research. I continued to be in contact with Theresa and began the process of doing interviews and fieldwork. After some initial probes into what these interviews would look like,

I learned that the real need of Salvation Farms was to examine the storytelling aspect of gleaning. Funding is a huge concern for Salvation Farms, and one of the important parts of obtaining funding, particularly through grant-writing and applications, is to be able to show the lived experiences of those working with the program. Gleaning's diverse range of volunteers, and its unique ability to impact people from all walks of life means that there is an immense wealth of experiences to capture. Conversations with Theresa and as I continued working with Salvation Farms led me to discover that the most important thing I could do was to begin documenting the experiences of those working within the gleaning system. Partly because the gleaning system that Salvation Farms was and is working to develop is so new, I found that they were looking for ways to begin documenting the change they saw both in individuals and in food networks. Early on in conversations with Theresa, she said, "I think it's hard, quantitatively, to capture gleaning in its entirety." That conversation yielded the understanding that this project's main initial purpose should be to try and qualitatively document some of the experiences of those participating in the gleaning system. Salvation Farms had at the time, and continues to have, hopes for expansion, both in terms of the services they provide and the number of institutions and stakeholders they work with. Doing this requires extensive amounts of funding, and much of that funding can only be obtained with documentation of what the organization does. Consequently, my thesis captures those moments, and begins the important process for Salvation Farms of continuing to document the change allowed through their efforts.

Theresa, who has an extensive and immeasurable knowledge of the gleaning system here in Vermont, provided initial contact with potential interviewees. Over the summer, I slowly began doing interviews with stakeholders from various areas of the system. Initial plans for the research involved doing around 20 interviews with various stakeholders. That number shrank to 13, as various obstacles arose for people planning to participate in the study. Over the summer, I continued my work with Salvation Farms, learning about the organization and doing participant observation at gleans at Dog River Farm in Berlin Vermont. At the end of the summer, it was decided that I would spend a day at the Southeast Correctional Facility interviewing inmates who had or were currently participating in the Vermont Commodity Program. It is very difficult to get student researchers into the prison system, but it is one of the most important parts of Salvation Farm's work. Although only a day was spent at the facility, continued research is being planned. This program has become the personal passion of Theresa Snow's, and continuing and expanding the program is one of the biggest challenges for Salvation Farms. These interviews took place at the facility on a single day, with inmates taking time during their normal work hours to come talk to me under the supervision of Theresa Snow. During the time I was at the prison, I observed the comings and goings of the staff and the interactions with the inmates, as well as receiving a tour of the facilities and hearing from the staff that work with the program.

To facilitate this research, I was supported by the Simon Family Foundation Grant, which I applied for through the Undergraduate Research Office in the spring of 2014. In the fall of 2013, I submitted my thesis proposal for review to the Honors

College. After it was approved, I began working with my thesis advisor Dr. Teresa Mares to apply to various sources of funding for the summer. The spring of 2014 was also spent applying for IRB approval. As I was interviewing two different groups of people, I submitted two separate IRB protocols, one of which was determined to be exempt, and the other which underwent full review. The full review for the prisoner cohort began with my submission of a protocol in which I explained the nature of my research and why it was important to include the voices of the inmates involved with Vermont Commodity Project. After my first submission, I received feedback from Gale Weld, the Research Review Administrator at UVM. In total, I submitted three drafts, the final of which was the one reviewed by the full committee. At the committee meeting, several considerations were brought to my attention regarding the manner in which I was to give information to the prisoner cohort. During the meeting, the principal liaison between the IRB and the prison system was contacted via phone in order to seek her opinion on the study and its potential issues. Following a period of time in which I answered questions from committee members, I left the meeting. Several days after the meeting, I received the committee's final requests for changes to be made to the protocol. I made those changes and subsequently received approval to do the research.

In total, I did thirteen interviews. Of these, five were done at the Southeast Windsor Correctional facility, all during one day. The other eight I completed over the course of the summer, beginning in June and going through September. Of the eight volunteer interviews, three were with primary coordinators and stakeholders within Vermont's gleaning system, while the other five were volunteers of diverse

backgrounds who had participated extensively in gleaning, through various channels. These interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes, and were supplemented by additional correspondence and note taking during field work. Over the course of the summer I did 30 hours of participant observation and took field notes, with the primary field site being Dog River Farm in Berlin Vermont. Dog River Farm is a growing hub for gleaning in Vermont; it works closely with Salvation Farms and has become a primary place for experimenting with new forms of gleaned food distribution, volunteer recruitment efforts, and building careers and increased volunteer education. Consequently, the participants I recruited for this study were primarily involved with Dog River, though one of them, Cindy Whalen, began her gleaning involvement at Pete's Greens in Morrisville. Two others were volunteers as well with the Intervale direct-to-consumer summer program.

The interviews were recorded in a public space, with most of them taking place in coffee shops in the Montpelier and Burlington area. One interview took place at Intervale Center, and various additional notations and materials from conversations with Theresa Snow were done at areas around Morrisville, the Salvation Farms office, and on the road. Although initially I used a digital voice recorder to do these interviews, I decided after the first one in which it failed to record that I would use my iPhone. Interviews were transferred to my computer immediately following the collection and stored securely. After collecting the data, I used the fall semester to transcribe the interviews and begin the process of qualitatively coding them for themes and conclusions. I used a program provided

through UVM called ExpressScribe to transcribe the interviews. For the coding, I used a combination of hand-written and electronic notations and references.

About Salvation Farms and Gleaning

Although small-scale informal gleaning activities have existed in Vermont for a long time, Salvation Farms was instrumental in the creation of a statewide program. Salvation Farms began as a pilot project at Pete's Greens in 2004 coordinated by Theresa Snow, an employee at the farm who was working with the agricultural program at Sterling College (Snow 2014). Recognizing that she had a desire to do more than just farm, Snow was encouraged by the farm's namesake to continue the project. In 2005, she worked with a senior at Sterling College to co-found Salvation Farms based on the principles and dynamics of education and community that she saw and felt while working at Pete's Greens. As originally conceived, she saw Salvation Farms as a way to bridge the gap between food need and food availability, and as a way to create more self-sufficient systems in smaller Vermont communities: "We built a grassroots community-based model for gleaning that engaged, well, that served the greater Lamoille valley and had other educational components to it. I like to say that we function in some capacity like a transition town, trying to reskill the community around meeting its own food needs and not just food rescue." (Snow 2014:1) Critical to the development of the organization was this concept of helping towns and communities become more food resilient, and Salvation Farms became dedicated to spreading this model and concept throughout Vermont.

In 2008, Salvation Farms moved towards achieving that goal by partnering with the Vermont Food Bank. The organization had been providing food to the food bank under Snow's directorship, and in 2008 she was asked to become part of the organization contingent on Salvation Farm's program becoming theirs. After approval from the steering committee and co-founder, Salvation Farms officially joined the Vermont Food Bank. The decision to partner with the Vermont Food Bank came because of a conscious recognition that they had the ability to spread the message about gleaning statewide (Snow 2014:2). The greatest challenge, as identified by Snow, was getting people to understand the value of the work, both quantitatively and qualitatively. As public understanding and public interest grew, however, existing gleaning hubs grew, and new ones began to sprout up across Vermont.

While joining the Vermont Food Bank was critical to the spread of gleaning across the state, the program lost much of its educational focus by incorporating into a larger model. The Food Bank's model focused on what Snow identifies as being a "get and give" model, where the highest importance is placed on providing as much food to people as possible. Through working with the Food Bank, they came to realize that there was an opportunity to create a program that would work on an agricultural timeline (Snow 2014:2). Salvation Farms now had a dual purpose: to not only work to develop resilient communities through food recapture and education, but also to create a much more efficient and understanding organization to work with farmers across Vermont.

Between 2008 and 2011, more than 1 million pounds of food were distributed through the Vermont Food bank, involving more than 120 farms and growers (Salvation Farms: History n.d.). While there was no doubt of the program's efficacy, it was decided that in 2011 Salvation Farms would negotiate the purchase of Salvation Farm's brand, in order to create a more comprehensive model of food recapture across the state. In May of 2012, Salvation Farms became an independent entity again and began the process of becoming a federally recognized non-profit. After achieving non-profit status in May of 2012, Salvation Farms set out to become a "state-wide clearinghouse for agricultural surplus." (Snow 2014:3). As the idea evolved, it became clear that Salvation Farms would be most useful as an organization that assisted communities in setting up gleaning programs. Additionally, they could work to deal with the logistics of setting up programs to help deal with the excess supply; this would mean the establishment of the Vermont Commodity Program and the creation of a processing center at the Southeast Windsor Correctional Facility (Salvation Farms: History n.d.) Currently, Salvation Farms works to support the Vermont Gleaning Collective, a statewide collective created by Salvation Farms made up of autonomous gleaning initiatives. The Vermont Gleaning Collective provides support to gleaning hubs that are just getting started or are working on expansion, assisting them in recruiting volunteers and finding distribution pathways for gleaned food.

Background With the Movement

Growing up in Vermont has provided me with a unique insight into the local and sustainable food systems that have cropped up in more recent years. I grew up with two parents who both emphasized the importance of healthy eating and who grew a large amount of the food that we ate during the summer. I benefitted from learning about small food production as a child, and took for granted until I went to UVM my privilege in having nearly constant access to healthy, fresh food. Working in landscaping and farming during the summers after my first year at UVM piqued my interest in learning more about the construction of communities around food systems.

My father and I live on 80 acres, which we co-own with our neighbors. The land is productive, as we use it for logging, food, and to grow hay for our neighbors who farm. Being raised in a way that emphasized the importance of connecting land and place to people gave me an inherent sense of what that connection looks like; the aim of this research has in many ways evolved to reflect that connection.

My friends and the community that I am a part of are all heavily invested in supporting the local food system, and frequently are the sites of discussion around issues with the current industrial agriculture food system. Living in Burlington has also brought my attention to the way that a community subtly enforces and polices food production and consumption; advertisements for “locally sourced” food at restaurants, for example, can be found at many Burlington venues, and the number of community organizations that have cropped up in recent years to address food systems related issues has grown exponentially. Additionally, many classes offered

through UVM are oriented towards the Burlington community; by that I mean that Burlington's food system has become a primary site for research for professors of all disciplines. Consequently, exposure to issues around food, agriculture, and access were inculcated into the curriculum of many classes I took from the very beginning of my time at UVM.

That being said, this emphasis on "good food" in the greater Burlington community as well as smaller communities formed through UVM often contributes to the erasure of very real issues of food insecurity and poverty. Comments from friends about the morals of buying food from Burlington's downtown food cooperative vs. buying from the farmer's market completely fail to consider that there are many who cannot do either; other conversations about the prices of food being too high revealed the lack of understanding of the privilege most college students have when it comes to food availability. As someone who has straddled the gap between working class and middle class for most of my life, I've experienced food shortage tangentially, watching my mom struggle to understand food stamps and experiencing the frequent frustrations of my parents as they said no to me in a supermarket. Consequently, while I cannot claim to have ever truly wanted for basic needs, I am much more sensitive to the difficulties and barriers to getting fresh food. I can't claim, then, to not have an inherent bias, or interest, towards issues of food availability. As a researcher, acknowledging my position in the research and how I observe and react to what I've learned is very important. That being said, I believe that my upbringing does give me helpful insight into the issues this research aims to

illuminate. I am able to connect better and understand these issues as someone who has experienced them.

Acknowledgement of Gaps in the Methodology

The timing of this research was the greatest limiting factor. Many of those I wished to interview were, due to their involvement with the farming sector, tremendously busy. In addition, I was working full time to support myself until I was able to get my research money, and unfortunately had to continue working full time to save money to pay for school. However, in many ways, the limits to this research illuminated for me as well as Theresa Snow the need for the continuation of this type of research for gleaning. Much of the research is best done in the winter, when the gleaning and farming season is less busy, and those involved with it have more time to talk. Additionally, many more volunteers exist than those I interviewed. The importance of understanding how gleaning impacts those who work within the system is something that this project can only begin to understand. Additionally, my own limits as a student to participate in gleans illuminated just how difficult it is for volunteers to find time to participate; their participation regardless says something about how important gleaning becomes in their lives, (and also mine).

Conversations about continuing this type of qualitative documentation of volunteer practices and the impact on communities will be immensely important both for the spread of gleaning as a practice as well as documenting the social change enacted through these types of programs. As someone embedded deeply within the system, I understand myself how important Salvation Farm's programs

are, and I have seen first-hand the positive changes wrought on the stakeholders. That being said, continued work needs to be done to document these experiences.

Profile of the study sample:

This research draws upon interactions with dozens of gleaning participants, as well as conversations had with stakeholders and people I met doing activities with Salvation Farms. The findings presented, however, are drawn from 13 semi-structured interviews done with gleaning coordinators, gleaning volunteers, and prisoners participating in the Vermont Commodity program. In keeping with IRB standards, all names have been changed.

Andrea:

Andrea is one of the primary coordinators of a gleaning network in Central Vermont. She lives with her husband and has two young sons. She grew up on a farm and has extensive knowledge on farming practices. Andrea is currently working on her Associates degree while running the gleaning program; it has turned into a full time job for her despite the fact that she is not paid anything more than a small stipend.

Cindy:

Cindy is a middle-aged woman and retired college professor who taught classes related to food and cuisine at Johnson College. She heard about gleaning from her studies and noted from her travels in Europe that gleaning there is much more of a

traditional practice. She is passionate about food and gleans in the summer as much as possible around her home.

Ellen:

Ellen is a recent graduate of UVM who became involved with the distribution end of a gleaning network in northern Vermont. She was a philosophy major in college but became involved with the gleaning network through an unpaid internship two years before the interview was conducted. She continued doing it after college thinking that it would be good to have the benefits at the local Co-op, and then continued doing it because she liked it.

Nolan:

Nolan is a recent graduate of Saint Michael's college who studied art and food. He, like Ellen was involved with the distribution and pick up end of a gleaning hub. He became involved through an odd series of connections, but mostly through his own initiative in knowing that he would like to be involved with the project. It happened to fit in well with what he was doing in school and wanted to do after school so he continued to participate.

Jen:

Jen is a professor, gleaning coordinator, and farmer. She is the coordinator of a local gleaning network and has done much for the development of gleaning as a whole

across the state. Her knowledge of farming and gleaning is formidable and is an active member in developing Vermont's sustainable food system.

Rachel:

Rachel is a retiree who lives with her husband close to a gleaning hub. She has had a variety of different career paths over her life, including working extensively in journalism. She is a political activist and volunteers for a variety of different campaigns in her hometown. She began gleaning a couple years ago but has done more and more of it as it has grown and become more organized. She is one of a core group of gleaners who I interviewed who have formed a good friendship group out in the field.

Elizabeth:

Elizabeth, like Rachel, is a retiree who moved to Vermont many years ago with her husband from Kansas, which, as she notes, is "nothing like Vermont." She found that living in Vermont was a conducive with her values and desires and fit her personality well. She has become one of the most devoted gleaners in her hometown and works exceptionally hard at it. She is invested in the system and provided an interesting perspective on the differences between Vermont's food system and the food system in Kansas.

Mary:

Mary is another very recent retiree who lives with her husband. She initially turned to gleaning as a way to fill her free time, and found that it perfectly suited her desire to be outside but to also be doing meaningful work. She was surprised by the friendships that she found out in the fields and is excited to do more in the future.

Tessa:

Tessa runs the coordinating program for Vermont gleaning, and could perhaps be referred to as the mother of Vermont gleaning. While working on a farm in the Northeast Kingdom, she recognized the immense potential for Vermont to have a gleaning system and went about creating a system that could help build Vermont's resiliency and infrastructure to allow for more gleaning hubs to sprout up.

Prisoner Sector:

In late December of 2014, I spent a day at the South Windsor Correctional facility doing interviews with five men who were either currently participating or had participated in the Vermont Commodity Program. These men came from a variety of backgrounds and due to their situation did not provide me with extensive information about their personal lives. Additionally, IRB protocol prevented me from asking too much about their background. However, I wish to recognize that they were extremely patient as they worked through my questions with me; there was very little time for us to become comfortable with each other but their honesty and willingness to be open about their lives and experiences is greatly appreciated. All names, both first and last, are pseudonyms in order to protect their identity.

Theoretical Orientation

Various aspects of this project have fallen on different ends of the spectrum between “pure research” and applied research. However, I attempted to conduct this research from the very beginning that this research would be useful to Salvation Farms. This differs from the traditional definitions of applied research, which emphasizes the researcher’s obligations to the participants (Cahill 2007). The goal of this research was to provide empirical evidence of gleaning’s positive social impacts in order that Salvation Farms could use it to better their programs. This research was conducted with the expectation that the end goal should be useful, and that all materials not subject to IRB protocol regulations would be provided to Salvation Farms for their use in order to provide benefits to the participants who kindly lent me their time and allowed me to use their voice.

In particular, working with a vulnerable population meant that I was highly aware of both my positionality as a researcher and the desire to accurately represent the voices of these male prisoners. I have attempted to present their stories in as few pieces as possible, and to keep their tone and character true to life. Only being allowed one day in the prison threw into relief the immense power differential I had as a researcher; I was allowed to walk out at the end of the day with their stories, which they were largely entrusting me to keep and use in a truthful way. In keeping with feminist methodologies, I will do my best to make sure this research is distributed to all those I interviewed. It is my hope that this research will help gleaning grow within the state of Vermont, and begin a long collaboration between student researchers and Salvation Farms. This research should be

continued, and while I remain here in Vermont it is my vested interest to see that happen.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

Access to food, and food that is meaningful, is a central part of how we construct our social identities and our ability to live life in a healthy way. In “The socio-nature of Local Organic Food, Alison Alkon writes that “the physiological necessity of food is a component... of nature, but our desires for particular foods, the social relations that govern the labor of food production and the means through food is commodified and distributed are all deeply social” (Alkon 2013:667). In other words, the ways in which we access food are as important as the food itself; the relationships we form in conjunction with the basic and innate practice of providing food are powerful and meaningful. While it is easy to get caught up in the popular discourse that emphasizes “sustainable communities”, that discourse often masks the importance of understanding what drives these connections formed at the intersection of providing and receiving food. The following sections aim to break down what really matters to those who are working to make these connections, and to try and understand what values are being emphasized in the creation of these ties. In the first section, “A New Definition of Community”, I use the values emphasized by gleaning participants as important to create a useful term in which to understand and improve these food based relationships. This is broken down into two parts: “Mutually Reinforced Responsibility” and “The Eradication of Isolation”. These sections outline and explain the most important elements of a healthy community according to gleaning participants and aim to provide some basis for the recommendations at the end of this section. The discussion then continues with a

section exploring gleaning's position on the spectrum between work and volunteering; similar to monetized work, gleaning is shown to provide tangible benefits to individuals and communities while maintaining a high degree of personal connection. "Challenging the dominant narrative" explains gleaning's unique ability to create more personal connections and to debunk popular and damaging stereotypes around issues such as food security. The third section provides an in-depth look into the experiences of inmates working with the Vermont Commodity Program and focuses on their perceptions of gleaning and the VT food system. The final section deals with the significance of this research and provides recommendations for further research.

A new definition of community: What really matters?

Defining community, and what it came to mean for gleaning volunteers, was not in any way the original intent of this research. It became clear, however, that some new and nebulous idea of community was one of the primary drivers behind the desire to glean and the investment that gleaning volunteers spoke of when asked about why they decided to glean. Much has been written on the construction of communities, some of which has been summarized in the literature review. The literature review problematized the concept of community and investigated its usefulness as a term and concept; this section of the findings will aim to rebuild the concept of community and how gleaning has come to reconstruct it in a positive and complex way.

In general, there were three ways that volunteers came to define the meaningful pillars of community involvement: mutually-reinforced responsibility, a sense of connection and a deepening understanding of recipients, and the eradication of isolation. These three concepts are complex terms, and perhaps the most important thing to emerge from the research is the idea that these pillars of community came to reinforce each other. Instead of being mutually exclusive, these concepts were interrelated and throughout the project came up again and again in interesting ways.

Mutually-reinforced responsibility

As many volunteers noted, gleaning was not an easy activity. Although the work hours were certainly shorter than the 8-hour days farmers pull, any type of farming work is not easy by any stretch of the imagination. Vermont's weather, which is frequently unpredictable, meant that occasionally gleans would take place on rainy or extremely hot days. Regardless of the weather, there was an understanding for many volunteers that they, as a part of this system, now shouldered a little bit of responsibility for the success of this activity. "You get this sense of responsibility," Mary explained, "Like if you know oh, it's going to be crummy weather, then if I don't go then they're going to be out there that much longer... You want to stay as long as you can." This sense of responsibility was multi-faceted--invariably it could be manifested as a sense of responsibility that seemed to stem from an empathetic desire to not make anyone else work harder, or as a sense of responsibility towards the recipients, who they frequently emphasized as being

part of their community, or lastly as a sense of responsibility towards making the most of their efforts. Mary, in addition to mentioning that she felt responsible for upholding her end of the bargain, so to speak, also began to feel some sense of pressure and urgency to get as much of the food out of the field as possible. “Maybe you only planned to go for two hours, but then you realized that maybe if you could stay another hour longer you’d make it all the way to the end of the row, and so you know it definitely became that you wanted to stay longer and help that to happen.”

This sense of responsibility seemed to stem from a few different places, both arising naturally out of the practice but also becoming something that some volunteers identified as being coordinator led. Allison, who coordinated the gleanings at Dog River, was often pointed to as a model of hard work and perseverance. Her own intense investment in gleaning was contagious and her welcoming presence was a large reason behind first-time volunteers sticking around. Interestingly enough, gleaners’ understanding of the importance of being reliable is an underlying tenet of the philosophical discussions of responsibility. One of the very first conceptions of responsibility by German sociologist and philosopher Max Weber identified that responsibility stems primarily from the understanding that success in a vocation primarily requires a thorough and empathetic understanding of the consequences of one’s actions (Responsibility | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy n.d.). Contemporary philosophical discussions around responsibility are often accompanied by the assignment of virtue--to be responsible is considered a “morally valuable trait”. Additionally, the functioning of society hinges upon everyone performing adequately within their sphere of responsibility--typical examples

would be a doctor prescribing the correct medication, and the patient correctly taking them. In order to understand the connection to gleaning, we have to consider that it differs by dint of it being a volunteer practice. Gleaning participants voluntarily create a sphere of responsibility through which they then use each other, the end goals of the practice, and charismatic leaders as a method of placing value and meaning on the activity, as well as mutually reinforcing the overall functionality of the practice.

A valid criticism of gleaning is that as a volunteer practice, it suffers from a more sporadic workforce; volunteers invariably have other spheres of responsibilities, they have jobs, families, and other activities in which they participate. “It does depend on volunteers. And that’s a hard thing, because people are living their lives,” said Ellen, pondering the obstacles to the expansion of gleaning as a practice. Cindy had gone on a glean the day before our interview, and told me about feeling bad that she was unable to get out in the field that day. “I knew this morning that Andrea (Salazzo) was going back this morning to the spinach field, and I felt badly I couldn’t join her, because when tell you we barely touched the spinach that was there, I thought oh my god if there were only 20 of us, and we go down the rows, we could get one hundred pounds of spinach, and the force is just not out there you know?” While Cindy was telling a familiar story, and one that is a legitimate issue, she was also revealing her deep sense of personal investment in the system. “It’s always been my personal priority,” she said, after considering why she was able to do it. While it is true that the issue of enough volunteers was frequently the obstacle to efficient gleans, most also said that there was increasing consistency

and greater numbers each year. Most volunteers had a significant personal investment in the practice and in their own involvement but worried that gleaning would never have sufficient volunteers. However, the findings outlined just previously indicate that as gleaning as a practice grows, the ability for gleaning to reinforce itself and consequently the consistency of volunteer efforts will only continue to grow. Mary was not the only one to mention the concept of mutually reinforced responsibility. Elizabeth mentioned that her increased participation this year was in some part due to the better scheduling system, but also because she has gotten so addicted to gleaning. Like Mary, she felt that the personal connections she had with the other people who gleaned made her want to do it more; she also felt responsible for making the most of the hard work done on the farm to grow the food for harvest. Mary summed it up well, saying emphatically, “some farmer didn’t grow it to throw it out!”

The Eradication of Isolation: Increasing Connectivity at all levels

In addition to the moral value and the responsibility felt by participants in the system, they also identified that building community ties was one of the most important things to come from their involvement. Mary, as a recent retiree, knew that she needed to volunteer in order to continue forming connections that were meaningful to her. “I had just retired from teaching,” she explained, “And I knew I wanted to volunteer back at the school (Rumney Elementary, her previous employer), because I knew it was going to be too hard to cut the cord cold turkey.” Mary was used to the close connections that formed in the school system, and found

that gleaning was an accessible and easy way to feel like she was having both making a connection and having an impact. “You know it goes to people that might not be getting fresh, healthy food otherwise,” she said, considering another reason that she picked gleaning as the volunteer activity she wanted to pursue. Making these conceptual connections helped ground what she was doing in the surrounding community; she also mentioned the joy of discovering new farms that were right in her backyard that she hadn’t known about.

Although Mary felt that she had gained a greater understanding of her community and the connections between farms and recipients, she also mentioned that knowing where that food was going was something she highly valued, and desired more of. When asked about what she thought would really add to the practice, she said, “I think that the only thing that might... to really be more specific about where this stuff is going to go, sometimes that was confusing to me, like which program was getting what and how it was stored. So I think that would be a good community piece to let people know where the produce is going to go.” The fact that Mary specifically connected community to this knowledge demonstrates a greater desire overall to have more knowledge about how the various parts of her community were interrelated. In particular, social proximity seemed to be a central concern to volunteers. The most meaningful connections were consistently those in which there was some tangible sense of closeness to the people that were being impacted. “You know if it’s going to a local community, or at least in central Vermont, then we’d be happy to know about that,” Mary said. The idea of knowing what was going on in your own community was similarly emphasized by Cindy, who

enjoyed that gleaning allowed her to make a more personal connection with a farm that was in her own backyard.

“I loved the idea of getting to know what Pete was doing. Because Pete was in our community, I’d seen him grow in our community--we both went to Middlebury. And he had this idea of using hot water to heat soil in a greenhouse, and that was his project at Middlebury, and then seeing him and the family go from a tiny farm stand on Craftsbury Road to what it has become today. And we saw it from the very start! And then I finally got to glean there, and I saw what he did, and it helped me appreciate the complexities of farming; it’s not simple, it’s really risky, and there’s a lot going on, and I just never appreciated that.”

This story illustrates perfectly the value of a practice that is open to everybody; it both creates and maintains connections, and it complicates normal systems of thinking.

Education was another way that gleaning was able to bring people closer together. Tessa spoke of the larger goals inherent in gleaning’s mission:

“I think the value of the gleaning program is not only the food that it captures, it’s this teaching of the ‘waste-not want-not’--why create or invest in more waste when you could engage the community responsibly managing food and in the meantime create a more educated populations that values that agriculture and understands the repercussions of the food system that we currently have? I mean, I think it is irresponsible to turn our backs on this food just because it takes a little bit more time.”

Tessa was picking up on several things that cropped up over and over in discussions with volunteers. Education around food inequality, farming practices, and food waste were all intrinsically built into gleaning, but gleaning's educative abilities went beyond numbers and focused on impacting the broader mentality that people had around food. Volunteers had varying degrees of interaction with the educative parts of gleaning, but all were excited by the prospect of continuing that aspect in the future. In particular, gleaning seemed to be unique in that the transfer of knowledge could happen in a variety of ways. As gleaning involved younger demographics, "teaching", in a more traditional sense, happened through the gleaning coordinators, as they worked to help younger kids understand what was going on out in the fields. "We've always emphasized the education component of the program," said Jane, "And how can we really educate people about the food that they're getting, and the importance of eating fresh foods, and also education about our local food and farming system." This type of education through gleaning was a way for people to connect with those more knowledgeable than them; for volunteers and recipients alike the educational capacity was something that went hand in hand with going out to the fields to harvest food. Even for older volunteers, the transfer of knowledge between from coordinators to volunteers was seen as being very valuable. Elizabeth noted that her coordinator "teaches us a lot out there." When asked about whether there were other educational components, she said, "Definitely. As far as you know, farming, you know I think all of us are experienced gardeners that I've talked to and worked with, but the component of farm production is way different than your home garden. So to learn that and see

where our food comes from and that piece... plus we talk to each other about gardening.” Elizabeth was identifying that there were two components: there was the knowledge she gained from actively learning from someone with extensive experience in the food system, and then there was the more osmotic transmission of knowledge that came from being on the farm and sharing knowledge across volunteers. This transmission on all levels allowed for a sense of closeness between volunteers and coordinators alike.

Mary emphasized the importance of creating a tangible connection with farmers and the concept of helping younger children to make the connection with their food supply. As a teacher at a local school, Mary said that she had firsthand witnessed the importance of making a connection with local farmers. Seeing that in the school she used to work at was part of her motivation to get involved with gleaning, and she mentioned that she thought it was “great to have kids out there that can be helping to harvest”. She continued, “Plus, they’re learning about a bunch of things. They’re learning about the farmer’s and about food insecurity and about some other kinds of food.” Once again, gleaning was seen as a place where a space of isolation from the food system could be reversed (Robbins 2008). Section 3 will discuss the more educative components of gleaning as a practice, but it is worth noting here gleaning’s unique position as a practice to be an educative force. Allison, in our discussion about what good food is and how it can be different to different people, considered that there is something intrinsically teachable about gleaning. Conceptually, gleaning can be seen as a realization of a broader critique of the way that modern society views imperfection and marginalization. Fresh food is good, but

it is the fact that this food is fresh but *also* unwanted that makes it particularly teachable.

Gleaning is work in context

So often, conversations I had with my interviewees raised the question of how to explain the meaning behind gleaning. One of the biggest ideas that emerged from these discussions is that the work was heavily grounded in context. This context was often related to the educative aspect of gleaning, as people learned more about the difference they were making. The importance of context was different for every individual involved with the system; the things they prioritized were often heavily dependent on their own upbringing and system of beliefs and values. Nonetheless, every person drawn to gleaning noted that they felt the work that they were doing was significant because it was easily connected to tangible results. Drawing on a concept discussed previously, Marx's conception of capitalist ways of production and the distance created between labor and end product was a central reason that gleaning as a practice felt so meaningful for many of those with whom I spoke. Walking back to our cars after a glean at Dog River Farm, Theresa Snow, founder of Salvation Farm's, put it best. "This is work in context," she said, after I mentioned that this was one of the only types of work I had ever done where I could see tangible results (Fieldnotes: June 2014).

More than anything, there was awareness across the board that gleaning was highly grounded in what was actually possible. Andrea spoke passionately but realistically about the challenges that often arose around volunteer efforts and the ability to work around those challenges. "Sometimes your goals adjust to reality,"

she said, when asked about had changed about the program from its conception. “You know our program is a bit more focused on education and engaging families and young students and young people from all walks of life, and in reality how many people have we really gotten to volunteer? Maybe not as many as we had hoped. But that’s more of a long term thing.”

Andrea felt that gleaning was unique in that the work expanded and changed depending on where the need was and where there was a real potential. If the building blocks were there, then gleaning would follow. It was the practice’s grounded reality, and tangibility, that drew people to the fields. Rachel noted that aspect specifically, saying that the first time she went out on to the farm was a wake up call for her, even though she felt that initially she had a pretty good awareness of her local food system. “I mean, I was pretty much into local food already. I have a friend who’s a farmer in Plainfield, and I like to buy from him, but I mean the first time I was there on a hot day, I got an incredible appreciation for how hard it is.” (Barns n.d) Most every volunteer I talked to stated that working on the farm for the first had been a novel experience, regardless of their prior experience. Rachel shook her head and trailed off as she spoke about her experience working at Dog River, saying, “We do two hours and practically crawl home...But I think about people in the central valley in California and...” (referencing migrant workers) (Barns n.d.) For Rachel, working on the farm opened her eyes to the reality of how difficult farm work was. She gained a sense of compassion and understanding of the food system that she hadn’t previously had; like other volunteers this changed and shaped her food consumption practices.

The above instance was not limited to just Rachel. Gleaning, regardless of the involvement of a participant in the local food system prior to their involvement in gleaning, added context to their experience with the food system. This type of situated knowledge has been written on by numerous anthropologists and feminist researchers, who emphasize situated knowledge's unique and necessary vantage point.

Conceptualizing and defining situated knowledge can often be challenging, but it is important to recognize its significance and role in gleaning. Donna Haraway's piece on situated knowledge and science explains that the most important part is that it allows for a more complete understanding of the "real world." Haraway states it as the following:

So I think my problem, and "our" problem, is how to have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own "semiotic technologies" for making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a 'real' world, one that can be partially shared and that is friendly to earthwide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness." (Haraway 579)

Through gleaning, volunteers were able to gain a more complete understanding of the real world, were able to see more "faithful accounts" of it. This concept of situated knowledge and the meaning invested in it was critical to volunteers, although they frequently did not put it in those terms. Elizabeth spoke of how much she enjoyed gaining a greater understanding of not only where the food was going,

but also how to grow and harvest it. In particular, the tangible connection to the farm that she gleaned at became something she looked forward to: “The other day when we were doing onions, George’s crew was out there doing the onions right ahead of us,” she said, referencing the owner of Dog River Farm. “We were behind taking what they didn’t... it was fun being that close and feeling like, ‘oh, we’re a part of this work group, and they’re laughing and he’s out there picking with them, and I really thought that was neat.” Because Elizabeth and the crew of gleaners were out on the farm at the same time as the owner of the farm and his crew, she was easily able to situate her work within the broader context of the food system. Her work gained even greater tangible meaning when she saw firsthand the food being left behind in the field--before her very eyes, food was becoming either a commodity, or something deemed unusable. These examples highlight the “thoroughly socio-organizational nature of agriculture and how it cannot be reduced to autonomous rational actors”. (Carolan 2006:327) The transformative power of that experience was that the food left behind was now not only being rescued from being plowed under, but it was being rescued from a system that didn’t want it. This was work in context in its finest hour.

This idea of contextualizing work in order to make it more meaningful is an idea that has been present in the study of food systems for a long time. Wendell Berry, the well-known author who wrote extensively about the way that knowledge could become situated in rural communities, wrote that the “most important knowledge was tacit, based more on skill than on isolatable facts, varying between practitioners, rather than standardized, and developed through sharing with

neighbors” (as cited by Badio 178). Work in context, for these volunteers, was created through a tacit and tactile experience in which the connection between their work and its purpose was made explicitly clear. When asked about the primary values associated with gleaning, she said. “Probably getting food to people... Feeling like I have at least a little part in that, and that it’s helping. I guess that’s the major thing.” All the other things are important too, but that’s the key thing” (Naklin n.d). Gleaning created an opportunity for learning to become egalitarian, for learning to spread across people of all walks of life. Gleaning allowed for the field to become an equalizer, a place where knowledge was generated and readily available for those who were there. Andrea noted this as one of her favorite things about being out in the field, saying how important it was to “give them that opportunity to get out and also engage with the other volunteers who maybe have been there a lot and know more about the food system and have interesting conversations about that.” (Levin) This aspect of gleaning positions it as a highly effective and most of all *inclusive* form of civic agriculture, which “frames a collection of food and farming enterprises that addresses the needs of local growers, consumers, rural economies, and communities of place.” (DeLind 2002:217)

Understanding the spectrum of work, volunteering, and the creation of a value system

When considering the concept of “work in context”, volunteers brought up a variety of different themes. Of these, two stood out: one was that the formation of a “value web” of sorts, where various moral values were being assigned to the

practice. The other was that through assigning values to the practice, gleaning came to represent a practice that spanned the gap between wage work and volunteerism—some participants referred to it as a volunteer activity, some as work, and some both. Nonetheless, the values associated with it were ones that impacted volunteer’s lives outside the field. Gleaning for volunteers instilled values of caring, altruism, moral goodness, and consumer awareness. These various conceptual attachments to the practice formed a “value web”, in which stakeholders could share, reinforce, or transform ideas about food, community, consumerism, and a host of others. “I think the power of this work is that it’s like the rock that hit the pond,” Tessa said. “There are so many things that radiate out from this very simple, very basic act.” Block et al. describe this sort of value web as being vitally important to forming connections and building community: “The concept of value webs refers to creating connections beyond the scope of traditional value chains, which often imply uni-directional linkages”. (Block et al. 2008:380)

One of these values that gleaning instilled was the value of human connection, posited in contrast to more isolating work. Farming, in particular industrial farming, was sometimes discussed as being something abstract prior to involvement with a gleaning program. Gleaning provided a humanizing aspect which volunteers found to be helpful and meaningful. Elizabeth, describing her husband’s youth, said that although they visited his farm and his family there, she “never saw the connection.” When I pressed her on that point, she clarified: “Well, it was a small farm, but it’s not sustainable or diversified crops... It’s one thing.”

(Naklin 2) Elizabeth was emphasizing that she felt much more of a connection to

the farm she gleaned at than others she had visited; she later stated that she did not see gleaning as “work”. Instead, it was an activity that allowed ordinary people such as herself to begin infiltrating the sphere of “work” that surrounded the farm.

Elizabeth’s value system was such that she placed a great deal of importance on the conceivably “sustainable” aspect of gleaning. Farming, on the other hand, was characterized as work. Forming a connection with the farm, though, began to allow her a greater connection, and helped with some of the separation that seemed to characterize when something became “work”.

Many times, volunteers would indicate their desire to schedule “work” around gleaning; they expressed frustration when “work” got in the way of gleaning. Rachel noted the difference in being able to predictably schedule her time in order to make gleaning possible, saying, “This year the gleaning is fantastic. Last year was much more hit and miss--different times, different days.” Additionally, gleaning could help many span this odd difference between work and an activity. In particular, gleaning was often a source of empowering work, an activity that like monetized work had a “result”, but one that remained non-monetized to a large extent. Ellen, who began working with the Intervale gleaning program as an unpaid intern, “recognized that it was a good thing for the City Market hours, and then just kept doing it each year.” (Rockhardt n.d.). For Ellen, the work was something that gradually transitioned into something less associated with money and more associated with the social aspects of the practice. “I think it’s really cool to meet people and get to talk to them about it, and to try and help with the education aspect, because it is an amazing resource that this food even exists. And I mean I was

educated a lot on it too.” Block et al. would characterize this transition as being a result of participation in a practice that had positive values attached to it. Ellen’s changing thought process could be seen as a result of “values *in the web*... Moral and credence values that may be present in a value web.” (Block et al. 2008:380)

Ellen’s experience was one in which she entered the program through a monetized, goal oriented pathway that gradually transitioned into her placing a different, more nuanced and layered set of values on her involvement. Jen told a similar story; her experience running her program was that many times people would start gleaning because of a monetary incentive, and then stay because they liked the feeling of gleaning. “We had one guy,” she explained, “he started gleaning with us at the end of July, mostly for City Market hours, but then said, ‘You know, this is so fun, your program sounds so amazing...I want to come every week and help’, and after a point it was more because he had such a great time doing it.”

Although I found many similar anecdotes through my interviews and fieldwork, the line between volunteering and work was not always so clear, and Jen raised important questions about this type of volunteering. “How do you get people to volunteer?” She asked. “I grew up in my family always volunteering for things, and there were no incentives, it was just something you did. But now a lot of organizations it’s part of their social justice mission to pay their employees to do a service. And of course I’m like ‘is that really volunteering?’ And it’s great, they’re coming out, but does that translate into them coming back? Sometimes yes, sometimes no.” (Safler n.d.) Jen’s questions placed consistency and values at the forefront of gleaning as a practice. There seemed to be an implicit moral value

placed on gleaning that varied across the board, and many volunteers had difficulty expressing what gleaning meant to them or how it fit into their lives as a moral practice. For both Allison and Jen, the fact that motivation often varied for people was both something they worried about but also admitted was largely out of their control. Allison told me about having a group of kids from the local elementary school come out to a glean, explaining that for her it was more about providing the opportunity to have that experience. "It's interesting how some of the students got very engaged with it and connected with what is happening and wanted to continue doing it... and then others did something for five minutes and then goofed around but I think all of them had the opportunity to, even the ones that weren't engaging that much... They were still getting stuff from it, and I think down the road they may remember pieces of that opportunity." (Leonard n.d.) "You have to be committed to that education piece," Allison said later. Although gleaning successfully involves people who would perhaps not be able to otherwise be involved in their food system, it will not involve everyone, and oftentimes that is unavoidable. Volunteers seemed to recognize this fact, but most felt the same way as Allison, saying that although they can't get everyone, even getting one person to have that experience was meaningful.

Across the board, though, gleaning successfully and meaningfully mediated transitions between these types of spheres of activity. Many people found themselves calling it both work, but then separating it from the type of work they did at home; others distinguished it as something they carved out time for as an activity that they valued as much work for which they received compensation.

Allison's story illustrates this perfectly, as she was and still is currently mediating this odd juxtaposition between being a volunteer and working for monetary compensation. Allison began gleaning as part of a program called Just Basics, a social justice organization that runs the Montpelier Food Pantry and Feast Program. After hearing about a request for volunteers, Allison began gleaning at Dog River Farm, gradually integrating her participation with gleaning into an internship she could get credit for to get her Associates degree. Allison had already had a connection with George Gross, who owns Dog River Farm, and thus was able to start building that relationship.

"I had the connection to this farm before we moved here, and I am still a part-time student--I have one class I still need to take at CCV (Community College of Vermont) for my associates and so I've been working on that slowly and having two little kids.... So I haven't had a job for a while and so this gleaning is sort of turning into my career, you know last year was just volunteering for the organization and this year the portion of setting up the program I interned at Salvation Farms through an internship at CCV so I got credit for my first 80 hours so I was working to set up the program and then after that I've been basically working about part time since January and now it's over full time. So I don't have any other job, and this year I'm only getting a minimal stipend, it's mostly still volunteer."

Allison spoke with candor and enthusiasm about the way that gleaning had helped create this connection for her, but was also realistic about the difficulty of finding ways to make the job lucrative for her. "The goal is to then get it so I can fund myself

and have a full time job for me but at this point it's still volunteer", she said, reflecting on the future of her involvement. Her ability to become engaged with the gleaning system allowed her to begin creating a career and meaningful work through a program that in and of itself engages those who are not necessarily working within the system. The fact that gleaning was able to mediate this border made the work she was doing even more meaningful.

Thus, although gleaning's position as a practice was often contested, it was largely seen as a value-shaping and moral practice. Interviewees ran up against the question of moral obligation to do good frequently when asked about why they liked it so much; for them, it seemed to be tied strongly to a sense that this was a volunteer activity that, like work, there was a tangible benefit to; however, unlike work, this benefit was not monetized and existed outside of the traditional workplace. Gleaning attracted people with all different abilities and from all different walks of life for this reason, and allowed for a greater range of participation overall. The practice itself was one that was consistently identified as being a "value-creating" activity-- participation in the activity was seen as being a way to instill values of giving, caring, and altruism.

The creation of this value web can be seen as an overwhelmingly positive development, since there is research to suggest that complex value webs result in greater inter-personal collaboration. "Food system value webs are anticipated to result in multiple outcomes that emanate from robust collaborations among the partners in the web. Collaboration may spawn greater trust between participants than what might be otherwise generated from traditional chain-like relationships."

(Block et al. 2008:380) Gleaning's ability to complicate traditional relationships and to create built-in values contribute to its position as an ideal practice in which to mediate social change and changing thought practices around food.

For the people by the people: creating a marginalized economy

The Vermont Commodity Program, which lightly processes and packages surplus gleaned food to be efficiently integrated into the existing food distribution system, does much more than food management. Currently run largely out of the South Windsor Correctional Facility, the program has worked to integrate educational practices, vocational training, and increased awareness around food waste, food insecurity, and local agriculture with the inmates involved. My visit to the prison to interview five inmates took five months to authorize, and another five to organize. I would like to state that one day is not enough to capture the complexity of these men's experiences. The quotes and opinions set forth here are a demonstration of the need to continue understanding these men's experiences and how gleaning can continue to be a positive force in their lives. Nonetheless, these five interviews perhaps reveal better than any others the power of gleaning to impact individuals as well as communities.

You will find no argument that prison is disempowering. For the inmates I spoke to, their lives were routinized and regulated; a certain amount of time had to pass between each interview, and many were hurried out to go to the next assigned place they were supposed to be. All of them were either currently participating or had participated in the Vermont Commodity Program for a significant amount of

time and had a good relationship with Theresa Snow. I spoke to each of them for a period of time ranging from 20 to 30 minutes, asking them about their participation in the program and its impact on their lives. Men who work in the commodity program are part of work crews formed by the prison; there are various other jobs assigned at the prison, such as a plate shop and painting crews. Inmates are assigned to various crews, but also have a choice to switch into various other jobs if they so choose and if there is room.

“No one should have to go through that, ever.”

All of the men I spoke with were immensely motivated by the idea that they were directly connecting with their community. Reaching out beyond the walls, in the form of the producing food to feed others, was their way of connecting and feeling a sense of worth in what they were doing. Sam noted that for a lot of inmates, gleaning was a form of rehabilitation that was hard to get inside the prison.

“Umm, I think... I don’t want to say it’s really the reward of it, but I guess there’s the feeling that you get to give back to the community where you come from. And there’s...it’s really tough, especially with some of us, it’s really tough to be able to give back where we came from, because a lot of people once they get wrapped in the corrections system, a lot of people look at it as, I’ve kind of failed in life... And I don’t feel that way because, especially because of this program, because I might have messed up, but I’m trying to make myself a better person by giving back”(Nichols 2014).

Sam in particular, being from an area close to the prison, felt that there was a tangible impact from the work he was doing. "I'm from southern Vermont, from Brattleboro, and a lot of stuff goes to the food bank in Bratt [sic], and that's really nice, because having to have been on welfare at one point in my life, I know how important it is to know where your next meal is coming from." (Nichols 2014) This represents the cyclical nature of gleaning for these men: many of them, like those who receive gleaned food, had not always been able to feed themselves adequate food. Being on the other end of the spectrum for them was a way of beginning to feel better about their role in the community again.

As with Sam, Calvin felt tremendous empathy towards the people who were receiving the food he was helping to provide. "The best is just knowing where it's going and who it's helping... And it's made me want to be a better part of it. Because like I said I have been on the other side of it, not delivering it but receiving on the other end, and it really helps, it helped throughout my life, and it's really the best thing to know that people are out there giving to other people and I really appreciated that." (Slate 2014) For these men, prison was not a place where they felt they had any sort of agency or power to enact change on their surroundings. As de Viggiani states, "As agencies of disempowerment and deprivation, prisons represent the antithesis of a healthy setting." (De Viggiani 2007:115) Consequently, gleaning allowed them to feel as if they were having a say in what their work was doing. For them, working with this system, and working with this food, was personal because some of them had acutely felt the burden of real hunger. Calvin told it from his perspective, saying:

“But I did want to find out how to help the community, and this is the biggest part of helping the community is food. Because not only, I wrote something down here too, that not only does it affect their health but also the emotions, the physical, it affects them a lot. It affected me a lot. Having friends looking down upon me, being shy to go to school because you know you’re not feeling that you’re equal to others, because at that point I wasn’t, and other kids don’t know better, and they shouldn’t have to go through that *ever*. And more that they could find help for children and to grow up and not feel that way, they could feel more proud to go to school, stuff like that. Help with their future... Because growing up, you have a bad future if you have a bad past, it could just be some kind of way because of past history.”(Slate 2014)

Calvin felt strongly that the power of the work he did was to try and keep children in particular from having to go through what he went through. He was acutely aware of what it was like to be hungry, and he repeatedly noted that this was his way of contributing to breaking the cycle. For others who had not directly experienced food insecurity, working in the processing plant was an important way for them to learn that they too could make a difference, and could work to create something meaningful. Andrew, though he did not speak on his own experiences with food insecurity, agreed that for many of the men who worked with the program it was an important eye-opening experience for them. “I think it’s a great thing for some of these guys that really haven’t had... That don’t really do a lot. They maybe, I don’t know, sell drugs or whatever, they’ve never really worked, and they don’t really have that experience, so it’s a good thing for some of the inmates here.” (Davis

2014) Consequently, this form of altruism was the greatest motivator. Each inmate had his own story to tell, but so much of it revolved around community--their experiences with food either deeply rooted in community or characterized by a deep lack of it. Their lives in prison, then, appeared to have become reoriented towards trying to help build a community outside the walls that they could then participate in upon their release.

Education for empowerment

Besides community strength as a motivator, the educative aspects of Salvation Farm's programs are immensely important, and hold great potential for expansion and improvement. All of the men I spoke with said that their knowledge around agricultural practices, food security, and food waste had improved since starting the program. Many of them expressed surprise at the amount of food wasted. Joe said that for him the "knowledge, the food, and knowing how much food is going to waste" was one of the most important aspects, and said that for him he had become intrigued by the whole process. "More farming, really..." he said, responding to a question about what he wanted from the program. "since you know since doing this it's really intrigued me, now it's kind of like, I want to know more about the process of all the farming." (Calman 2014)

The cyclical nature of knowledge, and the ability to begin connecting the dots between food supply and consumption, seemed to manifest itself in some of the interviews. In particular, Calvin, who works in the commodity program as well as in the garden, emphasized that he could see all the parts of the system working together. In speaking about how his consumption practices and thinking about food

had changed, he said, “Don’t waste it? I guess I would say that... And to eat what I need and not what I want necessarily? Because too, I’m also a gardener here. And that helps, both because I learn where this (gleaned) food comes from but also the process of growing it and that benefits a lot of saving money and helping out.” (Slate 2014) Interestingly enough, Calvin noted a similar thing to Andrea--that not everybody is going to be necessarily immediately invested in this system, but it’s immensely important to have the opportunity anyways.

“Me per se, it’s a relaxing thing, to help out. I don’t know... It’s how things, just to learn how things grow. It’s the circle of life, that’s pretty cool. And to know a little part of what not everybody thinks about every day, because it’s not everybody’s job to do that, but it’s pretty cool to have that experience under your belt. You’re stopping and smelling the flowers for real.” (Slate 2014)

Calvin wanted everyone to be able to see what the prison did, and how the work was helping the community. He spoke passionately about the possibilities for doing more community outreach, especially to kids, to try and humanize their presence as well as the activity. Like the prison, Calvin was noting that hunger is often invisible, and food sources are as well. Prisons are not public spaces, and as he had noted earlier, they and hunger both go together as being sources of shame. Consequently, “showing others that there are people that need this kind of help, and it’s just right there, a couple feet away, and its a little time out of your day to help out in this way”, was something very important for him. “It’s (hunger) in a lot of places”, he added later.

For Calvin, gleaning had opened his eyes to the possibilities that existed for this food and for the program:

“Just to know what this place has done for others, and what it has done for me to open my eyes, and I know if you run other programs like this that it will open up eyes that are closed to this, because I had to open up mine a lot. I came like I said from a background of poor family and not being able to afford things, and not knowing where to get food and supplies, and just knowing that there could have been more signs out there or things that show us where to go and stuff that can help.” (Slate 2014)

Andrew noted as well that he wanted more education about the communities and issues they were impacting. “The connection with people, the freshness of food, the community... Then you get more of a reward of satisfaction for helping towards people that need it.” (Davis 2014) For both inmates and volunteers alike, knowing where food was going was a source of great joy and satisfaction. Although he emphasized that the program was helpful, he also desired even more educative aspects, saying, “ The inmates that would be working in there, I mean there’s the food safety stuff, but that’s more of like, working in kitchens, that’s not really to do with where it comes from, how it’s handled, how it’s gleaned, all that the process. So yeah, education, educating a lot more.” Robert seconded that statement, saying, emphatically, that he was “always interested in learning”. (Vickers 2014)

Option and Agency: Good food vs food choice

Another important aspect of my conversations with these inmates was the way that they discussed their sense of agency, and concepts of agency around food. For those who struggled with food insecurity outside of prison, and who were consequently put into an institution where agency was greatly reduced, the idea that they were given a choice to both do this work was very important. They also emphasized the how important it was that they knew were providing options for others in powerless situations. “We do have a choice,” Sam said. “Like I was on it (the commodity work crew) before and they asked me if I wanted to go back on it again, and I think the biggest part is that it helps people. And I’m sitting here, right?” (Nichols 2014) Sam’s statement about his choice to participate in both the program and to do the interview was in response to my question about their willingness to participate. Research supports that prisons deprive inmates of agency, as it has been widely argued that, “prison is harmful, that it deprives individuals of basic human rights and needs, bringing physical, mental and social harm to prisoners and rendering them powerless and institutionalized.” ((De Viggiani 2007:117)

In addition to giving inmates a sense of agency, gleaning also allowed for human connection with the outside world, in particular through meeting Theresa Snow and meeting farmers who came to provide information on gleaned food. Particularly for Joe, he felt that being able to connect with farmers helped him have a sense of agency and direction for his life post-prison:

“We had a local farmer come in from Westminster. I knew of him, I never actually met Mr. Harlow personally, because I went to school at VT Academy, and VT Academy being close by to Westminster, I knew of his farm... but I met

him and I spoke to him about possibly getting together to work for him when I get out. I've spoken to Theresa about possibly if there's anything I could do when I get out, especially I mean, I like to be on the road a lot, and growing up on a horse farm, it's tough not to want to work with your hands. It's hard to go into an office job, so it's something I really look forward to doing as a career when I get out." (Calman 2014)

In addition to offering direction for those working with the program, gleaning and becoming more involved with the community was seen as an opportunity to provide choice for others. For those who struggled with food insecurity, there was the constant mention of the low "quality and quantity", and a desire to provide more options for those struggling with food insecurity. Many of them mentioned that prior to the program, they had not had any experiences where they had had real choices with their food. "Before? No..." said Calvin. "Because of this program I started thinking about more of it... Even when I had a harder life of being hungry and stuff, I don't know. I would eat what I was given." (Nichols 2014)

For Calvin and the other inmates, discussions about food insecurity helped them think critically about their own agency, and they begin to feel more empowered by the choices they were giving others. Additionally, they were able to find a place in the packing room where these types of conversations could happen, and where a sense of camaraderie could be built. Much of this was owed to Theresa Snow, they said, who as a facilitator for the program really heard what they were saying. "Yeah, meeting Theresa, that really meant a lot. I haven't really met a lot of people where we are. But actually I interacted with some people that I probably

wouldn't have interacted with otherwise. But you know Theresa has a lot to offer. She takes the time, better put.... She talks with us, and explains where the product's coming from, why it's coming from where it is." (Nichols 2014) Theresa provided knowledge, and more than anything, she listened to them and worked to put knowledge and choice back into their hands. This, again, demonstrates gleaning's work in context. Socially, gleaning provided knowledge and agency, but it also allowed them to have a sense of camaraderie together. "Yeah, it actually is pretty fun, except for getting patted down every time... But yeah it's pretty fun, it's a good group of us that are in there", said Joe. (Calman 2014). Between the social aspect and the feeling that they were able to begin helping others that also had limited agency, gleaning helped inmates not only feel empowered, but included them in the gleaning system, whose broader goal was to spread empowerment to other marginalized populations.

The broader lesson to be learned from the stories of these men is that gleaning is a practice that allows people to contribute to a social system that marginalized them in the first place. The inmates in this program fundamentally lacked choices, and their work in the commodity program was one of the few places where they could, in fact, enact choice. The fact that they were then giving this food to other people who also lacked agency and choice in their food procurement meant that they were creating an entire system outside of the commodity market. Gleaned food, without a doubt, represented many things for the inmates. Most importantly, though, it represented a raw good that, while not wanted by anyone else, was transformed by their labor into a product that would help others equally as

marginalized as they were. This was a marginalized food, transformed by marginalized labor, that was going to help those marginalized from the capitalist food economy. The power of gleaning lies in its ability to transform these systems of production and begin giving back some of that power to those who have so little of it. This aspect of gleaning is not limited to just the system located within the prison. Gleaning volunteers, recipients, and coordinators are all participating in a system that aims to help create a positive cycle driven by empowerment and agency.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

It is perhaps a fitting metaphor that gleaning has taught me a lot about the value of imperfection, flexibility, resilience, and hard work. This project has been the hardest thing I have ever done, but I don't think any of it could have happened if I had picked a different subject. When I began this project, I knew nothing about gleaning. I was a new convert to the study of food systems, inspired by my professor and now advisor Dr. Teresa Mares, and was excited that I had found something where it seemed like I could make a tangible impact on the world.

My initial conception of the project stemmed from a very broad discussion Teresa and I had in her office one day. "Have you heard of this thing called gleaning?" she asked, when I said I wanted to work with a local organization. "No," I replied, having no idea at the time what gleaning was or even that it had significance beyond its position as a word in my vocabulary. Teresa told me that an organization called Salvation Farms was doing some innovative and interesting work with food recapture, and that I should check them out. After researching Salvation Farm's mission and their various operations across Vermont, my academic interest was piqued. There was something about gleaning that connected with me intrinsically; the idea of food rescue seemed both exciting and meaningful in a vague sense. After some email correspondence with Theresa Snow, I had the opportunity to speak to her on the phone. Her down-to-earth, passionate, and intelligent conversation made the project seem possible, and I became invested in the collaboration without even having a fully fledged-idea of what I was getting myself into.

As the project came together more, I originally conceived it as being a broad-based attempt to examine the entirety of Vermont gleaning and ask the questions of whether it “worked”, how it functioned, and the impact it had on the food system. I received the Simon Family Foundation grant with this vague concept in mind; I was then subsequently hit over the head with a heavy dose of summer reality as the realization of the amount of research and work involved set in. As I saw gleaning firsthand and talked to volunteers, the way that I envisioned the project began changing in a significant way. Gleaning was about food rescue, yes, and it was about building resiliency, but more than anything, gleaning was *personal*. People connected with gleaning in strong and positive ways. This project was not only about numbers, or assessments, this was about figuring out what drove people to become invested in something, in what it was about a food practice that could draw in so many people. What was gleaning’s impact on a community? What could it do to improve the ability of people to feed themselves? These bigger questions started circulating in my head as I learned more about gleaning and its impact. Figuring out how to translate that into actual interviews and fieldwork, though, was another task entirely.

Doing the fieldwork turned out to be very challenging at times. Doing ethnographic work involves numerous difficulties that arise and exhaustion from battling these issues. The very first interview I did I was incredibly nervous, got lost, was late, and then the device I was using to record the interview didn’t work and the whole recording was lost. As the summer continued I struggled with finding the

time to do fieldwork around a full time job and other commitments. I also struggled with finding ways to connect with farmers and gleaners, who were at their busiest during this time of year. Fall brought a sense of burnout and exhaustion and a realization that I hadn't done the best job with my research and that it wasn't up to my standards—or the standards I wanted to fulfill for the sake of Salvation Farms, an organization near and dear to my heart who had provided me with endless support.

The values of gleaning, though, allowed me to navigate through the process of assembling what I had and what I had learned. As was fitting, and as is often the case with gleaning, I had more than I thought. As I began coding the data, I realized that the larger message of gleaning is one of finding ways around obstacles in order to deliver something meaningful. That realization was an important entry point in my scholarship, when a critical mass of data and research began to clarify things and I began to recover some of my joy in the project after hitting a low point at the end of the fall semester. I began re-learning things about food and gleaning that had resonated with me from the very start.

As Robbins, Putnam, and a host of others have noted, modernization and the increasing spread of capitalist modes of production have led to less connection, less social capital and less community investment than ever before. For many volunteers, gleaning was an antidote, a place where they could go to find something tangible and rewarding. The act of giving carried immense meaning for them; and all noted that it was the knowledge that they were helping their own community that

was most significant. They were participating in an evolving and novel food system, and at the same time, also finding an ideal space for conversations about food and food insecurity. The field was a place people could share news and ideas, where you could hear a conversation about someone's new grandson in one row and a conversation about the issues of fair-trade coffee in the next. It allowed people who wouldn't normally be able to participate the ability to do so, and it carried the message that there were never too many volunteers, that the more people connected and participating the better.

Gleaning was an egalitarian practice where the spread of knowledge and connection jumped easily from person to person in the field, and then out into the community. Communities and individuals alike benefited from its presence and its unique flexibility. At the same time that they worked to recover food that otherwise would be wasted and deliver it to those in need, they found reason to volunteer and experienced social connection; they participated in and grew to understand the food system as well. Gleaning followed the need and the supply of food, and volunteers followed.

Food, in its broadest sense, connects people--it carries messages of cultural morals and values; it can connect individuals or divide them. *Gleaned* food does all of these things and more. In a conversation with Andrea, she pondered the part about education and gleaning and said, "Gleaned food... It's particularly *teachable*." Andrea was speaking to the positive and important message that gleaned food carries with it: that imperfection and blemishes are not the sum total of worth; that imperfection often leads to different and more meaningful pathways. Without really

realizing it, I had ignored the largest and most important gift that gleaning had given me and other volunteers. During the period of this research, the focus was on the end product, creating a perfect thesis that would fulfill the unrealistic standards I had set out. In the midst of this project's development, I lost sight as a researcher of the ways that the process, the various imperfections and obstacles, in the end made me a better researcher and fundamentally changed me as a person. Unwittingly, I had fallen into the trap which gleaning was able to correct: that perfection is unattainable, and worth is not tied up in appearance, but instead in usefulness. The larger significance, the *point* of all this, was not to come out with a faultless finished product. The point was to demonstrate that gleaned food itself, and the networks that have sprouted up around it, are highly powerful metaphors for what the food system, and perhaps even society in general, has lost sight of in recent years. Perfection in food is a misjudged and misappropriated value; it has lost its roots, so to speak. Gleaning returns us to the value of fresh, healthy food regardless of appearance; it is through the community process of taking unwanted food and helping others that we can begin striking back at the cultural value that perfection is a goal. Imperfection and flaws are opportunities for resilience. They open new pathways, they allow for flexibility, and more than anything they allow for learning. Gleaning is an opportunity for Vermont, and for other places eventually too, to begin learning how to create a system that is flexible and open to new possibilities, that embraces imperfections and learns to use them for the betterment of everyone.

Walking back from the field that day at Dog River, I pondered the contented silence that filled the air as all of us slowly made our way to our cars. I got in and

closed the door and leaned my head back against the seat, trying to summon the energy for the long drive back to Burlington and trying not to think about the fact that I had to be at my other job in a few hours. I heard a knock on my window and opened my eyes to one of the volunteers leaning down to peer in from the passenger side. "You okay?" She asked. "It was hot out there today." "I'm fine," I replied. "Those cabbages are just heavy, you know!" She nodded and laughed. "That they are," she said, and turning away from my car smiled and waved at me before disappearing around the side of the parking lot. Her thoughtfulness touched me, and some of my tiredness dissipated. "What a day," I said aloud to myself as I started up my car. The sun was beginning to get lower in the sky, and the farm had never looked more beautiful. *So worth it*, I thought, pulling out onto the road and turning on the radio. This work was just so worth it.

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Codebook

| Codes | Subcodes | Description |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Community | For the community With the community Volunteer | How community is developed, role of community in relationships |
| Education | Engagement | Role of education in bettering volunteer's experience |
| Connection | Investment Friendship | Developing connection with other volunteers |
| Motivation | Reinforced Self | Why participate? |
| Empowerment | Choice Agency | Where gleaning provides agency and choice |
| Value | Value creation Moral values | How is gleaning a value creating practice |
| | | |

