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An Economic and Social Positioning of Small Scale Farming and Local Food Access in the Hudson Valley

Elias James Smith
Bard College

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by

Elias Smith

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to the people who have taught me critical and sensorial awareness of the lines between ourselves, each other, and nature that we are constantly drawing, and collapsing, and drawing again.

~

And for the short-lived season of ramps, fiddleheads, and approaching summertime.

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Table of Contents

Abstract

The paper examines the potential for Hudson Valley farms to better meet local needs for iterative, healthy and accessible food systems and community food spaces. I discuss potential for positive social change by addressing the strains imposed by capitalist systems on labor relations, problems with consumer accessibility, and the social stratification of food systems and spaces. My research includes interviews with Dutchess and Ulster County farmers, participant observation, literature analysis, and data analysis. The paper discusses labor practices, food distribution methods, food insecurity, and aspects of community building in the Hudson Valley's alternative food network. It explores commodification within the social-relational dynamics of local food systems, discussing economic class dynamics and shifts in public attitudes toward agriculture by addressing the changing populations and income demographics between the Hudson Valley and its metropol, New York City. This paper looks at on-the-ground efforts and circumstances of some small scale Hudson Valley farms and investigates how small-scale agriculture can be structured to better facilitate equitable local food systems, the viability of farming, and food accessibility.

Introduction

This paper explores sustainable farming and local food networks in the Hudson Valley. As economically, ecologically and socially productive spaces, farms have the potential to bridge communities, meet local needs, and recenter individual and communal relationships with natural systems. I show that small scale farming has the potential to form disaster preparedness on a local scale by aligning organizations in and around the local food system. Global systems are prone to pandemics and climate crises that have been shown to greatly increase food insecurity, especially within marginalized communities. Through the use of solidarity as a coalitional framework small farms can help to secure quality food assistance for a region. At the same time, the small business model farm competes and functions in a capitalist system even while certain projects or aspects of the industry attempt to depart from or reconfigure capitalist logics. By narrowing consumer accessibility and participation, market competition can lead to ambiguous labor relations and often drive premiums on food that can undermine many of the ethical eating values associated with the sustainable local food movement. Locally sourced food is often priced and promoted toward higher income customers. The target market usually occupies an economic status well above those of the farmers and farm hands that cultivate, harvest, distribute and sell the produce and added value goods. I will explore some of the social, geographic and economic circumstances that shape opportunities for ingenuity and social-ecological justice in local farm networks, as well as practical limitations.

This paper performs social analysis by following the interests and concerns found in interviews with several Dutchess and Ulster County farmers and food advocates. Following

personal narratives allows for a locally embedded perspective and relevance. The paper is built around four primary methods: literature analysis, personal interviews, participant observation, and data analysis.

Literature analysis. I performed extensive analysis on literature to develop several ways of looking at aspects of sustainable farming and alternative or local food systems, including discussion on added value products, moral and social economies, labor and land relations. Key texts include Margaret Gray *Labor and the Locavore*, Heather Paxson *The Life of Cheese*, Liz Carlisle *Critical Agrarianism*, Rachel Slocum *Whiteness, Space and Alternative Food Practice* and, Dean Spade's *Solidarity not Charity*, among many others.

Interviews. I assembled a series of seven interviews with regional farmers. I made connections with many of my interview participants through my apprenticeship at Four Corners Farm in Red Hook, NY and in training provided by the Glynwood Center for Regional Food and Farmings apprenticeship network. The interviewees include one food and farming program director, four non-profit farm owners or managers, and two small scale for-profit farmers.

Participant observation. This includes my personal experience in farming and working sales at a Dutchess County farmers market. It also includes my attendance at various coalitional events such as the Hudson Valley Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Summit, the Farmer Housing Working Group convening, and several farmer training sessions through the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT) network.

Data analysis. I built out a series of relevant data sets to support my findings and develop a context for farming and food economies in the Hudson Valley. I primarily used the

latest agricultural census from 2022. I performed my work and analysis using ArcGIS. This work is presented as a separate StoryMap web page linked in my methods section.

Today we see a resurgence in tenant based farming as common practice and a changing socio-economic character following events such as the 2008 financial crisis, and the global pandemic that drove a flight of higher income residents from New York City to the more isolated hinterlands like the Hudson Valley. In the first section of the paper I provide some brief historical and contemporary context to show the role of agriculture in the Hudson Valley from its native histories and pre-colonial cultivation practices through the conquest and genocidal colonial-projects of the Dutch and English, to the times of slave laborers and tenant farmers working under wealthy estate owners, to the advent of rail cars and shifts in agricultural priorities and markets.

I discuss the labor economy of mid to larger scale for-profit farms in the Hudson Valley's alternative food network. This regional industry offers alternative farming practices and distributional methods that differ in some ways from the mainstream commodity agricultural system, but in many cases the regional industry maintains similar exploitative labor practices regarding the treatment and exploitation of immigrant farmworkers. I examine this dilemma with perspective from Margaret Gray's 2013 book *Labor and the locavore,* which explores the day-to-day experiences and conditions of immigrant laborers–both H2A workers and undocumented migrant workers–within a holistic perspective of the labor economy of producing scale alternative-food-network farms in the Hudson Valley. My qualitative research works with a different smaller-scale niche of alternative network farmers than the group researched in Gray's book. For this reason, the majority of this section engages with Gray's research to better

understand on a regional scale the social and economic factors that exist around labor and alternative food practice. In my findings and discussion sections I discuss how my interview participants interact with labor, wages and work environments on their own farms. My interviewees and participant observation sites mostly included small (gross under 50,000$ annually) to medium sized farms, mostly non-profit and small acreage projects that employ small farm crews of either H2A or non-immigrant workers.

I continue in my third and fourth sections by discussing the social economy of local food systems and zones of potential exclusion or displacement within them. This begins with an exploration of the term "economies of sentiment" used in Heather Paxson's book *The Life of Cheese*. I use economies of sentiment as a framework to describe the projects of multiple value making and the relational aspects of small scale farming, and food networks that distinguish local economies from mainstream commodity economies. Further analysis of the local food system involves a deeper look at some of the social-relational and geographic-economic dynamics.

My methodology section provides a look at the practices, challenges, limitations, successes, and opportunities that led me to my findings. The interview findings section includes information from the farmers I spoke with and their respective projects and farms, and analyzes themes and results from across interviews. I also discuss relevant experiences and findings from participant observation of regional farming spaces and events. The research is divided into subtopics concerning tenant farming, farm labor, local food economies, farm communities, and food accessibility work. My results respond to these findings with ways forward on issues, and discussion on the efficacy of various food access practices, and concepts.

I conclude with some of the unresolved questions at stake, the steps this work of research took toward answering them, and a call for further work and research. In what ways are people working towards more just labor practices? In what ways are people working toward equitable land ownership? How are farmers attempting to make local, healthy, sustainable food accessible for all groups and income levels present in a locality? Can farms be used to bridge communities and build connectivity between people, nature and the systems and stewards that sustain them? How do we ensure that food and food spaces are accessible to everybody in a community and not just the people that are privileged enough to prioritize spending local premiums?

Literature Review

Historical and Current Context

The history of cultivation in the land now known as the Hudson River valley dates back long before western colonization and present-day farming practices and ethics. The Munsee-Stockbridge tribes resided in and around the region, farming and fishing seasonally. Cultivation included corn, squash and beans, an example of companion cropping known as the three sisters. Today, a resurgence in sustainable agriculture uses many indigenous methods of cultivation, biodynamic agriculture, and regenerative agriculture being some examples. (Sellers, 2016.) Originally known to native tribes as the Muhheakunnuk, "river that flows two ways" or "great waters in constant motion", the river valley region was initially invaded by Dutch colonists and later the English. The "Hudson River" received its current name from the English "explorer" Henry Hudson, who promoted colonial expansion into its territories on the merit of agricultural potential. In the process of systematic human and cultural genocide, Europeans imposed foreign concepts of ownership and resource extraction, disrupting indigenous approaches to agriculture, life, and land use more broadly. The use of slave labor and extractive processes in lumber and agriculture stood in stark contrast both to indigenous cultivation methods and human-land relations. European agriculture assumed access to and exploitation of life and land as fungible resources. The major forests were cleared, and crops became the primary land cover in the valley. (Sellers, 2016.)

Throughout the 1800's, technological advancements increased, along with improved methods for transporting goods. The railroad changed the role of farming from primarily

subsistence-based agriculture to bulk trade with metropolises like New York City. (Nevarez, 2018.) At the turn of the century, America's westward expansion and the onset of mechanical tractors began shifting agricultural production away from the Hudson Valley and consolidating a national food production network in the west, especially in California where environmental conditions are more suitable to year-round production. (Cronon, 1992.) The establishment of a national food market was also promoted by expanded rail systems and refrigerated railcars, with Chicago becoming the main trading nexus (Cronon, 1992.) Meanwhile, commodity crops proliferated across the midwest and the south: cotton, soy, corn. The allocational policies that promote large scale monocropping agriculture have continued to present day at great cost to the environment.

The practices of corporate agriculture are unsustainable. They shorthand farmers, and profit from the mistreatment of farmworkers instituting cyclical systems of disempowerment and exploitation, from investors, to CEO's, to landowners, to tenant farmers, to immigrant laborers, consumers, and the earth, the health of it's soils, air, water, biodiversity and seeds. (Berry, 1977.) The massive agriculture business is run in the interest of big chemical companies like Dupont and BASF, who have oligopolies on the petrochemical fertilizers, pesticides, and genetically modified seed patents that the vast majority of farm production depends on heavily. (Majeed, 2018.) Only a small portion of American farmland is used for fruit and vegetable production. (Ritchie, 2024.) The rest is allocated toward subsidized commodity crops, corn, soy, cotton and sugar beats, to name a few. The majority of these crops are produced for the cattle industry, textiles and ethanol production, not human consumption. (Ritchie, 2024.)

Corruption within food systems and production chains has caused a reactive interest in organic, and sustainable food production within local economies. Food movements that started as public awareness of issues within our food sector have broadened. (Guthman, 2004.) Localism, slow food and back-to-the-land efforts toward homesteading and supporting community scale farms are the driving forces for many of the small-scale agricultural movements. (Carlisle, 2014.)

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a small farm as any farming operation that collects under $250,000 in annual revenue. This number is quite high for the Hudson Valley and would represent a very large farm compared to the average in the region. For example, Columbia County has the highest per farm average of market value of products sold at $250,500 Putnam County has the lowest per farm average at only $22,300. (US Department of Agriculture, 2022.)

My working definition of a small farm for the purpose of this paper is an operation where food production is the organization, company or family's primary business in farming and a key source of income or funding and is still within the $250,000 cap. This includes nonprofit and for-profit models and allows for farms that may not be entirely economically self-sufficient. It excludes farms that are hobby-level side projects, non-market homesteads, or minimal hay productions. This also excludes equestrian farms that are very common in the area.

The census definition of a farm according to the United States Department of Agriculture is "any place from which $2,500 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the census year." Land that qualifies as agricultural can qualify for tax abatements. (White, 2023) This low profit minimum makes for agricultural policy

that is conducive to the operation of what is known as a "gentleman's farm," where wealthier landowners lease out portions of their properties for aesthetically pleasing agricultural work like hay production and similar low-cost operations that don't carry the noise, smells, and other rough edges that come with most farm work. (Dunn, 2022.) While this maintains a pastoral aesthetic and decreases property taxes for the landowner, restrictive tenant-based styles of farming can mean the dissolution of long-term land relations, reducing aspects of stewardship in short term leases and restraining production scales and methods in order to fit into aesthetic notions. The aesthetic scenery is very important to the social character and economic success of the Hudson Valley as a prominent tourist and real estate location, largely for New Yorkers looking to escape the fast pace of city life. (Nevarez, 2020.)

Once known as New York City's breadbasket, the region is still considered fondly for its agriculture and the bucolic allure of rolling fields and grain silos meeting dense forests and river, all under the impressive backdrop of the Catskill mountains that harken to intensely American perceptions of wilderness, and the elusive frontier. There is a history of New Yorkers coming to the Hudson Valley as a site for agritourism and access to nature. (Nevarez, 2020.) As early as the colonial expansion era, the Hudson River School featured the region's landscapes in paintings meant to encourage colonial expansion with the promise of abundance and opportunity. (Cusack, 2010.) Today, the New York Times frequently publishes real estate articles that showcase the quaint and creative smalltowns and cities of the valley for second home speculators and AirBnb vacationers. (Angel, 2023.) (Nevarez, 2020.)

Labor and Sight

The politics of sight is a framework introduced in the book *Every 12 Seconds,* in which author Timothy Pachirat performs a participant observation investigation into the modern industrial slaughterhouse. A politics of sight is a framework for projects of social transformation that seek to shed light on acute power dynamics of visibility and sequestration that function in exploitative industries and systems. I put Margaret Gray's book *Labor and the Locavore* in conversation with the politics of sight in order to disentangle exploitative labor relations present on some alternative food system farms in New York and the Hudson Valley.

Gray's research like my own is based in the Mid Hudson Valley; however, the bracket of farmers that she researched is outside the scope of my own qualitative work. Gray describes that the farms in her study consisted of medium to large sized for profit farms. Medium farms gross between $50,000 and $250,000 annually and large scale farms produce anywhere above $250,000 annually. Gray states that, "the farmers I interviewed were not tiny mom-and-pop operations, and all used hired labor." Although the farms in Gray's study are of a smaller scale than those in industrial agriculture, they are much larger than the farms involved directly in my study. The specific conditions and farms that Gray studied do not necessarily represent the niche of farmers in my research.

The abstract power dynamics of sight and concealment are employed as a fundamental component to modernity, in what Norbert Elias calls "the civilizing process." Elias proposes that "it will be seen again and again how characteristic of the whole process that we call civilization is, this movement of segregation, this hiding 'behind the scenes' of what has become distasteful."(Elias, 2000: 102.) This concept functions with a specific understanding of the term

"repugnant," a term symbolizing conditions or situations that evoke a generalized reaction of distaste, horror, shock and reactions of disapproval that call upon sentiments of pity and revocation or a call for change of the given reality. Elias argues that development of commodity and modern statuses are reliant on obfuscating "repugnant" aspects of civilization. Instead of improving, doing away with, or addressing such practices and industries they are instead distanced from the everyday citizen, hidden "behind the scenes."

Pachirat defines the politics of sight as "organized, concerted attempts to make visible what is hidden and to breach, literally or figuratively, zones of confinement in order to bring about social and political transformation."(Pachirat, 2011: 15.) The politics of sight is a direct response, and action against systemic concealment of repugnant systems. It is a means of doing away with, or socially transforming systems which have been concealed in the interest of extracting surplus value at the expense of the worker and of product or service quality, in industries that are often, unglamorously, vital for the function of modern society.

Understanding "repugnancy" as a social concept is important in order to see the effectiveness and the limitations of the politics of sight. The politics of sight relies on socially constructed relativities of "repugnance." Michel Foucault characterizes as an "immediate collective and anonymized gaze."(Foucault, 1981: 105) a public that is assumed to be reactive to negative stimulus, that a public gaze is shocked by "reveals" of previously sequestered injustices, precisely because those systems are hidden away. Shock comes from the unexpected, and the socially unacceptable. So what defines the line of acceptable? What normalized components of modernity come across as shocking when the realities of their production are revealed to be unjust?

Margaret Gray, author of *Labor and the Locavore* undertakes what I believe Pachirat would define as a "context sensitive politics of sight." In describing the potential paradoxes and pitfalls of the politics of sight model, Pachirat makes clear, projects that work to make visible ingrained locations and systems of concealed social, economic and moral confinement are essential, but such projects must do so with a clear positional awareness. To be effective, projects that employ a politics of sight must "acknowledge the possibility that sequestration will continue even under conditions of total visibility. … the need for a context-sensitive politics of sight that recognizes both the possibilities and pitfalls of organized, concerted attempts to make visible what is hidden and to breach … zones of confinement in order to bring about social and political transformation."(Pachirat, 2011: 255) Gray works to not only expose systemic injustice imposed on immigrant farm laborers, but also to put those into a holistic context of the labor economy of Hudson Valley farms. Gray states that her "field research certainly turned up evidence of labor and human rights abuses, but my primary goal is not to offer an exposé of this wrongdoing. Instead, I aim to present a deeper, contextual analysis of the typical work experience of farmworkers on these local farms and the many factors that have shaped it."(Gray, 2013: 43) Just as it is not Gray's goal to focus on case specific injustices, it is not my purpose writing here to retell the specifics of the labor abuses. I hope to situate an awareness of the broader labor-economy to help inform my analysis of possibilities and limitations for socially transformative work within the Hudson Valley's alternative food systems.

Gray's field work took place over an extended period of time and she had to go to great lengths to access conversations with the immigrant workers featured in her research. There is a vested interest in keeping the conditions and livelihoods of immigrant workers sequestered even

within alternative food networks, despite the tendency of alternative food network owners to promote connectivity through direct-to-consumer distribution, and despite the appearance of transparency through the storytelling that many businesses develop to describe their history, mission and practices. Pachirat describes that the politics of sight functions on the assumed social power of visibility and reaction on the part of the general public, and that this "assumption of 'power through transparency' also motivates those who fight to keep repugnant practices quarantined and sequestered from sight."(Pachirat, 2011: 247) In Gray's findings we see that the sequestration of immigrant farmworkers from public sight and conscience occurs at multiple levels; some of those operate in direct concealment, while others occur *selectively* in full view.

The general food system relies on systems of visual disconnect and closed distances between spaces like the farm, and food manufacturing facilities and the spaces of sale, and consumption that work to consolidate consumer interaction away from the systems of production. Food is transported in nondescript shipping containers, to nondescript supermarkets, where the status quo appearance and quality of produce, packaging and pasteurization strips away from food all signs of its origin and journey. These systems of confinement seek to create a social image of convenience for the consumer, disconnected from the hands that picked and processed, closed off from guilt and limitation. The shelves are always stocked, and non-native or off season options are abundant.

The small-scale, "locavore" alternative food system functions as the opposite. The local-scale, sustainable production farm's economic viability *is* visibility. Active promotion of amiable and connective markets, sustainable practice and healthy products are the selling point for local-scale farmers. They often sell at higher premiums to compete within local economies

where their consumer bases still have access to more affordable options from subsidized international food markets. There is an emphasis on storytelling and the value of "knowing where your food came from," of "knowing the farmer," and so on. So it is interesting to see that in this structure, as Pachirat suggests, sequestration may "continue even under conditions of total visibility,"(Pachirat, 2011: 255) as demonstrated by the often neglected plight of immigrant farm laborers working on many of these local-food-system farms.

The capitalist project of cyclical exploitation is one of the systems that socially reproduces economically incentivized adversarial or paternalistic worker-employer relationships and the ongoing subjugation and sequestration of immigrant workers. (Gray, 2013.) Immigrant farm laborers are put into positions without transportation, often with serious language barriers and on-site living, so that their boss becomes both their landlord and the gate-keeper to the outside world. This leaves them with little agency or collective bargaining, this can enable poor working and housing conditions. They often work up to 90 hours per week without overtime pay. (Gray, 2013.) Due to agrarian exceptionalist policy, what would likely be considered labor abuse in other industries is within the legal limits of farmwork. (Gray, 2013.) Meanwhile, farmers working outside of the industrial agriculture sector are experiencing higher overheads and land costs as well as lower rates of return for products. Smaller farms often fail to qualify for federal and state subsidies and regulations. Likewise, regulations often place a disproportionate burden on the small farms outside of the industrial sector. (Gardner, 2006.) The small farmer's ability to properly compensate laborers is stretched thin. Even farmers who would like to see better conditions for their workers are often economically invested in reproducing systemic inequalities within their own labor forces.

Power dynamics rely on blame displacement within systems of visible injustices. This shows how the repugnant impact of full visibility is made inert by unevenly distributed systems of agency and the moral and practical responsibility to maintain one's livelihood. These pressures work in tandem to decontextualize the cause-and-effect of repugnant or exploitative systems even when one is actively involved in them. Gray describes a shift in farmer, farmworker labor relations following the economic changes that globalization wrought upon small-scale farmers. “By the turn of the twentieth century the agricultural ladder was broken. Farmhands lost the opportunities available to previous generations, and seasonal work became normative and permanent. Economic and class disparities between farmers and their laborers widened. … the advent of the businessmen-farmers who, no longer sympathetic to the plight of farmhands, began to identify workers’ interests as hostile to their own and associated workers with both discipline problems and high costs.” (Gray, 2013: 30) The economic gaps between employment chains and thin resources associated with globalist competition spawn adversarial relationships that diminish the mutual humanity between parties involved in capitalist industries. This is a situation in which the politics of sight becomes difficult to keep track of, because visibility of material abuse is not necessarily the heart of the issue. The power of sequestration is built into social complexities that work to decontextualize the "visual" register of systematic exploitation.

A key argument in Gray's book is that food movement advocacy has largely left behind the issue of labor practice and labor economy within alternative food systems. The localism discourse that has come about in response to industrial farming, while acknowledging the abuse of farmhands in the industrial agriculture sector, has a deficit of critical labor conscience in scrutiny of its preferred alternative farms. When the ethics driven economic participants in local

food systems that Gray terms "locavores" buy produce at a premium from local sources, they are securing fresher, seasonal produce, but these benefits come at a social and moral premium. The next local food economies section in this paper goes into greater detail on the social and moral functions of the alternative food economies, but as Gray puts it, "consumers are led to believe that purchasing directly from farms facilitates an intimate, trusting relationship with the farmer, and this bond seals the common understanding that the local food production process is more wholesome and morally gratifying than the industrial commodity system."(Gray, 2013: 11) The assumed total visibility of purchasing directly from the producer in local markets is an example of power operating in a selective revealing of processes. Gray describes that this abdication of moral trust present in socially embedded direct-to-consumer practices "cannot but encourage locavores to set aside their concerns about the production process."(Gray, 2013: 11) This setting aside of concern permits moral gray zones.

Locavore ideologies are leveraged in an oppositional framework, where sustainably produced, locally-distributed agriculture is the *alternative* of the dubious industrial farm. This creates a narrative of moral binary, the good alternative against the bad mainstream. Narratives like this run the risk of reducing complex realities, especially since both business models exist within the capitalist logics and competitive markets. Industrial agriculture has undergone extensive publicity through projects that employ a politics of sight format for breaching and revealing concealed spaces and practices. Projects have leveraged the power of public reaction to create social transformation and awareness of repugnant agricultural practices. (Guthman, 2004.) These projects are a major motivator of alternative food networks in the first place; however, this process has also set new standards of repugnance for the ethical eater. These new standards may

have shifted public perception of sustainable farming to be outside the effectiveness of public reaction to repugnancy that Pachirat describes as the "emotive engine that is implicitly or explicitly assumed to generate their [projects using politics of sight] transformational power." (Pachirat, 2011: 252) This leads to what Gray has identified as a blind spot in food advocacies collective concerns. This blind spot allows the exploitation of farmworkers to be legitimized by the state and largely neglected by would-be forces of social transformation.

Gray appeals to food advocates to be more critical in their food activism. Her research sheds light on systemic issues, that "would yield lessons for scholars, policy makers, and activists."(Gray, 2013: 7) She proposes a a holistic local, a "comprehensive food ethic" asserting that, "Ethical eaters should be concerned if their own health and livelihoods are advanced at the expense of others."(Gray, 2013:3) In a capitalist world, this trade off is often taken for granted.

Those in places of privilege are always there because of the existence of exploitation. Local food systems claim to be a transparent alternative to massive agriculture akin to Pachirat's description of a world in which "every zone of privilege would exist in full contact with the zone of confinement that was its counterpart."(Pachirat, 2011: 242) But this implicit or sometimes explicit claim to moral exemption within your food choices cannot coexist with wilful or uninformed ignorance toward the underlying exploitation of the labor force. Gray asserts that, “Any code of ethical eating that ignores this perpetuation of injustice is highly selective, if not morally hollow.”(Gray, 2013: 67) She claims that "it remains the case that local or small agricultural producers are driven by market dictates and regulatory norms that render their approach to labor relations more or less indistinguishable from those of larger, commodity oriented, industrial farms."(Gray, 2013:2) By highlighting the ways in which this kind of

agricultural operation *does not* present an alternative to the massive agriculture business within the workings of capitalism she hopes to recenter the critical conscience of ethical eaters.

In discussing the gap between consumer concern over the treatment of animals and concern for the working conditions of farm hands, a farmer observed to Gray that, “They don’t eat the workers.” Gray describes the farmer's point that, “his consumers' primary concern is with what they put in their bodies, and so the labor standards of farmworkers simply do not register as a priority.” (Gray, 2013: 129) This example highlights one of the pitfalls of the politics of sight. What if the public doesn’t react to revealed exploitations with the disgust and pity that one might expect? What if the assumed and “anonymized gaze” that Foucault speaks of simply looks away out of disinterest? Gray responds to this by offering a definition of sustainability that includes the comprehensive health of community and land, differentiating this idea of sustainability from those who would pick and choose from the aspects of sustainable practice that directly benefit their own bodies and exclusive communities while valorizing themselves at the same time.

Local Food Economies

The Hudson Valley's local food movement and related agricultural projects can be seen as an alternative to the mainstream food system from multiple viewpoints and at the same time be a part of capitalist imperatives and competitive markets. A circulation of theories on the economic positioning of alternative food networks (AFN) are discussed in the article *For Food Space: Theorizing alternative food networks beyond alterity*. From a purely political-economic definition "true alternatives would counter capitalism and its tendencies." (Leitner, Cadieux, Blumberg, 2020: 3.) Systems like this would practices that resist the functions of capitalism and would attempt to exist and function outside or in direct opposition to capitalist markets. However, local food systems still rely on and exist within market competition and capitalist motivations. According to “For Food Space,” local food systems invest in an "array of different values, practices and social arrangements”, but they do so regardless of whether those values, practices, and arrangements “overtly challenge capital." (Leitner, Cadieux, Blumberg, 2020: 3.) The value systems along the chain of production, promotion, and distribution are alternative and understandings of success can include and prioritize practices and end goals beyond profitability. The article asserts that social conventions in economics represent "not simply the values that structure production-consumption networks, they also reflect institutional contexts, social and cultural constructions of quality, and even different understandings of profitability."(Leitner, Cadieux, Blumberg, 2020: 5.) AFNs are established by the development of interdependent interests within groups of producers and consumers to advance markets that provide material and social attributes not offered by the mainstream food system. AFN motivations include concerns for ecological health, food quality, food system transparency, and embedded farmer and

community relationships created by direct-to-consumer distributional practices such as community supported agriculture (CSA)[1] or farmers markets. The article describes these qualities as a social economy, "because they foster local circulations of economic value and they help address social needs."(Leitner, Cadieux, Blumberg, 2020: 6.) These social needs and desires might be met for some in AFNs but the conventions model of understanding AFNs does not account for the uneven distribution of social and fiscal access to these alternative spaces and food options.

In her book *The life of cheese* Heather Paxson introduces a concept that helps explain the added social value of goods that often leads to price premiums in what she refers to as an economy of sentiment. Economies of sentiment refers to "projects of multiple value making." (Paxson, 2013: 65.) In this model, the physical value of a product is enriched and connected by social, ecological and cultural value stemming from histories within a craft (farming), and community involved in the final marketable product (local farms and eaters). The connections made through market and non market interactions and relations in economic activity are social and the human embodiments of producing value are also embodiments of selfhood and community. (Paxson, 2013.) The allocation of value, the aspects, practices and products that a group of people finds worthy of social and fiscal investments, can be seen as a form of community and identity. For example, values are expressed by paying more for certain produce

[1] CSA's are a means of participating in local food systems and purchasing farm products. Instead of individually purchasing goods from a farm, participants buy shares of a farm's produce at the start of the season. They pay a set sum (often either up front or through a payment plan) and get access to regular offerings from the farm. This can look like pick your own, or farmstand style where you fill a bag or box with a set quantity of products from what is available. The CSA distribution model allows for a distribution of risks and rewards between the farm and the community that it serves. Farming comes with seasonal risks, loss of crops, a worker having to leave mid-season, or any number of events can greatly impact a farm's ability to function and profit. Farms can also have bumper seasons where production booms, in these cases members receive more produce. When payments are made regardless of these events in the form of shares there is less risk for the farmer and a greater connection with the communities involved.

in order to support a local farmer and eating certain fresh foods, spending more time at farmers markets as a social and food hub, or buying into and participating in a CSA share.

What if the interdependent interests of producers and consumers were to shift the conventions that shape the value systems and economic functions of alternative food to become more in line with a moral economy? *For food space* explores what a moral economy might consist of, including "relations of solidarity and justice with proximate and distant others, regard for the global environment, concern for social inclusion, interest in the well-being of the disadvantaged, and the reskilling of everyday life." To realize these goals within the confines of competitive markets under capitalism may not be feasible. This kind of socio-economic recentering would take more than a strong interest. *For food space* asserts that alternative networks are not "insulated from capitalist dynamics… even when elements of a moral economy infuse economic transactions between farmers and producers, farmer livelihoods are not protected from the effects of competition."(Leitner, Cadieux, Blumberg, 2020: 6.) Even if it doesn't fully counter capitalist tendencies, the will and the interest for solidarity or moral economic activity does exist within both consumer and producer groups. In my findings and results sections, I discuss some of the ways that solidarity efforts in small-scale Hudson Valley farming are being enacted.

For food space also asserts that the conventions associated with alternative food "engender alterity because they cultivate visceral reactions that are not produced when consuming food procured through conventional food networks." (Leitner, Cadieux, Blumberg, 2020: 8.) Visceral reactions include a sense of connectedness, of knowing where your food came from, how it found its way to your plate, and a supported belief that it was cultivated using

non-harmful agricultural methods. As seen in Margaret Gray's *Labor and the Locavore,* moral practices are not guaranteed within alternative food projects. Part of the local food economy is telling a story to imbue associations of ethical consumption with the sense of taste. Paxson states that, "Part of the story that sells cheese and other value-added farm products, after all, is a narrative of moral consistency: healthy foods are said to emerge from practices that also safeguard the environment; non alienated labor is imagined to generate particularly tasty foods." (Paxson, 2013: 93.) Here we see a common issue in the local food movement, where spatial relations are conflated with ethical ones and the selective visibility of certain positive practices becomes enough to assume an encompassing ethic. The gap between perception and reality hosts a variety of moral gray zones, including the immigrant farmworkers justice issues that I address in the labor and sight section of this paper, and the stratification of access to healthy food options and community food spaces.

Exclusive Localism

Farming is a historically low-income blue collar profession, yet it has become increasingly expensive to take part in. (Southard, 2021.) With a reviving romanticism surrounding farm work and the agrarian homestead lifestyle, (Jones, Dunn, 2022.) new farmers are coming to the business out of higher paying blue collar careers and higher class backgrounds. (Nevarez, 2020.) This new demographic of farmers might have financial savings and connections that can allow for access to an otherwise restrictive business with low financial viability for startups in the region. (Gray, 2013.) The type of person that has a majority of access to farming in expensive areas like the Hudson Valley will in many ways define the food culture of the region, the types of food produced, the ways in which it is marketed, and ultimately who ends up getting to eat it.

Local food economies can perpetuate income and social stratification and unequal access. An interview with Alison Hope Alkon, Yuki Kato, and Joshua Sbicca, co-editors of A Recipe for Gentrification: Food, Power, and Resistance in the City discusses some ways in which food can be a part of the mechanics of gentrification. Commercial gentrification often occurs alongside or before residential gentrification, and this is often felt directly through local food markets, as shifts in consumer demographics change the commercial standard for businesses. (Josée, Chrobok, 2020.) Food businesses and prices change in a short span of time, as old businesses go under and new entrepreneurs with different economic backgrounds and interests move into neighborhoods. (Nevarez, 2018.) Some pre-existing businesses and farms shift marketing strategies to adapt. Food outlets (markets, restaurants, and farm stands) become priced and structured in ways that no longer accommodate the interests or budgets of lower income local

populations, but instead are suited towards the demographics of more affluent newcomers. These newcomers are increasingly associated with rent hikes and housing scarcity. (Johnston and Chrobok, 2022.)

In her article Whiteness, Space and Alternative Food Practice, Rachel Slocum defines a typology on alternative food practitioners and patrons where "Those involved in alternative food tend to be economically and/or socially middle class. They have the wealth to buy organic, the inherited or schooled knowledge about nutrition or the environment and they are politically liberal to left." (Slocum, 2007: 3.) These demographic observations are generalizations but can be applied both to producers and consumers in the Hudson Valley. In many ways the dominant demographics of the producer (farmer, restaurateur, small business owner) in the region can reflect dominant consumer demographic trends as well. Those with money and middle to upper class backgrounds who choose to enter farming inevitably bring with them their class values, associations, connections, preferred methods of marketing and distributing goods. (Slocum, 2007.)

The interests and values of producers will shape the options and points of access to alternative food networks available for a variety of consumers. For example, a diversity of options available at markets that include culturally specific foods might either welcome or discourage different groups of people. (Slocum, 2007.) A variety of other producer-controlled aspects can affect the experience. Is the pricing of produce set to cater to higher income individuals? Are there options for people from a range of income levels? Do they accept SNAP and EBT? Are those food assistance payment methods in any way subsidized in order to compete with the caloric value per dollar that cheaper foods can offer? How, and where is a CSA

promoted? Where is the farmers market located? Is it only accessible by car? Is it located by majority white and affluent communities? The answer to questions like these can ultimately decide the kinds of communities that are fostered and included in alternative farming and the communities that are structurally rejected. Food justice oriented programs are integral to the creation of an equitable food system that isn't predominantly operated by and catered to white affluent residents of a region and that is not complicit in the displacement of groups that don't fit into the social and economic homogeneity.

Thomas Macias' article Working toward a just, equitable, and local food system: The social impact of community-based-agriculture describes the exclusion that can unintentionally occur in food and farming projects that seek to build alternatives to mainstream options. Macias questions whether local food movements have the capacity to create inclusive social change that confronts systemic injustices and uneven distribution of health and food access. He warns that when alternative projects don't include practical, well promoted, and comprehensive methods for access, especially extended to systematically marginalized groups, "there is a good chance food quality will be stratified with the relatively well-off having the best access and the rest of society left with food created primarily for mass production and easy distribution, product quality being a secondary concern." (Macias, 2008: 1088.) This is already the case in the wider American food system, as seen with issues such as food deserts, underfunded governmental food access, and distribution issues leading to high levels of food insecurity as well high levels of diet related diseases and health issues that disproportionately affect poorer and non-white neighborhoods. (Aviola, Nayga, Thomson, Wang. 2013.) Must it be the case that local food systems replicate these inequalities, or is there potential within local economies and food systems for grassroots,

coalitional efforts toward creating food justice and community resilience on local, context specific scale?

Food Accessibility and Solidarity

Mutual aid involves the reciprocal exchange of resources and services within a community. It operates on the collective responsibility to provide for one another within the shared social or physical spaces that people inhabit. The management mutual aid should be organized by grassroots, coalitional networks where power is shared amongst the constituents, signatories, and beneficiaries. Ideally, mutual aid should acknowledge both the uneven realities of a) resource distribution and access to the benefits of society, and b) subjugation to state violences, systemic poverty and extractive racial capitalism[2]. Mutual aid should also actively resist the consequences of maldistribution of resources and targeted state violences that are disproportionately felt across different identity groups within the United States' patriarchal social system, which is seeded in white supremacy, heteronormativity, and deeply rooted class divisions. (Spade, 2020.)

Mutual aid networks often coalesce in communities where systemic needs or grievances are structurally unmet or underfunded by state and private infrastructures that fail to adequately provide vital services and functions such as emergency food access, health care, employment, and other assistance programs. Mutual aid networks are a decentralized response to these gaps in the social support network, and operate independently from state and private organizations that often frame "need" as being a personal failing, and qualify access to aid with bureaucratic and/or moralistic conditions. (Spade, 2020.) In *Solidarity not Charity: Mutual Aid for Mobilization and*

[2] Racial capitalism is an understanding of the interdependence between racism and capitalism in function, historical emergence and continued existence. (Kundnani, 2020.) Capitalism relies on the reproduction of racial exploitation, the root cause of massive wealth accumulation and the global commodity economy. The systems that perpetuate cyclical exploitation and the struggle of immigrant farm workers discussed in the labor and sight section of this paper.

Survival Dean Spade writes that, "In capitalism social problems resulting from maldistribution and extraction are seen as individual moral failings of targeted people. Getting support in a context that see the systems, not the people suffering in them, as the problem can help combat the isolation and stigma." (Spade, 2020: 137.) Assistance in a mutual aid framework should be given based on need, not on the ability to meet conditional factors.

Food precarity is becoming increasingly serious, and the US is experiencing an epidemic of diet related illness that is perpetuated by the architecture of food deserts, poverty and corporation friendly food policy. (Aviola, Nayga, Thomson, Wang. 2013.) Will Allan, renown Wisconsin farmer and advocate for making sustainable agriculture accessible to underserved communities writes in *A Good Food Manifesto for America* that, “What is happening is that many vulnerable people, especially in the large cities where most of us live, in vast urban tracts where there are in fact no supermarkets, are being forced to buy cheaper and lower-quality foods, to forgo fresh fruits and vegetables, or are relying on food programs – including our children’s school food programs – that by necessity are obliged to distribute any kind of food they can afford, good for you or not. And this is coming to haunt us in health care and social costs. No, we are not suddenly starving to death; we are slowly but surely malnourishing ourselves to death. And this fate is falling ever more heavily on those who were already stressed: the poor." (Allan, 2019.) Issues around the access to healthy food have far reaching consequences and are implicated in entrenched inequalities.

Local food systems can work to address these issues by focusing on how inequalities manifest on a local scale and by identifying existing social movements and skill sets, organizing politically, and sharing knowledge and resources with aligned organizations and businesses.

Projects that involve aspects of mutual aid can work to build social mobility within communities. Social mobility makes for stronger, inclusive communities that are able to organize people, businesses, and their unique skills, around common grievances. This can develop into context specific preparedness to handle conflict, meet needs and withstand the impacts of climate change, war, disease, and related shocks to global systems by increasing community based reliance separate from the often volatile global economy. Spade states that "expanding the use of mutual aid strategies will be the most effective way to support vulnerable populations to survive, mobilize significant resistance, and build the infrastructure we need for the coming disasters." (Spade, 2020: 131.) As climate worsens and the disastrous practices of industrial agriculture and the petrochemical corporations continue to degrade top soil and environmental systems, the divides in access to healthy food will continue to grow. (Montenegro de Wit, 2021.)

The increasingly common disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic also show how systems for emergency relief are stretched thin and limited. Maywa Montenegro de Wit's book *Abolitionist Agroecology: Food Sovereignty and Pandemic Prevention* explores the relationships between the COVID-19 pandemic and global food systems and ecologies. The negative effects on biodiversity and distinctive ecological zones that global food supply and massive agriculture continually obliterate have created a highly pandemic prone planet. (Montenegro de Wit, 2021.) Global policies around land use and resource distribution have led to existential vulnerabilities paired with infrastructures that are ill equipped to withstand disaster. Montenegro de Wit states the level of food assistance need in the US during the height of the pandemic in 2020, "Feeding America, the nation’s largest network of food banks, said it was experiencing a 98 percent increase in demand – with some banks in rural areas so overwhelmed they had to close."

(Montenegro de Wit, 2021: 15.) This brings us back to the semi-rural setting of the Hudson Valley, where food access issues skyrocketed during the pandemic. Small farms had a hand in meeting on the ground food needs during the worst of the pandemic, and farms play a role in ongoing food justice work in the Hudson Valley region. (Fowler, 2020.) Many farms, both for profit and non-profit, reprioritized to meet the crisis by donating large quantities of produce to emergency food distributors.

While local food systems can trend more toward replicating systemic divisions, I have found in my qualitative research that smaller scale farming networks can also offer opportunity for social transformation and effective food justice work. This is occurring with an emerging interest in food justice work and socially active farming amongst small-scale producers in the valley, and enabled by the coalition building that the personal scale of local farms, and the adjacent regional food and farming advocacy organizations lend themselves to. When carefully directed, local food programs and farms can address context specific and practical needs within the region, creating more resilient and equitable food spaces and distribution.

Methodology

The bulk of my research consisted of seven personal interviews with local farmers. In the early stages of research I contacted 20-30 local farms with a drafted interview recruitment letter. I interviewed two for-profit farms and four non-profit farms. The non-profits were much more responsive. One interviewee, Megan Larmer is the food and farming program director at Glynwood. I met most of the interviewees as an apprentice at Four Corners farm in Red Hook, NY. I submitted my interview research proposal to Bard College's IRB and received clearance to research. I recorded and transcribed all of my interviews, which ranged between 30 and 90 minutes long. I developed my research questions in coordination with my senior project advisors. The questions were designed to highlight personal experiences, opinions, and practices regarding food distribution, financing, labor, land-ownership, outreach, and other topics related to food access and the viability of small-scale farming in the region. Interviewees all consented to having the conversation recorded and having their names and associated farms reported directly in the paper. I cleaned direct quotes to make the content of the statements direct and understandable.

In addition to the interview process, I rely on participant observation drawn from a number of different Hudson Valley agriculture events, spaces, and jobs that I worked in the past year. These include CRAFT farmer teach-in events at regional farms, Glynwood hosted events and seminars during my time as an apprentice, the farmer housing working group convening, and the CSA coalition summit. They also include my time working at a farmers market in Copake, New York, and my work at Four Corners community farm. I took careful notes with pen and paper at these events and journaled collectively during my summer working in these farm spaces.

In the first semester of my research I engaged with these topics through a geospatial data lens. I used the program ArcGIS Pro to analyze publicly available data related to health, food access, income, and other signifiers related to the local food system. This aspect of the research helped significantly in the writing of this paper. I have compiled figures and descriptive writing to show the data driven aspects of this project. The figures and more in depth data analysis can be accessed via this URL.

https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/2dd7ae25708c4666a0562a6a57122107

Link for data based research and descriptive writing done through ArcGIS Pro.

There are limitations and flaws in my interview research design that I address here to provide transparency of process and result. The sample size of this project was very small. I had trouble hearing back from most of the for-profit farms that I contacted. From seven participants it is difficult to draw generalizations or representations for a larger group of people. The typology of regional farmers was also inconsistent, further diluting the ability of this research to accurately represent a larger group of farmers. There were four non-profit farmers, two for-profit farmers and one non-profit program director. The farmers I interviewed also varied between owner/managers and contracted managers. The duration of interviews was also inconsistent and depended on how well the conversation ran, and how much time the interviewee had to spare. The shortest interview was just under 30 minutes while the longest interview lasted one hour and 45 minutes. The content and questions in the interviews would also vary. I adapted questions on the fly to fit the conversational direction of each given interview. I would choose to skip or modify certain questions if I had felt the topic had already been addressed from a previous tangent or response. The location and mode of communication was inconsistent. One interview

was held inside the participant's home, and discussion took place over tea and cookies, compared to another interview which took place outside on a farm in cold December winds. Meanwhile, the remaining five interviews each took place either over Zoom video chat, or via phone call. This is worth noting because I believe the environment and physical context of a conversation will change the attitudes and sentiments of its participants.

Findings

Moving to my interview and participant observation findings section. I have organized my combined participant observational and interview-based research findings into several topics and subtopics. These categories include personal motivations, systemic issues or struggles, and successful practices and possibilities. I start with a summary of the backgrounds, aspirations, and ideals of the study group. The study group includes interview participants, people I met and interacted with at various regional farming events, and apprentices and farmers I worked and learned with during my summer in the Glynwood apprenticeship program.

Research Participants.

Interviewee description.

Half of my interviewees did not grow up around agriculture or come from agricultural families. The other half either grew up in or adjacent to agriculture, with one multi-generational farmer. All of them spoke of their college education in relation to their involvement in agriculture. From professional theater and classical opera, to studies in environmental science, food studies and social work, backgrounds also included labor organizing, politics, social work, and non-profit coordination. Most participants went through several career changes or worked adjacent to agriculture before becoming full time farmers. Some had conflicted class relationships around farming. For example, some participants came from middle class families that did not initially value farming as a legitimate career, or viewed it as a lower class vocation. The majority come

from middle to upper middle class backgrounds, and now either identify as working middle class or working class.

Age	Racial Group	Gender Group	Economic Class
60s	White	Female	Blue collar
40s	White	Male	Middle Class
-	-	Female	Middle Class
30s	White	Non-binary	Middle Class
30s	White	Non-binary Trans-femme	Working class
30s	White	Female	Middle class

Self-identified demographic information of the research participants.

Overall study group.

My research participants expressed personal motivation coming from the need to maintain a connection with the earth and their food through being outdoors, and working with their hands. There is a strong belief that every person should have access to a relationship or understanding of the food you eat and where it comes from, how it is cultivated, and how it is procured. There is also an expressed desire for self directedness, valuing agency separate from an institution or company. There is an emphasis on the service aspect of farm work and that there is a responsibility on behalf of the farmer to their land and community constituents, and that their food and work should not just cater to wealthier consumers.

Attention to food accessibility.

Across my interviews and in my interactions at the multiple convenings I attended, it became clear to me that food-access is a priority or concern for many regional, small-scale farmers, with a regard for food as a political tool. It was felt that breaking bread and bringing food to the table has organizational and community power building potential. In this way, many of the farms I have interacted with had implicit or explicit political motivations and situate their projects within larger social contexts.

Tenant Farming.

A primary topic that emerged in my research are issues related to the practice of tenant farming. Housing and real estate in the Hudson Valley has become increasingly expensive and many farmers rely on leasing land to run their businesses. There are a number of programs that pair landowners and tenant farmers. These are promoted as a positive for farmers and landowners. Landowners get tax write-offs associated with agricultural land use, farmers get the opportunity to farm without needing to own land. Farmers in theory get to lease and start their farms as usual. However, interviewees contended that not every landowner is as onboard with farm operations as they might initially believe themselves to be. The Valley is promoted as an agrarian space and many people are drawn to it because of that. In practice being in close and constant proximity to farm life can be too disruptive and unpleasant for some Hudson Valley landowners. Interviewees described some ways in which lease contracts and landowners can be

restrictive with what the tenant farmer can actually do on a property, and the ways tenant farming can curtail operations and land stewardship.

Tenant tensions.

Tensions can arise and antagonisms with landowners are felt amongst the three tenant farmers I spoke with in interviews and those that I met during participant observation fieldwork. An anonymous responder described some of the popular tenant to landowner matchup programs, and that these programs may be more difficult than advertised. An anonymous respondent discussed non-profit tenant farmer matchup projects as promoting a fantasy of easy access to becoming a farmer, "Like, follow these steps and take this course and like YouTube, it in some ways sets you up for failure. [...] The whole, like, matching of landowners with farmers, I got the grant and I was really on board a few years ago, especially when I got my piece, like it worked. [...] then this is kind of predatory because, now I'm in it real deep. Yeah, these organizers don't get it and then, these owners don't get it. They're actually stifling me and they're actually antagonistic in a lot of ways." This farmer felt that matchup programs should implement more involved training for landowners, systems of negotiation to level the power dynamics inherent in a landlord to tenant relationship. "I feel like the landowners need more training in these tenant to landowner farming match ups. Because it should be a two-way thing. We're putting down a lot of money, and then to be at the whim of the landowner. What I am gonna leave behind when this falls apart is a pretty nice spot for the next farmer from all the sweat equity I put into this land that I lease, and I don't get jack out of it in the end."

For other tenant farmers the constant worry about lease renewals and rent increases hampered their ability to run a successful farm business and lead an enjoyable life. Talea, the tenant farmer at Montgomery Orchards on land recently acquired by Bard College, describes the everyday stresses of farming on a year-to-year lease, "Every year we were like, oh my god, are we going to be here next year? But this property is a seductress and once you get your blood, sweat and tears in the soil. You can't leave. We have given everything here but it's not ours." Since Bard acquired the land Montgomery place is now much more secure, with a long term lease agreement. Longer term leases, for instance 15 or 30 years, allow farmers to more securely invest in the land with their labor, farming practices that prioritize longevity of land over fast production, and infrastructural improvements or additions.

Time scales.

On the tenants' side, farming and shorter term lease agreements take place on conflicting timescales. The seasonality of a farm takes place over many years, while the time scale of a lease exists rigidly, and is subject to changes in markets. Short-term leases make investing in machinery, infrastructure or the soil itself far more of a risk. Talea recalled farming the Montgomery Place land before securing a long-term lease agreement. "Being on a year-to-year lease, there were so many limitations. How many apple trees are you going to plant if you don't know if you're going to be here next year, right? There are a zillion things we would have done if we had had a longer term lease from the start." This can leave farmers very apprehensive about what is worth planting or which practices are worth pursuing when dealing with a shorter term lease. For example, cover cropping involves planting a parcel of land with a non-productive crop

like clover with the intent to fix nitrogen and other vital minerals, replenishing the soil's vitality in between plantings of more exhaustive, but immediately marketable crops like zucchini. It is a great practice for the longevity of soil, it is good for the farmer, the produce and the environment. But when you lease on a short term, leaving a whole plot of land to be "non-productive" for a season can be a very risky move. And that longevity work may not even count for the farmer if the lease ends. Talea explains the conundrum, "With a year lease are you going to put in a cover crop or are you going to plant zucchini that you can get money back if you don't know, if you're going to be here?" Talea suggested that within tenant farmer and landowner agreements there should be some form of subsidy in place or payment coming from the landowner that compensates farmers for environmental stewardship practices. "Soil is the most important thing we've got, that we're supposed to be taking care of, and I feel like, if there are tenant farmers, the land owner has to somehow compensate to make sure that you can do cover crops and do everything correctly without endangering your financial security at the same time." This can ensure farmers are able to plant cover crops and be proper stewards of the land within the market logic of a lease, without endangering the farmers financial security.

Generational shift.

Real estate costs and the switch to tenant farming have also contributed to an overall decrease in the number of regional farms. Generational Hudson Valley farms are in one way or another pressured out of agriculture. Talea from Montgomery farm gave me several examples of this. She recounted a story about her friend and neighboring farmer Chuck Mead, who sold his farm Mead Orchards. The farm was bought by someone unrelated to agriculture, the new owner

hired Chuck Mead to manage what was previously his own farm. Talea told a similar story about her friends, the Fralee's, who used to run Rose Hill Farm before they sold out and moved from the valley. They, like Chuck Mead, were generational farmers. There is a trend of generational farm owners having to sell their farmland to wealthier, non-agricultural buyers, who then in many cases lease back to farmers or hire managers. One interviewee expressed worry after discussing the increase in farmland being bought and the decrease in farm operations, "I definitely feel worried in terms of land tenure. A lot of farmland is being purchased by folks who can afford it but who are not necessarily farmers. All the statistics are showing that many, many farms will be for sale in the coming five to ten years. So who's purchasing those, and will they continue to be farmed? How will they be farmed?" This farmer is not alone in this concern. When speaking with a few young farmworkers and apprentices I heard again and again a sense of uncertainty: Is farming a viable career choice? Will I ever be able to own a farm of my own?

Labor.

Moving from tenant farming issues I bring up the topic of labor and workplace practice. The majority of my interview participants identified fair labor practices as a high priority both on personal and project wide levels. Most farmers I interacted with want to provide well paying jobs that allow workers to make a living. I heard the theme repeatedly in conversation with various farmers at CRAFT events, the farmer housing working group convening, and the CSA summit. Some of the farmers I interviewed are working to implement innovative methods for cultivating positive work cultures and liveable wages. Some examples include cultivating workplace

cultures that allow for bottom up leadership and decentralized authority, sharing meals, formalizing pre-shift check ins, and forming workers cooperatives, where seasonal profits are evenly distributed amongst the crew. While there are positive steps being taken, labor is a very difficult aspect of farming for all involved.

Employers.

For small farmers seeking to hire a farm crew, finding skilled, and committed workers can be a real challenge. Non-profit programs like the Glynwood apprenticeships and state run programs like the H2A visa temporary farmworker program can meet needs, but these often involve complicated applications, difficult requirements, and bureaucracies. Not all farmers have the time or ability to meet these requirements. My interviewees discussed several of the limiting factors for hiring. There is a mismatch between the difficulty and commitment level of the work and the base pay that farmers can offer. This disconnect further extends to the high cost of living in the Hudson Valley, and is magnified by the shortage in affordable housing across the region.

Housing.

Commute distance is an important factor. Farm days start early, and longer commute times are a barrier to potential employees. Katie Speicher, the farm manager from Common Ground farm, a non-profit project in Beacon, NY, describes issues with housing and commuting as it relates to a farm's ability to hire labor. Speicher describes situations where, "folks commute from over an hour away because they couldn't find an affordable place to live here and then you know, ultimately quit because that's completely unsustainable for farming. Or I've had folks turn

down a job offer because they couldn't relocate. And I think housing costs and cost of living versus the pay don't really align." Housing pressure can force workers to leave farm crews mid-season, which can be devastating during the producing season. When relying on a small crew, the absence of one worker can mean the need for farmers to compensate with dangerously long work weeks and a downscale of production.

Farms with included or discounted on-site housing have an advantage in hiring labor. The farm manager from Phillies Bridge Farm, in New Paltz, NY, said "Housing was available for me last year, free of charge. And we have a three-bedroom bunkhouse for apprentices, which has private bedrooms and bathroom and kitchen. And so I think that that's like a real asset that we can offer, especially given what I've seen for farm crew positions going around out there right now without housing. And it's like, okay, you're paying $17 an hour and someone has to pay rent from that. Like, it's just really hard." At the same time, on-site housing has some drawbacks for employees. It limits work-life balance and complicates employer-employee relationships with simultaneous tenant-landlord dynamics.

The Farmer Housing Working Group is a coalition of regional farmers, community land trust members, and housing advocates formed out of the pressing need for affordable housing for farmworkers. The group is funded by a Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant to pay wages for the advocacy work involved in organizing for housing development action. It has taken on the role of pre-planning and organizing resources and related organizations toward the goal of improving the viability for regional farming through affordable housing work.

Job precarity and H2A visa workers.

The seasonal nature of agricultural work is another difficulty for laborers and employers alike. Outside of greenhouse production, and overwintered crops like squash or sometimes kale, farms have a practically capped window for production. This means that laborers are not guaranteed year round income, and benefits are not often included. For many products, like apples, there still are no practical technologies to assist in harvest. This means that for larger farms, massive workforces are required for harvest seasons. This labor demand is almost entirely met by H2A and undocumented immigrant workers. Talea, the farmer from Montgomery place, describes larger farms in the region that employ as many as 300 hundred H2A workers seasonally. Montgomery Place Orchards farm operations employ three H2A visa workers from Jamaica. Talea spoke about her working relationship with this crew, having hired back the same people year after year, "...none of us do anything. Like, I don't go to weddings. I say, you have these people coming up here and giving up their life. I can't just sit back and do less than them." There is a culture and pressure to work excessively long work weeks that is often standard on farms.

Work environment.

Farm crews for small scale operations usually number between 3-15 workers, depending on the size of the operation and how many workers are full-time or part-time. I spoke with a few young farmworkers at the CSA coalition summit. They recounted work environments in which they were stuck working with toxic individuals. Due to the shortage of labor and the extreme workload of farming, firing problematic individuals often doesn't seem like an option and farm

managers might fail to deal properly with workplace conflicts and problems. Many farm managers have limited experience and little or no training in handling conflict.

Issues like this highlight the importance of skilled leadership and management on small farms. One manager I spoke with at the CSA coalition described some of the ways that she uses her leadership position to foster a positive work culture. She named community meals as one of the most valuable culture-building tools. Also important were bottom up leadership and active communication between the team, to seek input from workers, giving voice to all levels of the crew. She also said that it is important to communicate the bigger picture, the "why" of the work, with sincere enthusiasm.

Chris Nickel from Finca Seremos, a start-up CSA based farm, describes the importance of the management role, and of the experience brought to the task by themself and their partner. "We both have the advantage of having been farm managers before. And that makes a huge difference. I think in the agricultural world, you have a lot of people who are getting promoted to managers, because they've been on the farm or been farming for three, five, seven years. And that's the only qualification. Rarely is there training that's offered. The reason you get the position is because you've been farming for a while. Years farming does not a good manager make." Finca Seremos is not at the stage of hiring on additional workers, but Chris described to me some of the methods they plan on using to cultivate an equitable workplace with economic justice at the forefront. These include cluster hiring and the creation of a workers cooperative, which I discuss in the results section.

Non-profit staff retention and pay.

In the case of non-profit food and farm organizations, there was a reported trend of low pay, poor staff retention and in some accounts toxic workplace environments. One interviewee described an atmosphere that care work is thought of as unpaid work within the grant and funding world that non-profit organizations are a part of. When discussing funds within non-profit programs, Megan Larmer, director of regional food and farming programming for Glynwood, notes that funders are ready to supply money for physical things, like infrastructure and other very tangible investments, but when it comes to the day to day needs like direct food donation, and especially hours worked by organizers, funding becomes scarce. "They don't want to fund actually just buying the food and what they really, really don't want to fund is my time. Raising money to cover my time and Michelle's time is the number one hardest ask for this work." During the CSA Coalition summit, NY farmer Christina Chan admonished that "part of non-transactional work is making sure you don't exploit yourself."

Rebecca Yoshino encountered a similar workplace trend while working a non-profit farm. A parallel is noted in some of these cases where the work and goals of the organization line up with the farmers personal ideals and motivations but the social structuring and labor relations lead to burnout and underappreciation. My interviewees frequently reported staff retention issues. Yoshino reported that "The work that was happening with the Hmong American Farmers Association for example, checked so many boxes for me. So many boxes and these weren't even organic farmers either. And yet, it was like a really toxic work environment. If you look at everybody that's in leadership roles there, besides the people that are on the very very top there's like a complete turnover every year. It's tricky if you are reliant on external funding, especially if there's lots of strings attached from grants. I think that the non-profit model can be really

problematic." Sam from Four Corners farm describes some of the ways that the need to cater to funders can detract from the on the ground efforts for non-profit groups. "The hard thing about running a non-profit, you're constantly chasing the money. So you're crafting these programs to address whatever hot topic is at the moment. And then people lose interest and so you skip to the next one oftentimes. Money begets money, you have to kind of associate with certain people and schmooze and get into these circles to get access to that money, and then those people kind of dictate what you're able to do and what you're not able to do."

A lot of staff retention and wage issues come down to finances. As one non-profit farm manager describes, the relationship between a non-profit organization's board and its employees can be one thing on a personal level and be another when financial accountability is involved. "I feel like I am constantly in a little bit of tension with my board of directors, the folks who are making those decisions. I think, you know, that everyone believes that we should be paying people a living wage, but does that play out in reality? [...] I think all of them have really good hearts and really want good things. But, you know, at the end of the day, if this organization were to go bankrupt, the board of directors role is to be responsible fiscally, so they're not going to put themselves into any dangerous financial positions." Calls for change reflect this. Farmers concerned with non-profit work in their responses mention a need for more funding toward existing non-profit groups.

Local Food Markets.

In this section I discuss findings that are related to the marketability of local food. All participants generally agreed that there had been an increased interest in local food as a distinct value and consumer movement. They cited more traffic at farm stands, more income from sustainable practice production and promotional projects, and increased attention to farming and food related non-profits.

Pricing.

Yoshino discussed some of the circumstances that lead sustainable farmers to price higher, asserting that profit isn't the bottom line for most farmers, at least not by choice. "The premiums that people have to pay are really intense for local food. At the same time local farms, especially sustainable local farms are including in their price points all of the externalities that big commercial farms pass on to the next generation in terms of polluted water, air, degraded soil. So that is a tough thing. I mean I don't think that there's any small farms even if they're selling, you know, bags of three baby bok choy for like 10 dollars that are running home to the bank. Like everybody's holding on by a shoe string." A lot of small-scale farmers have personal morals related to the ecology of their land and the wholeness of their practice with it. There are moral values that a number of the farmers I spoke with associated with sustainable practice, fresh produce, and an idea that having a relationship with your food through knowing the people who produce it increases the enjoyment one receives. One farmer spoke about the ephemeral nature of fresh produce. "I believe fruit and vegetables have an energy, and the sooner you eat that vegetable, the healthier it is for you. There's just some unknown." Many regional farms are very

specific with their messaging, and their businesses mission, the story they tell of themselves and their products.

Added value.

Moral or sentimental practices in the production and distribution process do become entwined with profitability. They become part of the promotional messaging of a farm or food practice. Farmer Sam describes this as, "They're selling a lifestyle, they're influencing whatever you want to call it. And, that's not something I want to do personally, but I understand that it's sometimes necessary, especially when you can only sell a food product for so much money. You've got to add some value to it, right? And you can add value to it by turning it into a pie or through cideries. But like, there's a lot of cideries… the whole lifestyle thing just seems to be pretty profitable these days." For Sam at Four Corners, where produce is made for direct donation, selling to rich people is not what he wants to do. Curating a marketing story in order to add premium to food is not something he wants to take part in. But he also made clear that it is in part due to his financial background, family and socio-economic position that he is able to take a role in farming where profit is not of primary concern. He describes that he isn't "disparaging people who decide to go to the Rhinebeck market and cater to folks with money. To me I have the luxury that I have enough money in the bank that I can take these few years to hopefully break even, and not like, lose my house. Like that is a privilege that I have and I get that people who don't have that privilege need to make some money to survive. So they will cater to who they cater to to keep the farm."

The added value that a sentimental economy might imbue its products with, as Rebecca articulated, does not necessarily equate to a spectacular increase in profit. Talea describes her aversion to the steep incline in food pricing at her farm stand, using jars of jam as an example. "I'm like five dollars a jar. they're selling it nine and ten dollars a jar now and i would have never done that. Then the packaging keeps going up too so it's not like we're making more money." Beyond the added cost of sustainable farming practices, overhead costs, operational costs, and production costs like packaging are increasingly expensive.

Socio-economic shift.

The farmers at Montgomery place noticed a dramatic shift in the popularity of local food taking place sometime in the late 90's, early 00's. The change in their farmstand business was the marker of this shift. The stand went from being a low revenue stand that had to be supplemented through sales at farmers markets to its current role, Montgomery farms only point of sale, where along with the farm's own products they retail for 72 other local producers. Talea recalls "There was a time when we'd be lucky if we had three people come during the day [...] People weren't foodies yet, the wave hadn't hit." Now their farmstand is busy round the clock on a summer's day, "This year we had over 72 vendors that I write checks out to, just in this tiny farm stand. They're all regional within a two hours drive. We bought and sold 35 thousand dollars worth of flowers last year. Flowers alone. This speaks to the change in community too. That's what the change in our farmstand is from." This shift in community has to do with the changing socio-economic character of the Hudson Valley, as over the past 20 years affluent residents largely from New York City have moved into the region.

Class conscience.

As in the case of Montgomery Place orchards, even with a good level of success, farmers are often overworked. They don't get to be a part of many of the products and services they sell. Telea describes the average work week on the farm. "We do 40 hours a week through the winter season and much more during the producing season. There is no balance. Our biggest thing is we don't eat the food we grow. I had breast cancer six years ago. I had made a list, and number one was, we're going to eat the food we grow. You're too tired by the end of the day." The differing labor class of the producer and the predominant economic class of the consumer appears to have created a unique interest in socially active farming that in cases prioritizes workers wages, and the accessibility of food. Megan Larmer describes the character of the Hudson Valley farmer as being in tension with a capitalist mismatch between producers and consumers of the local food movement. "The CSA is a SNAP project completely grew up out of coalition meetings where farmers were explicitly saying, I'm unhappy that my food is so expensive, and people on limited funds can't get it. I think a lot of that comes from this sort of entrant farmer world, or people who have worked in different industries, or lived in different places and have sort of a more cosmopolitan political identity. And I think a lot of it comes from changing industries, when people moved out of whatever kind of work they were doing before, came out of college and became a farmer. They were poor, like, really poor. And so they have class conscience. That belies how expensive the food they sell is, it's a capitalist mismatch. It's not by their fault, but that's part of what sort of sparks that real drive towards economic justice and access work."

Within farm spaces some farmers are able to do more with food accessibility than others based on different socio-economic positions, and business models. Economic and organizational conditions permit for differing levels of food access work. And it has been clear to me through my participation in summits and these interviews that most folks are on the same side, and want to be engaging in the same things, even if they must do so to differing extents.

Accessibility and food spaces.

Here I build off of the context given by the local markets subtopic to discuss findings related to the accessibility of local food spaces and products.

Community strength.

I spoke with Chris Nickel from Finca Seremos, where they use a dynamically edited sliding scale CSA that ensures an equal split of high income and low income participants. This model of facilitating an equal split between higher and lower paying participants self-subsidizes food accessibility and involvement in the social aspects of a CSA. The social aspect includes the weekly shared space of picking up produce, and various community events that farms will sometimes host for their CSA members. Nickel's farm will be distributing food into their home neighborhood in Brooklyn. Nickel described this neighborhood as having a split community between more affluent individuals and a much lower income working class population. The farmers have connections and social networks within both communities. Nickel speaks about the faith they have in the farm's ability to bring people together and build community power,

"There's a real way in which CSA can be a powerful community making tool that fights against a lot of the divisions that exist in our neighborhood […] it can create meaningful coalitional relationships that can then be utilized for different ends." As an example, Nikel described community power building through CSA spaces as the possibility for things like tenants unions to form in natural conversation and the meeting of capabilities and needs found within a community. "It doesn't really matter what the campaign is, it's the social mobility that is important."

In addition to CSA as a distributional model, some farmers mentioned that pre-arranged contracts with emergency food distribution organizations could be a boon to the business. With pre-season contracts they can plan out certain acres specifically for those organizations, this covers a certain yield as paid for without needing to do promotional work and with much less ambiguity concerning the success or demand in sales of one crop over another in CSA distribution and farmers markets. It also engages farmers with the food accessibility work they might want to take part in without putting themselves at risk of exploiting themselves. Mentioned was the importance of creating long term relationships with pantries and other emergency food organizations.

Creating spaces outside of the traditional transactional relationship.

During the CSA coalition the concept of the farm as a third space was addressed via a closing panel. They described an "epidemic of disconnects" to self, others and nature occurring in our world. Countering these disconnects was the concept of tending to soil. The metaphorical inner soil and social soil, and to the physical topsoil. Using CSA as a model, they discussed how

farmers might be able to offer a connection back to the earth for non-farmers, a tending to of these metaphorical and literal soils. The panel also mentioned non-physical third spaces, systems of mutual support and nourishment. I found in my interviews several examples of physical and non-physical third spaces taking place through farming.

Examples of third space farming.

Yoshino's work with the Bard farm is very well integrated with the campus community and seeks to develop connections between students, food, and land. Her farm space interfaces extensively with the arts and hosts community events, teach-ins and class visits often, while providing healthy produce to the campus. Rebecca says that, "Ultimately I am just trying to create an open, and inclusive, and safe, and nourishing space for people to come and be disarmed together, and find common ground through a multitude of practices." Non-profit farmers whose projects have summer camp components spoke to the importance of connection with people through land, food and being outdoors as very important for youths and that this brings a deeper relationship to food, and natural systems for families. Many of these programs were minimal or free of charge for families with lower incomes.

Suz from Phillies bridge talks about the Hudson Valley apprenticeship program run by Glynwood that supplies an apprentice hiring apparatus for participating farms, and how it was a benefit to farm mentors as well as mentees. She spoke about the community between farmers that arose through the program, "There was a mid-summer social event. [...] We just went swimming, ate food, and then inevitably talked about work and had some really great conversations while still in towels and bathing suits about like, oh, this is feeling really hard.

How do we deal with this? What's your strategy? How are you separating your life from your work, when you live at your work? What are your strategies? And we had at the orientation last week, one of the farmers was like, hey, can we start a text group or a group chat?" These unofficial networks of communication and knowledge sharing relate to the concept of a non-physical third space, or unofficial community forum.

The food access work that farmer Sam Rose is a part of was started largely in response to the effect that the COVID 19 pandemic had on food systems, and food security in the region. Four Corners donates all the food it produces to underserved people in his community, ensuring the highest quality of produce. Additionally the farm runs a community garden. He speaks of the community farm aspect and the emergency food efforts as two well suited endeavors to meet the immediate needs in his local community, especially during the pandemic. The community farm and garden plots offered a way for people to safely interact within social distancing measures and the food access brought people together around a common, and universal goal of feeding those in need.

Talea describes making food accessible as a difficult thing within the financial world of a small farm business. But she feels it is nonetheless a responsibility of hers. "I just try to take care of my pond if that makes sense." At the same time she feels that some farms might have a negative connection with what makes a donation worthwhile, that "Sometimes people donating things, it's them dumping unwanted things." She holds the quality of donation or food accessible options to a standard such that she, "never wants to dump things on people, ever." This sentiment is expressed by other interviewees as well and is the operating ideal of Four Corners farm, that "Just because you're getting it for free it shouldn't be of a lower quality." Talea believes that the

small scale of the Montgomery Place orchard is very important to its functionality within a community context. She describes her belief that, "I always felt like farms should not be bigger than supplying for [something like] 300 families. If you start doing more than that your level of responsibility sort of goes out the door because then you don't even know who's really eating your food. But if you're staying small, you're going to make sure everything you're doing is safe and good and healthy."

Coalitional farming.

Megan Larmer's work with the food sovereignty fund is a program that establishes produce contracts between farmers and underserved communities within their regions. The fund was started in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It continues with its mission statement, "The fund pays farmers, in advance, for this food. Farms are matched to community-based hunger relief projects so that those projects gain access to the locally grown foods that the community they serve needs and deserves." The fund uses an accountability council to keep the project in line with its stated mission, with participation from 22 farms and 18 food access organizations this past year. Megan Larmer discusses how Glynwood's more successful coalitional efforts and food justice programs like the food sovereignty fund maintain efficacy, and are able to grow. This is involved with building and sustaining networks that rely on alliances across a food system. Megan explains, "you have to listen to the stakeholders, right? You have to constantly be asking what it is people want you to do, you have to show up to other people's stuff. I think people overlook that a lot. You can't just expect to be the house of the work, you have to go to other people's houses too and support them in what it is that they're trying to move forward, even

if all that means is just being physically there and listening. [...] to be the learner and to switch those sorts of power positions with each other as often as possible in order to keep those networks really lively."

Sam addressed a disproportionate demand for food access projects from farmers to the available supply of food justice funding and programs. Even with this scarcity Sam says, "I didn't feel competition, I did feel community." It seemed to him that a lot of his fellow farmers were lining up for the same resources but that "it just felt like we all kind of meet at the same places that are giving out aid and, support and, education." The mutual interest and the existence of spaces, programs, and funds to support those socially active, food justice projects brings together like minded-farmers and creates coalitional strength.

Interview Participant Hopes.

What are my interviewees working towards, and what changes do they want to see in the world through the realm of agriculture? I had each of my interview participants respond with their hopes for agriculture on three scales. The national, the local and the personal.

Across responses there are many overlapping sentiments. There is a clear call for government intervention to make small-scale more viable and equitable for both farmers, farmworkers, and consumers. The belief is that the government and landowners should share the effort and cost of being both cultivator and steward. The cost should not be passed along to consumers. My interviewees broadly favor de-commodifying the small-farm, local produce experience, and market so that it becomes more viable for farmers and consumers across the board. This will also distribute the concentration of small-scale farms so that alternative food networks are not only found within affluent regions that have access to localism as a consumer trend among the affluent. Within that call for intervention is a focus on labor rights, securing living wages and the capacity to build a work life separation, by affordably limiting the excessively long work weeks that farmers are all too accustomed to.

"We need parody pricing and other forms of aid that big farmers are getting, gobbling up all the subsidies."

"I would want to see the end of big crop subsidies and the end of organic in name only, I would want to see us break up the agrochemical monopolies and nationalize them and repurpose all their resources for small-scale diversified organic farming, agroecological farming, prioritizing soil health."

"I want it to be profitable enough that farmers can be farmers as a full-time job."

"I would like to see a lot more small farms. I think that you're going to get much more responsible people. If you're feeding the people you know, you're going to do a better job of it. Farming is the beginning of everything and will be the end of it."

"I would hope that we can figure out a way that local farms can be able to affordably access land and housing and make a living, while being able to provide jobs for farmhands who can also make a living doing this terribly important work. Ultimately I think it needs government intervention."

"I want that everybody has access to culturally relevant, healthy, sustainably produced food that also supports local and rural communities."

Figure 1 participant responses.

Unsurprisingly, the participants' visions of ideal futures in agriculture hold the small scale, direct-to-consumer model farm to be a path forward for larger issues related to global food systems. Hopes for supporting and opening up the possibilities for small farms across regions to succeed and provide for their community constituents. There was a particular emphasis on breaking down cultural, and systemic barriers that often marginalize and limit non-white people within farming and alternative food spaces, and a call for supporting marginalized farmers, building connections between the many different kinds of farmers and farm workers. There is an acknowledged social and coalitional gap between the predominantly white farmer and food advocate spaces from farmers of color, immigrant farmers, and farmworkers.

"I'd like to see a massive redistribution of the crop and food funds, land acquisition for young farmers of color, complete paradigm shifts are what I want to see."

"I want to see better labor support and real wage increases for workers, for migrant workers and folks who are doing the hardest, most repetitive labor with so little support."

"I would like to see farming in this region become more accessible and welcoming to people who are not white farmers. Folks from all backgrounds to create viable farm businesses, organizations, projects in this region. And to widen these circles that form within the Hudson Valley farming community. For all of us to be having conversations or building community with farmers who are not like us, have different backgrounds, speak different languages, have totally different experiences with farming. And to be able to build a stronger coalition that way."

"I want to see a bridged gap between different workforces specifically between the sort of gentrifying farm work force of folks like myself of maybe second or third career backgrounds who go into farming, bridging that community with the farm workers who are less often domestically born, more often foreign born, maybe don't have english as their dominant language and come from far more working class backgrounds. I don't think we are going to be our best advocates for ourselves until we can stand more united than we are now."

Figure 2 participant responses.

Results

Here I transition to discussing the findings. The collective results of my mixed methods research highlight four major needs to be addressed within the Hudson Valley local food and farming world in order to make equitable spaces, products and practices for farmers, farmworkers, and consumers.

Describing the major needs.

I have consolidated an interconnected and varied set of subjects into four categories. 1.) the need for equitable processes and regulations for tenant farming. 2.) the need for equitable labor practices that are able to meet the high cost of living in the Hudson Valley. 3.) the need to bridge social-economic, and cultural rifts in order to build community strength and inclusivity. 4.) the need for healthy, sustainably produced food to be more accessible across localities. In the following section I discuss why each need or topic area is important, the associated challenges with examples of ways in which my research participants are engaged with the topics, and calls for action, potential solutions and steps forward. The third need regarding community and farm spaces, and the fourth need regarding accessible food are consolidated into one topic heading titled "Community and Access" due to overlap between the two classifications.

Overview.

The table below compiles descriptions of each major need and the associated solutions that I identify in greater detail throughout the results section.

Four primary needs	Solutions
Equitable practices, programming, and regulations for improving the viability of tenant farming operations	• Advocating for state regulations or prompting farmer to landowner matchup programs to promote longer term leases for tenant farmers. • State or program regulated compensation for stewardship practices done by tenant farmers. • In depth training for landowners in programs that facilitate farmer to landowner lease matchups. • Increased communication between landowners and tenant farmers with intermediaries that might help to level power dynamics between tenant farmers and landlords.
Practices and regulations to create equitable labor practices in the high cost of living Hudson Valley area	• Advocating for the major redistribution of agricultural subsidies to re-prioritize small scale farming. • Cultivating positive working environments through increased funding to programs that provide training for farm manager roles. • Creation of workers co-ops on farms to equitably distribute end of year profits amongst crews. • Coalitional efforts to create subsidized farmworker housing options in order to increase the viability for farm work as an occupation. • Increased funding to non-profit organizations and food access programs to improve non-profit pay and staff retention.
Practices and possibilities for widening food access and building community strength within local economies	• Development of coalitional alliances that sustain and expand interdisciplinary and cross industry cooperation and solidarity. Cross industry relationships can look like farm to food pantry partnerships, or affordable housing organizations partnering with community land trusts to combine efforts where goals align. • Mobilizing coalitional alliances to create secure and aligned food systems to prepare for global crises like the COVID pandemic. • Implementing sliding scale models of produce sales and CSA memberships. The model allows for internally subsidized access to food and food spaces and helps to eliminate the social isolation of food pantries, and cultural stigma of needing food assistance.

Compiled needs and solutions.

Tenant Farming.

Discussion.

While real estate value is often higher than many farmers can afford, the potential revenue associated with higher income in areas like the Hudson Valley that are peripheral to metropolises like New York City offer a market for small-scale farmers who largely rely on direct-to-consumer distributional methods. The small farms' need for higher paying markets also creates an uneven concentration of alternative network food sources. The option of "local" is in large part only available in higher income regions, detracting from potential engagement with food justice work by limiting physical access to alternative food options based on a neighborhood or a county's income and proximity to tourist revenue. Even with the opportunity of higher end markets, many farmers describe that the real estate and operational costs are usually above the actual business value.

Tenant farming has an exploitative history. Today, it is branded as a positive mutually beneficial meeting of farmers and landowners even when some of the exploitive dynamics have remained unchanged. The farmer is the one investing in the land, its soil and longevity. But in the end the farmer has no claim to the land they are working, their relationship to it is confined to a lease cycle. The owner accrues the long-term rewards of their farmer’s labor.

Solutions.

Possible solutions or improvements for tenant farming could address issues involving uneven power dynamics between tenant farmers and landowners, and open up the possibilities for successful agricultural and stewardship practice on leased properties.

Compensating tenant land stewardship.

Talea and Doug from Montgomery Place orchard proposed that stewardship work practiced by tenant farmers should be in some way compensated. For practices like cover cropping this could involve policy based intervention, whether that would require landowners to compensate for regenerative practice, or that a subsidy or a fund could be established to provide farmers with financial incentive and opportunity to tend to soil health, and other environmental services.

Improvements to land-owner to farmer matchup programs.

When it comes to non-profit organizations that run programs for tenant farmer to landowner matchups, interviewees called for improved networks of communication and accountability that would level potential power imbalances between landowners and tenant farmers, and allow tenant farmers more security and agency to run their farm. (Dunn, 2022.) Along with this point there is a need for longer term lease agreements that allow farmers to more securely invest in the land they are working on. This way they can grow their businesses and avoid the uncertainty that comes with shorter term leases. This is another example where policy changes could help ensure longer term leases for tenant farmers, or it could be an opportunity for non-profit groups to condition further security for tenant farmers in landowner matchup programs.

Labor.

Discussion.

The tight knit nature of small farm work crews has potential for positive work environments that center economic justice and living wages, but also the potential for meager pay, overworking, toxic interpersonal relations and replications of larger exploitative dynamics. On the farm, the workplace environment can be seen as a reflection of the leadership abilities of the farm manager. Housing and commute times are a major inhibitor for farmworkers. Interdisciplinary coalitional action is being undertaken by the Farm Worker Housing Group to plan and fund affordable on and off site housing for farmworkers across the valley. This effort is especially attuned to the ways in which issues like housing and food access are epistemic and require responses from across different specialties and social efforts. The Farm Housing Working Group in particular realizes the common ground between housing advocacy organizations and community land trusts. They have mobilized the interaction of these otherwise unconnected groups to work towards creating affordable housing specifically for farmworkers. This helps to improve the care of community lands by enabling regenerative agriculture practice.

In the non-profit world wages are determined by a board that is held fiscally responsible for the organization's success or failure. An organization's funding and constituents are involved with philanthropists, various grants and sources that often have specific stipulations and strings attached to the money. This can lead to situations where the quality of pay and workplace is overlooked. There is also the issue that Sam Rose addressed, where non-profits need to "chase" funding associated with often quickly shifting topics of interest, and where funders often want to earmark their donations to specific causes and uses within a cause. This can hinder the ability to

develop storied efforts that maintain case specific know-how and context to issues that are often integrated into a communities specific needs. Issues like the exploitation of immigrant farmworkers or food insecurity are usually deeply rooted and require ongoing efforts to create lasting change. An example of this sidelining can be seen in some of the challenges that the Glynwood food sovereignty program faces when fundraising. The food sovereignty fund is a rather unique non-profit program in that the contracts that it makes with farms are made upfront. If a farm cannot fulfill a contract due to extraneous circumstances (injury, climate issues, etc.) the unmet quantities of food are forgiven and the remaining food due to the pantry is bought from another farm. Megan Larmer describes that this kind of program is flagged as a "no go" when put into a funding request. "You cannot pay for things before they've been received and you cannot give people money for doing nothing." The program in ways does not fit into New York State's funding priorities, "I think because we're trying to be emancipatory in the process. We don't have enough rules, restrictions, and check ins and rules for some programs." Grants and funds often prioritize infrastructural investments or social initiatives over providing money for programs like the food sovereignty fund that buy food from small-scale producers to provide for underserved people within the producers communities. Highly conditional funding is also implicated in the issue of staff retention. If a group is losing staff they are losing ground on retraining and miss out on developing a staff with specific experience and community knowledge.

Solutions.

Possible solutions and improvements address labor relations regarding pay and workplace environment, housing accessibility and government subsidies and programming. Farm managers I spoke with discussed practices they bring to their farm team to create positive working environments, such as sharing meals and taking home produce, daily check-ins, music in the field and an overall prioritization of well-being. One farm is implementing a workers cooperative that would equitably distribute end of year profits for the whole farm's staff. Practices like this emphasize economic justice. Others called for increased funding to non-profits to improve staff retention. Coalitional alliances are formed to address epistemic issues like the housing crisis. These kinds of efforts are also important to food justice work. It is also clear that government intervention is required. Several farmers called for a redistribution of agricultural subsidies to be invested in small-scale sustainable farming. This would help address the sort of double bind where farmers are pressured to price their food high to avoid exploiting themselves and their workers, but in doing so might undercut class solidarity by making their produce and food spaces less accessible across income levels.

Community and Access.

Discussion.

The viability and value of small scale farming is more affected by the social zeitgeist of tourist and newcomer buying behaviors and preferences now than in the earlier days of wholesale farming, where viability was tied more closely to the wider food economy. This local consumer centered market allows for alternative economic conventions as described in the local food economies section of my lit review. Alternative conventions might prioritize concerns for ecological health, food quality, food system transparency, and embedded farmer and community relationships. Local farm economies that are largely reliant on higher income consumers and tourism also mean that the value and thus viability of the work is constantly at question since economic success is more directly connected with a localized social interest in the specialty or premium of local products. The defining and value making of a premium (i.e. sustainably produced, locally distributed) product is something farmers have to advocate for in the promotion of their goods and services, mission, and the vocation of sustainable farming as a whole. Where with wholesale farming, prices are tied to larger scale trade that has become increasingly dominated by massive industrial agriculture firms. Corporate domination of wholesale agriculture is supported by national "get big or get out" policy making primarily instigated by 1970's US agriculture secretary Earl Butz, which prioritized "efficient" mono-production of highly commodified products like corn, soy and cotton. (Berry, 1977.) The small-scale wholesale farms and dairies that were once commonplace in the Hudson Valley have to a significant extent disappeared as a result of "get big or get out" style agricultural policy. (Southard, 2021.)

An increase in wealthier customer bases with interest in local food in the Hudson Valley means that some farms are able to keep up with the competitive large scale agricultural markets, and hikes in production costs. Smaller scale regional farms are largely involved in direct-to-consumer or similar distribution practices and have extensive marketing, branding and other promotional materials or events. The selling of a "lifestyle" or adding a social value to make farming more profitable is often a necessity to remain viable within a national and global food system that is economically hostile to small-scale production.

There is a difference noted between farmers in the non-profit or somehow subsidized end of farming and those that are farming entirely for-profit, where their livelihoods depend entirely on sales. However, a similar kind of promotional storytelling is what allows non-profits to gain funding from grants and programs and support from wealthy donors. Speaking generally, the means are in essence alike between the non-profit and for-profit model.

The change in socio-economic character that affected business at the Montgomery farm stand can be seen as an example of the commercial gentrification discussed in the *Recipe for Gentrification: Food, Power, and Resistance in the City* article. (Josée, Chrobok, 2020.) Where a change in the socio-economics of local consumers affects a change in the prices and available products at food outlets like Montgomery Place.

There is also a disconnect between a farmers own economic and labor class and the predominant labor class of local product consumers. These conditions make for a unique interest in socially responsible farming that prioritizes workers wages, and food access. This class conscience has come across through coalition meetings that mobilize the social goals, needs, etc. of this group of regional farmers, including programs like the food sovereignty fund.

Solutions.

It is understood that food *should* be expensive to appropriately accommodate the work that farmers are doing and so that farmers can afford to provide living wages to their employees. Also important is that food should be affordable and healthy food should be accessible regardless of income. These seemingly contradictory concepts can be met by increasing government subsidies and assistance to small-scale farming, allowing farmers to be paid more and consumers to pay less. But where government intervention falls short, as it often does for small-business owners, the sliding scale model has taken off as a self subsidizing method for equitable food access.

Sliding scale.

The sliding scale model for food accessibility circumvents the cultural isolation of food pantries and allows for financial and caloric needs to be met while still receiving the social benefits of being a part of a CSA or other alternative food system space. This is made possible by having higher price points on CSA shares for those with more expendable income. Those with means subsidize those who might not otherwise be able to partake. This has the potential to truly serve a locality, not just a select social group or economic class within that locale.

Farm-to-pantry partnerships.

Farm-to-food-pantry partnerships offer another tactic that allows farmers to engage with food accessibility work and circumvent the need to focus sales toward higher income customers. With pre-season contracts, farms can plan out certain acres specifically for emergency food

distributors. This covers a certain income per acre as paid for without needing to do promotional work and with much less ambiguity around a specific kind of vegetable's success at market.

Community strength.

The possibility of the farm as a community meeting ground, and that food spaces could be used to make something that is outside of traditional transactional relationships implies a need for relationships to grow between farmers and non-farmers/consumers, and an additional need to create more farming adjacent roles. Farm facilitation experts can help to bring farming into a broader social context. Farms can become places of social as well as material production and reproduction, instead of being relegated, taken for granted and commodified to the point of non-existence within the broader social-imaginary. Interfacing with arts and social events is a way in which some farms are building stronger and more inclusive communities. Mission driven businesses form socially attuned *why's* for their work that help to cohere social interests within a community and mobilize efforts toward different ends. Whether it be coalescing artwork, enacting mutual aid, or forming tenants unions–as were some examples from my findings–this speaks to food as a political tool, where physical and social needs can be addressed at once.

Coalitional strength.

As well as the farm being a space for local communities to gel and generate a sense of place or community solidarity, the relationships between farms in a region is also important. Coalitional alliances between farms seems to be a defining characteristic of Hudson Valley farming. Through my experiences attending CRAFT events in the summer, sitting in on the farm

housing working group convening and later the CSA coalition summit, a sense of inter farm community felt palpable to me as an outsider. Folks would be catching up, talking shop but also sharing their lives, over food and shared interests. This was highlighted by the luncheons at each event, time for people to connect over a potluck style meal. The CRAFT events and other regional programs for farmers and apprentices all involved some element of leisure time or celebration, often over shared food. Knowledge is shared freely between farmers and problems are addressed in collaborative ways, as seen in the example of the informal inter-farm group chat that I describe in my findings.

Crisis preparedness.

The pandemic caused a breakdown of food systems, and employment which led to an increase in food insecurity and traffic inundating existing food security establishments like food pantries. (Montenegro de Wit, 2021.) The fragility of our emergency responses calls for new systems of supplying food within localities that are layered with multiple inputs and distribution points and have an iterative structure. Megan Larmer notes the need for "intentional redundancy." She said "We saw in COVID, that when you have concentrated, quote, unquote, efficient food supply chains, it takes just one shock to the system for them to completely break." Coalitionally aligned farms can prepare for disaster within a community by including in their projects any number of the food accessibility methods I have discussed in this paper.

Conclusion

I came to this topic as somewhat of an insider. But I would not describe myself as a farmer. I don't at the point of writing this paper know what it is like to farm full-time, to have my livelihood depend on the work. I also don't know first hand what the pressures of running a small business feels like. In high school I worked summers on small-scale sustainable farms in Western Massachusetts and I became involved in farming in the Hudson Valley before my senior year of college the summer of 2023. That summer I worked for one of my interview participants Sam Rose at Four Corners Farm, and as a vendor for Jake's Gouda farm at a farmers market in Copake, NY. In this way I have been an active participant as a farmworker, a vendor and as a consumer at some of the spaces I analyze in this paper, including farmers markets or the Montgomery place farm stand.

I have taken an analytic perspective of these roles, practices and distributional spaces through my data analysis, interview methods, participant observation and literature review. Through my mixed methods research and writing I have discovered struggles, potentials for change and overall, a hopeful prognosis for the economic justice and social transformations that farms have the potential to facilitate in the Hudson Valley. In my results section I identified four primary needs including the need for equitable processes and regulations for tenant farming, the need for equitable labor practices, the need to build inclusive communities and food spaces, and the need for healthy and sustainable produce to be accessible across income levels. Tactics for equitable labor practices, community work and food access emerged in my literature review and findings. These look like farm workers cooperatives, sliding scale models for making food more

accessible, and farm-to-food-pantry partnerships. I also discuss ways in which small scale farms and food and farming non-profits are coordinating within the region to build more resilient and accessible local food systems. I show the ways in which the commodification of local food, that I describe as catering to higher income customers, or selling of a lifestyle, both complicates and enables food access work in the context of non-profit and for-profit farms. I connect the change in typology and marketing tactics of regional farms–shifting from primarily wholesale farms to primarily specialized direct-to-consumer farms–with a change in the socio-economic makeup of the Hudson Valley, noting trends that following crises such as 9-11, the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic New York City residents affect a rural displacement, or gentrification of spaces within the Hudson Valley. The subsequent changes in real estate value, availability of housing and cost of living in the valley directly affect the possibilities and limitations of farming here. Tenant farming is a common practice and it comes with a suite of difficulties that I discuss in depth. Housing and the cost of living is also a major barrier to employers and farmworkers.

I explore and build context for these topics through my literature review sections. There I explore several key topics using some of the following theoretical frameworks. I use the politics of sight, a framework of affecting social change that is presented by author Timothy Pachirat to examine the labor economy of alternative farms and the exploitation of farmworkers that author Margaret Gray investigates in her 2013 book *Labor and the Locavore*. I discuss various articulations of alternative economies, including Heather Paxson's concept of sentimental economies to help understand the economic positioning of small-scale farms and local consumers in the Hudson Valley. I use mutual aid as a framework to aspire toward a local food

system grounded in solidarity practices and for positioning the food access, economic justice and accessibility oriented projects and practices that I identify in my research.

I suggest here relevant topics and methodologies for future research. In-depth interview based research with immigrant farm workers on local farms in the Hudson Valley has been very well developed through Margaret Gray's *Labor and the Locavore*. To integrate this work with the niche group of smaller scale Hudson Valley farms that my research focuses on, it would be helpful to develop an interview protocol and research project that speaks with apprentices from Glynwood's programming, who represent a "new wave" of young farmers. A comprehensive study might include interviews from a range of farmworkers coming from different backgrounds, and may end up highlighting some of the disparities in working conditions, possibilities for career mobility, and the ways in which labor interacts with social visibility, understood through the politics of sight.

Survey based research from a selection of residents in the Hudson Valley across income levels and identities may lead to interesting findings by ascertaining a variety of relationships to food, local farms and the socio-economic changes I describe taking place. This could be done via interviews, surveys, or focus groups. The researched group could be expanded to include agritourists visiting the Hudson Valley, or it could be narrowed to focus on specific distribution methods, such as farmers markets or members of CSAs. Interviewing agritourists could give more insight to some of the market dynamics at play between Hudson Valley producers and the revenue from New York City markets and consumers. A focus on active local participants in food systems by interviewing CSA members could provide contrasting insight into the values and beliefs held by local consumers of small scale farms.

I highlight farm-to-food-pantry partnerships as an effective method for making local food more accessible. I came to this conclusion based on accounts on the producer side of that relationship. Farmers describe that the benefits of these partnerships include the financial security of pre-season contracts and the sentimental value in providing food for those in need without underselling their own labor to do so. It would be a worthwhile endeavor to research the pantries that buy local food in these partnerships. Who are their constituents, what values are important to them? Research could delve deeper by making connections with the people who receive food from emergency food distributors and pantries. What kinds of food do they want to see on their plates? What struggles exist and how would these findings connect with the research in this paper.

The issues I present on economic justice, food insecurity, and social stratification of access to healthy options and community spaces are not specific to the Hudson Valley, and are felt to varying degrees across the country. The examples of practices and solutions in this paper are regionally specific; however, I believe that given detailed reporting on each individual model–i.e. sliding scale access, the food sovereignty fund, farmworkers cooperatives–tactics and guides could be communicated and applied to the particular contexts of communities, businesses and organizations outside of the Hudson Valley. In my interview with farmer Chris Nickel I asked what hopes they have for the future of Hudson Valley farming, they replied, "I want to see us really take seriously the importance of food justice and food access work and not just do lip service. I want us to be a proof of concept that bottom line can still work." The practices and frameworks I describe in this paper offer potential for socially engaged small-scale farming to redefine the implications of local food systems. An ethically attuned concept of locality must not

ignore the multiplicities of a place as informed by the many interdependent spaces, histories and individual contexts that bring definition to it, including the zones of sequestered exploitation or neglect that cushion the zones of privilege.

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