

Reinhabiting our Earthly Home: Ways to Reshape an Urban Foodshed

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Introduction: Making Visible the Real Material Foundations of Society

The centrality of food and farming eludes many of the inhabitants of both sides of a deep divide created by modern society: urban regions where most people now live, and farming regions disconnected from urban markets, even from nearby cities. Architect and planner Carolyn Steel in *Hungry City: How Food Shapes our Lives*, coins the term *sitopia* ---from the Greek words for “food” and “place” --- to help us understand that while monocultural farming regions and global cities have become distant and mutually opaque, all it takes is a shift in awareness to recognize how food and farming shape the lives of humans everywhere. Steel’s perspective switches perspective not only on the material foundations of cities, but also on the folly of an urbanizing world that allows capital to undermine natural ecosystems and the knowledge of the farmers who have co-evolved with them for millennia. Yet *sitopia* recovers lost awareness of the existential link between food, society, and ecosystems. Many are beginning to act wisely, without knowing where small steps will lead. Like Dorothy in Oz, all we have to do to return to Kansas is to know that we can.

The task is daunting, to at once find the wizard causing edible commodities to appear as if by magic, and to discover that he is really a human creating scary effects. The uncontrolled experiment in which the human species has been engaged for 150 years

-- a mere blip in the 10,000 years of human societies based on farming, settlement, and cities --- has led to a state of affairs in which farmers can as rarely eat their products as eaters can grow their food. Ever more humans have come to rely a handful of temperate “breadbaskets,” including North and South America, Australia and New Zealand, for grain-based calories and livestock-based proteins,¹ and adapted their diets to an increasingly industrial cuisine² heavy in ingredients widely agreed to be unhealthy for humans, especially for the poor in industrial societies and for those supposedly improving their welfare by participating in food markets in cities (Hawkes). In the past 25 years, supermarkets have also swallowed many of the mixed farms, truck farms, orchards and the like, which were still in intimate connection with nearby cities both North and South, commanding farms to specialize in standard varieties of green beans, fish, and flowers, and displacing local fresh markets. With our short mammalian time horizons, recently shaped by hegemonic faith in a disembedded phantasm called “the market,” most humans have come to take all this as a natural and therefore enduring state of affairs. It is not. As soils and waters are depleted and polluted, as climate change and genetic simplification intensify the agronomic vulnerability of these practices and these regions, as fossil fuels

¹ Early competitors of U.S, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina and neighboring regions for European markets included present northwest India (now Punjab and Pakistan), the Danube Basin (now mostly Hungary and Romania), Black Sea region (now several former Soviet Republics), and Siberia (Friedmann 1974). Even these regions are a small proportion of the first export regions created as part of the first world food market,¹ and as that market was extended to the rest of the world through the twists and turns of hegemonic rules, the standard varieties of wheat, maize, cattle, and pigs that helped European settlers transform alien ecosystems into specialized zones of production have become further reduced (Crosby, Kloppenburg and Kleinman).

² The consequent shift from a trio of starchy staples, legume as plant protein, and variety of domestic and wild plants for vitamins, minerals, and flavor to a trio of fats, sweeteners and salts to create apparent diversity in industrial foods made of a small number of deconstructed ingredients (Mintz; Goodman Sorj and Wilkinson), and an even more drastic change from the foraging diet that underpins human genetics (Cordain et.al. 2005)

that replaced human and animal energy --- “petrofarming” (Walker) --- becomes more evidently problematic, this food system looks like a train rapidly heading for a cliff.

Sitopian thinking requires a long view. A food system that ensures good, healthy food for all through farming guided ecological design has never been accomplished in a world we have now --- an increasingly urban, industrial, abstracting space (Harvey), with massive movements of commodities, people, and especially money, with growing gaps between rich and poor, and with pervasive social and military conflict. Until humans reorganized material life via solar energy stored in fossils a mere two centuries ago, all ate mostly foods created by farmers, artisans and cooks proximate to settlements; people could move on and resettle, and they could trade, but always they organized their institutions to get energy from the plants that human and animal power could bring forth in each place. Over the long term (compared the history of industrial capitalist farming systems) agrarian societies linked agronomies that replenished soils and waters with cuisines that enhanced human wellbeing (Mintz, *Eating and Being*). Although past ecological farming systems included deep exploitation of peasantries and agricultural workers by ruling elites (Wolf *Peasants*; Bayliss-Smith; Duncan) and susceptibility to famines, their productivity in material measures was often much higher than our present monetary measures suggest. Wise combinations of traditional practices with formal scientific point the way towards knowledge-based livelihoods, food security, and restoration of soils and waters. As crises accumulate, international policy documents are inching towards this realization (IAASTD; Wise and Murphy 2012).

No railway tracks or paved roads guide a journey to such a food system. Change is more like sailing, tacking with the wind and waves, surviving squalls, and idling in

doldrums.³ Such a food system may be emerging in the interstices of the one that now dominates, by reconnecting what the dominant system separates and replaces with money and finance: crops from animals, eaters from growers, rich from poor, farms from forests, watersheds, carbon cycles, and all of these from the ever-flowing energy of sun. As we move towards living within our energetic means, let us think of that place as home. To create a sustainable food system is to come home.⁴

Home is not about “local” as a contrast to “global,” but about inhabiting a *place* embedded in many places, crossing scales of social organization and government just as ecosystems nest and overlap up to the biosphere.⁵ Food system change is about emergent relationships, practices, and discourses which emerge within, overlap and cross-cut the dominant food system. A sitopian lens reveals a networked, ecologically and socially embedded *food economy* emerging at once within and against the dominant institutions of capital and across governmental boundaries. The creators are not captured by a frame of social movements, because their practices include but cannot be reduced to resistance, advocacy, or even “practices of reform” (Andree et.al.2011: 154). Nor is the emerging social economy captured by “alternative” (or even “prefiguring”) institutions, understood as outside and opposed to dominant ones (Goodman et.al. 2011). Food system change lends itself especially well to theories of complexity, resilience, and adaptive governance (Walker et.al. 2004; Moore and Westley 2011).

This paper explores how changemakers of many kinds are coming to understand and reshape the food system of the highly urbanized Golden Horseshoe region stretching

³ Patti Smith used this metaphor to describe emotional maturity. CBC radio, *Day 6*, Saturday, June 14, 2012.

⁴ Kloppenburg et.al. More below.

⁵ See the Sustainable Places project at Cardiff.

west of Toronto along Lake Ontario, with about a quarter of the population of Canada and more than half of Canada's best farmland (Ontario Farmland Trust 2010). This region is dominated by food and farming typical of what we have come to call "advanced industrial societies". The Golden Horseshoe is also a region of food system innovation, including social justice, sustainable farming, and initiatives to relink "urban" and "rural" economic infrastructures, policies, and people.

Drawing on structured conversations animated by key food system actors and interviews with other key individuals, as well as documents from nonprofit and government organizations, I explore interstitial and symbiotic food system change (Wright 2010). I interpret networks of individuals and anchoring organizations --- private, public, and nonprofit --- that pursue aspects of just food and farming outside, within, and across governments at all scales as a *community of food practice* (Friedmann 2007). In the limited space of this paper, I try to convey how individuals found organizations, move through them, dissolve them, and change them from within. I follow two interwoven threads: relationships and discourses. Like the ecosystems they seek to reinhabit (with different degrees of explicitness and agreement), these communities of practice are nested and overlapping with other communities up to and including global politics. As food system praxis unfolds, divisive positions --- for instance between income distribution and community building, between farming and environmental management, between prices giving farmers a decent livelihood and prices making food accessible to everyone, most of all between urban and rural --- sometimes give way to collaborations to change the worlds of food we now inhabit so insecurely. Conversations in Southern Ontario point to an emerging bridge: *health*.

Singing Lessons

A metaphor for change of the magnitude required comes from Michael Sacco, visionary founder of ChocoSol, a “learning community and social enterprise” which makes chocolate using “durable, ecological, open source tools and techniques” both in Toronto and in the Oaxacan communities which are part of the community; the two parts are connected through “horizontal trade” based on “reciprocity and inter-cultural friendship.” Sacco listens for a song in the distance, keeps trying to harmonize with that song, and sometimes finds that the song is inside, it has become his song.⁶

Melodies and Rhythms: Two Songs

Although there is little we can be sure of, there are some principles that can roughly define a sustainable food system (Friedmann, Gardens):

1. Grow what is good for the earth
2. Eat what is good to grow
3. Organize social and spatial relations to enhance good eating and growing.

These principles suggest a convergence between an emerging ethic of *responsibility* and *justice* and the 10,000 year old agrarian legacy of *subsistence* and *reciprocity* (Scott 1974: 157-92). They do not imply an idyllic past, nor do they point to specific ways that these have been met.⁷ Indeed, past civilizations have been as varied as inhabited landscapes, climates, and cultures, and have sometimes exceeded limits of their foodsheds (Eisenberg); many village-based food systems enforced rules through nasty

⁶ The song is a personal communication, December 2011. The rest is a TEDx talk 2/25/10 in Waterloo, Ontario. <http://tedxwaterloo.com/speaker/sacco> Accessed June 29, 2012

⁷ Historical variation in nineteenth century foodsheds are evident from the contrast between Europe and China; the former was more or less organized in concentric circles of land use modeled by von Thunen, and the latter in complex hierarchical, overlapping regional systems of markets, villages, and cities (Steel, Skinner)

practices, including envy, gossip, and fear (Scott 1974:5).⁸ Ours is not the first economy stretching foodsheds across non-contiguous spaces; the Roman Empire created a foodshed that included African grain and English oysters, one that lasted many centuries longer than our oil dependent food system has so far. (Steel 2009; n.d.). One of the precedents to our own global foodshed was very much embedded agronomically, as the first consciously scientific farmers in 18th century England used ecological efficiency (with few purchased inputs) to increase specialized production of wheat or wool; High Farming is more well-known for enclosing land and exploiting agricultural workers, but it has lessons for scientific agro-ecological farming (Bayliss-Smith 1982; Duncan 199).⁹ Real utopian foodsheds have much to learn from indigenous and traditional farming systems (Bayliss-Smith 1982) about adapting farming and cuisines to ecological possibilities and limits, as well as from genetic, energy, and other emerging technologies.

To make growing food sustainable requires *permanent culture* (“*permaculture*”), defined according to pioneer Bill Mollison as “the study of the design of those sustainable or enduring systems that support human society, both agricultural & intellectual, traditional & scientific, architectural, financial & legal.”¹⁰ Ontario

⁸James Scott’s discussion of the envy, rivalry, gossip and other nasty traits enforcing subsistence and reciprocity rules in traditional villages, as well as his understanding of tradition as historical depth rather than eternal harmony, are excellent guides.

⁹ imperial systems such as ancient Rome, which shipped grains from North Africa as well as oysters from Britain (Steel 2009).

¹⁰ “Derived from ‘Permanent’ and ‘Culture’ ...: Permanent: From the Latin *permanens*, to remain to the end, to persist throughout (per = through, manere = to continue) [and] Culture: From the Latin *cultura* - cultivation of land, or the intellect. Now generalized to mean all those habits, beliefs, or activities that sustain human societies... Thus, Permaculture is the study of the design of those sustainable or enduring systems that support human society, both agricultural & intellectual, traditional & scientific, architectural, financial & legal. It is the study of integrated systems, for the purpose of better design & application of such systems... Permaculture is a philosophy of working with, rather than against nature; of protracted & thoughtful observation rather than protracted & thoughtless action; of looking at systems in all their functions rather than asking only one yield of them & of allowing systems to demonstrate their own evolutions.” Bill Mollison, cited at <http://www.permaculture.net/about/definitions.html>

permacultural leader Jane Hayes argues for “long term environmental planning” that extends “past budget and political cycles”, even a 500 year plan modeled on First Nations’ goals to do good for seven generations (Lavogiez 2010). More modestly (in some ways), Wes Jackson and Wendell Berry propose a “fifty year farm plan” (NYT) that shifts incentives from depleting and polluting annual grain monocultures in the US prairies to the extraordinary agronomic challenge of creating foodgrains (and much else) from perennial polycultures capable of restoring the fertility of the grasslands that supported native peoples and bison for thousands of years. Permaculture is a knowledge-intensive approach for all regions (Fukuoka; IAASTD;), all crops and livestock, on all scales from the smallest plot to the biosphere.

The reverse principles guide the industrial food system in the capitalist world economy:

1. A small number of transnational corporate buyers supported by governmental and intergovernmental rules govern what is good to grow and what is good to eat
2. People eat what is good to buy¹¹
3. Farmers grow what is good sell

The food system is sometimes described as an hourglass (Lang et al), with a small number of corporations controlling sales by many farmers and food artisans (though fewer all the time) and to many eaters (ever more dependent on purchasing food) which have promoted farming and food processing that mimic industry (Goodman, Sorj and Wilkinson 19 ; Friedmann and McMichael 1989; Friedmann 1993), including especially

¹¹ Prices inflect but do not displace taste (culture), commensality (social relations of eating in community or family), solidarity (with farmers or workers), and newer, more fluid ideas of sustainability. Indeed, interstitial and symbiotic foodshed change work through markets in a variety of ways.

reorganizing biological processes via “petrofarming” (Walker 2004). To turn this leaking tanker around before (or as?) it sinks requires many tugboats, that is, massive changes of values, institutions, and social resources, very likely fundamental changes in property and power.

Lyrics: Linking Sustainable Foodsheds with Health

The principles governing industrial, capitalist food systems do not include health of eaters or of agro-ecosystems; therefore, both appear as external and fragmented problems. The unifying idea emerging within the community of food practice, what may be the discursive pivot of a new foodshed constellation, is *health*. Understood widely, health of individuals, communities, and ecosystems are linked and policies centred on them can be understood as *ecological public health* (Lang and Heasman; Lang et.al.) Perhaps paradoxically, after three decades of neoliberal policies, it is now possible to imagine health --- of individuals, communities, cities, soils, and watersheds --- as a qualitative criterion overarching and linking government policies. Even as governments are increasingly subject to quantitative financial audits, even as cuts to social wages have made more people more food insecure and charitable responses more inadequate, even as exposure to corporate-dominated markets has made farming more monocultural and chemical intensive (despite environmental farm plans), even as “sickness” systems have become more focused on surgery and pharmaceuticals than prevention, the institutional and policy gaps are becoming visible among environment, agriculture, poverty, food security, and a medical system ever more fiscally stressed by chronic disease care. It is possible to discern synergistic solutions around a shared value broadly conceived as “health.” In Ontario (as elsewhere), it is becoming possible for government officials to

hear an emerging melodic theme of healthy food and farming. Yet health of individuals and ecosystems are far apart in institutions and discourses in Southern Ontario. Health may be an emerging nexus.

Foodshed is a useful idea for linking the actual and the possible. The foodshed of a city like Toronto, for instance, can be seen as both the *global* supply lines organized by food retail corporations, and the emerging networks of food businesses, social enterprises, government agencies and civic organizations working to reconnect the *regional* economy (Campsie 2008). The idea, which has become widely used in food system writing, was recovered by Kloppenburg, Hendrickson and Stevenson (1996:41) for a double purpose --- “to understand where we are now and where we wish to be in the future... And while a system can be anywhere, the foodshed is a continuous reminder that we are standing in a particular place; not anywhere, but here.” The word for here, as they write in their title, is *home*: “coming home to the foodshed.”

The Golden Horseshoe: A Typical North American Urban Foodshed

The exceptional Community of Food Practice in Southern Ontario is working within a political economy typical of North American urban regions. The Golden Horseshoe has a declining manufacturing base, and a continuing loss of farmland, especially that providing fresh produce to urban markets. Dominated by the City of Toronto, with 2.6 million inhabitants, most of the regions' 10 million people live in hundreds of smaller cities, towns, suburbs, and villages. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food recently reported that one in ten families in Canada is food insecure. The problem is especially acute in aboriginal populations, both in cities and on reserves.¹² The Ontario

¹² <http://www.srfood.org/index.php/en/component/content/article/2253-canada-national-food-strategy-can-eradicate-hunger-amidst-plenty-un-rights-expert/>

Association of Foodbanks --- institutions thought to be temporary when they first appeared in the 1980s --- reports that 374,000 Ontarians used food banks in 2009, an increase of 19 per cent over the year before, and almost 40 per cent of those are children; this is only a fraction of their activities, which include meal programmes offering 740,000 meals a month.¹³

If regional agricultural markets for fresh produce and livestock had been able to grow in tandem with cities and towns, farmers might have found a vibrant regional market (Winne 2008).¹⁴ But cars made it possible for cities to sprawl and trucks made it easy to move food long distances. Roads at once made it seem more efficient to move fresh fruits and vegetables long distances to urban markets and encourage conversion of farmland. Total farm area in Ontario fell from 22.8 million acres in 1931 to 13.3 million acres in 2006 (Statistics Canada 2006c), and the 1986 Ontario orchard acreage was 30 percent smaller than in 1941 (Gayler 1994: 284), even before government programs encouraged ripping out of peach trees and planting of vines.

The Golden Horseshoe lost its regional infrastructure of processing and trade (Baker et.al. 2010), especially for fruits and vegetable canneries and abbatoirs (Carter-Whitney and Miller 2010: 12-13). Regional food industries and traders were marginalized as retail and processing industries became centralized, and supermarket supply chains increasingly reached across the continent and even the world. Yet decline of the auto industry has contributed to the fact that the food sector --- including service, manufacturing, and retail --- is now the largest economic sector in the region, with small

¹³ <http://www.oafb.ca/hungerfacts.html>

¹⁴ Much of what follows is from Friedmann (2010:).

and medium enterprises continually emerging and successful ones acquired by large corporations (Ajayi, et.al.2010). Most successful businesses are in foods appealing to “health” and “ethno-cultural” markets. The question is whether the future will be McJobs or artisanal networked businesses, even as we shall see, social enterprises.

Orchards, truck farmers, and small livestock operations suffered over the decades of change. Those that survived shifted from diverse crops for a growing regional population to specialized exports. The 135 farmers of the ten thousand acre area just north of Toronto called the Holland Marsh --- one of the most fertile regions in North America --- now export more than half of their \$50 million crop of vegetables (Reinhart 2009), mostly carrots and onions grown with achieve economies of scale suited to exports. Supermarkets mainly sell imported carrots and onions (Reinhart 2009) --- “redundant trade” typical everywhere in recent decades.

A huge cultural gap now exists between young, diverse urbanites and aging farmers of mostly European descent. Prior waves of immigration included farmers, who produced for nearby urban dwellers as well as exports. The region is an intersection of transnational diasporas (Cohen 1997), with immigrants retaining active cultural ties to groups in other countries. Half of Metropolitan Toronto’s population of 5.5 million born outside of Canada, and an equal number of new Canadians live in surrounding municipalities (Toronto 2010; Statistics Canada 2006b), with one of the fastest growing municipalities listing two-thirds of their populations as visible minorities (Statistics Canada 2006a). These immigrants mostly arrived in a time of increasing world food trade and found it easy to import prepared foods and ingredients, including fresh ones.

Farmers are divided about the future. Some wish to sell to so-called developers at

speculative prices to finance their retirement, having worked for low prices all their lives, and sent their children to school for other occupations. The corn and soybeans which offered hope of survival are no longer profitable to aging farmers. Those within it, vocally oppose the Ontario Greenbelt, created in 2005 to protect the Toronto watershed, while at the edges (which include internal spaces exempted for municipalities to expand), farmers are tempted by speculative prices. Others, both actual and hopeful farmers, wish to farm differently. They are attuned to urban markets, farm intensively with mixed crops and small livestock, and experiment with new forms of relationships and marketing. These include large farmers of the Holland Marsh growing red carrots, bok choy and any other crops they can for increasingly diverse urban cooks and eaters. They also include young people trained in sustainable farming and immigrants experimenting with transplanting crops now imported as ingredients in the many cultural cuisines of the region.

Growing: Discovering what is good for the earth

Farming, in which human and animal energy transform the sun's energy into all the food, fuel, animal feed, and fiber (Roberts 200) available for human societies, has been marginalized by agriculture, in which specialized production systems are geared to markets. The former exists in complex relations with forests, waterways, and wider ecosystems, while the latter specializes in one crop destined for large buyers of food or fuel or feed or fibre, and substitutes complicated financial and institutional arrangements in place of physical relations and flows (Naess). What we have learned to call the "agricultural revolution" substituted market-based commodity goals (though markets are as old as farming); the industrial revolution substituted fossil for human and animal

energy even in agriculture. For half a century explicit and hidden subsidies have encouraged specialized agriculture that suppresses specificities of crops, animals, and landscapes to the point that any farm that is typical of its region seems “exceptional or marginal, traditional and conservative... destined to disappear” except for niche products for privileged consumers initiated into the mysteries of refined taste and *terroir* (Lacombe 2008; Johnston and Baumann 2010).

However, renewed attention to regional farming systems is fundamental to renewing healthy soils and clean water *for everyone and for the long term*.¹⁵ Spurred by food and financial crises, international policy fora are at last beginning to appreciate the role of small farmers in combining ecosystem management with food security --- and with “rural livelihoods” --- that is, with knowledge-based work in a food system networked back to farms (IAASTD, WDR 2008; SRFood; Wise and Murphy 2012). Initiatives and organizations in the Golden Horseshoe have learned to collaborate in ways none of the actors anticipated when they began their journeys.

1. Farming Again

One way to enable economically stressed farmers to become active leaders in ecosystem management is to pay them for their contributions. This policy direction was named “multifunctionality” in the 1980s in Europe, partly as a way to protect domestic and export subsidies within the emerging trade regime of the World Trade Organization. Its origins and history are complex, but did support a rebalancing of agriculture (internationally competitive commodity production) with farming. By increasing public support for farmers to direct income payments not tied to specific commodity prices, new

¹⁵ This is the argument put forward, for instance, by Local Food Plus, a nonprofit specializing in public procurement, whose original impulse was a survey among students, a majority of whom said they were willing to pay a bit more for local, sustainable food. www.localfoodplus.ca

values and relationships could emerge. There are many pitfalls in attempts to build new agrifood relations, such as the potential of government protected designations of quality foods to be at once captured by capitalist relations and also seeds for regional, networked cultural economies to crystallize (Goodman et.al.2011, ch.4). Though the idea of multifunctional policies was promoted by the Christian Farmers of Ontario twenty years ago, government did not respond. Instead, farmers combining food production with ecosystem restoration are starting with the land to rebuild a territorial foodshed, which is unfolding in the interstices of the food system.

Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) is an organization birthed less than a decade ago by a visionary local conservation official and a courageous farmer, which has created a momentum for government policies to pay farmers for environmental goods and services. While this was far from their initial thoughts, as they discovered that government was not going to simply respond to synergistic solutions, even from well connected insiders and constituents, they discovered how to find urban allies and widened their perspective in the process. Two aspects of their journey eventually resonated with urban movements: first, ecosystem management resonates with urban-based environmental movements, if they can come to understand farming, and with farmers if they can lose their distrust of city folk; and second, as anti-hunger came to include healthy food, and as farmers could see at least one way to multiply income streams, possibilities appear to close the price gap between hungry eaters and underpaid farmers.

The path to urban alliances came through trial and error. Dave Reid, trained as a fish and wildlife biologist, is a conservation official of the Province of Ontario. As Land

Stewardship Coordinator for Norfolk County, his task was to induce private landowners to maintain and restore wildlife habitat. Norfolk County is relatively prosperous farm county, with a history of chemical intensive, monocultural farming; the landscape contains occasional tobacco sheds and ginseng screens, remnants of successive specialized crops that rose and fell, and specialized vegetable growers. The unique forests and waters of this part of the foodshed located on Lake Erie have been degraded. Most of the people Reid had to induce to restore wildlife habitat were farmers whose entrepreneurial practices had led to industrial production and to loss of forests, hedgerows, and clean waterways. If these farmers were to “get off the jug,” as now agro-ecological farmer Bryan Gilvesey puts it, they had to learn to be creative and to take some big risks with their businesses and the incomes of their families.

When Reid first heard about ALUS, a program being talked about in the Province of Manitoba in concert with a U.S. hunting organization called Delta Wildfowl, he saw the possibility for getting farmers to cooperate. After decades of the roller coaster of price shifts, farmers were not an easy sell. Gilvesey says he agreed to try a demonstration project on his farm because he expected it to boost his income as he converted to pasture for Texas Longhorn cattle. He was cautious when introduction of tall prairie grasses led to annual weeds; farmers are threatened by weeds, which with patience, disappear as the native plants become established. His relationship with Reid allowed him to persevere. Working with Reid, Gilvesey introduced native flowers, initially to increase biodiversity. This led them to investigate native pollinators and their habitat, which was surprisingly on bare ground and in stumps. Gilvesey experimented with various ways of rotating pastures and wild grasses, introduced solar powered pumps to keep cattle from polluting

the stream where fish habitat was being restored, and hedgerows and birdhouses and much more, becoming along the way, in collaboration with scientist Reid, a farmer-scientist.¹⁶

Of course, habitat cannot be restored on one farm, but requires collaboration across streambeds, and across the foodshed. Gilvesey's journey unfolded along with the policy work designed to shift the farming landscape to restore forests, grasses, and waters in ways that enhanced farm viability both ecologically and economically. Together Reid and Gilvesey began with what they call a naïve faith that government would fund pilots for the 31 willing county farmers, included leaders of the farm community, who the two had patiently convinced to try. Reid and Gilvesey held a workshop in 2003, including farmers, conservation and agriculture organizations and officials from the provinces of Manitoba and Prince Edward Island (PEI), where breakout groups independently shifted their perspective from measuring ecosystem effects to measuring pre- and post-trial public attitudes to the health of the landscape. They understood "it is not about projects but people," because it is too hard over the short life of a pilot to show longterm benefits to trees, fish, birds, and water. In hope that organized support and clear measurement goals would convince government to fund pilots, Reid wrote what he calls the "bible" for farmers to restore habitat and proposed a pilot project in 2007. It was refused.

This effort led to important lessons. Reid and Gilvesey came to understand that they were part of a historic shift towards policies recognizing the "multiple functions" of agriculture (crops and livestock, employment, landscape/ecosystem management). Yet this shift was not easy in the institutional legacy separating agriculture from all other

¹⁶ I elaborate this term, along with "nutritionist-cook" in (Friedmann Gardens),

issues, with agricultural ministries locked into lobbies of specialized “producers” or “growers” as they came to be called; part of the challenge is to recover an identity as “farmers.” The European policy of multifunctionality was often opposed by organized farm lobbies, who had not been included in design of the policy by trade and environmental groups. Yet the idea was taken up there and across the world by the international farm movement Via Campesina and found to be sound by international experts (IAASTD).

Norfolk ALUS learned from the experience of PEI that the old type of regulatory approach had failed. That government tried ALUS as a response to fish dying due to agricultural runoff. Even in a small province, where ecological and social relationships are more visible, uniform farm level regulations did not lead to the revival of fish populations. Even if they had got funding from the Ontario government, the “bible” was not the best approach. But they had not waited for funding. Working with Delta Wildlife, Gilvesey and three other farmers began in 2005 to create demonstration farms (“from a narrow and selfish perspective” of increasing farm profits) and organizing tours for prospective funders, other farmers, journalists, and urban folks interested in food and where it comes from. As Reid points out, tours led to on-farm sales of Gilvesey’s meat.

Reid’s motto became: “tell someone they forget; show someone they remember; involve someone they understand; enable someone they will act.” This action meant not only changing farming but finding ways to collaborate with (or work around, politely) initially threatened farm groups and allies in environmental, food, and eventually anti-hunger groups, and in the process to create models of commercially viable agro-ecological farming. Gilvesey, a gifted speaker in public and private, never tires of

explaining his conversion from dependence on corporate advice and products to engaged knowledge-intensive farmer, whose grassfed beef commands premium prices with minimal effort, and whose farm has become a healthy home for his family as well as bluebirds, native grasses and wildfowl.¹⁷ Their approach shifted to “adaptive management,” that is, away from prescription of “the bible” towards “tapping into farmers’ own innovation.” A new kind of “extension” from a conservation official learning from a collaborating farmer works personally with each farmer to discover what can be done on each farm to both restore wildlife and help the farm, since working with nature effectively can reduce costs and labor, sometimes dramatically. For instance, farmers discovered that patience with weeds until tall grass prairie was established, and creation of hedgerows for soil and water management and as habitat for native pollinators, also allowed them to save cost (and risk) of hiring honeybee pollinators. Gilvesey says, “by living with projects, farmers have come to rediscover that nature has something to offer their farming operation which makes it sustainable. They use less chemical and all that stuff.” Farm culture is changing through “collaborative design.”

While the goal of ALUS is to improve farm viability, it points to other possibilities to multiply income streams to farmers. As farmers open to wider horizons than the specialized commodity markets of the past fifty years, they can gradually drop the chip on their collective shoulders about urban consumers. While some have identified with “business,” and turned in farm skills for commodity trading and investments, others are connecting with eaters who are becoming more interested in them and in farming. Municipal Boards of Education have small apprentice programs for secondary schools,

¹⁷ www.yuranch.com

including chefs; why not pay farmers to train apprentices? Agriculture officials already promote “value added products” on farms; why not expand this idea to public education? Energy policy already pays premium prices for electricity generated on farms as elsewhere; why not integrate with farm and environmental and health policies?

If farmers can trade costly inputs for knowledge-intensive farming, their incomes potentially grow comprehensively, even without charging higher prices. They generally do, and have to, in a transition, but if foodshed markets are reconstructed, that could change. We can only find out by trying. That is one side of the price gap dividing ecological farmers from low-income eaters. I will turn to the hunger problem, that is, access for low income consumers, later. First, it is important to realize that the agrifood system is the major employer in the region. Will the foodshed be based on McJobs or good jobs?

While government policies are in siloes, and agricultural policy remains locked into what are now called “commodity” groups and programs, ALUS’ successful experiments and public communications led in 2011 to relatively stable foundation funding of \$1.5, enough to hire permanent staff.¹⁸ Understanding of what is wanted is different from when they began, so far reaching potentially that it is surely more surprising that stressed officials can listen at all. It is remarkable that three of the four national political parties had a food policy in the last election; the winning party, alas, stayed with its agricultural policy, supporting industrial agriculture and exports.

The Agro-Food Sector: Reorganizing Scale

¹⁸ Foundation funding has undergone changes in recent years which make it problematic as a continuing source for experimental nonprofits. This requires considerable research.

Farming is with difficulty recovered to public policy, even or especially by Ministries/Departments of Agriculture which for fifty years have been locked into commodity policies and commodity producer lobby organizations --- corn producers, pork producers, even vegetable producers. While ALUS exemplifies efforts to transition to farming by established commercial agricultural producers, new farmers are challenged to get established as farmland continues to disappear into what we persist in calling “development.” I will take the land question up in the last section. Here, ecological farmers must create their own markets, as Gilvesey does for his beef, within the frayed infrastructure of the past regional agrifood economy. Some of it lies in the cultural gap between edible commodities and urban cuisines. I will follow a few of the threads of the web being woven by people and organizations undertaking these initiatives.

The problem of farmland is too complex for the paragraph I can devote to it here, but cannot be ignored. One important initiative, which failed but may have changed the public conversation, was the Markham Foodbelt proposal. Markham is a rapidly growing satellite city of Toronto, including immigrants from many cultural backgrounds, built on excellent farmland. Within its jurisdiction are White Belt lands, one of the spatial holes designated for urban expansion by towns in Ontario’s Greenbelt. In 2010 two young women elected councilors proposed to include agriculture in the town’s smart growth policies for density, energy, and transportation. Well organized local environmental groups (both in the region and beyond) mounted campaigns in support, national figure David Suzuki deputed to Markham Council in favor, and a majority of Markham citizens approved of the Foodbelt Proposal. It was opposed by conventional agricultural producers of corn and soy, who argued from experience that agriculture was not

economically viable compared to other land uses, and the so-called developers wanting to buy their lands. It was very close, losing by one vote in a highly mobilized Council meeting. It showed widespread support for saving farmland, and deepened awareness of existing mechanisms and organizations, such as Ontario Farmland Trust. Yet missing was the decisive shift in discourse to understanding how new farms are part of regional economic vitality; by changing to the kinds of intensive, mixed small farms that are economically viable, towns like Markham have the potential to include farmers and farm products in employment and cultural diversity policies, including established farmers already shifting crops and practices, and young people and immigrants entering farming. If existing support for small and medium enterprises built on current trends toward local, healthy, and cultural foods, they would benefit from and enlarge demand for local farms providing ingredients (Gombu 2010).¹⁹

The food sector has come to replace automobiles as the largest employer in the Golden Horseshoe, and not only because of the drastic decline of the latter (Ajayi et.al.2010). New farmers are well aware of these economic trends and often use direct sales via farmers markets or Community Shared Agriculture arrangements, in which customers become farm partners by buying products in advance and often participate in other ways. New farmers, who usually want to farm in environmental attuned ways and on smaller scales and with a mix of crops, find it difficult to get access to disappearing farmland. A variety of nonprofits are assisting with creative forms of “succession”, as it is called in the agricultural world. FarmStart trains new farmers and organizes “FarmLINK” to match “new farmers who are looking for land or mentorship with farm

¹⁹ <http://greenbelt.ca/news/economy/expert-coalition-calls-towns-leadership-markham-agriculture>

owners who have land available or expertise to share” (farmstart.ca/programs/farmlink/). These arrangements are invariably innovative and specific. Everdale Environmental Learning Centre educates new farmers in a context of multifaceted experimentation in fuels, architecture, energy, and business management.²⁰

Payment for environmental services could help established farmers whose entrepreneurial skills are finally turning to the urban markets they have ignored in recent decades. Members of the Holland Marsh Growers’ Association, who shifted to export carrots and onions at the outskirts of Toronto, are proud of experiments with new crops such as baby bok choy and red carrots, in demand by Chinese and East Indian communities, respectively (Reinhart 2009). Leaders of the organization now appear on panels with FoodShare, the oldest food anti-hunger organization, and members of the Toronto District School Board to advocate for government funded student nutrition programs (sadly lacking for an OECD country) and to include food from growing to preparing to eating in all levels of the curriculum.

In addition to reconnecting farmers to urban markets, payments for services could include training apprentice farmers. School boards pay other skilled trades to train high school students as part of their education. It is only jurisdictional boundaries between districts of education, and between urban and regional governments, that make it seem odd to treat farmers like skilled trades, including chefs. At present new farmers are being trained by a network of sustainable farms called the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (www.craftontario.ca), including Everdale and FarmStart, which are mentioned above. Paying both old and new farmers to educate new entrants could

²⁰ www.farmstart.ca and www.everdale.ca

multiply income streams. As many urban high school students have little connection to the countryside, and rural youth may wish to pursue urban occupations, why not interpret farming as a “trade” fitting criteria of the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship program:

- opportunity to start training in a skilled trade while completing the requirements for an Ontario Secondary School Diploma;
- school to work transition through direct entry into apprenticeship training;
- opportunity to train the skilled workers employers require [or for farm renewal];
- solution to address the problem of skilled tradespeople shortages in general, and specifically the lack of young people joining the trades.²¹

Farmers’ livelihoods can once again be multi-faceted. For instance, many have taken advantage of Ontario’s incentives to produce wind and photovoltaic energy. These possibilities expand existing Ministry of Agriculture invocations to “add value” on farms.²²

Labour is a very complex and thorny problem that takes many forms. Many types of Ontario farms rely on temporary immigrant workers with limited rights relative to citizens and certainly to organized labour. Local foods, whether from greenhouses, sustainable farms, or conventional growers, find they cannot hire citizens for the prices they can ask. Even more challenging perhaps than reducing subsidies to fossil fuels used for industrial fertilizers and pesticides (reinforcing the effects of rising prices), is to work towards changing policies that externalize social costs of labour by hiring temporary non-citizens (Sharma 2006). Although ALUS pilot farms show that farmers can reduce labour through wise use of ecosystem cycles, farmers like Gilvesey nonetheless require help; Gilvesey and his family have longterm relationships with a Mexican worker who

²¹ <http://www.oyaptdsb.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=content&PageID=1011&PageCategory=42>

²² <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/busdev/valueadd-bib/index.htm>

comes year after year. Although present use of temporary migrant labour by small ecological farms pales beside exploitation by large-scale agricultural monocultures, foodshed change has to engage directly with exploitation of temporary immigrant workers. It is beginning. Justicia/Justice for Migrant Workers has built on media coverage of accidents, such as the traffic death of ten migrant workers from Central America employed as chicken catchers in February 2012, to also demand inquiries into deaths of Jamaican migrants killed the year before directly at work.²³

Less often noticed even among food activists are overwork or self-exploitation always typical of farmers (Bernstein 2010), now extended to volunteers and those beginning enterprises attempting to bridge gaps in foodshed economy.²⁴ Devoted young people engaged in these projects are buoyed by idealism, including love of nature, food, and justice, but become discouraged when their very hard work seems to bring them barely closer to their goals. Young farmers need communities, sociability, and amenities beyond those now available through electronic media, and they need a decent income and worklife so that they can have children and enjoy life. Pressing against the agricultural infrastructure created by supermarkets and their long supply chains, efforts to create self-employment in the food system often requires self-exploitation.

2. Territory Again: Recovering the Cultural Economy of the Urban Foodshed

Part of the solution is to rebuild the territorial foodshed undone first by commodity agriculture and then by the supermarkets' long and variable supply chains.

²³ <http://yourlegalrights.on.ca/news-source/83853>

²⁴ These few lines barely capture the richness of the conversation about labor organized by Deborah Barndt and Kristen .

The task consists of relinking two distinct aspects of proximity: economic and spatial (Michnik 2008). In a diasporic urbanized region, one of the gaps to close is cultural.

The new organization that has brought together a number of initiatives and facilitated coordination through its (so far) two annual *Bring Food Home* conferences is Sustain Ontario: Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming. It was created in 2009 with funds from the Metcalf Foundation, a small family foundation with a comprehensive vision for preserving and enhancing the countryside of Ontario and the capacity to be both nimble and focused. Metcalf arrived at a foodshed perspective through a process that focused on the intersection of food, farming, environment and landscape. It commissioned planner Philippa Campsie, who had little prior knowledge of the agrifood sector, to write a 2008 report called *Food Connects Us All*, which recommended creation of Sustain Ontario. Inspired by Sustain UK, Sustain Ontario adopted a greater balance between food security and healthy farming. In its short life Sustain has incubated a number of foodshed-wide initiatives for sustainable farming, urban-rural connections, education, and most recently a food and nutrition strategy.

Economically, one of the successful initiatives that Sustain built on was a dramatic rise in interest in public procurement --- the “power of the public plate” (Morgan and Sonnino 2008). This idea had been persistently floated in the 1990s. when what then Coordinator of the Toronto Food Policy Council Rod MacRae calls “trade chill” led to a hegemonic assertion that the North American Free Trade Agreement prevented the City of Toronto from favoring local food. In 2005, just a few years before the founding of Sustain, the University of Toronto had already modified its purchasing policies for clothing in response to a student “no sweat” campaign. A champion within

the college system convinced the University to consider a pitch by Lori Stahlbrand to make sustainable food part of its RFP as the ten-year contract for its 70,000 students was expiring. Events moved quickly, as Stahlbrand brought the possibility to the Toronto Food Policy Council for advice. There she met the second speaker that day, social entrepreneur Mike Schreiner who had created a profitable local, organic food delivery service --- a private complement to the nonprofit Good Food Box which by then had reached 4000 boxes a month--- and who was looking to shift public policy towards local sustainable foods.

The two created Local Food Plus (LFP)²⁵ in tandem with Stahlbrand's work with the UofT contract team, which made LFP the certifying body for the purposes of the contract. LFP brought in MacRae, with a doctorate in agroecology and a leader of the Canadian organics movement, to write their standards. MacRae's vision of an ecological farm based model of healthy food for all as public policy was tempered by a practical appreciation of the standards fatigue of farmers. His innovative standards, which piggybacked on existing standards, included not only production and proximity (defined by jurisdictional rather than ecological boundaries) but also energy, animal welfare, and most important, labor. A respected organics inspector was recruited to train LFP staff, despite the fact that LFP's innovative point system (drawn from integrated pest management and other sustainable, but not organic, farm practices) changed from hierarchical inspector-farmer relations to a continuous improvement model, seeking to assist farmers to raise standards and thus to raise the standards of the sector as a whole. This meant not only adding criteria to organic farmers, but also certifying farms that met

²⁵www.localfoodplus.ca

minimum criteria for proximity, energy, animal welfare, and labor, but fell short of the organic “gold standard” for production systems. Each of the players brought relations of trust to working with each other shortly after meeting, and to gaining acceptance by institutional buyers and farmers. Soon they cracked retail, through a small, local grocery chain owned by an earlier generation of Italian immigrants, and then helped other regions set up their own LFP organizations (Friedmann 2007). Unusually, LFP has already had a change in leadership, as Stahlbrand and Schreiner moved on. In 2012 LFP has shrunk from its peak as foundation and government funding have shrunk and changed approach, but its influence ripples out through more contracts --- now the push is hospitals --- and through public awareness. An extraordinary mobilization against a new “comprehensive economic and trade agreement” between Canada and the EU, which would explicitly force public procurement to open to transnational corporations, included public resistance by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.²⁶ This concerns far more than food, of course, but food and water concerns were important in deputations to City Councils across the country.

New policies, as an important policy paper from Sustain Ontario puts it, must close the “gap between agriculture and health” (Baker et.al. 2010) They must at the same time close other gaps between economic vitality (shall we call it health?) of a complex agrofood sector stretching from farms to commercial prepared meals, which since the decline of the once dominant auto industry is now the largest sector in the region (Ajayi, et.al.2010), and policies developed in silos for (at least) health, environment, land use planning, social assistance, and agriculture. Food system change is thus not mainly about

²⁶ <http://www.fcm.ca/home/issues/more-issues/international-trade.htm>

individual consumer choices, although they play a role; it is mainly about renewing land and labour in farming, distribution, processing, selling, buying, and eating, and of prices of various kinds of edible commodities relative to each other and to incomes, and most of all to knowledge. All of these involve changes in rules governing markets, that is, public policies.²⁷ Sustain's website traverses the whole of a territorial agrifood sector, from well attended public events on urban agriculture to the emerging food and nutrition strategy bringing professional nutritionists into conversation with actors across the food sector, nonprofit anti-hunger organizations, and several levels of government. Its fall 2011 day-long mobile conference, consisting of 12 separate bus tours, was organized by a committee of farmers, academics, and Sustain staff; urban and rural participants rode buses together and visited farms, research stations, anti-hunger organizations, and other sites to illuminate the challenges and successes of 12 good food ideas in Sustain's *Menu 2020*. The list of sponsors partnering with Sustain were Toronto Food Policy Council, the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee, Foodshare Toronto, the Foodshed Project and World Crop Project.

The World Crop Project illustrates how interstitial change leads to government involvement, this time in creating the cultural basis for a territorial agrifood economy. Of course, most crops (and livestock) grown in North America, including the Golden Horseshoe, are transplants accompanying colonial settlement (e.g., Carney and Rosomoff 20), and most farmers are descended from earlier immigrants. Nonetheless, it still

²⁷ It is important especially for a U.S. audience to insist that incremental change does not reduce to consumerism, as Michael Pollan says, changing the food system with your fork. This paper is concerned with real changes in land use and farming, food access and food cultures, involving policy changes; this includes removing obstacles, often across jurisdictions and scales of government, and creating spaces to enable or incentives to encourage innovations in particular directions. Sometimes the change are large. The question of tipping points preoccupies many change agents.

requires a leap of imagination at the turn of the 21st century for most Ontarians to think of changing crops and (if not industrial techniques). Euro-Canadian farmers, diasporic arrivals to cities and towns, established agricultural commodity organizations and governments are just beginning to see that immigrant farmers and crops are the basis for renewing farming demographically, culturally and economically.

This shift came from at least three directions. One was conventional farmers in Holland Marsh had already seen market opportunities by switching to large fields of a small number of varieties, mainly bok choy and carrots for regional Chinese and South Asian markets. Another was a for-profit social enterprise guided by cultural/culinary and ecological values and knowledge. Arvinda's is a unique form of family enterprise, which began when Arvinda Chauhan tired of her job as civil servant and began Arvinda's Gourment Healthy Indian Cooking classes. Her daughter Preena Chauhan, with an MA in Environmental Studies from York University (whence many food system changers emerge), and experience with an Ontario student grant to start a "summer company," began to work as a policy analyst. She, too, soon tired of that and decided to join her mother's business, but to add her own environmental and business training. She launched a spice line, always trying for organic and fair trade, and other initiatives, including culinary tours of Toronto's Little India (with many regional restaurants) and of regions in India. Preena is a member of the Toronto Food Policy Council as a pioneer in searching out farmers who could supply ingredients Arvinda's was forced to import.²⁸

The third was led by small nonprofits that recruited and supported immigrants to experiment with crops that could provide livelihoods, renew the farm sector, and nourish

²⁸ Interview with Preena Chauhan,

the cuisines of their communities. Recognizing that many immigrants who were accepted to Canada because of professional degrees are not able to work in their fields, and have little connection to the countryside as they struggle to find their way in diaspora, FarmStart hired Sri Sethuratnam, an agricultural engineer with twenty years experience in South India and a Canadian MA in agricultural extension, to manage their Farm Start-Up Programs, for “New Canadians, young people from non-farm backgrounds and second career farmers.” In a downtown Toronto neighborhood, The Stop Community Food Centre, an urban nonprofit, began similar programs in their greenhouse.

Within only a few years, the government and corporate funded Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, with over 70 agronomists from around the world and more than 200 acres of prime government owned farmland in the fertile --- and highly urbanized --- Niagara region of the Golden Horseshoe, took the lead in a Greenbelt Foundation funded project, whose partners included not only their traditional constituents, the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, but also FarmStart and The Stop. Vineland’s professional staff are agronomists, but also marketing specialists with such cutting-edge projects as eye-tracking, and experts working on nanotechnologies for packaging.

Here several paths open to potentially distinct futures. Sethuratnam describes himself as “a passionate student of traditional management practices in agriculture, and a proponent of integrating traditional approaches into modern farming methods...[believing] that traditional and indigenous methods may hold the answers to issues like environmental sustainability and climate change.”²⁹ Like ALUS pioneers,

²⁹ <http://www.farmstart.ca/about-us/our-team/staff/>

FarmStart, The Stop, and Sustain all approach farming as “sustainable livelihoods.”

Contrast Vineland’s description of the World Crops Project in purely economic terms³⁰:

Nearly 63% of Toronto's population will be from an ethnic background by 2031. The city's largest ethnic group (South Asian) has a population of 718,000. The South Asian community alone spends \$396 million each year on vegetables followed by the Chinese community at \$252 million and the Afro-Caribbean community at \$84 million.

Displacing just 10% of imported ethnic vegetable product with locally grown produce would create a new market worth \$73 million dollars for Ontario farmers. There is also potential for export to nearby population centres in the USA which have similarly diverse populations and demand for vegetables.

Yet this is not a simple contrast. The Director of Vineland, Jim Branson, was formerly a research scientist at the University of Guelph, closely tied to the Ministry of Agriculture. He describes the field trials with farmers as marking his personal journey “from my lab as world the world as lab.”³¹ The former president of the Growers Association is one of ALUS’ pilot farmers. And of course, Sethuratnam intends FarmStart’s farmers to succeed in marketing their crops. And in protecting them from natural hazards; is adaptation of microwaves in fields to prevent crops suffering frost damage consistent with farmer-scientist collaboration? Perhaps. What is certain is that, in contrast perhaps to France or Peru or Ghana, it is a distinct challenge to move forward towards sustainable farming in a diasporic urban region.

Eating: Discovering what is good to eat

As cities take the lead in sustainability and food policy, distinct trajectories arise from their institutional histories. And leapfrogging is possible. For instance, Calgary, once a bastion of conservatism in a province with some of the world’s largest livestock

³⁰ <http://vinelandresearch.com/pub/docs/CaseStudy3WorldCrops.pdf>

³¹ vinelandresearch.com/get.asp?t=doc&id=87 (accessed July 14, 2012)

and field crop operations, in 2010 elected a progressive mayor, Naheed Nenshi, born in Toronto of Asian immigrant parents from Tanzania. Nenshi is a pathbreaker, not only in his background as the first Muslim mayor of any Canadian city, but also in sustainability policies from transportation to food. Calgary's support for local foods grows out of its sustainability policies and, while it features local chefs, focuses on supporting farmers. The trajectory of Toronto, whose Food Policy Council predates Calgary's by two decades, has been set by its location in Toronto Public Health. As nonprofit organizations and smaller cities in the Golden Horseshoe foodshed embrace efforts towards a networked, embedded food system, they begin from health.

In 2012 it is perhaps not difficult to imagine that food security, rooted in social justice, should include access to healthy foods rather than the packaged edible commodities sold most widely at lowest prices. Yet when the Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) tried for months in the 1990s to get City staff to cooperate in documenting the connection between diet and chronic diseases such as diabetes, they hit a brick wall as hard as the one protecting against public procurement of local foods. Even though the TFPC had a "farm sector representative" from the start, the connection between food security and ecosystem health was a much greater imaginative stretch. UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier de Schutter, has expanded the the right to food to include the right to a healthy agro-ecosystem. The trajectory of food security and anti-hunger politics in Toronto has evolved within the framework of health.

Approaches to food security diverge into what can loosely be seen as corporate and social-ecological. While this is far too simple, it is useful to contrast the "feeding the world" discourse, which extrapolates quantities of commodities (mostly grains),

population, and prices into frightening predictions of shortages. This discourse serves a project of deepening corporate control and industrial agriculture, with attendant appropriation of land and integration into finance capital. The specific agenda at present is biofortification: the proposed solution to lack of micronutrients in the diets of the poor is to engineer specific vitamins or minerals into plants, which will be owned by corporations and planted in place of mixed farming systems. Of course, the displacement of mixed farming systems was a major cause of both lack of access to a variety of foods, both wild and cultivated, and displacement of farmers a major source of poverty and food insecurity.

The alternative approach seeks to increase the diversity of both farming systems and diets, and the power --- most recently “food sovereignty” of regions to ensure them. The pioneer in this has been Brazil, which drew its national food policy from the longstanding experience of one of its small cities, Belo Horizonte. Rod MacRae and Debbie Field, directors of TFPC and FoodShare twenty years ago visited Belo Horizonte and took enduring lessons from its popular restaurants, *sacalao* subsidized food markets, support for regional farmers, and most of all, attention to the poorest and most vulnerable. All the issues were already engaged, for instance, how to balance short term needs such as infant malnutrition requiring nutritional supplements with long term goals of economically sustainable, accessible food system for the region --- its foodshed. When the National Food Policy Council was created by Lula, Field and Nick Saul, director of The Stop, were invited; deep connections endure, marking a new relationship of knowledge and experience between North and South.

From Hunger to Food as a Public Good

The conflict between short-term needs and long-term goals have compounded over the two decades. The first tension was between what was called the “charity model” and community development based on food--- on community kitchens and gardens, on education and most of all, on social enterprise. While this history cannot be told here, it is important that food banks (pantries in the US) which began in Canada in the early 1980s, were never institutionalized to the extent of those in the U.S. This is partly because there are no government held surplus stocks of food, no food stamps, none of the food-related social services that stem from specific U.S. farm policies. Canada’s policies, notably supply management, prevents surpluses from arising, while the Canadian Wheat Board (recently disbanded despite a court ruling that it could not do so without a referendum of farmers) was directed to maximizing exports and export prices for farmers. Without food stamps, social welfare in Canada is solely based on income transfers and the types of social provision more common in Europe, such as subsidized housing.

Food banks were first thought to be temporary, and therefore the need for charitable donations of food. Within a decade, they had clearly become a permanent feature, as unequal income distribution led to growing poverty, especially among families, the working poor, and children. FoodShare and the TFPC were both created by the mayor of Toronto with the goal of “creating a just and sustainable food system” that would make food banks unnecessary. While even the staff of food banks agreed on that goal, conflict soon arose over how to pursue it. Advocates of resistance to cuts to social assistance argued vehemently against programs such as FoodShare’s Good Food Box, which made group deliveries of fresh produce boxes to paying customers on a schedule geared to social assistance payments (paid when the check was received, delivered when

money was running out). The point of the Good Food Box, designed by social entrepreneur extraordinaire Mary Lou Morgan, was dignity --- everyone paid, marketing was colorful and enticing, and vegetables came with guidance on how to prepare them. Opposition insisted that such programs diverted energy from the only important struggle, which was for living wages and social assistance. FoodShare always supported this goal, and has always run the “hunger hotline” that advises hungry callers where they can access emergency food. But it has also pioneered programs such as incubator kitchens, seedlings, youth employment training, bee-keeping, composting, and more, which have shown the way to put some of the isolated pieces of a fragmented food system back together.

Hunger has become worse, as has government response to pressure for social justice. In March 2012 the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food made his first official visit to an OECD country, Canada. Olivier de Schutter had his staff contact civil society organizations as well as coordinate official meetings with the Canadian government. The government of Canada barely acknowledged his visit. After he issued a report chastising the government of Canada for its failure to meet its international obligation to move towards food and nutrition security, and especially its failure to reverse the severe food security problems of indigenous peoples. Members of Parliament from the majority Conservative Party indulged in a vitriolic attack on the Special Rapporteur, the United Nations as a whole, and the very idea that the Right to Food could be an issue for Canada.

By then, however, a remarkable civil society organization had emerged nationally. One reason de Schutter chose Canada was because of the high level of

coordination of food security activism, which made it easy for his office to arrange civil society consultations as part of his visit. The civil society process was coordinated by FoodSecure, a national organization created only in 2006 and until March 2012 led by a volunteer Executive Director and a few grant-supported staff. In 2011 FSC had released an extraordinary report based in “kitchen table talks” across the country called *Resetting the Table: A People’s Food Policy for Canada* in 2011; building on those networks, FSC got buy-in from virtually all civil society organizations --- from farm groups to low-income community projects to First Nations food security organizations --- to make a single proposal for site visits in his short visit, including a detailed account of who had participated in the process, all submissions received from member organizations, and voices that may be missing. This network worked with his office to coordinate site visits and voices from the people, including First Nations. The meetings held with civil society groups worked across occasional tensions among groups and strategies and may have reached a new level of collaboration as a result of the visit. FoodSecure Canada was able to respond quickly to the Government of Canada’s rejection of the report, collecting signatures from organizations across the country to a letter drafted by its first paid Executive Director, appointed only days before his visit.³²

From Ending Hunger to Good, Healthy Food for All (content sketched in here)

Content: institutional role of public health in Toronto, other municipalities, and finally government concerned with medical system, in pointing towards links with healthy farming and food processing and distribution. Food and Hunger Action

³² See <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=12159&LangID=E> and http://foodsecurecanada.org/sites/foodsecurecanada.org/files/ENGLISH-LETTER-FINAL_JUNE10-1.pdf . Diane Bronson, the first paid ED, is supported by a three-year grant from the J.W. McConnell Foundation, based in Montreal. See <http://www.mcconnellfoundation.ca/>

committee includes community economic development (food related social enterprise) as well as emergency aid.

Food deserts are about access to healthy foods, especially fresh fruits and vegetables. Community gardens and related. Community kitchens and related. Mobile vendors and regulatory obstacles. School programs.

Recipe for Change, an alliance of farmers, education officials, parents, and students to make food required in the curriculum. FoodShare and The Stop pioneer diverse, locally controlled delivery of universal programs, that is, a new and better type of government policy from top-down provision and regulation.

Governing: Discovering how to make it happen

Foodshed and sitopia are ideas inviting praxis to reshape food and farming as existential foundations of cultures and socially organized territories. Moving from resistance to “offering solutions”³³ is fraught with dilemmas and dangers (Goodman et.al. 2011). When corporations use this language, they want to sell a product. When people devoted to food system change use it, they are pursuing interstitial change, sometimes by selling a different kind of product from a social enterprise,³⁴ always by joining up issues. Linking hunger to locality in a vimeo called “Toronto Food Access: A Tale of Two Postal [zip] Codes,” Debbie Field, Director of the longest established civil society food

³³ This phrase was used independently by Ravenna Barker, Director, and Bryan Gilvesey, Advisory Board of , as two leaders of Sustain Ontario: Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming. Field quote is from vimeo“Toronto Food Access: A Tale of Two Postal Codes,” at <http://sustainontario.com/2012/06/20/11079/growing-good-food-ideas/toronto-food-access-a-tale-of-two-postal-codes>

³⁴ Interstitial change can be indistinguishable from simple reforms; only the song can guide discernment. Making mistakes is inevitable. Acknowledging them is key. More later on leadership and adaptive governance. Social enterprise and the social economy are ways to move towards a democratic economy (Murray 200 ; Wright section; Quarter and Armstrong).

security organization in the region, says: “Policy takes a long time to change. At FoodShare we pilot solutions first, prove they are workable and eventually convince policy makers to implement them.” Eventually government officials listen through tiny holes in the walls they have shored up as institutional policies and constituencies no longer serve. Food has been the hole in the donut of health, agriculture, environment, and social welfare. By seeing the hole, it is possible to glimpse how the fragmented bits might begin to cohere, and the image of the circle comes fuzzily into view. Sitopia becomes conscious praxis to reconstruct the foodshed, and perhaps even territorially embedded economies which are at the same time open to others.

Land

To make viable farms into a restored foodshed requires new land policies supporting new forms of governance. Not only watersheds, which are protected in the Ontario Greenbelt, but also farmland is a public (in Europe) or social (in the U.S.) good (Goodman et.al., ch.3; McMillan 2012). Ontario Farmland Trust is one of a number of small struggling organizations devoted to voluntary actions, and punches above its weight in regional if not provincial policy discussions. Yet as the Greenbelt comes up for renewal in 2015, the Government sponsored, independent Friends of the Greenbelt has promoted local food, farm tourism, and a variety of other measures to rebuild markets, while the land question remains taboo. Ultimately, protecting streams, habitat, and other ecosystem flows, depends on coordinated and adaptive governance.

A promising approach is “protected commons” or “common pool resources” analyzed by Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom and her associates; it avoids the fully open access full of pitfalls, from free riders to powerful plunderers, by embedding rights of use

and access in social institutions. It learns from governance of traditional (informal) societies, in order to understand how to adapt to formal governance institutions. Appropriation of land as private property is deepened by appropriation of seeds as intellectual property (Hess and Ostrom 2007), where a parallel solution may be as promising. Open source models for software have prompted innovators to devise rules and institutions to create protected commons for genetic knowledge (Kloppenburg 2011). ALUS illustrates how innovation from below can “unlock the public sector from rigid, top-down, hierarchical organization” (Ostrom 2005), but the question remains how public policy can adapt. This is something sociologists should take up.

Meanwhile, partnerships are eliding boundaries among public, private, and civil society enterprises, and with them, the boundaries among issues no longer separable in practice. Both Everdale and FarmStart partner with a variety of public and private institutions at municipal, regional, and provincial levels. Experimental farms are created on public lands managed by the municipality. An urban-regional mirror to the ALUS alliance, the Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) has made a major shift away from banning uses on conservation land to integrating “sustainable, near-urban” farmers as “environmental stewards” in its Living City “vision for a healthy, attractive, sustainable urban region” based on healthy rivers and shorelines, biodiversity, reduced greenhouse emissions, and cultural diversity. Sustainable agriculture, according to the TRCA, “includes the use of diverse crops, innovative and sustainable agricultural production methods—a combination of appropriate technology, Environmental Goods and Services (EG&S), Beneficial Management Practices (BMPs) and new partners. Farming operations may be on a smaller scale than the typical agri-food industry approach and do

not compromise other TRCA objectives (i.e., the Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy).”³⁵

Adaptive Governance

Three of the four national political parties had food platforms in the 2011 election, though not the Conservative Party which won. As Gilvesey says, “if you have the good idea, you will be in the lead until the end of time; when you get enough momentum, that’s when government will get on board.” As health costs soar, and as poor diets are increasingly connected to looming chronic disease “epidemics”, political leaders and government officials are becoming less deaf to synergistic solutions faced by silos of health, environment, and agriculture. Just barely. Now Gilvesey, a big man who says he used to be frightened of Toronto, is co-chair of Sustain Ontario: Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming. Based on growing organization across sectors, Ravenna Barker, director of Sustain, has access to the office of the Minister of Agriculture and to the Premier of Ontario.³⁶

Food policies cross dysfunctional gaps in levels of government, too. For instance, public health and individual health care are municipal and provincial responsibilities, respectively, while food safety is divided between federal and provincial governments, with municipal governments involved as well, for instance in licensing. Each part of each level of government has to work hard to listen to civil society voices, and when they do, figure out how to square jurisdictional as well as the substantive policy circles. And civil society voices are becoming more aware of each other, more coordinated, and more focused strategically. There is no single part of government to change, and no easy way

³⁵ <http://www.trca.on.ca/the-living-city/programs-of-the-living-city/near-urban-agriculture/>

³⁶ Interviews with Bryan Gilvesey and Ravenna Barker.

to shift policies. But adding new policies at the margins may be reaching limits --- or tipping points to deeper changes.

Food system change crosses and begins to reshape jurisdictional boundaries between municipal, regional, provincial (state), national and international governments. Diverse social actors are therefore involved *interstitially* in changing the *agrofood economic sector* from below, and *symbiotically* in changing policies and regulations across a range of *government institutions* (at every scale and across scales),³⁷ including (in addition to trade and finance) health, agriculture, natural resources, environment, and social services (Wright 2010).

*An Example of Adaptive Governance: Toronto Food Policy Council*³⁸

³⁷ Goodman et.al. (2011) refer to something similar as “reflexive localism.”

³⁸ Thanks to Joel Fridman for insightful analysis of a conversation about the Toronto Food Policy Council through the concept of adaptive governance.

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