THE ALTERNATIVE FOOD MOVEMENT
IN HUMBOLDT COUNTY, CA:
SOCIAL BONDS AND DIVISIONS

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ABSTRACT

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In light of the corporate-ruled, globally-scaled food system that dominates much of the world’s food production, distribution, and consumption practices today, the Alternative Food Movement has gained popularity across the nation as a purveyor of small-scale, local food systems with a focus on environmental sustainability and human rights to healthy food. As the movement continues to develop, concerns by activists, scholars, and community members are being voiced about the social divisions in movement participation.

This thesis explores the social bonds and divisions in the alternative food movement within Humboldt County, California. Via interview research with individuals working within the alternative food system, questions are addressed regarding how workers understand and define their work, how the movement creates opportunities for community involvement, and how they address barriers to participation. Findings reveal that the alternative food movement is a source of both social bond and social division, primarily across economic and cultural/racial line. A strategic method of inclusive and equitable communication between leaders, decision-makers, and community members is identified as a potential solution to create a more inclusive and adaptable movement.
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INTRODUCTION

Today’s system of food production, distribution, and consumption is heavily influenced by the ideology of capitalist globalization. Capital, rather than human health, has become the deciding factor driving food production and consumption. The commodification of foods, as the commodification with any item, changes the way it is viewed and managed by producers and consumers. Food no longer has value in and of itself. Rather, the value of food items is susceptible to market shifts, rises and falls. Thus, human health (nutritional health) is also susceptible to the volatile capitalist market. As Nally (2010) explains, this new system of commercial food production “involves the destruction of local people’s safety nets and coping mechanisms” leading to food insecurity, potential famines, and food shortages. As a result, there is a reliance on and demanded support of corporate food options (Nally 2010).

It is in light of the current global food system that what is known as the ‘alternative food movement’ has risen in the United States. The alternative food movement involves reactionary efforts that seek to combat the increasing commodification of food and the commercialization and industrialization of agriculture. The logic of alternative food follows that more local, environmentally sustainable, and small-scale artisanal food institutions serving specific geographic communities should
replace the current global and commercial food system in order to save human and ecological health.

Under the banner of the alternative food movement, numerous community organizations and initiatives have developed and grown to challenge the dominant form of food production and distribution. According to human geographer Rachel Slocum, the central concepts of the alternative food movement include “the community food system, food security, and sustainability” (2007:522). Further, the initiatives of this movement include four components: supporting local farmers through local organizations; non-profits hosting nutrition education, cooking demonstrations, and obesity prevention (among other health-related issues, depending upon the needs of the community); environmental groups to monitor sustainable production methods; and organizations advocating for those groups that are oppressed in the community (Slocum 2007). The support for small local farmers and a community food system involves developing direct marketing systems in the community, usually in the form of Farmer’s Markets, Community-Supported Agriculture, farm stands, or linking together local institutions – schools, hospitals, senior centers, locally owned grocers, etc. - with local producers. Direct, local markets help to “re-embed people in time and place” (Zerbe 2010) and thus (re)develop and deepen relations with their community, their local food system, and the ecological environment used to produce their food.

Despite the numerous developments that have risen from the movement and allowed for greater security and sustainability in local food systems, the movement also has been the site of many critiques by scholars and activists throughout the country. A
primary critique has been the movement’s tendency to create, sustain, or potentially magnify the in-group and out-group divisions in specific communities (Guthman 2004; Slocum 2008). In other words, the fourth component of the movement—advocating for the oppressed groups in the community—has fallen short. As Thomas Macias stated (2008) “food is a fraught signifier.” Indeed, food is more than sustenance, and more than a commodity. Food is a symbol that represents culture and history, socioeconomic status, and social bonds (Slocum 2010). Food can bring people together and be a centerpiece to community building, and at the same time it is one that can divide people and cause great destruction in a community. For example, in Contexts magazine, Josee Johnston and Kate Cairns (2014) write of interviews they conducted with women living in poverty and their experience of shopping at farmer’s markets. Their findings highlight the emotional element that is involved in their shopping experience. These women living in poverty expressed emotions of stress, intimidation, and feeling ‘out of place’ when they attended their local farmer’s market shopping outlet—a key marketing outlet used in alternative food systems (Contexts 2014). These emotions add an element to the shopping experience that creates a feeling of division from the larger community.

This thesis explores the perspective, and understanding of those working within and for an alternative food system in order to provide a greater understanding of how and why these systems are practiced in a community. The questions of who is participating in the alternative food movement, and why, are key considerations when assessing the movement’s functioning and potential impact. This research seeks to contribute to the understanding of how social identity influences the alternative food movement. For the
The purpose of this thesis, the community researched is Humboldt County of Northern California.

This thesis explores several research questions:

1.) What is the alternative food movement?
2.) What does the alternative food movement look like in Humboldt County, California?
3.) How do those working in an alternative food system define and understand their work?
4.) How does the alternative food movement create involvement opportunities for community members?
5.) What barriers to the alternative food movement participation exist for community members?

This thesis is organized into chapters including a review of existing literature, methods of research, results and analysis, and a concluding discussion and summary chapter. Chapter Two begins with a review of existing literature on the alternative food movement and the relationship between food and social groups. This includes a history and description of the current dominant food system, a history and description of the alternative food movement, as well as discussion of the relationship between food, social bonds and identity. This discussion provides background information that allows for deeper analysis of research questions three and four. Chapter Three discusses the methods for research used to address the research questions of this
study, which involved semi-structured interviews with individuals working with in local food system of Humboldt County. A description of the respondents and the methods for respondent selection are also included in this chapter. Chapter Four then turns to review and analysis of findings that come from interview data. Chapter Five concludes the research and summarizes key points and findings, as well as provides some suggestions for future research and work in Humboldt County’s local food system.
THE RISE OF THE DOMINANT FOOD SYSTEM

The first step to understand the rise of the alternative food movement is to develop a clear understanding of the dominant, conventional food system that controls food production, distribution, and consumption on a global level. It is by developing a clear understanding of the dominant system that one can come to fully understand the alternative, how those working for the alternative perceive and experience this work, and how consumers perceive and experience this alternative. It is likely that much of the perception of an alternative is based on the dominant system at the given moment, as it is this dominant system, which provides humans with a means of comparison for the arising alternative.

Eric Holt-Gimenez provides great insight into the destructive nature of commodifying food. According to Holt-Gimenez, the industrialized “corporate” food system controls the flow of food in ways that can only be understood through the rhetoric of capital; while there is overproduction of food, around a sixth of the world’s population is “too poor to buy this food” (Holt-Gimenez 2011). In this rhetoric of capital, food is available based on exchange value and those able to afford the exchange, and not necessarily available to those who have the greatest need for the item. If food were conceived of first and foremost as a necessary component to human survival and a human right (as humans have the right to live), it can be imagined that greater, more equitable access would be
available to all, and not determined by financial tides and an individual’s position on the socioeconomic ladder.

For a historicized and systematic analysis of the relation between politics, economy, and food the concept of a ‘food regime’ can be employed. This concept rests on the idea that the growing power of capital to continually reorganize agriculture exceeds the power of state policies that direct agricultural practices to national ends (Freidmann and McMichael 1989). In other words, capital has exceedingly greater control over agriculture than the state. By following the logic of this concept, it can be seen how the international political-economic relations of food production and consumption have been linked to forms of capitalist accumulation since the 1870’s, when the first food regime began (Freidmann and McMichael 1989), and even how this regime logic permeates into the alternative food movement that has risen in retaliation against the corporate food system.

Harriet Friedmann was the first sociologist to use the term *food regime* in 1987 after conducting a study of the post-World War II international order of food systems. Friedmann systematically mapped the rise and fall of the United States ‘food aid’ program, in which cheaply produced surplus foods were delivered in mass quantities into ‘third world’ countries (McMichael 2005). The concept of the food regime is particularly useful because it historicized the global food system by problematizing agricultural modernization, thus underlining the important role of food in the global political-
economy order. Further, it identified the contradictions within each regime that ultimately
generate new crises and lead to transformation.

The First Food Regime: British Free-Trade Imperialism

Harriet Friedmann was joined a few years later by Philip McMichael to expand
and further develop the concept of a food regime. Their joint work led to the
identification of three separate, but interrelated, food regimes that have taken place from
1870 until today. As Friedmann and McMichael explain (1989), the first food regime
took place between 1870 and 1914, and was spearheaded by Britain in its quest for
hegemony in the global food system. This regime centered on European importation of
crops and foods grown in colonial empires and settler states (Canada, the US, and
Australia), primarily wheat, meat, and tropical products. In essence, the first food regime
was based on the British model of free trade imperialism (McMichael 2005). Britain used
policies of economic liberalism in order to access colonial economies and empires of
other rival European states in order to establish economic dominance. It is during this
first food regime that we see the development of human-altered or human-generated
‘foodstuffs’ (Friedmann and McMichael 1989). Biological inputs in food production
(ecologically occurring minerals, nutrients, etc.) were in many cases replaced by the use
of chemical or mechanical inputs (chemical, synthetically produced additives and
replacements) as agriculture became further incorporated into the capitalist economic
system known as agro-industrialization, according to Friedmann and McMichael (1989).

The Second Food Regime: US Hegemony & International Food Trade

The second food regime, like the first, is founded upon the pursuit of national hegemony. However, unlike the first, this second regime is centered in the United States during the mid to late 20th century. In order to make this regime possible, a restructuring of the global trading system was required. During this time, the United States encouraged decolonized nations to define themselves as new states and become independent of European power. Friedmann and McMichael (1989) argue that this encouragement was a means for the U.S. to incorporate these new nations into the current system of international trade, of which the U.S. was now the hegemonic power. As a necessary component of industrialization programs, newly independent states adopted cheap food policies. The U.S. capitalized on the growing market via exportation of wheat to the Third World, or periphery countries (Friedmann and McMichael 1989). Although at the end of the first food regime the U.S. had suffered considerably from reliance on the export of grains (particularly in wheat exports) to Europe, this time, because the U.S. was in a new place of hegemonic power, they were able to use the exportation of wheat as the primary mechanism of their assured power over newly developing nations (Friedmann and McMichael 1989). Not only did this ensure their domination and hegemonic power in the global trade market, but it also helped the country recover from the dust-bowl crisis that occurred as a result of the previous food regime (McMichael 2009). According to these authors, the movement towards durable, manufactured foods represented the larger shift in the political-economic food system toward mass production and mass consumption. This movement away from imported, natural foods toward domestically
manufactured replacements is what Friedmann and McMichael (1989) view as the defining feature of the re-nationalization of domestic agriculture in economic core countries, particularly the U.S. Soon, however, international trade came to a halt.

As the second food regime came to a crumbling end in the 1980’s, as Third World countries were facing staggering amounts of debt due to the high amount of bank loans that had previously been taken out to continue importing mass amounts of food. In a scramble to save themselves and their economic standing, investors and capitalists alike began outsourcing labor and manufacturing to Third World export processing zones in order to save money on production costs, primarily through lowered wages of workers (Friedmann and McMichael 1989). This movement by the ruling class to place manufacturing locations in Third Worlds can be understood as the first phase of the subsequent, third “corporate food regime."

In her analysis, Friedmann finds the lineaments of a “corporate-environmental” food regime in the relation between environmental politics (land usage, energy sources, etc.) and the reorganization of food supply chains. In her view, the food system is one divided along class lines. While those of the upper class are provided with a selection of fresh and relatively unprocessed foods, those of lower class are only provided with “edible commodities” that are composed of highly engineered and unnatural ingredients (McMichael 2009: 152). This idea of a class division of food distribution has deeply rooted into the way we distribute food, even in the alternative food movement’s efforts. In this movement, the long history of class-based division in food distribution continues to influence the functioning of even the most well-intentioned alternative food system,
this is a point of contention for many communities fighting for an alternative food system, a point that will be returned to later on.

Friedmann’s notion of the food regime is clearly influenced by a Marxian perspective. The theory of a food regime depends upon the Marxian idea of the “metabolic rift” meaning the “separation of social production from its natural biological base” (Foster 1999). When applied to the idea of food systems, this means that the social ordering around food policies is no longer based in sustainable forms of agriculture and human nutrition needs (although the subject of what constitutes human nutrition is greatly debated as well). Under corporate food systems, we do not grow to feed but rather we grow to sell.

Sociologist Farshad Araghi presented a further extension of the food regime concept, considering the food regime as a “political regime of global value relations” (Araghi 2003). Araghi’s value-relations theory proposes that food is inherent in global value relations in regard to the reproduction of labor within the capitalist system. In this analysis of the capitalist system, food is not just a commodity but is rather a commodity-relation central to capitalist power (Araghi 2003). The ruling class of the capitalist system creates a political order of food by controlling the availability of foods and the continual fluctuation of prices, including the difference in affordability of less-processed foods versus manufactured foods. This is particularly similar to Friedmann’s notion of a classist based food system. Following this logic, agricultural practices as well as alternative forms of food production and consumption are central to practices of capitalism found across time and space. It is important to note, however, that in Araghi’s theory, food itself
is not central to the capitalist global system but is rather a means of maintaining control over the various forms of labor. In fact, Araghi makes the bold claim that “…global agriculture and food are inseparable from the reproduction of labor” (Araghi 2003: 51). By presenting the food regime in this light, Araghi reveals how, under the system of capitalism, food is primarily evaluated as an exchange-value, and use-value is only a secondary concern. In other words, the value of food is judged not by its nutritional value (its use) but by what it can be exchanged for (money, control, another commodity, etc.). In this food system, the primary concern of food products is their uniformity and appearance, rather than the taste and nutritional quality of that product (Zerbe 2010).

In the alternative food movement, this logic holds true as well. The tension surrounding capital circulation is not lost in the efforts of the alternative food movement. For example, there is a constant tension in community alternative food systems between providing farmers with a decent wage for their labor while also providing the customer with the lowest cost, highest value product. The dialogue quickly slips into discussions of who is ‘willing’ to pay for the highest quality item, rather than a dialogue of who is able to pay for what type of food (Guthman 2008; Contexts 2014). This continues to be a site of conflict, confusion, and frustration for alternative food movement efforts nation-wide as newly forming food systems struggle to find the right place for capital in the equation.

The Third Food Regime: Corporate Rule

Philip McMichael proposes that the current food regime, known as the “corporate” food regime, started in the 1980’s and continues today. Like the previous
two, this regime has similar components but is decidedly different from the previous two in several ways. The distinguishing feature of this food regime is the neo-liberal political-economic system and the support for globalization that rules economic activity throughout the world (Burch 2009; McMichael 2009). This current food regime is transnational in that it is not based in a single nation or in the interaction between national ruling classes but rather is based in the transnational World Trade Organization’s (WTO) Agreement on Agriculture (McMichael 2005). In other words, the market, rather than an empire or state, now organizes the new food regime. In fact, the state serves the market, due to the power and privilege given to corporations through economic liberalization and privatization (Burch 2009). It is important to clarify the difference between international and transnational. According to sociologist Bill Robinson, while international systems are systems composed of a group of nation-states, transnational systems are composed of “economic and related social, political, and cultural processes…that supersede nation states” (2004:46). The differentiation between the prefixes is crucial to understanding the corporate food regime and the “globalization project” of that regime.

This ‘globalization project’ is directed to resolve the economic crisis created in the previous food regime by the ‘development project.’ In the past regime, the financial and economic relations that gave rise to transnational corporations and banks were still constrained by the limits of nation-state, both spatially and socially. Thus, as capitalist logic goes, a movement towards globalization and neo-liberal economics would allow more power for the developing transnational entities and thus rescue the global economic system (McMichael 2005; Burch 2009).
In the first phase of the corporate food regime, the World Trade Organization Agreement on Agriculture institutionalized neoliberalism in hopes of deepening market relations through means of privatization of states (Pechlaner & Otero 2010). Under this agreement, states lost their “right to food self-sufficiency as a national strategy” (McMichael 2005:281). This regulation includes several direct laws such as a minimum import rule of 5% of domestic consumption for all participating nations (McMichael 2005). In addition to the changes in policy, the economic ideology came to be that participation in international food trade was not only preferable but, in fact, necessary for national survival. Products from the global North were quickly replacing agricultural goods from the global South, increasing from 64% to 71% of domestic consumption between 1970 and 2000 (McMichael 2005). As food manufacturing companies from the US and other core nations began to relocate their manufacturing sites in the global South, production costs were cut, primarily due to lowered wages for laborers in the periphery nations. This agricultural industrialization had gravely negative impacts on the proletariat class of periphery nations, including the displacement and disempowerment of farmers as well as slum-dwellers surrounding urban centers (McMichael 2005; McMichael 2009; Pechlaner and Otero 2010).

As these corporations were now able to produce much more for the same cost (and with fewer environmental regulations), surplus was generated at greater levels than before. This allowed for the lowering of food prices, which McMichael argues to be a mechanism for providing cheap food to those in the global North who were faced with lowered wages due to economic rifts (2009). ‘Dumping’ of cheap foods in low-income,
periphery nations also became a common mechanism of corporations to deal with the
great surplus that was now being produced (McMichael 2005; Pechlaner and Otero
2010). Dumping is defined by the mass-importation of goods into a nation and, as the
term connotes, it is done purely as a means for ridding of surplus. These cheap, highly
processed foods were sold at prices affordable to the lower-class and the poor while those
of high affluence were provided markets with healthier, and more natural foods such as
fresh fruits and vegetables (McMichael 2009; Dixon 2009; Popkin 2006).

**Building on the Concept of the Food Regime: Nutritional Impacts**

Other scholars in the area of food studies have expanded the concept of the food regime to further contextualize and expand our understanding. Jane Dixon (2009) applies
the concept of the food regime with focus on the nutritional impacts of the food regime.
Dixon adopts the concept of the “nutrition transition” first defined by Barry Popkin in
1994 (Popkin 1994). The ‘nutrition transition’ can be defined as a shift in food
consumption way from plant-based diets toward one based primarily on animal-protein,
oils and fats, and processed sugars and carbohydrates (Popkin 2006). As nations become
incorporated into the nutrition transition, the type of foods consumed is differentiated
among classes. Those of lower class are forced to buy heavily processed, nutrient
depleted foods due to price and availability while those of higher affluence are provided
with healthier, less processed dietary options. This ‘nutrition transition’ is resulting in not
only high prevalence of mal-nutrition and under-nutrition among poorer populations, but
also of diseases typically found among those of high affluence, such as obesity. This
transition is at a global level, it impacts not only those of the poorer, periphery countries but can also be seen in the US population as well.

Dixon (2009) shows in her research how the continual shrinking of dietary diversity on a global level and increasing power of corporate input on nutritional standards has gravely negative side-effects on consumers, and therefore on workers. Dixon’s work can be connected to the corporate food regime in several ways when considering the rule of the market episteme in dictating the types of food supplied to different social classes and the heavy manufacturing of foods. Within the United States, we can see this nutrition transition in light of the corporate food regime with the phenomenon of ‘food desserts’ – to give just one example.

A food desert is defined as a geographic area that does not have access to healthy, fresh, and affordable food (USDA: Food Deserts 2014). Further, they are identified as “low-income communities” or “low-access communities” (USDA: Food Deserts 2014). As Julie Guthman (2014) points out, these communities are often a result of income and/or racial inequalities. To understand this concept one must not only look at the quantity of food outlets in a particular community or geographic area, but the quality of them as well. In an urban area, for example, there may be a food retailer on every block. However, there is a drastic different between a convenience-store food retailer stocked with snacks, candy, and soda and a store that sells whole-food ingredients to make a filling, energizing, and balanced meal. Research on food security has shown that wealthy districts have three times as many supermarkets as their poor counterparts, and that white neighborhoods have an average of four times as many supermarkets than neighborhoods
of predominantly African American people (Morland et al. 2002; Food Empowerment Project 2014). Such a stark contrast in food access across racial and class lines cannot be brushed off as coincidental. Indeed even if such a phenomena were, in fact, purely a result of chance, the lack of reaction to address this gap in food access is evidence in itself of greater political dynamics at work. In some communities alternative food movement efforts are engaging in by the public to address these issues of food access and food security, many directly combating the racial and classist discrimination of food outlet locations.

Bruce M. Campbell takes yet another avenue in his focus on the food regime by developing an environmental perspective (2009). In his work, Campbell discusses the emergence of “food from nowhere,” a term used to describe highly-processed, genetically engineered foods that, unlike fresh fruits or vegetables for example, do not come from a specific geographic region but rather are generated in factories. As Campbell explains, this exemplifies the ‘metabolic rift’ that results in the separation between humans and nature. Unlike in previous food regimes, however, environmental and public health concerns are gaining attention by working populations across the globe and, as a result, there is now an emergent issue of what Campbell calls “cultural legitimacy” (2009). In other words, consumers today have a heightened distrust of science, food politics, and retailers. This distrust may result in public demand for transparency of the food system and/or a shift away from current, inhumane forms of food production, distribution, and consumption toward a new alternative.
THE ALTERNATIVE FOOD MOVEMENT

In light of this current food regime and the effects it has on our nutritional health and connection to our nutritional sources, groups have organized and movements have formed. The distrust resulting from chaotic, mystified, and suspicious food-market practices has caused many people and groups to take their nutrition into their own hands. The alternative food movement is one of these social movements that focus on small-scale, geographically specific and directly-marketed foods that are grown in ecologically sustainable manners.

The concept of the ‘alternative food movement’ is itself slightly misleading - it is more than a single cohesive movement. Within the United States there are several movements comprising the meta-movement for alternative food choices. In general, there are two areas of inquiry that are the focus of alternative food studies – one that concerns itself with food production and one which focuses on the consumption of food (Nestle 2009). While these two areas can be separated, there is clear overlap between the two. For this reason, there are also some sub-movements of alternative food that seek to address both production and consumption. Ultimately, all sub-movements of the alternative food movement seek to provide healthy, naturally produced food to people while respecting workers rights and protecting the natural environment.

In his discussion of those movements which focus on production, Marion Nestle (2009) identifies the good, clean food movement; the Slow Food movement; the farm-
animal movement; the locally grown movement, the organic food movement, the safe food movement. Secondly, when speaking about those movements that focus on consumption, Nestle includes the anti-marketing-food-to-kids movement, the school food movement, the calorie-labeling movement, and the anti-trans-fats & anti-high-fructose-corn-syrup movement. And finally, the movements that include considerations of both production and consumption in their efforts include the community food security movement, the better farm bill movement, and the food studies movement (Nestle 2009).

Overall, while these sub-movements all have differing focuses, they share a common goal of a food system that provides adequate food that is healthy for both the environment and the human (this may be a specific individual, a specific group, or all humans in general, depending on the sub-movement).

Although each specific sub-movement of the alternative food movement has its personal history, the alternative food movement as a whole finds its root in the mid-to-late 1900’s. In Post-World War Two United States, there was a proliferation of chemicals and synthetics used in the home for cleaning, gardening, and consuming. This is what is commonly known as the era of ‘better living through chemicals.’ During this time was the introduction of the Green Revolution (McMichael 2005). The Green Revolution was an introduction of particular technologies for food production. These technologies utilize agro-industrial monocultures and the bio-engineering of food products and synthetic food replacements in the items we ingest. The result has been the elimination much of the world’s biodiversity, seed saving, and local knowledge of agriculture (McMichael 2005). By way of agricultural replacement, the green/gene revolution generates a plethora of
“food from nowhere” both in the form of animal feed and as manufactured foods for human consumption (Campbell 2009). “Food from nowhere” is a term used for foods that are manufactured and are partly or completely synthetic. The intention of using this phrase is to differentiate these manufactured foods from Earth-produced foods that have specific geographic conditions and regions in which they grow (“food from somewhere”).

It was in light of this era that individuals began to organize together against the vast, and fast, spread of chemical inputs and form what we know today as the alternative food movement. Surprisingly, as much literature as there is on the alternative food movement today, there is little literature on the historical development of the movement. Marion Nestle, a prominent scholar in the alternative food movement, has written a short account in which he identifies three texts that he argues were highly influential in developing the alternative food movement in the United States. Nestle (2009) identified Mastering the Art of French Cooking by Julia Child, Simone Beck, and Louisette Bertholle, published in 1961, as the first book the spark interest in US citizens around food as a cultural indicator. This book, Nestle claims (2009) brought the realization to many US residents that their available fresh food is limited, at least in comparison to France. If this book did, in fact, have the effect Nestle believes it to have had, it is telling of how the emergent alternative food movement developed its cultural lens. For example, the book Mastering the Art of French Cooking showcases and places on high authority the gourmet-style cooking recipes developed in white, European culture. These recipes take great time, dedication, cookware, and high-quality, fresh ingredients. This distinct cultural quality lays out the foundation for the movement and already begins to develop a
social identity that praises great energy and time dedication to one’s meals and does not directly address considerations of busy schedules and limited income or access.

Nestle (2009) identifies the second major text as *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* written by Sidney Mintz in 1985. This book, says Nestle, laid the foundation for Food Studies as a worthy academic field of inquiry, particularly throughout universities and colleges. And finally, Nestle says that *Fast Food Nation: the Dark Side of the All-American Model* by Eric Schlosser in 2001 “has turned masses of readers into advocates eager to change the current food system” (2009:38). ¹

While Nestle’s declaration of these three sources as the historical development of the alternative food movement is convincing, it appears that further research and attention should be given to developing a clear understanding of the movement’s history. One limitation to Nestle's statement is that he appears to only consider textual media and does not consider television programming, government and policy influence in health campaigning, or other sources of public information and media. Certainly more than three texts have influenced the movement, and it is widely known that the idea of health and nutrition was brought up prior to the 1960’s. In the early 1930’s and 1940’s, for example, Adelle Davis was a noted nutritionist who published many works that promoted the consumption of “natural, whole foods” in order to live a healthy lifestyle – words that still hold strong meaning in our food culture today (Chellum 2012). Later, in the

¹ Interestingly, all of the texts identified by Nestle are written by white-European and white-European-American individuals, and therefore, the information is influenced by this cultural perspective. While this demographic of food authors may be due to the bias of Nestle's own acknowledgement of important actors, it may also exemplify a heavy white-European-American cultural influence in the alternative food movement.
beginning of the 1950’s, national health and fitness icon Jack Lalanne began a television show about health, nutrition, and physical fitness that reached television-owning housewives (as these were the people at home during broadcasting) across the nation and motivated them to consider these topics in their day to day lives (Challem 2012). Indeed, prior to his show, in 1936, Lalanne had opened the United State’s first health club (Stone 2004).

Lalanne played an important role in making physical fitness and nutrition a common topic in health discussions and helped propel the popularity of other nutrition and health programs, books, and professionals throughout mainstream United States culture including the book *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. These individuals were key in the development of our cultural understanding of nutritional health and physical well-being – ideas that influence both the dominant and alternative food systems that exist today.²

**Issues in Clarifying the Alternative Food Movement**

The movement’s goals toward more humane and ecologically sustainable food practices are complicated, however, by confusion and disagreement over the definition of what ‘adequate’ food (both in quality and quantity) and ‘healthy’ food really mean. After all, who has the ability, the right, or the responsibility to define these terms? Where are

² Further research of influential figures would provide a more detailed historical development of this nation-wide movement and help to better define cultural nutritional ideology. In addition, a more detailed and exhaustive understanding of the historical development would help to determine the degree and nature of white-European American cultural influence on the movement today.
these people situated within time and space, within their political, social and cultural reality? As these types of questions help to determine how individuals form their definitions, we come to the realization that there may not be a single blueprint definition for ‘healthy.’ This word holds different lexicon and connotation for each individual, across and within cultures and communities. Is health determined, for example, by individual bodily function in response to food, by carbon-footprint created from one’s food, or by the satisfaction and pleasure accompanying it? Is healthy food measured in milligrams of micro- and macro- nutrients contained in a food item, or is it measured purely in the quantity of food one was able to eat that day? How do additional synthetic inputs and food origins play a role in determining the ‘health’ of food? Some initiatives, such as the anti-trans-fats movement and the labeling movement for example, may determine that consumer’s bodily response to the ingested item is a primary determinant of health of one’s diet. On the other hand, some alternative food initiatives such as with the locally-grown movement and the farm-animal movement may define healthy diet primarily in terms of the environmental impact it has. Further, initiatives such as the Slow Food movement add additional emphasis on the sense of pleasure and community that comes from one’s interaction with their food, thus adding a more emotional element to determining the health of one’s diet.

In the alternative food movement, the lack of an explicit definition, of what is ‘healthy,’ as evident in the lack of definition in academic literature or on movement organization websites, leads movement participants and non-participants alike to develop ambiguous, uncertain definitions (organic, non-synthetic, environmentally sustainable,
and pleasurable) of healthy diet. These generalized, uncertain words that are passed around, with no clear consensus on their real, true meaning, leading each individual to develop their own understanding and interpretation. The gaps in communication have serious impacts in the alternative food movement and all those affected by its practice, both directly and indirectly. Food and dietary practices hold strong significance of identity for an individual, a community, and society at large (Slocum 2008). When we debate topics of food and diet, we are debating more than isolated acts of feeding a body, we are debating around core foundations in our identity. Within the alternative food movement specifically, as efforts within each sub-movement to define exactly what their goals, vision, mission, and logic is, more community members begin to identify with this message – or not. As a result, in-group and out-group divisions begin to emerge in the community, often replicating divisions already existing and incorporating them into yet another arena – the food market.
SOCIAL DIVISIONS AND THE ALTERNATIVE FOOD MOVEMENT

Defining the Social Role of Food

Part of what makes food such a critical topic for debate is the intimate relationship each human has with it. Unlike most other commodities that we consume, food is ingested into our very bodies and becomes a part of us. Food is what constitutes our cells, tissues, and allows for our body to function. However, in this era of industrial agriculture, we as consumers in the United States are being more and more removed from our food source. We are alienated from the very thing that provides us life, and we are thus further alienated from ourselves. Due to this alienation, for many food becomes something that is imagined as neutral and passive.

According to Rachel Slocum (2010), food is commonly portrayed as a neutral substance, one that is “passive, mundane.” It is a day-to-day action we must partake in, like brushing one’s teeth or going to the bathroom- we all do it on a regular basis. However, while food certainly can be a mundane experience, it is never passive. The foods we consume always have direct results on our bodies, our short- and long-term health, as well as our social bonds. Food is only mundane when it is readily available and adequate for the consumer. Food only appears passive if one does not delve into the history behind their food (Slocum 2010). The history includes who/what produced, cultivated, processed, and distributed the food; where the cultivation and processing occurred; how it arrived to one’s mouth; and it also includes where the extra waste,
byproduct, and potential pollution will end up. Further, food is only passive if we blind ourselves to the social context in which food is cultivated, distributed, and consumed. To say food is passive and mundane is a privileged perspective. For those who do not have readily available, adequate food, or who are socially ostracized or belittled for the culinary practices, food becomes a site of conflict and contestation (Slocum 2010).

There is nothing passive, mundane, or neutral about food, it is both a social and a biological act. Food not only symbolizes social inclusion or exclusion, it actively creates and recreates social relations (Slocum 2010). Actions such as grabbing a ‘quick bite’ on our way to work or class, or when we sit on the couch with a snack in the evening, are never a neutral acts, they are indeed a learned behavior and ones that take decision-making and reliance on memory from past experiences with food. It is also calculated and structured by what one can afford, what is readily available, the preparation required, and the individual’s personal preference. Even the seemingly mindless snacking and decision-making habits are indeed the result of years of practice in socialization of food-decision habits. One’s culture, social and physical environment, formal and informal education, socialization, and biological impulses all influence the decision of whether or not, for example, to eat meals at a table or in front of the TV, to buy bottled water or drink from the tap, or whether to eat alone or communally. As Roland Barthes (1966: 29) stated, “food is a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behaviors.”
Who is the Alternative Food Subject?

Taking this understanding of the relation between food and identity, then, one can begin to understand how the alternative food movement influences and is influenced by social bonds. Being a part of this movement and its related practices is, as Barthes (1966:29) explained, “a system of communication” and “a protocol of usages, situations, and behaviors.” Those who follow the protocols such as buying locally or directly from producers, attending farmers markets, eating and growing organic foods, or shunning conventional corporate foods and markets are expressing an identity and therefore defining their bonds to particular social groups.

This division among those involved in the alternative food movement and those who are not is a topic of criticism among scholars and food activists. In order to engage in these criticisms of the alternative food movement, one first must ask, who is the alternative food subject? How does this subject shape the alternative food movement?

According to Rachel Slocum (2008):

Alternative food networks articulate white ideals of health and nutrition, offers whitened dreams of farming and gardening that erase the past and present of race in agriculture, mobilize funding to direct programming toward non-white beneficiaries, and create inviting spaces for white people. Because whiteness, as the norm, is largely invisible, none of this appears obvious or problematic. In this account, it is the white subject who sets the norm and ideals that are to be applied to all cultural, racial, and ethnic populations within the United States. In this same perspective, the alternative food movement falls into the universalism of whiteness. The universalism of whiteness assumes that values, ideals and norms held by whites are the ultimate truth and norm, and anyone who disagrees is simply misinformed and needs to
be educated (Guthman 2011). Often, this education is in the form of community workshops, trainings, school-based programs, and hands-on learning programs, all relatively formal in their practice and engaging in a decidedly White-European American approach to knowledge obtainment (Guthman 2011). This approach is one that commonly uses the class-style learning with an identified leader or instructor and several pupils. Julie Guthman describes this strong desire by (white, middle-class) alternative foodies to educate according to one’s own ideology as a “missionary impulse.” Here again we can consider the word ‘healthy’- who defines it, and how? If it is the white subject that plays the role as central and ideal subject, then it is this subject who assumes the role of defining ‘healthy’ and assessing various food practices accordingly.

Understanding the Cost for Participation

Cost is a divisive factor in-group identity. In the economic-based food system we live in today, this division crosses over with food habits so that what, where, and how often one eats symbolizes their economic group identity. For those who have trouble affording basic necessities, the message to budget more money for better quality food is more likely to deter participation than encourage it, no matter how much more tasty, sustainable, or organic that food may be. It is easy to see how the message of the movement falls into this trap, however. In order to gain monetary funds to be effective in their work and afford various production and business costs, the organizations, businesses and groups must sell items at a price high enough to cover cost and provide a little extra for income to those working. This follows the assumption that then more local money
will then go to the local, small-scale producers and sustainable production methods to provide these companies with a consumer support base to prosper. This, in itself, seems like a good plan.

At the same time, however, this plan excludes a huge part of the population that simply does not have the means to participate in such a fashion. As J.M. Hirsch (2008) of the Associate Press wrote, the alternative food movement has long had the reputation of being “uber-yuppie” and “creating the impression that quality food is only for the well-to-do.” In order to have real impact, the movement must not focus on the foodies and food lovers that can support them, but also the focus on those individuals who can only afford discounted, industrially-produced groceries and may see a fast-food meal as an exciting splurge and indulgence. How are the experiences of these individuals’ food enjoyment belittled by the message that organic, local, fresh foods are superior? Rather than touting the woes and horrors of these food systems, a more in-depth examination and confrontation of the obstacles that force these people to consume industrially-grown and fast-food needs to happen at the national, state, and local scale.

What is affordable to a middle-class individual, for example, may seem expensive to an impoverished or economically-struggling individual. There is more at play, however, than the ability or disability to buy a particular item. The culture surrounding the retail outlet at which these foods are sold may socially exclude or include particular groups of people along economic lines. For example, in their study of food-shopping experiences for middle-class and ‘poor’ women, researchers found that the emotional experience greatly influenced habit (Effird 2014). Women of lower economic class or
racial ‘minority’ expressed feeling socially excluded and unwelcomed both based on economics and social acceptance. As one woman explained, she was frustrated by her financial inability to participate and stated, “It frustrates me because I can’t make the best choice that I think is available for my family.” Here, this woman’s main consideration is providing for her family and her inability to do so.

By turning back to the concept of the corporate food regime, further understanding of this economically-mediated distribution of food can be identified within the realm of the alternative food movement. In the previous discussion of the corporate food regime I identified how the World Trade Organization Agreement of Agriculture allowed for leading food-business corporations to develop low-cost means of producing cheap food products thereby generating large surplus that is dumped onto the impoverished and communities of lower economic standing. Those who have more economic wealth to expend are provided more extensive selections of higher quality foods such as organic fruits, vegetables, meats, dairy, etc. As Noah Zerbe (2010:21) observes, the introduction of an economically-mediated food economy replaces “non-economic principles such as reciprocity, redistribution, and social obligation” with social relations “mediated primarily by the market.”

Perhaps it is due to the fact that the alternative food movement is arising out of the era of the corporate food regime that the movement itself appears to enact corporate, market-oriented manners of food distribution and, consequently, inclusion in the movement social identity. As alternative food movement critic Julie Guthman argues, “projects in opposition to neoliberalizations of the food and agriculture sectors appear to
have uncritically taken up ideas of localism, consumer choice, and value capture – ideas that seem standard to neoliberalism” (2006: 1174). Guthman is arguing that in an attempt to stem away from the corporate domination of the food system – which enacts neoliberal economic policies – the movement has in fact re-created the core concepts that neoliberalism is founded upon. She identified localism, entrepreneurialism, self-improvement, and consumer choice as the four neoliberal themes that reoccur in alternative food movement practices (Guthamn 2008).

A key point in her argument is the role that consumer identity plays in one’s inclusion or exclusion from the movement. In this light, one’s identity becomes tied to their consumer habits – ideas of consumer choice imply that all consumers are on an even playing field and it is a choice (rather than ability) to buy organic, local and sustainable foods versus corporate, industrially grown food products. Here “consumption comes to serve as a privileged entry-point for thinking about political and ethical responsibility” (Hartwick 2000 cited Guthman 2008). To put this another way, it could be said that *unbound* consumption serves as a privileged entry-point for such mental energy. Consumption requires expendable economic capital, therefore, involvement in the politics and ethics - of food systems in this case - is a privilege afforded to those who can, quite literally, afford to do so. In a system in which purchasing particular items in particular distribution settings is a primary symbol of in-group identity, it will undeniably create divisions between those who have the ability to pay the cost of participation and those who cannot.
Localism Ideology and Community Identity

In alternative food rhetoric, the ideal of local-based agriculture and economy is held in high esteem as the protagonist against commercial, global food system. Creating this local/global binary leads to the “reflexive valorization of the local” (Zitcer 2014). In other words, there is little criticism or constructive reflection of the local efforts that take place in the name of alternative food. The focus on a local food system suggests that it will be more environmentally attentive, socially just, and bring a greater personal connection among producers, consumers, and their food (Fujita 2014).

However, the focus on localism is not about supporting any local food system or local producer but rather the focus is quite specifically one’s own local geographic community, of managing one’s self within their own immediate reality. Such a narrowing of one’s personal reality provides a pathway to creating social divisions and ‘othering’ geographically separate communities as a means to excuse inactivity and/or apathy toward said communities. Some scholars, such as Allen, FitzSimmons, Goodman, and Warner (2003) see this ‘patriotic’ opposition to globalized lifestyle as one that easily becomes “elitist and reactionary, appealing to narrow nativist sentiments” (Harris 2009). This reflects an individual-oriented thinking pattern and the compartmentalizing of our lives, characteristic of the United States culture.

However, it may also be argued that this is the most tangible reality for the individuals involved to grasp, certainly more so than a globalized food system in which their food system spans thousands of miles. Perhaps it should be viewed as an opportunity for potential growth and change on a more geographically manageable scale.
Perhaps, this is a step in the right direction for finding applicable and relevant answers to the great inequalities that have yet to be adequately addressed at the national or state level that is contextualized to a specific area, a specific population, with specified stakeholders, actors, and policies.

In our nation today, however, dynamics of power based on socioenomic status influence what degree of input certain individuals have in their community. Thus, localism is a means to “managing of the self”\(^3\) available only to those who rest comfortably within the limits of what is normalized. It is a privileged position to feel intimately connected and proud of one’s local geographic community, one that is bestowed upon the ‘ideal subject’ who follows social P’s and Q’s as expected.

How, for example, does an individual of Indigenous descent interpret the alternative food movement rhetoric of being ‘connected to the land’ and taking pride in one’s geographic community? And what would it mean for them to speak up when they have a different point of view? How can one feel proud of their local community and see themselves as part of a group if they are socially marginalized within that very community? How do different cultures within a local geographic community interact and negotiate with one another? Who decides? And how?

The idea of ‘the local’ leaves much to be debated, and perhaps this is why scholars, activists, and critics such as Julie Guthman, Allen, David Nally, Andrew Zitcer, have debated the moral/social/political ‘goodness’ of ‘the local’ within the movement. There is no one-size-fits-all system for community engagement with food, and a

\(^3\) This is a term borrowed from Michel Foucault’s theory of biopolitics
“reorientation toward the importance of local agriculture,” which is assumed to necessarily lead to social inclusivity and cohesiveness, sustainability and food equity (Macias 2008) very well may have such effects in one particular community, but quite harmful consequences in others. It may create more social cohesiveness, sustainability and food equity for those involved in the local agriculture initiative - those able and willing to support local farmers - while ignoring or potentially harming those already marginalized in the community and whose voices are not given space in the dominant public sphere. Those engaged in the movement must consider those in the local community who are disabled, those who cannot engage due to language or cultural barriers, those whose voices are seldom heard, and those who simply do not have the time to devote to hands-on engagement and assume even greater responsibility in their lives. This issue raised is in what creative new ways can new ideas and approaches arise in order to combat a food system that provides opportunity for some subjects while oppressing and erasing others.

In this context, ‘the local’ can indeed be a positive and useful scale for community building, but it is not inherently so. Rather than assuming a dichotomy between these two geographic scales that local=good and/or local= X miles, much more insight and understanding can be gained with a more nuanced approach. The idea of ‘the local’ is itself neither good nor bad, it is how ‘the local’ is employed that determines its consequences. In some localities, the idea of the local may be brought to the extreme by alternative foodies and rendered with blind appraisal, where, as Slocum (2007) paraphrases “the local is good because it is local.” Some communities may see ‘the local’
as their only alternative to ‘the global.’ In other locations, however, the local may not be imagined as an inherently good scale of community, but rather may be the best or most appealing option for the community members. Even further, a local community is often home to several communities that all have differing ideas of what ‘local’ is and how it should(n’t) be incorporated into the local geographic community’s food practices.

The approach that takes on a local perspective is more grounded in the cultural climate, environmental factors, and important demographics that influence the lives of residents. The focus on ‘the local’ potentially allows for an easier bridging between theory and practice – between ideology of localism and the actual practice of local economics, politics, and social programs. Indeed, perhaps one reason local initiatives sometimes do not succeed is because they are not localized enough (not truly localized), but rely on blue-prints of ‘ideal local programs and actions’ (“best practices” templates) that are not sufficiently adapted to their own unique climate. While there is the universal (not universalist) agreement among all alternative food movement that there is a more just way of producing, distributing, and eating food (Slocum 2007), the interpretation of what is just may be different depending on the local culture(s). As Haydu (2011) explains, “cultural models lead comparable social actors in different directions…divergent interpretations of the same objectives in different settings.”

A Note on Participation Models

Concerns surrounding participation equality are not unique to the alternative food movement. In any community decision, there is a model of participation that is enacted.
By developing a clear understanding of some basic participation models, the observed practices in this regard can be more easily identified. There are different levels of public participation in community decision-making that allow and disallow for different types of public input. W. Michele Simmons (2007) identifies four types of participation in community decision-making including: strategic action, pseudoparticipation, partial participation, and full participation.

Strategic action is defined as “striving to influence the public into thinking about [the topic] the way experts to” (2007:90). This strategic action is more interested in winning over the argument than it is in reaching an understanding between parties.

Pseudoparticipation is closely related to partial participation in that both these approaches allow for public feedback to experts and decision-makers only after the policy or decision has been made. In pseudoparticipation, the public's feedback may be allowed, but not actually considered or addressed, rather it is the 'illusion of participation' (Simmons 2007:31). In partial participation, the public's feedback is at least partly considered, however this is after the decision was already implemented, leaving little room to address the public's concerns that may be vocalized. These three models create a one-way flow of information thus maintaining a power dynamic between the experts and decision-makers with the rest of the public. In addition, they do not produce the most just decision for all effected. In an alternative food decision, those who are considered experts and decision-makers may be non-profit and social service organization board leaders, major local food-business owners, and other food-related workers with a respected status among the other decision-makers.
Finally, Simmons describes the facilitated full participation model. This incorporates all experts, decision-makers, community members, community groups, state agencies and pertinent government organizations, as well as a facilitator. All come together to determine the criteria for the decision, and all present and consider options, from which a final decision is made. In this way, the expert knowledge is balanced with community member’s knowledge of his or her own local area and both are incorporated into the decision with equal importance.

Only a full participation by the public throughout the entire development of a new initiative of policy decision allows for all community concerns, considerations and opinions to be addressed. This also requires an outlet for community members to share their own knowledge about the topic at hand. In food-related concerns, varying cultural methods of food cultivation, preparation, storage, and distribution are considered with equal respect. The different community cultures can vary by ethnicity or race, economic class, the geographic neighborhood one lives in, or the lifestyle one engages in, among other things. Full participation, which is commonly facilitated by an outside party, requires that, “all parties listen to one another and value the type of expertise that each brings to the table” (Simmons 2007:131).

In this approach, the decision makers' role is primarily to listen to the various public community groups, rather than the more common approach in which the decision maker speaks of their proposed idea or initiative to the public and then may or may not allow for feedback and input. In facilitated full participation, the community members are incorporated into decision-making from the very beginning. Simmons (2007) explains
that this can be a challenge, as decision-makers are used to their position of power and may be unwilling to relinquish some of this power in the decision-making process. Indeed, those in decision-making roles strongly believe they are the knowledge-holders who must transmit their information to others. In this way, it would seem counter-intuitive to switch the roles and open one's self to being a learner as well as a decision-maker. According to Simmons, what prompts a change in the decision-makers approach is when the issue is long-standing and eludes resolution. In consideration with the alternative food movement, varying and divisive participation opportunities have been a long-standing issue, among activists and scholars alike; a concern that as of yet continues to elude a clear resolution.

A facilitated full participation requires multiple modes of collecting information depending on what works best for each community group. In order to truly acknowledge and respect all different community modes of communication, it must be flexible. This may involve a combination of meetings, surveys, interviews, focus groups, and informal discussions with different community groups and members in varying locations, at varying times, and with different group sizes. Simmons identifies key questions to answer to ensure participation is equal and accessible.

In regards to power, she asks (2007:129):

- Who listens to the publics?
- Is there frequent and substantial discourse among affected parties?
- How does public participation affect final policy?

In regards to participation, Simmons asks (2007:129):
• Who is affected by the decision?
• Who participates in discussions of decision, and what is their role?
• What groups or individuals are left out, and how can they be involved?
• (Are alternative voices being heard?)

In regards to process, Simmons asks (2007:129):

• When are those affected allowed/encouraged to participate in decision?
• How is public knowledge gathered?

These questions are an effective means to begin addressing gaps in public input and participation in food-related decision-making. This approach requires that we avoid essentializing the issue (Simmons 2007). Instead, complicating the issue with contrasting perspectives is to be encouraged in order to fully acknowledge all lenses through which the community functions. In this way, a solution can be found that respects the lives and cultures of all community members. In addition it provides understanding of the various ways community members and groups experience and will be affected by the decision at hand.

Summary

The literature addressed in this chapter has allowed for the development of a definition of the alternative food movement, which has been identified as a reactionary response to the current dominant food system – the corporate food regime. The alternative food movement, a movement comprised of multiple sub-movements, has the
goal of creating strong local food systems in which small-scale food producers can sell their organic products through local direct marketing outlet(s), therefore supplying food that is fresh and organic for the consumer and safe the ecological environment.

The literature on this movement, however, has identified areas of concern in the alternative food movement. Namely, the concerns of the localism ideology, the high cost for alternative food practice participation, and the high presence of white universalist ideology, all of which lead to social divisions between those who can participate and those who are barred or deterred. The debate over desire versus ability to participate emerged as well in the literature, which has informed the research questions about what opportunities and barriers exist for community members to participate in the movement. Further, the characteristic ideology of the alternative food movement discussed in this chapter provides a comparison to conceptualize how those working within this movement in Humboldt County understand and define their work. The outline of four basic participation models has presented a template from which the participation in Humboldt County’s alternative food movement practices can be more readily understood and gauged. With this information, the focus of research can now be more focused to the setting of Humboldt County, California in order to address how these concerns in participation and deterrents to a nation-wide movement materialize in the real-life practices.
METHODS

Setting

This study took place in Humboldt County, on the northern coast of California during the spring and summer of 2015. Humboldt County is a rural county, covering 4,052 square miles of mountainous terrain and including numerous waterways. The county is home to a population of 131,613 people (US Census Bureau 2013).

Historically, what is known as Humboldt County today was originally a land occupied by many Indigenous peoples of the Wiyot, Tolowa, Hupa, Yurok, Karuk, and Sinkyone, among many others (Freeman and Raphael 2011). Indeed, before the arrival of white European immigrants, this land was inhabited by over 40 autonomous groups, which maintained boundaries while constantly interacting with one another (Freeman and Raphael 2011). The Humboldt County Historical Society, using information from indigenous informants, states that before the arrival of the white immigrants in 1850, these 40 plus peoples shared common cultural elements based around their “acorn- and salmon-based economies” (Freeman and Raphael 2011). Pre-1850, the food system of the area was based on wild cultivation of foods such as acorns, berries, elk, deer, salmon and other fish, which were traded among families and peoples. This food system required the inhabitants to move throughout the geographic space “to be where the food or other necessities are when it is time to harvest them” (Freeman and Raphael 2011:20). This was the original local food system of what we call Humboldt County. Freeman and
Raphael (2011:20) claim that these foods were “enough to maintain Indian people forever if used respectfully and judiciously.”

Upon the arrival of white European immigrants in 1850, the landscape and the food system began to change. Here, as more and more white immigrants arrived in hopes of finding gold for economic wealth, they also began to produce their own food as a means remain in the area (Freeman and Raphael 2011). This led to distribution of indigenous land by United States officials given to those willing to farm it, holding strong to the Jeffersonian ideal of small, independent farming in which all are imagined as starting anew, on equal footing (Freeman and Raphael 2011). Thus, farming in Humboldt County began. The idea of a farm is characteristically different from the wild cultivation practices of the indigenous peoples. According to the Merrian-Webster dictionary, the act of farming includes “a specific area of land and its buildings used for growing crops and raising animals, typically under the control of one owner or manager.”

Within the first ten years after their arrival, white immigrants has enclosed 10,975 acres and placed another 3,547 acres under cultivation mostly in wheat, oats, hay, peas, and potatoes (Freeman and Raphael 2011). Further, there were now 19,205 cattle (an animal as of yet foreign to this land) in the county, equating to seven cattle per every white immigrant. During the rush and subsequent fizzle of gold prospecting, the agricultural pursuits of white immigrants served as a symbol that “they intended to stay” (Freeman and Raphael 2011:143). Meanwhile, this land appropriation and manipulation of the natural resources restricted the Indigenous peoples from practicing their traditional food system and limiting their mobility, forcing them to adopt new white-European
cultural practices while still holding strong to their own cultural identity.

Roughly 100 years later, after much of the land had been changed from timber industry and the political boundary-making of individually owned land, timber company-owned land, state and national parks, and indigenous reservations, a new food culture began to develop in the area with the back-to-the-land movement of the 1960’s. This movement was composed of mostly individuals who, according to Ingram and Ingram (2005), chose to pursue the organic farming lifestyle as a counter-cultural statement. Anthropologist Jentri Anders (1990) adds further context by identifying a sense of environmental connection and stewardship, as well as a desire to remove oneself from the social culture of the United States, as key factors in creating the subculture. Among those who are a part of this subculture within southern Humboldt County, it is known as the Mateel (named for the location of the community between the Mattole and Eel Rivers). Anders states, “In fewer than twenty years, distinctive cultural patterns have developed based on the principles of harmony with the environment, local self-sufficiency, social equity, expectations for less material consumption, and personal responsibility for the implementation of these ideals” (1990:13). These ideals resonate closely with the ideals of today’s alternative food movement, as those focus on environmental and social wellbeing, local self-sufficiency, and a sense of personal responsibility to take part in upholding such cultural principles.

The historical back-to-the-land movement is deeply tied with the current alternative food movement in the related focus on sustainable, organic agriculture, and small-scale, community-oriented food systems. Today, this history holds strong in the culture of
Humboldt County, particularly among those working in the county’s food system. For this reason, Humboldt County serves as an ideal location to delve into the practical uses, understanding, and perspectives of those participating in the alternative food movement.

Although there is the presence of more conventional food practices and outlets common to the United States such as Safeway Foods, Wal-Mart, WinCo discount superstore, Costco, and Ray’s Market, there is also a strong presence of alternative food outlets as well. Humboldt County takes pride in being a hub for alternative food practices and sustainable farming. There are several seasonal farmer’s markets including five managed by the North Coast Grower’s Association in Arcata, Eureka, and McKinleyville, as well as several others in Garberville, Shelter Cove, Fortuna, and on-and-off in other towns such as Trinidad (North Coast Growers Association 2015; personal communication 2015). Additionally, there are more than fifty working community gardens that are incorporated in the North Coast Community Gardens Collaborative (North Coast Community Gardens Collaborative 2015). Among agriculture producers, there are currently 89 agricultural producers registered with the North Coast Grower’s Association as working businesses (North Coast Growers Association 2015). The county is home to the North Coast Co-op with two locations in Eureka and Arcata, Wildberries Market Place in Arcata, Eureka Natural Foods, River Song Natural Foods in Willow Creek, and Chautauqua Natural Foods in Garberville.

Individuals who work at each stage of the local food system – from cultivation to distribution – were included in the research. The purpose for this wider scope of respondents is to provide a several viewpoints and a holistic understanding of the
Humboldt County alternative food system rather than only the viewpoint of one subgroup within the larger system. As a food system demands interaction and cooperation between all subgroups within the food system group, it is important to incorporate respondents from each of such subgroups to encourage and continue this interaction. By analyzing these respondents in such a fashion, further consistencies or inconsistencies can be identified at each level of the system’s operation.

Research Steps

This study used semi-structured qualitative interview to conduct research into Humboldt County’s local food system and the influence of the alternative food movement. The research questions for this thesis were addressed via discussions respondents about their roles in the local food system, how they perceive this work, their understanding of the concept alternative food movement/system, and their interpretation of the opportunities and barriers for community involvement. The respondents for this study consisted of local farmers, food-related non-profit organization members, local tribal workers, and grocery outlet managers that identified as being part of the local food system in Humboldt County. To identify potential respondents, I utilized an online directory from the North Coast Grower’s Association’s directory webpage as well as the Humboldt Made website to identify local producers and food businesses. Potential respondents were identified from the directory based on their mission statements and business description. Those businesses and farmers who identified their work as supporting local community and agriculture or promoting a just food system were
contacted. In addition, some respondents were identified using interpersonal networking because of their lack of online presence.

Initial contact was made in a few ways, depending on each respondent’s availability. Several respondents were initially contacted via email communication, in which the researcher outlined a brief explanation of the research, the respondent’s role, and an invitation to participate. Other respondents, however, did not have an email contact and were therefore contacted through a telephone call in which the researcher again outlined a brief explanation of the research, the respondent’s role, and an invitation to participate. The researcher also visited local Farmer’s Markets at the beginning of the summer of 2015 season and communicated research information in person to invite potential respondents. Appendix A shows the initial contact script that was adapted for each of these initial contact settings.

At the beginning of interviews, respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary, and that their responses would be kept anonymous and their information was confidential. After respondents agreed, they were asked to sign an informed consent form, and their responses to interview questions were tape-recorded. Interviews were semi-structured, and an interview guide was used to direct the conversation (see Appendix B).

The interviews began by asking respondents to give a basic explanation of what they do – what their role is, their responsibilities in that role, their future plans, and how they got involved. They were then presented with the term ‘alternative food movement/system’ and asked about their understanding of this concept and how they
relate to this concept to answer my research question number 3 of how these workers define and understand their work. Focus then went to their personal work, their goals, and their customer base, as well as their perception of why certain people become customers/participants and others do not. These questions provided information for research questions numbers 4 and 5, which focus on barriers and opportunities for participation by the community. At the end of the interview, the focus again shifted away from the individual’s personal work to consider the county’s food system as a whole. This slight change in focus allowed for the consistencies or differences between one’s understand of their own work and of their larger community as a whole to emerge. They were asked what they believe is the motivation for involvement, or potential deterrents and how the local food system could be improved or expanded.

Sample Population

A total of eight respondents were interviewed for this research either at their farms, in their offices, or in another location of their choosing. Of those respondents, six were female and two were male. Seven of the respondents (87.5%) self-identified as white or Caucasian and one respondent self-identified as Native American. The respondents ranged in ages of 23-59, with four respondents (50%) between the ages of 23 and 35, two (25%) between the ages 35 and 45, and two (25%) over age 50. Two respondents stated they were born and raised in the county, while others stated they were from other places, although one respondent did not share their hometown. Two research respondents were small-scale, organic farmers, one was a food-business manager, one
representative of a local tribe, and four worked in social service organizations that focus on food-related topics.

Data

After conducting interviews, they were transcribed into Microsoft Word and coded to protect the identity of the respondent. Each file is simply labeled “interview 1/2/3/4…etc.”, the number corresponding to that number written on their informed consent form. The transcriptions were then uploaded into Dedoose computer database program for organizing and analyzing data with the use of codes. Codes were used to “identify topics, themes or issues, and bring together data segments where these occur” (Bazeley and Richards 2005:23).

Limitations

This thesis research is limited due to the small sample population interviewed, in comparison to the population of individuals working within the local food system of Humboldt County. Further, the majority of those interviewed lived and/or worked in the county’s Humboldt Bay area, the most populated area of the county. As the conclusions of this research suggest, continued discussion of these questions and topics at hand with more workers throughout the alternative food system of Humboldt County would provide greater insight into the perspective, understanding, and experience of those working in the local food system.
The Social Reality of the Movement in Humboldt

Interviews conducted with local food-systems workers provide great insight into the lived reality of those who work in an alternative food system. These interviews allowed for an analysis of the local, alternative food system of Humboldt County, CA, and the perspective and understanding of individuals who work in it. Through these interviews, I have addressed the existing literature on the alternative food movement, and compared the local alternative food system of Humboldt County to determine what this movement looks like in this community. Respondents provided information including their day-to-day responsibilities, their work goals, and their own perspectives of what motivates and what deters member of their community in becoming actively engaged in alternative food practices. The information covered in interviews allowed for the research questions on the alternative food worker’s understanding and definition of their own work as well as the questions focused on community opportunities and barriers to participation.

Participation Perspectives of Alternative Food Workers

The information provided by research respondents demonstrates a relationship between food practices and social group identity. In general, there was a division between those who portray food practices considered to be alternative food practices and those who portray conventional practices, or similarly, do not portray alternative practices. For those who do engage in such practices, there was an experience of social bonding. For
many respondents, their food practices created a “sense of connection” to their community or a sense of being “plugged into something that is meaningful.” For these respondents, they experience a bonding with their customers and co-workers. In these discussions, one respondent stated, “…the value of a community pot-luck or a meal together and the conversations that can come from that and the connections can be really powerful.” This respondent considers food to be a potential site for social bonding and community empowerment. Another respondent elaborated that supporting local food producers is, “an up-and-coming trend, I suppose” and “we are motivated because we want to be part of the group that is supporting local business.” Here, the respondent explicitly links group identity to one's food practices, in this case the economic act of purchasing one type of product (locally produced or sold) versus another (non-local).

Food practice also created social group division – particularly across economic class lines. The theme of cost and economics continually emerged in various contexts throughout discussions, mostly in regards to product prices, different food distribution outlets, and also various ways some respondents sought to reduce to economic barriers to alternative food through their work. The topic of cost tied in directly to other divisive factors in community participation in the movement, including the geographic distribution of local neighborhoods throughout the county (transportation considerations included), the differences in schedule flexibility and availability across economic class groups, and in a few instances, the emotional and interpersonal element tied to economic class divisions. As one respondent explained:
Its all interrelated, if you don’t have time it usually is because you’re working a lot, and you’re working a lot because you need to make money, and if you don’t have enough money you won’t have enough resources to get yourself to those places to purchase things.

In this statement, “those places” refers to farmer's markets specifically, a food distribution site incorporated into the alternative food system.

Some of these social group divisions were evident in more implicit ways. For example, on some occasions respondents described people not engaged in alternative food practices as not “totally committed to what they're eating,” related their food choices to “no self-control” or stating things such as “I don't know why anyone would be deterred...maybe you don't like to cook...maybe you don't like to get dirty...” These quotes imply that the perception by these speakers of those not involved in the alternative food social group are not involved because of a lack of desire, or a lack of self-responsibility. Although these statements were mixed into discussions of barriers such as economics and availability or accessibility, there remained the implicit assumption for some that there is lesser desire among those not involved. This sort of perception is misleading and maintains barriers between groups, restricting communication and true understanding. It should be noted, however, that this perception was not apparent across all respondent interviews, suggesting that intra-group perception varies from person to person.
Respondents of this research were asked to discuss how they understand the term 'alternative food movement' to be defined in order to develop an understanding of their own definition of this movement. Five interview respondents were unfamiliar with the term, although six were able to define the movement with accuracy when asked to guess at its meaning. One respondent, when asked what he believed the term to mean, said, “…I’d say its not mainstream type of process but more devoted towards conserving resources, keeping local economies strong, and feeding the area with food that’s produced in the area. That’s my assumption – I could be incorrect.” Most respondents, when asked, explicitly posed the alternative food movement as opposed to the ‘conventional’, or ‘industrial’ food system. In addition, descriptions were included such as small-scale, local, environmentally sustainable, and family-farm driven.

This discussion was then followed by asking the respondent if they felt that their work was a part of such a movement. In this situation, there was some hesitance in the respondents’ answers, due to their (until recent) unfamiliarity with the term. For example, as one respondent stated, “its kind of a general sounding term…” However, after discussing the meaning, all but one of the interview respondents shared that they did believe their work to fit within the definition. The respondent who did not state so, however, did not state that they are not part of this movement, but rather positioned themselves as serving people who engage in both alternative practices and non-alternative practices. This respondent stated, “I serve the people that are in this county, whoever walks through the door.”
In identifying with the movement, one respondent explained, “But, now that I know the definition, that’s exactly what I am part of, I guess…but yeah…I don’t really think about it that much…it’s just something I do.” This respondent’s statement shows the mixed emotion of sureness, as shown with the statement “that’s exactly what I am part of” but also their unfamiliarity and un-sureness which is evidenced in their immediate follow-up of “I guess...” The statement that follows in this quote provides even further evidence into how this phenomena of unfamiliarity with a description of one’s own area of work occurs. As the respondent stated, it is something he/she simply doesn’t pay much mind to, it is simply “just something I do.”

Another respondent in this study gave a further explanation about the perspective of “its just what I do.” As she stated:

Using the term ‘alternative’ is tricky, because a lot of what we’re doing is trying to normalize buying local food and being part of the local system and perhaps in Humboldt, maybe more in Arcata, there is a huge contingent of folks to whom normal or even conventional would be the local co-op and farmer’s market…

This explanation pinpoints the term ‘alternative’ as the source for uncertainty and unfamiliarity. Here, the respondent is speaking to the local culture of Humboldt County, one that is perceived by most respondents to have relatively unique in its food practices, when compared with the rest of the United States. In fact, only one respondent did not think that Humboldt County has a unique food system and food culture in comparison to the rest of the county. One person described this food-related behavior as “ingrained in our community” and stated, “I guess that’s kind of why I don’t picture myself…” and then trailed on to state “…in this community, its kind of a bubble…but it’s a good
bubble.” Again, this respondent is claiming a unique culture of the community, one he describes as a bubble, implying that it is isolated or separate from the rest of the country, but one he sees as distinct and separate in a positive manner.

Therefore, the research data begins to identify how the local community of Humboldt County presents a strong relation with the alternative food movement. The county has numerous businesses and organizations that are highly active in practices typically characterized as being alternative food practices. However, because these practices are so common, they are not seen as an alternative. For this reason, even those working within such practices may not be familiar with, and do not feel a close relation to, the term alternative food movement.

These findings begin to outline an argument in support of localism. Here, within the county of Humboldt, the term ‘alternative food’ does not hold the same meaning and impression that it might in other communities that are more unfamiliar to these practices. For this reason, those engaged in such practices in Humboldt County may take a different approach in their outreach and communication than to incorporate the name alternative food movement in their message.

One respondent did state that she uses the term “movement” when communicating with the community about food-related initiatives and ideas. However, she did not use the term ‘alternative’ and was unfamiliar with the phrase ‘alternative food movement.’ This respondent shared that she uses the term ‘movement’ with the community because “sometimes you have to use those buzz-words to keep the momentum going.”
The findings in this research support the conclusion that the idea of localism, as discussed in the existing literature, is a tool, one that is neither inherently good nor bad but that has potential to be adapted to a particular community in order to most directly address their unique concerns, obstacles, and assets. The tool of localism becomes an issue when the food practices are not truly embedded in the reality faced by entire local community but rather based on one singular perspective of what ‘the local’ community is and what they need and want, or on an isolated ‘best practice’ learned from a separate and unrelated local community. A local community must communicate among its groups and individual members and more importantly it must develop strategic means of doing so that allows all community members equal access, ability, and respect in the conversation.

Social Group Identity and Perceptions on Cost

Interestingly, when discussing both motivators and barriers to community participation in alternative food practices, the topic of cost was the most prevalent theme. The majority of research respondents (seven of eight) expressed that the cost of alternative foods was a major consideration in how they perceived and understood their work. For example, one producer explained that he works with a local food bank to donate a portion of his produce in order to remove some of the economic barrier to participating in this food system. He explained that, “I can’t work all the time for free but this helps to support me and support the idea that I want to provide produce for low-income individuals…like myself, because I’m in the realm, you know?”
This statement provides further insight than is gathered from existing literature on cost consideration in the alternative food movement. Although existing literature does point to the need for farmers to make a livable income, the discussions remain logistical – considerations of balancing prices to suit the farmer and the consumer. This quote, however, highlights the emotional response to this balancing act, which influences the speaker's perception and understanding of his work. In addition, this statement identifies what he sees as the barriers to participation and how he addresses them. The producer, in this case, feels a sense of identification with “low-income individuals” because he see's himself “in that realm.” It is this self-identification with a particular group, and the shared experience of feeding oneself on a limited income, that encourages him to take part in partnerships with non-profits to reach those customers he cannot serve at the farmer's market.

This differs drastically from the perspective of another respondent who said in his own work, “it's more about [our customer's] lifestyle than it is about the price.” This speaker also made a point in the interview to separate himself from the realm of corporate grocery store shoppers, stating he avoids these stores and prefers to attend local, alternative markets. Here, the respondent's understanding and perception of his work is shown to be through the lens of lifestyle choice rather than economic ability. This lens also informs the speaker's understanding and perception of the barriers and motivations for participation by customers. He later stated, however, when asked about community barriers to the county's alternative food system as a whole (rather than barriers within his own role specifically) that, “I think its probably cost of goods, I think WinCo (a large
discount supermarket) shopper is going there for a reason, and I think that’s probably what is prohibitive.” This second respondent's perspective is similar to the first in that he recognizes the prohibitive nature of local, organic food prices. Yet, he does not identify with the group, which is prohibited, and does not address such considerations in his own work but focuses on the lifestyle choices of the more affluent economic classes. Those who are unable to afford such prices are not considered as customers or potential customers; there is an inherent assumption that customers attending the respondent’s business have an income allowing for their prices, if they do not, they are not part of that lifestyle.

These two perceptions and practices of the respondents show a qualitatively different approach to one’s work based on worker's group identity, which in this case depends upon economics. The difference supports the argument that group identity is related to one’s food habits, meaning it is a site of both social bonding and social division. When one makes a living based around their own food habits, this social identity influences one's work priorities, perceptions, and overall experience. This identity also influences how the worker creates opportunities for the community to take part and how they identify and address barriers to the community’s participation.

In addition, these two contrasting perspectives lend to the complexity of local communities. Even within the group of people identifying as working within an alternative food system, the perception, experience, and approach can be drastically different. Each community has nuances; for a complete and holistic understanding of one local community's alternative food system the differences even among individual workers
in the same system must be unraveled. Further yet, this also shows an argument for the local as a good scale of focus, for if there is such contrast in approach among community members, the contrasts among state or country members is surely as varied.

Barrier to Participation: Cost

When asked about barriers to community participation in the alternative food movement, the topic of cost came up among seven of the respondents in regards to their own personal work, and among four respondents when discussing the general community at large. This theme was talked about in regards to the price difference between conventional food items and small-scale, organically produced items sold directly at farmer’s markets or co-ops and natural markets. As one food-producing respondent expressed, “Even though food isn’t the price is should be - food is expensive at the farmer’s market, its definitely more money than Safeway, its even more money than the Co-op or Wildberries, it’s always a little more.” In this quote, the respondent makes an important statement that although the food is unaffordable to many in the community, it is still a small income for the local producer, as evidenced in the statement “food isn’t the price it should be.” This statement touches on the tensions felt in alternative food practices between providing a livable income to local, small-scale farmers while making the product available to community members across economic class lines.

Also, this quote also has deeper implications about the economic stratification of the food system. In this quote, the respondent makes a distinction of the farmer’s market being more than Safeway, a conventional commercial supermarket. He also notes “its
even more than the Co-op or Wildberries” (a local small grocer in the county) demonstrating the mental division between the Safeway shopper and the individual shopping at the local food co-operative or the local market, and yet another division of those who buy their food at stores and those who attend the farmer’s market. In this way, the act of attending one of these locations serves to symbolize a group identity, which is at least partly based upon economic class and differing levels of affordability.

Other discussions of cost as a barrier included the cost for reserving a community garden plot, high overhead costs for growing one’s own food, and the relation of cost to transporting food to more rural and geographically isolated communities throughout the county.

Geographically isolated communities

Several respondents mentioned that the cost for participation tends to be higher for those living outside the Humboldt Bay area – the geographic area of population density in the county. Outside of this area are many small communities that are relatively isolated from the county's bay. For some of these communities, it can take a couple hours to travel to the bay, where stores with necessary items are located. These communities are constricted in their ability to stock market shelves with local fresh produce due to the high cost to transport these items. In total, five respondents spoke about the challenges transportation in the county, both for consumers and producers, as a barrier to their work and to community participation in the alternative food system. One respondent shared
insight into the reality of food cost for those living inland and in more rural, geographically isolated communities. This respondent stated:

When a family comes in for Hupa or Orleans or something and they probably have – not an economical car, a lot of people have trucks, that’s their choice – but they’ll spend $80-100 just to drive in and back in gas to do a big monthly shopping at Costco or WinCo or something like that.

This respondent also shared that community members of Hupa have informed her that their own commercial food retailer, Ray's Supermarket, “has higher prices than anywhere else.” This speaker is sharing information about additional economic barriers for those living in geographically dispersed locations. In addition, the speaker is identifying these people as being in the social group of commercial grocery store shoppers rather than local market shoppers or attendee's of the farmer's market, which is evident by her specification of Costco and WinCo or “something like that.”

Information about the distribution challenges, as explained by another respondent, helps to illuminate this situation further. As she explained, “we don’t have distributors working with local farmers and running their food around on their behalf” and continued that,

Not only is small-volume purchasing an issue here, its not a huge attraction. It has to work financially for all involved, even if there is a lot of interest….ultimately if its not going to be a benefit to the farmer its not going to happen.

Here, the mention of small-volume purchasing is related to the outlying rural communities, which have smaller populations in comparison to the central area of the Humboldt Bay. Due to the fact that those outlying communities have smaller populations, their delivery needs are for smaller volume, which cannot balance out high transportation
costs. This information also adds to the complexity of the idea of the local, showing that even in a local community such as a county there are numerous sub-communities for which factors such as geography, transportation, and economics are experienced differently.

Food stamps and farmer's markets: Confronting economic barriers

In efforts to confront the issue of cost, local non-profits have worked with local farmers and the federal government to create a system which allows Food Stamp (Calfresh) recipients or Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cardholders to use their benefits at local farmer's markets and some Community-Support Agriculture (CSA) farms. This also includes the Market Match Program, which provides EBT card holders with $5 just for using their card at the market. Many respondents spoke about the EBT and Market Match programs in terms of increasing “the accessibility of things.” Indeed, economic affordability appeared to be considered equal to accessibility when this program was discussed. These statements come from the great growth that has happened recently in reaction to this program. This market program has seen positive reactions from Cal Fresh recipients, growing 30-40% in the last five years, as one non-profit worker explained. However, some research respondents remained skeptical about the impact this program has. The farmer's market prices are still much higher than those at grocery stores, and these differences in price can make a big difference for individuals that have to make every dollar count. As one respondent explained:
You can take your food stamps to farmer’s markets but there’s a lot of people on food stamps who never go to the farmer’s market, but they’ll go to the grocery store and do they buy apples and peaches with that? They probably don’t. They probably buy the rice and flour and staples because fresh food is expensive and I think its gone up a lot.

Particularly if an EBT card holder has to account for costly transportation and considerations of making it to the market within the scheduled time (a challenge increased for those who must work multiple jobs to make a livable income), the extra challenges for budgeting money and time can create a barrier to shopping at the local farmer's market and therefore create a barrier to being a part of that group identity.

Timing and schedules was a topic brought up by five of the respondents in relation to participation both in the speaker's personal work and in relation to the county as a whole.

Motivating Participation?: Making it affordable

Six respondents spoke about cost in a positive manner, identifying their own services and work as providing low-cost alternatives to expensive market prices while providing fresh locally grown produce. These practices included community gardens, volunteer opportunities, and finding new distribution methods that cut down on transportation cost. In addition, some spoke about their involvement in partnerships between local producers and local food aid programs, such as the county food bank, to allow producers to make a livable income via direct-marketing (i.e. farmer's markets, CSA's, etc.) while also providing low- or no-cost fresh produce to those who cannot afford the typical prices – a partnership practice unaddressed in existing literature on the subject.
One respondent spoke about the influence of cost in food decisions and explained, “probably the number one thing that people say is: food has gotten so expensive, if I grow some of my own its cutting down on my food budget and I’m eating healthier food too.” This topic was discussed in relation to workshops held for home gardening lessons and in relation to participation in the 50-plus community gardens throughout the county that community members can become a part of. Another respondent explained that they meet the needs of their customers and create opportunities for participation by finding exchanges that do not necessitate economic capital. This respondent explained:

With the volunteering and internship you get to always walk away with fresh veggies. So, if anyone was hungry ever at a time they could come here for a couple days and put in some work and walk away with fresh veggies, so we make it accessible that way.

This quote shows concern for those who cannot readily afford organic, locally grown fresh produce and an attempt to address the situation. However, this non-economic exchange requires the customer to be able-bodied and have “a couple days” of free time to dedicate to working on the farm. The necessity for physical ability was recognized by this respondent, in saying, “there is a certain level of physical fitness required, I suppose.”

This respondent also expressed an effort to create a welcoming atmosphere and explained, “We’re really a safe space, we’re inviting and try to be inclusive and friendly and I think people are looking for that.” However, what one perceives as a welcoming atmosphere is based on group identity and group culture. This speaker noted that, “I might be biased though, because I’m already deep in the culture” identifying her group
identity and acknowledging how this identity influences her perception of accessibility and what a “welcoming atmosphere” incorporates.

Economics and Emotions: the Relationship Between Money and Group Identity

These statements about the atmosphere of the setting these workers create are key in understanding how social group identity can influence one’s participation or lack thereof in the alternative food movement. Those working within the movement may desire to make it an inviting, welcoming atmosphere for all the community. However, their perception of what is inviting or welcoming, and their understanding of what isn’t inviting or welcoming, is greatly influenced by the culture they are steeped in. These individuals already enjoy a comfortable status as an active member of this social group, they are familiar with it and feel connected to it, which generates a different experience in these group activities than out-group members (or individuals attempting to be in-group members) may experience. The statement shared by the previous speaker about creating an inviting atmosphere can be understood in relation to the following explanation by another respondent who spoke about the emotional barriers some experience at the local farmer’s market:

…there are visible signs of low-income or cultural differences certainly that develop between the classes so definitely some people feel like ‘that’s just not my place, that’s just not my community.’ And I understand, you know? I understand, its complicated stuff where you feel included and the many years of history that have come into developing that.

Here, the speaker is nodding to the interpersonal and emotional elements that come into participating in the alternative food movement. There is no mention of these
low-income or culturally different individual’s desire for the actual food being sold at the farmer’s market. Indeed, it can be assumed if these individuals are attending the farmer’s market because they desire such food, just as other alternative food supporters desire them. And yet, they still feel that “that’s just not my place...not my community.” It is not the food that deters their involvement but the interpersonal relations and the complex historical relations that go into creating it.

Interestingly, the emotional element to participation and the factor of group identity was only brought up as a major consideration and barrier or deterrent by two of the respondents. Many respondents, in regards to the farmer's market, saw the economic opportunity of Food Stamp acceptance as a way to diversify the market and reach a great part of the community. However, the economics are only one aspect of accessibility. The emotional element of in- and out-group identity plays a major role in the accessibility of a program or event. Although addressing economic barriers is an important step in making such food practices available to all in the community, the focus cannot be halted there, and new ways of making it accessible and inviting, or discovering what those who feel uncomfortable would prefer is paramount.

The information provided by research respondents has illuminated the complexity of an alternative food movement. Unlike much of the theoretical literature of this movement, the information gathered from those working in this system has shown a much more complex system at work. First, although the system in Humboldt County does practice alternatives such as farmer's markets, co-ops and CSA's, they also work with the federal and state governments to incorporate policies that provide more economic access
to low-income and impoverished individuals, as evidenced in the Market Match Program and the use of grant funds to support some community gardens. Further, this information shows how farmers participating in direct marketing and other common alternative food practices also may be supporting more conventional food programs such as providing food to local food banks. This sort of activity was not discussed in literature reviewed, although it is an activity that has large impacts on the community as a whole in regards to accessibility. Indeed, in reviewed literature no acknowledgment of non-economic exchanges was included.

In addition, these findings provide further understanding of the relationship between group identity and food practices. Information gathered in this research has identified the implicit and explicit ways that one's food practices and identity influence their perception of the alternative food system.

Influence of Funding on Worker Perspective

The topic of money also emerged in interviews as an influential factor in respondent's work decisions. Funding played a major role in decision-making for respondents, including considerations of grant funding, which is often necessary for non-profit organizations and community groups to create and sustain programs and initiatives that serve the community. There are limited funding resources available for the various initiatives that are created in the alternative food movement. While some alternative food businesses can rely mostly on their customers to provide their income, some organizations, particularly those that serve under-served and under-represented
individuals, must find other means of funding. Often, this means seeking out grant money that allows them to provide spaces and events such as community garden plots and tool sheds or food-related workshops and courses (Personal Communication 2015). Funding is an important component in the alternative food movement in order to provide opportunities for the economically-underprivileged to be involved in the movement. In order to offer these participation opportunities, there is some reliance on outside entities – governmental grants or private granters – to provide necessary resources. The addition of a funding party into the alternative food initiatives further complicates the management of the practices engaged in by the organization(s) and the means in which they can be offered. In some ways this was positive for respondents. For example, the producer that is partnered with the local food bank is able to do so by receiving a small up-front stipend at the beginning of the season for overhead costs. This stipend is provided from a grant they received by the food bank from the government. This grant allows the farmer to sell directly at the market while also providing for the food bank each week and thus creating an opportunity for more community members to take part of the alternative food system. This partnership also gives him necessary money for overhead costs at the beginning of the season. Even more so, this farmer is able to stick to his personal goal of providing 'good food' to low-income individuals, which has a positive emotional effect on is work.

Economics, however, have negative impacts on a food system by stratifying distribution and creating economic competition for our life-source. Those who have greater economic stability and expendable economic capital are providing a great variety of options while those with limited income are constricted in their options. Organizations
that seek to address this inequality and provide healthier food options to low-income individuals often rely on grant funding from state and federal government. Effectively, this maintains the food system within the economics system and allows economic capital to play a highly influential factor in food decisions. Respondents spoke about funding as a determining factor in what types of programs they could offer, how long they could continue for, how many people they could hire, and where they were able to offer these events or programs. Funding was a behind-the-scenes force in much of the worker's understanding and perception of their work. Further, the decisions made based on funding considerations lends to creating the opportunities and barriers for community participation.

One respondent, in her efforts to attain funding for community gardens, desired to change the definition of a local tribe's traditional foods in order to do so. She explained, “I was like, 'pshh we’ll just say all fruits and vegetables are traditional foods now, and then we can grow them in our community garden, get reimbursed through USDA.'” This approach appears to be a survival technique; to provide food security and fresh produce to her community via a community garden, there needs to be economic funds. In order to have economic funds, the speaker must fit her garden within strict federal grant guidelines and requirements, in this case by claiming they are maintaining their food traditions in their efforts for food security. When asked whether the grant guideline for traditional food included the food cultivation techniques, the respondent did not know. When asked if an explicit definition of the tribe's traditional foods existed, the respondent did not know.
However, the respondent did explain her perspective further in stating “redefining...because we are an evolving group of people, we’re not stagnant so we like carrots and vegetables also, we don’t just like acorns” and that “…to have our garden and get reimbursed for it there might be some things that we have to go through just creatively to figure all that out.” These quotes show the way that economics have a strong influence on the way people relate to and think about food, and one's food-related social identity. Here, there is a hint of inconsistency in the speaker's message, through her explaining they will have to “go through creatively” to figure out how to make the definition work. Yet she remains determined to attain the economic funding.

Again, it appears that strategic communication would be a useful tool to identify with the community what 'traditional' means to the tribe members and leaders, to decide if they wish for a definition to include all fruits and vegetables available today as their traditional foods, and to determine if they want to create this definition for the purpose of funding their community garden. Certainly, the method of how this communication occurs is significant.

White Universalism in Humboldt County's Alternative Food System

Within Humboldt County, CA the incorporation of ‘white universalist’ (Guthman) ideology appears evident within the alternative food system. Guthman defines this ideology as the belief that the values, ideals and norms held by whites are the ultimate Truth and norm (2011). In relation to food concerns, this ideology assumes a single, standardized food-body relationship (namely the Standard American Diet and Food
Pyramid) and neglects to consider cultural, social, and historical contexts in terms of both knowledge of what is 'good food' and enjoyment of it. This is defined by Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy as ‘hegemonic dietetics’ (2014). This ideology, then, seeks to educate others about their values, ideals, and norms in order to ensure that they are, indeed, the universal norm (Guthman 2011). This education commonly takes the education model of a single instructor who is the keeper of the knowledge, and their pupils who are the recipients. In this education style, there is not communal sharing of knowledge or discussion of differing perspectives of the values, norms, or ideals; it is a one-way system of relaying information. Guthman describes these education efforts as a 'missionary impulse' to pass on one's own beliefs to 'save' others. This mission carries the implied assumption that the white ideal/value/norm is inherently correct and it is the white individual's duty to ensure that others understand and follow in line.

Within the alternative food movement, this is evident in the high popularity of farming, cooking and food preparation workshops and educational courses that are provided primarily to the under-represented and underserved in the community. This education commonly follows the Standard American Diet model of nutrition and the European-style farming traditions of food cultivation, although they are not presented explicitly as such. Rather, these practices are presented as The way to farm and The way to manage one’s nutrition. The Standard American Diet is an example of hegemonic dietetics in which a standardized food-body relation is normalized and is the only model taught regardless of the culture, social reality, or history of the recipients of this
information. The fact that these practices are culturally white-European is effectively erased by how they are communicated and made to be the norm.

Guthman continues in defining the whiteness by explaining a space, practice, or institution is “coded as 'white'...not only through the bodies that tend to inhabit and participate but also in the discourses that circulate through them” (Guthman 2011: 266). These principles of white universalism, in regards to food, declare that all bodies should follow the standardized balance of their consumption (following the Standard American Diet and Food Pyramid (USDA)) and consume their meals accordingly. The white-universalism does not account for different cultural, social, and historical contexts that have allowed humans to survive, and thrive, on other diets – these practices are effectively erased from the picture painted in the white universalist mission. Indeed, this universalism effectively blinds the white culture to understanding itself as even having a culture of food norms/values/ideals because it so adamantly claims these norms/values/ideals are universally true and correct. This white universalism effectively creates barriers to participating in the alternative food movement by interweaving white universalist principles into the alternative food movement message, making them appear inseparable.

The County of Humboldt has a population comprised of 82.76% (111,409) self-identified white individuals, according to the 2013 Census (United States Census Bureau 2013). Given this mostly un-diverse population, it is no surprise that the alternative food system that exists in this county portrays many of these principles of white culture. For example, a good portion of certified farms and food-based organizations offer various
workshops, internships, and courses on every step of food prep from planting seedlings to storage and meal preparation, in order to educate their community. Many of these workshops and courses are offered through social service organizations similar to those discussed by Guthman and Slocum, which commonly serve low-income populations in the county. In this way, the alternative food system within Humboldt County appears to be engaging in these white universalist principles of – perhaps unconsciously- deciding what is ‘good’ and ‘healthy’ and teaching their own form of food practice to others. One respondent portrayed what Guthman described as a 'missionary impulse' of white culture by exclaiming, “I would love to go in a grocery store and take over someone’s basket and tell them what they bought was good and what was a waste of money.” This was described by the respondent as making them “smarter consumers.” This statement shows the speaker to see herself as an authority figure who knows the best interest of unknown people and wishes to “take over” their food choices. Although the speaker has good intention to get healthy food to people (in this context, “low-income” individuals), the approach is one that normalizes the speaker's own food habits, suggests them as “smarter” and compares the eating of others to this imagined norm. The speaker is also taking a standardized idea of what healthy eating is, and applying to all bodies she sees, regardless of potential differences in culture, social world, or cultural history. The speaker is concerned with food security in the community, and the high rates of food-related illnesses throughout the country. She sees a change in eating habits as a means to addressing these issues per a standardized model of the food-body relationship.
The desire to educate, and the desire for education, is certainly not inherently bad. Indeed, if we learn from Michel Foucault, “knowledge is power, power is knowledge.” This education can be a means of self-reliance and empowerment for students, as they are able to familiarize themselves with their food and take control over their eating habits, rather than being passive consumers, alienated from their energy source. In fact, the topic of empowerment and self-reliance came up in discussions with six respondents when discussing motivations for community participation both in the respondent's own work and in relation to the local alternative food system as a whole. When speaking about empowerment and self-reliance, respondents spoke of the high number of people “growing their own” and taking their diets into their own control. One respondent explained, “I see the excitement on their face … so you’re motivated because of your self-success … providing a little bit for yourself feels good.” This respondent is noting the potential of food to bring a sense of empowerment – to alter one’s self identity through food by seeing one’s self as successful in providing for themselves, therefore feeling empowered, and can begin to see themselves as no longer reliant on the corporate food regime. Five respondents did mention that lack of knowledge could deter participation, and was most often discussed in relation to community members being unsure how to prepare fresh produce they buy/grow, how to grow produce, and having misguided nutritional information from commercial food companies. These deterrents to community participation leave the question of why this lack of knowledge would deter someone from attending a course or getting involved in a community garden, for example. With so many course, workshops, and learning opportunities, however, it appears that more than
the lack of knowledge is deterring people from being involved in the movement. A few respondents spoke of lack of knowledge in terms of being aware of what opportunities exist. This lack of awareness of what is available is a more drastic example of the social division around food. For some in the community, such as the interview respondents in this study, this movement is bustling and vibrant while for others, it is hidden and unknown.

It is not the idea of food-related education that is an issue. Rather, it is the approach that is a key consideration; language use, topic selection, pedagogic style, teacher presentation, and the general atmosphere created by those passing on their knowledge. When discussing nutrition, cooking, or farming workshops/trainings, for example, the phrase “back to the basics” and, as one respondent phrased it “revisit old traditions” came up frequently. When using these phrases, none of the respondents explicitly addressed who’s traditions were being taught. In discussing a farmer training program for a local indigenous tribe they work with, one respondent described such training as “back to the basics” but later contrastingly stated that:

We don’t have a lot of farming or produce-based mindsets. [The tribal members] traditionally aren’t farmers, they’re hunters and fishermen and gatherers but not necessarily farming on a larger scale is really part of the culture, I guess.

This quote demonstrates the cognitive dissonance that the members of white culture sometimes experience when imparting farming and white European-American cultural food practices on their community that is comprised of other cultures – cultures that are minimized by the dominant presence of whiteness. Although the training is done with
good intention of providing economic- and food-security, the approach effectively obscures other cultural food practices and holds white-European American farming techniques as “basic” or normalized, to which all other forms of food cultivation are contrasted. In effect, this maintains the white cultural practices as the norm and imagines this norm as being ubiquitous throughout history, and a superior food lifestyle.

However, the development of these education practices, including training and workshops, is complex. The desire to educate others on healthy food and eating comes, in part, from messages received from those being served. For example, there may be a group of people (cohesive or dispersed) that request cooking courses (a common request, according to five respondents) or workshops on canning or preserving, or, an internship opportunity in farming. In other words, the practices are not initiated solely by those engaging in this work already, they may be responding to requests they hear from people in the community. The pattern of education initiation has more of a cyclical interaction rather than a top-down, one-way approach. The initiation can begin either by the individual working within the food system, or by those the program will serve, and this education program desired may spark another program for education in the future, or lead a student of the program to become a working member of the food system, continuing the cycle of education. As one respondent explained, their workshops are held with the idea that respondents will eventually volunteer their time to teach these lessons as well. This idea can have an empowering effect on those that are served, by providing an opportunity for community members to learn about food cultivation, preparation, storage, or nutrition and then become a leader him/herself, going on to teach others so they too can take more
control over their dietary habits. It should be noted that this respondent in particular noted that their workshops and trainings are “very, very inexpensive” in order to lower economic barriers to participation by the community.

Yet these practices and programs begin to take on white universalism when those executing such principles fail to see all deterents to participation – particularly other than economic - or, similarly, fail to consider other cultural food practices and approaches. It would be of benefit to address the questions: who are the individuals in the community requesting these programs, and alternatively, who is not being heard? Further, what methods are used to collect this information?

In this research, three respondents spoke about “culturally appropriate foods”4 as an important consideration in their work. Further, one of these respondents brought up the idea of culturally appropriate outreach methods, which she defined as “the different ways communities spread the word.” However, the respondent shared that this was not a topic discussed among her colleagues. Other respondents, when asked about outreach methods, did not express any consideration about cultural appropriateness. One respondent who spoke about culturally appropriate foods did mention that survey methods for collecting community information were ineffective means and that face-to-face communication was more effective in their community. However, this respondent

4 According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the U.N., culturally appropriate food "is understood as food that corresponds to individual and collective consumer demand and preferences, in line with national and international law.” These preferences and demands are developed according to the culture the individual is socialized in.
had earlier stated that much of their current food-security work relied greatly on information gathered from survey methodologies.

In one interview, a local farmer spoke of emotional tensions he felt between himself as a white male farmer and a local Indigenous population when engaging in a program in which local farmers teach local Indigenous people their farming techniques. As he explained:

I mean our agriculture is different than what the Native Americans practiced, although there are a lot of people practicing similar things…but by and large the consensus I get from some tribes – I don’t’ want to generalize – is kind of to push away a lot of ideas from the affluent white community. Which, is totally understandable - I’m all-supportive of that. I see that if you were to go in and say ‘you guys need to start farming and gardening, why aren’t you?’ They’re healing from a whole bunch of hatred that was pushed upon them for years and years and years.

This quote from a local organic farmer provides further context to the racial politics of local alternative food practice. Here, the farmer is engaging in these ‘white universalist’ practices of teaching their own form of food cultivation as THE way to cultivate food. However, on an interpersonal level, this farmer takes account of the historical relationship between the two communities of white settler-immigrants and indigenous tribes and makes attempts to be sensitive and compassionate towards this history. Further yet, the farmer continues in his teaching of decidedly white-European traditions he is contacted to do, regardless of the discomfort he feels about it.

It appears that there is a lack in communication about this topic, which disallows for the complexity of the situation to be unfolded. The farmer has these personal and competing thoughts and feelings about his work he is contracted to do, yet he does not
openly discuss and express these concerns with those he is working with. By understanding his work as engaging in white universalist principles, it will provide this speaker, and others like him, a vocabulary from which to begin unraveling their understanding, beliefs, and emotions about this topic. This has the effect of allowing one to see their white culture as a true culture and not as a ubiquitous truth that all humans are expected to know and follow. The concept of white universalism is used not to condemn but rather to illuminate unconscious motivators and perceptions behind these practices. This allows for the programs to be better adjusted to meet the needs, and acknowledge to diversity, of culture and knowledge of all community members in a respectful and equitable manner.

Summary

The findings gathered from interview research for this thesis have provided a depiction of how those working the alternative food system understand and define their work, and how they perceive, create, and address opportunities and barriers for community participation in the movement. The findings have demonstrated the social bonds created among those engaged in this movement as well as the social divisions that exist between those involved and those not involved in the movement – and between the different degrees of involvement. The practices of the movement are varied from farmer’s markets and small co-ops to community gardens and food-related workshops and therefore community participation is complex and varied. Some practices in the movement were more accessible for the community while others may be more barred in
terms of economic requirements, time and location availability, as well as the potential experience of social exclusion or being an outsider. Ultimately, the findings of this thesis research have revealed the underlying white universalist ideology that influences much of how the movement operates within Humboldt County, CA and lends to much of the social division surrounding the movement.

The image of alternative food practice is one that follows the standardized, white-European model of food production and personal nutrition. This model is spoken of and presented as the norm to which other food practices are compared. This ideology was evident in the high presence of white individuals in food-related leadership positions, and the type of dialogue used when discussing these farming and nutrition practices. For example, the use of common phrases such as, “back of the basics” and, “revisiting old traditions we have nostalgia for” imply a white-European model but was never explicitly acknowledged as such. This normalization of whiteness effectively obscures other cultural practices of community members and makes them ‘other’.

While the movement within Humboldt County empowers many local residents in providing for themselves and taking control of their diets, it remains veiled in white universalist ideology. Unless this ideology is unveiled and seen for its truth – another culture among many cultures – it will continue to rule the alternative food movement ideology and remain a barrier to participation for much of the community except for the few that fit the profile and share the same cultural ideology.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has demonstrated the relationship between food practices and social group identity, highlighting the social influence of group identity on the alternative food movement in particular. This relationship between food and identity has been shown to play a major factor in how workers understand and define their work, and to what opportunities and barriers exist and are addressed for community participation in the movement. In the beginning of this thesis, I outlined the current dominant food system – the corporate food regime- characterized by its global scale, industrial and commercial production methods, high reliance on synthetic and chemical inputs, and economically-based distribution methods. I have shown the historical development of our current corporate food regime since the British free-trade imperialism of the late 1800's.

This illumination of the current dominant food system has provided the background from which the alternative food system has emerged, thus allowing for a clarified definition. This movement has been identified as a movement of sub-movements, though it ultimately seeks to develop a food system, which provides adequate (in terms of nutrition, cultural appropriateness, quantity, and quality) food that is healthy for both the natural environment and the human consumer. This movement focuses on organic, small-scale production and distribution, and encourages direct-marketing/local economics, as well as the spread of knowledge of nutrition, food
production, and basic cooking techniques. The ideal of social equity is also ingrained in the alternative food philosophy.

The alternative food movement, however, has its own imperfections and concerning issues that are to be addressed as it continues to develop. This thesis has identified three key areas of critique within the movement that relate to social and community identity: the ideal of localism, the high costs for participation, and the influence of white universalism on community participation. Localism ideology has great potential for providing food consumers with a tangible connection to their food system and a geographic environment that is manageable for a community. In essence, this is a potential antidote to the metabolic rift caused by the global, capitalist food economy. The idea of 'the local' is not inherently good, but rather it is a useful concept that deserves greater deliberation and negotiation within each local community. It is by limiting the scope of inquiry to a local community that the complexities and intra-group differences emerge and can be more adequately understood and addressed. For example, interview data from this research has shown the different perspectives – in regards to opportunities and barriers, and the goals of their work - even within the scope of Humboldt County’s alternative food movement.

Within Humboldt County's food system, social divisions in consumer participation are based primarily on economic barriers. I have shown that beyond the dollar price, the economic divisions in food practices create an emotional and social division among community members, which deter accessibility to a part of the community beyond considerations of affordability. These emotional responses, I argue,
are due to the close relation between food and one’s individual and group identity. When there is debate over food, it is a debate over our very selves.

Removing economic barriers to community participation in the local alternative food system was a focus for several research respondents in their work. My findings have revealed that throughout the alternative system there are differing levels of accessibility and affordability, which allows the alternative food system to serve different members of the community based on their needs and abilities. For example, while the farmer's market is known for having higher prices than other food outlets, respondents also spoke to the low cost of community garden plots and some local workshops that serve low-income, impoverished, and underserved populations. However, these initiatives necessitate time availability, transportation, and physical ability, which may be deterring concerns for those with limited income.

In addition, some local food organizations create working relationships state and federal governmental bodies for funding and for policy change, which bridges the gap between dominant food system and alternative. An example of this is the ability of the local farmer's markets and some Community Support Agriculture farms to accept federal EBT (food stamps) cards as payment. Although the alternative food movement in many ways strives to be self-reliant, the movement is also localized and flexible to be uniquely adapted for each community. The alternative market is only a single component of many efforts being made in local alternative food communities, and the efforts to remain embedded in the local community provide new avenues for further inclusion of the community.
Finally, these considerations of economics and group identity are to be understood further by examining the concept of white universalism (Guthman) and its impact on the alternative food movement in the county. Respondents, while well intentioned in their efforts, displayed tendencies towards white universalist ideology. This was evidenced in the underlying assumption that the white-European American food model and a standardized food-body relationship (hegemonic dietetics – Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy 2014) are The Best or Smartest food practices. In addition, the romanticized notions of ‘old traditions' of farming erase local history of non-white food practices and the not-so-romantic historical development of the farming practices in this county, ultimately belittling the existence of other cultures past and present.

Further, the lack of consideration of emotional barriers to participation to those who do not share this group identity illustrates a blindness to the white culture that surrounds the alternative food system in Humboldt County. This follows in white universalism, as the universalist ideology assumes that white culture is a ubiquitous and unquestioned norm and therefore blinds itself to seeing its own norms, values, and ideals as a culture.

**Future Research and Community Action**

In order to make the alternative food movement available, accessible, and appropriate to all community members, the dialogue must move beyond the concept of “inviting ‘them’ to the table” – a phrase commonly used among alternative food participants, including several research respondents for this study. The idea behind the
phrase is much like the idea of inviting someone into one’s home for dinner. It is used to portray an image of invitation and acceptance from the speaker. However, for the recipient of that invitation, the message may come across differently. To invite someone to one’s table is to invite someone into one’s own personal comfort zone, one’s own personal social world. It creates a power dynamic as table-owner and invitee, as someone who is ‘at home’ and one who is a visitor, and outsider or non-member. I propose that rather than ‘inviting people to the table’ perhaps we should seek out new alternatives – perhaps we can open ourselves to the possibility of being invited as a humble guest to the tables of others. Further, perhaps we can come together with other groups to build a 'table' together, or to throw out the table all together and sit down together on the ground as equals.

A new approach to enhance and encourage community inclusion must be done in a strategic, methodological manner to ensure that the systems of communication are equal, equitable, and approachable. In my thesis research it was evident that there was an inadequate strategy in communicating with the local community and receiving requests or responses to their work. At times, it appeared that the strategic action of community participation was being enacted some of the time when respondents spoke about policies or initiatives they had enacted or were planning to enact, but had no system for the community to give input or feedback or to assess who was being represented from the community. Some of the time, partial participation was enacted in which the respondents created an initiative and then created a forum for the community to respond. However, the method and degree to which community responses are addressed and considered
remain uncertain and are done according to the subjective perspective of the individual in charge.

Within the local food system of Humboldt County, a model of facilitated full participation would provide a system of communication between local organizations and the broader community/communities and create an outlet for a plethora of alternatives to the current alternative food practices to develop. Ultimately, this would make the movement accessible, appealing, and varied to fit the lives of a greater number of community members. The beauty and challenge of an alternative food system is that these alternatives can only be as abundant and diverse as the voices who are involved.

The alternative food movement within Humboldt County is strong, which leads many people to focus on maintaining a status-quo rather than continuing to grow and change. As one respondent explained, “I feel like we’re doing really well here, and that’s one of my main messages for people who are like ‘we need to do better!’ Its like, ok there is always room for improvement, but lets acknowledge how amazing it is already.” Yet, as another participant explained, “it can be hard to make change because people are like 'oh we're doing great!' You know it’s hard to move forward when you're already doing pretty good.” For those who enjoy a position within the social group of the alternative food movement, the benefits are many and it may appear that the entire county is “doing really well.” However, as this thesis has demonstrated, one’s social reality can obscure the greater reality of the community as a whole, in some cases hiding the long-standing issues that remain present even after good work has been done.
I argue that there is a long-standing concern that has as of yet eluded resolution. This, I believe, is the factor of social divisions and the influence of white universalist ideology on the alternative food system in Humboldt County. The fact that this was a concern for some respondents but remained un-mentioned by others is reason in itself for a dialogue to open up. I believe a facilitated full public participation approach to this dialogue will help address this issue in an equitable and respectful manner. This sort of public participation will therefore lead to an even stronger, more inclusive food culture, and community culture in general, that reaches beyond old romanticized traditions and instead looks ahead to create new traditions and new social bonds.
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Initial Contact Guide:

Hello!

My name is Hanna Menefee, I’m a graduate student at Humboldt State University completing my Master’s degree in Sociology. I am currently writing my thesis about the opportunities and barriers to participation in the ‘alternative food movement’. I am turning my sites more locally on Humboldt County to assess how the issues being debated exit in our own local food system, and to what extent.

I am conducting interviews with some individuals working in Humboldt County’s local food system about their perception and understanding of our local system. I am writing to ask if you would be interested in participating in an interview to be part of this research.

I anticipate the interview will take about 45 minutes, and we can meet in a place and time that is comfortable for you.

I appreciate your time and look forward to hearing back from you. Please let me know if you have any questions or would like to speak more with me about my research and/or the interview. Thank you!

Best,
Hanna Menefee

ham246@humboldt.edu
APPENDIX B

Interview Guide:
How would you describe your involvement in the Humboldt County food system?

Probing: for how long, what are your responsibilities in this role, how did you get involved?

What is the ultimate goal of your work/business?

How successful do you consider yourself in reaching these goals?

If participant suggests lacking in success: What might improve your success at reaching your goals?

Are you familiar with the term “alternative food system/movement”?

How would you describe/define “alternative food systems”?

Do you consider yourself to be part of an “alternative food system”?

What is the general make-up of your customer base?

Probing: racial/ethnic make-up, class-status, male/female, age group, etc.

How do you reach your (potential) customers?

Probing: marketing & advertising, selling locations

Why do you think these people (in particular) purchase from you/your business?

What do you think might deter some people from buying your product(s)?

Is this an area of focus/concern in your work?

If so: Have you taken any steps to address this?

In regards to the alternative food system in Humboldt County as a whole:

What do you think motivates people to be involved?

What deterrents do you see for involvement, if any?

How much of an issue is this in the county?

If considered an issue: Do you think/know there are actions being taken to address this?

How might we as a community expand our alternative food network to include a greater variety and number of individuals?
If you could change one thing about the county’s alternative food system, what would it be?

Is there anything more you would like to say about this topic before we finish?

**Demographics:**
Gender/Sex:
Race:
Age:
Length of time in Humboldt County:
(if not born-and-raised local) Where they are from: