An Inquiry into Democratizing Alternative

Agro-Food Movements:

Participation of Social Justice Organizations and Underserved

Populations in the Thurston County Food Systems Council

by

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Abstract

An Inquiry into Democratizing Alternative Agro-Food Movements:
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the Thurston County Food Systems Council

Heather Kowalewski

The alternative agro-food movement is emerging across the world in
response to the environmental and social degradations initiated by the global
industrialized agro-food system. It is crucial to take a step back and assess
whether players in the agro-food movement are reproducing the same
inequities present in the current agro-food system. A political ecology
analysis identifies a lack of food democracy, or the ability for citizens to
influence and participate in the current agro-food system, as a systemic cause
of social inequity. Underserved populations that lie outside the dominant
culture disproportionately lack access to both food and democratic
participation, and are currently missing as prominent players in the agro-
food movement.   A case study of the Thurston Food Systems Council (TFSC)
asks the question of why underserved populations are missing from the agro-
food movement at the local scale to provide insight on promoting food
democracy globally. Qualitative interviews with local social justice
organizers gives insight to creating inclusive organizing environments;
empowering underserved populations within social movements; and the
potentials to integrate social justice into the alternative agro-food movement.
Major barriers to diverse participation revealed in the study range from
immediate practical needs, deep patterns of oppression, and systemic issues
of a capitalist system. Overall, there is unfulfilled potential to connect social
justice organizations and underserved populations to the TFSC and the larger
movement. Developing a more just agro-food system(s) will require
communities to identify existing inequities and to intentionally create
avenues for democratic access by all peoples.

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Acknowledgements

Acronyms

CFS	Community Food Security
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture
FNB	Food Not Bombs
FPC	Food Policy Council
GRuB	Growing Raised Bounty
LFO	Left Foot Organics
POWER	Parents Organizing for Welfare and Economic Rights
SSS	Senior Services for South Sound
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (previously Food Stamp Program)
TESC	The Evergreen State College
TCFB	Thurston County Food Bank
TFSC	Thurston Food Systems Council
TRPC	Thurston Regional Planning Council
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

Chapter 1: Introduction

"The agro-food system is 'both a symptom and a symbol of how we organize ourselves and our societies,' and represents 'a microcosm of wider social realities.' "
(Lang, 1999, p. 218)

Agro-Food Systems as an Environmental Study

Food is the most intimate connection humans experience with the natural

environment. Humans are literally consuming other organisms into their own being

and are dependent upon these organisms, and the functions that support them, for

their very survival. This vital, concrete connection to Earth has been present for all

peoples in all places and so remains today. Environmental historian Donald

Worster (1990) claims this unique relationship gives us the ability to examine,

through agro-food systems, not only the "*reorganization* of nature (1100)," but also

the "restructuring of *human* relations (1098)." Agro-food systems on one side entail

humans altering ecosystems to maintain a consistent flow of provisions, a process in

which we literally modify and "re-organize" nature to fit an image that makes sense

to us and meets our needs. On the other side of the system are the relationships

among individuals and institutions necessary to produce, process, distribute, eat,

and dispose of this food; relationships which are structured and re-structured

according to dominant social, economic, and political paradigms. The practical act

of agriculture is bounded within natural limits, but the agro-food system, as a whole,

is a socially constructed entity bounded by political-economic arrangements and

social norms.

Investigation of the agro-food system requires a political ecology approach in which the reinforcing cycle, among political frameworks structuring society, human-nature relationships, and human-human relationships, is made transparent. Through this lens, relations of power, privilege, and preference become palpable. At a conceptual level, a political ecology of agro-food systems allows humans to examine the manifestation of conscious and subconscious perceptions and ideologies underlying society. Behaviors and arrangements perceived as "normal" are revealed to be creations of complex network of both past and current influences. In this way, humans are able to investigate the individual and collective psyche through analysis of systems that are produced and practiced. At a practical level, a political ecology of agro-food systems allows humans to structure systems in a more balanced, holistic way with a deeper understanding of inter-relationships among and within systems. Emergence of a growing alternative agro-food movement illuminates the contention surrounding the current agro-food system and indicates the potential for global shifts in this vital human relationship to planet Earth.

Food Equity – an Integral Factor of a Sustainable Agro-food System

Currently, individuals, organizations, and communities across the world are taking political and grassroots action to evolve agro-food systems. Niche movements that comprise the overall alternative agro-food movement include local food, organic food, community and school gardens, food sovereignty, community food security, sustainable agriculture, and slow food. Each concept offers ideas and actions around a more just and sustainable agro-food system, however approaches differ in

definition and prioritization of what a just food system looks like. It is a crucial time to assess whether the same inequities produced by the current system are being reinforced within alternative structures.

Sustainability automatically implies that social, ecological, and economic factors will all be considered in a holistic and balanced approach. Sustainability advocates have succeeded in bringing environmental issues to the forefront of the alternative agro-food movement, but have failed in equally addressing social justice and equity issues (Allen 2010; Jacobson 2006; Sachs 1992). Any goal surrounding sustainable agro-food systems should consider social equity, not just environmental impacts, in its assessment. Social equity within an agro-food system can be assessed in numerous ways including workers rights, access to appropriate foods, and health impacts. Allen (2010) describes both "material equity (that is, the distribution of resources) and process equity (that is, inclusion and democratic participation) (296)." Within the alternative agro-food movement, there is a trend for those with less material equity to also have less process equity, meaning those who have less access to resources (food) typically have less access to process (organizing and movement-building) (Allen 2010). A movement championed by those of the dominant culture, whom currently have disproportionate access to both resources and process, risks inadvertently incorporating the same underlying ideologies that have served as the foundation for inequity in the current system. Analysis of social equity within agro-food systems demands an understanding of who has the power in the system, and is

ultimately the analysis of the current state of democracy within current and emerging systems.

Research Question

This research explores the state of social equity, specifically process equity, within the alternative agro-food movement at the local level through the case study of the Thurston Food Systems Council. Literature informing this study is focused on the theories underlying the agro-food movement, but specific case studies allow for the teasing apart of these theories at the practical level. If communities want to implement more just agro-food systems, there must first be an understanding of the existence and perpetuation of inequity. Inequities revealed in a community case study will be place-specific to some extent, but without a doubt will reveal patterns that cross space and place. Literature and past studies presented in this research identify a trend of difficulty in creating inclusivity and diversity within the alternative agro-food movement. Comparison of specific case studies can begin to identify the political ecology behind these trends.

The Thurston Food Systems Council (TFSC) has been critiqued for its inability to engage socio-economically diverse community members, which raised the specific research question: Why are the voices of underserved populations missing from the alternative agro-food movement in Thurston County? The goal of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers to creating an inclusive, diverse organizing environment at the community level and within the larger agro-food

movement. The expertise and knowledge of social justice organizers interviewed for this study provides insight on creating inclusive organizing environments, empowering underserved populations within social movements, and the potentials to integrate social justice into the alternative agro-food movement.

I present the research first by explaining in Chapter Two the theories underlying my analysis of social equity in alternative agro-food movements, specifically theories of political ecology, food justice, community food security, and food democracy. Chapter Three investigates inequities within the current globalized agro-food system and some of the underlying factors behind food insecurity and food equity. This chapter also discusses the formation of Food Policy Councils and their potential to play a crucial role in increasing food equity through democratic participation. Chapter Four explores Thurston County specifically through the lens of food equity, examining food insecurity trends and the presence of the alternative agro-food movement at the local level. The last section of the chapter provides a description of the Thurston Food Systems Council, the entity at the center of inquiry, which provides a specific case study for analysis. Chapter Five lays out my methods and results. Chapter Six will provide my interpretation of research data as it reveals the major barriers to engaging underserved populations in local agro-food organizing and corresponding implications on the national agro-food movement. Chapter Seven provides a summation of conclusions drawn during the study and the big picture ideas readers should leave understanding and questioning.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Environmental studies, much like food studies, is inherently interdisciplinary. The field as a whole recognizes that to examine an "environmental" issue, one has to examine it from all perspectives because social, political, economic, and environmental systems are an entangled web through which humans define, and live on, this planet. Although this study is done primarily from a social justice lens, its findings reflect the complex relationships among political-economic structures, social interactions, and relationships to the environment, and is particularly interested in power distributions and social equity revealed at the local level. This study draws upon concepts from many disciplines and theories including political ecology, community food security, food justice, social movements, food democracy, and food policy councils.

Political Ecology

Political ecology practitioners may come from a wide range of backgrounds in both the physical and social sciences, but are connected by their "query [of] the relationship between economics, politics, and nature (Robbins 2004: 5)," with nature including human actors. The concept was termed in 1972 and initially research focused on relationships in the Global South[1], however similar analysis can be applied to conditions in Western society. Often the overall goal of political ecology research expands beyond academic inquiry to include practical application

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[1] The term Global South refers to lesser developed countries in the geographic south that tend to face great amounts of political, social, and economic upheaval. A socio-economic and political divide defines the North-South divide. The nations of Africa, Central and Latin America, and most of Asia comprise the Global South. (American University Center for the Global South Website)

of theory to benefit marginalized social and natural systems. Research has the potential to move environmental issues into movements incorporating social justice (Peet and Watts 1996b). The majority of research surrounding the agro-food system has been conducted in the natural sciences from an "environment" perspective, and has not been balanced with issues concerning social equity and access. Emerging political ecology studies make these connections. According to Patricia Allen (1998), Director of the Center for Agroecology, University of California Santa Cruz:

> A political ecology of food and agriculture seeks to understand the contradictions and conflicts which structure social relations and interactions with nature and which drive economic change. (157)

Understanding relationships across both natural and social systems brings together "green" issues (those concerning environment as a focus) and "red" issues (those concerning social justice as a focus) in hopes of developing a progressive society that supports sustainable relationships between society and nature (Allen 1998).

I find the case study of the Thurston [County] Food Systems Council (TFSC) to be a contribution to the larger political ecology literature. Political ecology provides "an empirical inquiry into specific movements, discourses, and institutions focused on environment and social justice within a geographically bounded region (Watts 1996: 14)." My research is an inquiry into the discourses and movements around food justice through the particular case study of TFSC.

Food Justice

While many of the concepts underlying the alternative agro-food movement

consider the entire cycle of food and the associated human and environment

exchanges, the food movement as a whole has not proportionately addressed social

justice (Allen 2010).   Food justice, however, highlights equity and its connection to

political forces. Tim Lang (1996) identifies the following ideologies as the

foundation of food justice:

- Consumers have rights which must be fought for rather than assumed
- Human and environmental health go hand in hand
- There is no such thing as an average consumer
- What matters is not just "what" is eaten, but "how" it is produced and distributed
- Policies can be changed for the better, but this requires imagination, coalitions, and focused effort.

Much like political ecologists, food justice advocates recognize environmental health

is positively correlated with the health of people, and that the health of both is a

function of the amount of equity within the system. Inclusion of human rights

within the food system adds a level of social justice not often found in many

alternative agro-food concepts, and therefore serves as a founding ideology of this

study.

Community Food Security

Community food security (CFS) proposes similar ideals as food justice, but CFS

stresses the notion that the community, versus the individual or household, is the

appropriate scale for analysis and change in agro-food systems. Hamm and Bellows

(2003) define CFS as "…. a situation in which all community residents obtain a safe,

culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system

that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice (p. 37)." This approach

differs from the concept of local food, another major sector of the alternative agro-

food movement. While local food is considered a viable part of CFS, local agriculture

and local food activists tend to focus on the support of local farmers and purchasing

of local goods respectively, which in itself does not address the larger scope of

equity issues. CFS offers a method of using the local to define an equitable,

sustainable system and has the potential to develop "a deep and democratic

understanding" of equity and power issues through local experiences (Allen 1998).

Levkoe (2006) identifies CFS as the most holistic perspective underlying the

alternative agro-food movement for it builds off human rights and anti-poverty

discourses to include sustainability, community building, and the recognition for "a

strong safety net that can provide for those in need until conditions improve (p.

91)."

The CFS discourse stems from anti-hunger and environmental justice movements in

the 1970's. Theory identifies the community as an "...integrated social and

ecological system (Ganapathy 2005, p 52)...." and recognizes the "...underlying

social, economic, and institutional factors within a community that affect the

quantity, quality, and affordability of food (Kantor 2001, p 20)." CFS goes beyond

traditional food security assessments that consider individual households as a unit

for analysis, and instead considers the food system of an entire community, from

production to disposal. This study provides a CFS perspective for Thurston County,

and supports the lens of CFS as a framework for food equity studies.

Food Democracy

The theory of food democracy is summarized by Lang (1999) in the following quote:

> Food democracy ideally means that all members of an agro-
> food system have equal and effective opportunities for
> participation in shaping that system, as well as knowledge
> about the relevant alternative ways of designing and operating
> the system (83).

The benefits of food democracy may go well beyond an influence on the agro-food

system. For example, Charles Levkoe (2006) proposes that skills and empowerment

gained from involvement in community food organizing can increase democratic

participation in general. Democratic learning is linked to informal socialization by

family and culture, as well as through formal educational institutions (Levkoe 2006,

Merrifield 2001, Schurgurensky 2003). Indirect learning occurs through group

participation, and scholars recognize that actively being involved in social

movements is essential for this learning to occur. Social movements, such as the

agro-food movement, get individuals locally involved which leads to more interest

and engagement in broader issues (Levkoe 2006). The ability to influence politics

becomes real and relevant in a local context and can then be extrapolated to larger

issues.

The alternative agro-food movement is unique in its range of diverse groups and

interests, which increases its potential for large-scale social change. Food First

(2010) connects these notions in their report *Democracy in Action: Food Policy Councils:*

> The power of informed, democratic collaboration, especially when linked to specific places where people live, work, and eat, has an additional emergent quality: it can change the way we – and others – think. This is social learning, the basis for social change. (3)

Arguably we cannot achieve a just, sustainable agro-food system(s) without promoting food democracy. As researcher Neva Hassanein (2003) points out "food democracy is necessary because achieving sustainability involves conflicts over values, and there is no independent authority, such as science or religion, to which we can appeal for resolution over these conflicts (85)." Ideas on what is fair and just, as are reflected in sustainability and food justice, are not absolutes, but subjective reflections on the values that our society supports. People of the society are the only ones who can decide what that balance of values should be. Achieving food democracy requires a shift in thinking how and who can contribute, and creating pragmatic mechanisms for making it happen.   Organizations modeled after Food Policy Councils, such as the Thurston Food Systems Council, particularly appear to have this potential.

A key phrase in Lang's (1999) food democracy definition is "*equal* and effective opportunities (83)." Chapter 3 reveals ways in which our current agro-food system does not support food democracy, particularly among underserved populations, and drastically lacks equal or effective avenues for participation. This study assesses the current state of food democracy in the agro-food movement, and investigates the

barriers and opportunities community organizations have to increase food

democracy, particularly among those disproportionately impacted by injustices of

the agro-food system.

Chapter 3:

The Global Agro-Food System and Associated Resistance

The U.S. serves as the global model and driver of the industrialized, commodity agriculture that produces the majority of food in our world. In the mid 1800's the industrial revolution resembled a shift from a largely agrarian and rural American society to one based on mechanization and mass manufacturing; a shift grounded in capitalist ideologies. American policies encouraged, and continue to encourage, this growth within the country and around the world (Allen & Wilson 2008). The result is a globalized agro-food system geared towards high productivity and efficiency that depends on massive inputs of fertilizers, pesticides, water, and fossil fuels. Systems produce large amounts of food, but also immense inequities and unsustainable practices. "Cheap food" produced by the global system has the costs of negative externalities absorbed by society and nature, costs which are now being felt in economic terms by those even in the richest countries, and are destroying ecosystems and livelihoods globally.

Environmental costs appear in the forms of deforestation, eutrophication, chemical contamination, and soil erosion (Tilman et. al 2002; Olson 1992; Pimental et. al 1995). Additionally, food-related activities are a leading source of greenhouse gases contributing to climate change (TRPC 2011). Social costs include hunger, exposure to toxins through pesticides and fertilizers, and diet-related diseases, which are now one of the leading causes of preventable deaths in the United States (Health &

Human Resources website). The collective alternative agro-food movement

symbolizes resistance to this arguably broken system, however players in this

movement risk inadvertently reinforcing and reproducing inequities. The following

sections reveal practices and underlying ideologies that are not congruent with the

goals of food justice, community food security, and food democracy.

"A basic principle of modern state capitalism is that costs and risks are socialized to the extent possible, while profit is privatized."
– Noam Chomsky

Inequity in the Agro-Food System

The U.S. agro-food system is based off capitalist ideologies, a political-economic

concept geared towards production and growth. Following the Great Depression,

the United States adopted a form of capitalism based on the principles of individual

freedoms liberated from the state, deregulated markets, and the privatization of

resources, often termed neoclassical, neoliberal, or laissez-faire capitalism.

Whatever the term, this form of capitalism assumes that all humans have equal

opportunity and access, failing to account for social oppression, like racism and

classism, inequalities, and the exploitation of natural resources. Privatization and

capitalization of the agro-food system has resulted in a few owning the market, and

the "commodification of human relationships," in which people are merely

consumers with little influence on how the system operates (Levkoe 2005).   Allen

(1998) argues the alternative agro-food movement has not been successful in

challenging these underlying capitalist ideologies, which has prevented true change

from occurring. She argues that instead of attempting to integrate more people into

the same system, societies, particularly the United States, need to envision different political and economic arrangements that may be more conducive to equity.

The scope of this research does not address the functions of neoliberal capitalism, and cannot make claims to whether an equitable agro-food system is possible under these ideologies. Regardless, the current agro-food system has inequities that are connected to the structure of the system. Players in the alternative agro-food movement have to make these inequities transparent in order to avoid re-producing existing issues, and the extent that these inequities are inherent to a capitalist system should continue to be analyzed.

Hunger in a World of Abundance

A blaring example of inequity in the globalized agro-food system is the number of people that suffer from hunger and food insecurity in the world. The concepts of food justice and community food security are based off the beliefs that food is a *right,* and that *all* peoples should have access to healthy, appropriate food. Although more than enough food is produced today to feed the entire world population, millions around the globe suffer from hunger and food insecurity. Traditionally hunger was viewed as an issue of production versus population – a belief that the planet could not produce enough food for such a large population. Today, this approach is considered outdated and verifiably false as it is statistically supported that increases in amount of food produced are not related to *access* of the food produced (Boucher 1999). By the 1980's, in quantity, there was enough food to

provide "access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy

lifestyle" (World Bank 1986 as quoted in Anderson & Cook 1999), however in 2010

the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported 925 million

people worldwide suffered from hunger (FAO 2010).

Hunger in the United States

In the United States issues of hunger are framed in terms of food insecurity. The

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines "very low food security," or

"food security with hunger" as an individual or household that "reports multiple

indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake (USDA Economic

Research Service website)." As one interviewer of this study put it, hunger in the

United States is "missing meals" and it is happening all around us. In 2011, 16.7

million American children and 33.5 million
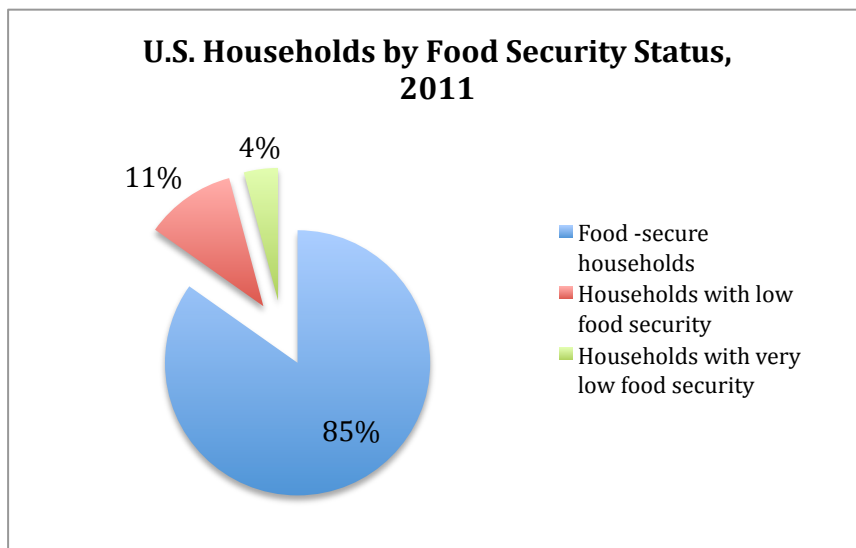
Figure 3.1. U.S. Households by Food Security Status, Year 2011 Census Data as collected on the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.
Source: USDA Economic Research Service website.

American adults were living in food insecure households (Feeding America website) (Figure 3.1).   Issues of food insecurity in the United States will likely continue to increase.   From 2009 to 2010 all the food banks in the US saw an increase in visits ranging from 11-21% (TRPC website), and one in nine Americans were recipients of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (previously known as the Food Stamp program)(Food First 2010).   Furthermore, the assistance provided through emergency food response is currently under risk of budget cuts and remains a main area of contention in the political system.

Institutionalized Oppression within the Agro-Food System

Inequities within the agro-food system are not evenly distributed throughout society, but instead are shouldered by certain groups within the larger population. Almost all populations that fall outside the dominant culture, or represent a minority, are at higher risk on all levels within the system. In 2011, food insecurity in the United States was highest among low-income households, single parent households, Black non-Hispanic households, and Hispanic households (Feeding America website) (Tables 3.1, 3.2, 3.3), and forty percent of workers in the lowest paying sectors of the food chain identified with a minority population (Rockefeller Foundation 2012).   Social class is one of the main determinants of diet-related diseases, such as diabetes and obesity, and in the United States there is a 20-year life expectancy difference between the most and least advantaged populations (Food First 2010; Marmot 2005). Additionally, disadvantaged populations across the

world suffer the most from environmental degradation (Human Development Report 2011).

Disproportionate access mirrors disproportionate impact; populations that suffer most from food insecurity and food-related issues are the populations with the most limited access to food. The term 'food deserts' has been developed to define low-income neighborhoods that do not have access to a grocery store or healthy, affordable food within a certain distance. Grocery stores strategically choose locations in middle and upper class neighborhoods to ensure higher profits leaving low-income and minority neighborhoods with mostly corner stores and fast food restaurants (Food First 2010). Food that is accessible at low prices is often highly processed and laden with chemicals, sugars, and fats. Currently, there is not a level playing field for nutritious food, local food, organic food, or culturally appropriate food, particularly among low-income and minority households. One of the critiques around the alternative agro-food movement is that it has not yet confronted issues of racism and classism present in the current agro-food system. Consequently players in the movement "often end up reproducing the same political and economic disenfranchisement" (Food First 2010: 12).

Race/Ethnicity	Food Secure	Food Insecure	
	Percent Food Secure	Percent Low Food Security	Percent Very Low Food Security
White non-Hispanic	87.9	7.9	4.2
Black non-Hispanic	74.1	15.9	10.0
Hispanic	71.7	20.0	8.3
Other	86.9	9.1	4.0
Total Population	83.6	10.9	5.5

Table 3.1. U.S. Households by food security status and race/ethnicity, 2011. Source: USDA ERS website.

Poverty Level	Food Secure	Food Insecure	
	Percent Food Secure	Percent Low Food Security	Percent Very Low Food Security
Under 100% Poverty Level	57.8	26.5	14.9
130% Poverty Level	60.7	24.8	13.6
185% Poverty Level	64.1	23.1	11.2
Over 185% Poverty Level	93.0	5.0	1.9
Total Population	87.6	8.4	4.1

Table 3.2. U.S. Households by food security status and poverty level, 2011. Source: USDA ERS website.

	Food Secure	Food Insecure	
Household Composition	Percent Food Secure	Percent Low Food Security	Percent Very Low Food Security
Married-couple families	85.0	11.2	3.8
Female head with children, no spouse	62.5	25.5	11.9
Male head with children, no spouse	73.7	18.8	7.5
No children, more than one adult	89.7	6.0	4.3
Total Population	83.6	10.9	5.5

Table 3.3. U.S. Households by food security status and household composition, 2011. Source: USDA ERS website.

Power Distribution in the Agro-Food System

If amount of food is not the issue then we are forced to look deeper at what prevents

certain peoples from obtaining consistent food supplies. A political ecology

approach identifies the need to understand power distributions supported by

existing political and economic arrangements. Who has the ability to make

decisions in our systems? Who defines the discourse around these systems? And

who is profiting and benefiting from these systems? Immediately it is seen that one

of the major issues is the absence of comprehensive approaches that connect these

factors with the presence of inequities and the lack of power citizens have within

the system.

The agro-food discourse supported by the United States government disproportionately focuses on production and emergency food services versus actual *food* issues (Allen 1998). The national political and economic environment supports large-scale operations that are motivated by profit and production versus nutrition, sustainable practices, and equity. In the US, and the world, the agricultural and food industry is controlled by a handful of transnational corporations that regard profit as the primary goal. Four firms control 84% of the meatpacking market, three firms control 55% of the flour milling market, and five retailers control more than half (52%) of the grocery market, with Wal-Mart controlling one-quarter of the total market (Rockefeller Foundation 2012). Over 60% of the retail purchases are in control of ten of the largest multinational corporations (Thomas 2004). Figure 3.3 gives an example of the consolidation of distribution within the agro-food system. American agricultural policy is comprised of legislative actions intended to meet the needs of the large players of agricultural industry, often with detrimental impacts to the overall society and the environment (Allen 1998; McCalla 1985; Paarlberg 1980). Policies initiate a cycle where money from consumers is transferred to the wealthiest farmers who in turn fuel the industry and policymakers. The cycle removes power from the consumer as well as from farm and food workers who perform the majority of agro-food work (Allen 1998).

Figure 3.3. Corporate Ownership of Food Distribution. This image exemplifies how ownership is consolidated within the agro-food system. Consumers are often unaware that the seemingly diverse options are in reality owned by a few. Source: Huffington Post 2012.

In the United States there is one single government entity concerning food, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). Political power lies solely in one institution that does not address the many stages of food following production such as processing, distribution, purchasing, eating, and waste disposal/recycling. Wayne Roberts, Canadian food policy analyst, explains the error of this approach:

> "Because food touches so many aspects of our lives in so many ways, a government that does not have a comprehensive food policy cannot, by definition, have a comprehensive health policy, energy policy, job creation policy, environment policy, global warming policy, anti-poverty policy, immigration and settlement policy, trade policy, industrial policy or – last but not least – agricultural policy. When food is torn apart, with bits stored in silos of health, energy, environment, immigration, trade and agriculture departments, it becomes like the patient who is treated by doctors as a liver, pancreas, heart, spine, ear, nose and throat, not a whole person."
> (as quoted in Phillipi 2010)

A primary goal of the alternative agro-food movement is to demonstrate that in reality food is connected to many, arguably all, sectors of development and commerce, and as a nation we have to recognize these relationships. Figure 3.2 gives a more holistic example of the relationships and influences that are part of an agro-food system. Transportation impacts the accessibility individuals have to food; environmental issues ranging from pollution to climate change are linked directly to agricultural practices; education is a key component in restoring knowledge on healthy, culturally appropriate eating practices; and development regulations can support or hinder urban and community gardening and farming. As it stands there are no municipalities in the nation that focus on *food*.
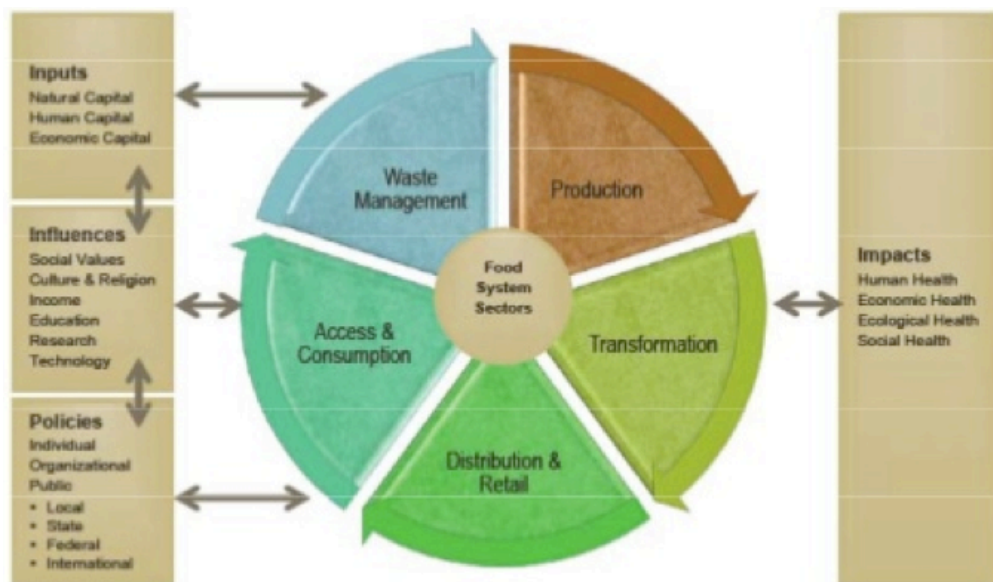
Figure 3.2. Model of an agro-food system indicating the complex interactions and relationships of an agro-food system. Currently the United States government does not have entities in place that address the agro-food system at this level of systemic analysis. Source: Iowa Food Systems Council 2011.

Food insecurity definitions utilized by the USDA fail to link individuals with the economics and politics of the community and nation in a largely apolitical approach

(Anderson & Cook 1999). The failure to address systemic, political ecology sources of hunger is exemplified in conventional responses to hunger and food insecurity. For example the charity-based system of giving food to those experiencing food insecurity, such as food banks and soup kitchens, largely dismisses the circumstances that led to food insecurity in the first place. These actions are not economically empowering and are merely a stepping-stone to addressing the hardships of poverty that underlie issues of hunger and food insecurity. Responsive versus preventative measures remain prevalent at local levels as well as for global hunger aid.

Levkoe (2005) believes injustices in the agro-food system are correlated with the "increasing focus on people, not as citizens, but as consumers." Additionally, the corporate agro-food economy has created what Kneen (1993) defines as "distancing" from our food: "the disempowering and deskilling of people from producing their own food and being able to eat well." People are losing much of the knowledge and skills associated with cooking and eating in healthy, culturally appropriate ways; a condition that disempowers peoples to take control of food security within their lives. It becomes obvious food is a "political issue" when one understands government structure and regulations detract power from the people. Hunger and food insecurity are then realized as a result of "a lack of power and democracy" (Boucher 1999: 2). The alternative agro-food movement exemplifies that communities all over the world are yearning for a different way of relating to

food, yet in the current system people do not have adequate avenues to voice their opinion leaving them powerless.

Food Policy Councils: An Avenue for Food Democracy

The alternative agro-food movement is largely based on the belief that a more sustainable, just agro-food system will become a reality through empowering community members and starting with local change. Food Policy Councils (FPC) are a specific method and organization structure that connects local community action with the overarching policy shaping and influencing these communities. FPCs are recognized for their ability to directly increase food democracy. The Thurston Food Systems Council was inspired by the functions and structure of FPCs.

The first FPC was formed in 1982 in Knoxville, TN in response to food access inequities. Since that time dozens of FPCs have formed throughout the United States and Canada in the attempt to locally assess and evolve agro-food systems. Some of these organizations have been extremely successful, while others have disbanded or evolved into different entities. Food First, a national food advocacy group, performed a comprehensive examination of these organizations in 2009 in which 45 individuals were interviewed and findings were published in a report entitled "Food Policy Councils: Lessons Learned." The interviewees of this project were the prominent players of functioning and past-functioning councils, allowing a firsthand perspective on the opportunities, challenges, and potentials of these organizations. Other national organizations, such as the Community Food Security Coalition and

the Drake Agricultural Law Center, are attempting to serve as comprehensive resources for FPCs and similar organizations.

Additionally several pieces of academic research have emerged over the past years as these organizations reach a stage of comparison and analysis. It is encouraged that individuals, organizations, and communities proposing a FPC or system-level food organization first research these resources. It is often easy to feel isolated in addressing issues, or to be excited to begin as quickly as possible, however there is much experience and wisdom on the formation and functioning of FPCs.

What is a Food Policy Council?

A Food Policy Council (FPC) is a group of stakeholders that ideally represent all sectors of the food system, including production, consumption, processing, distribution, and waste recycling. Sectors are often represented by diverse players in the community that may include anti-hunger and food justice advocates, educators, farmers, politicians, non-profits, business owners, workers in the food industry, food processors, food distributors, and concerned citizens (Food First 2009). Together, these diverse stakeholders provide system-wide assessment and problem solving for local and regional food systems, a sector that is not present in the American political system. In 2009 there were over 40 active FPCs existing at local, regional, and state levels (Food First 2009). Some are government mandated and may actually be housed in government, while many are grassroots initiatives that become housed by a non-profit or become a non-profit themselves. Either way

FPCs often have a relationship and recognition by local government officials so that

they may influence actual policy.

The term "food policy" can be somewhat misleading concerning the function of

these councils. While many do focus on actual politics surrounding the food system,

they also streamline food programs in the local area. Food First (2010) identifies

that councils typically have one or more of the following functions:

- To serve as forums for discussing food issues,

- To foster coordination between sectors in the food system,

- To evaluate and influence policy, and

- To launch or support programs and services that address local needs

In other words, influencing policy is essential for structural change in the food

system, but the social benefits of education and coordination appear equally

important. Above all a FPC is intimately connected to, and therefore expressed, by

people of a specific place. Specific functions, and even the name, of a FPC reflect

each community's unique needs and abilities. For example the organization this

research focuses on decided to choose the name Thurston Food Systems Council

versus Thurston Food Policy Council because it was felt the term "policy" is limiting

in its scope. This has happened in other communities as well, but these

organizations still fall under the broad purpose of FPCs "to coordinate work in all

sectors within the food system of a specific geographic area" (Food First 2010, p 19).

Regardless that each FPC is unique to a community, Food First and other pieces of

literature (Beihler et al 1999, Borron 2003, Schiff 2008, Webb 2008) identify similar challenges and opportunities regardless of council size and location.

Challenges & Potentials for Food Policy Councils

This research focuses on the challenge for Food Policy Councils (FPC) to engage diverse membership, specifically from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, however this challenge is by no means disconnected from other limitations. One of the largest challenges faced by FPCs is the ability to balance the focus between policy and programming. While it is recognized that system-based change has a long term approach and will require changes in policy, studies of councils identify projects "accomplished within a relatively short time frame help to build credibility for an organization along with member motivation and pride" (Schiff 2008 as quoted in Food First 2009a, p. 34). In the context of engaging underserved populations this pressure for short term, immediate successes may have councils acting before they have a diverse stakeholder membership. The discussion section of this research explores the trade-offs on building diversity in the initial formation stages of the organization as a means to empower underserved populations versus building a concrete infrastructure before beginning concerted efforts to engage diverse populations.

Lack of staffing and funding are certainly the most concrete barriers to expanding council work. Food First (2010) reports that many FPCs have no funding and survive purely as volunteer organizations. Furthermore the majority of FPCs at all

levels have either no staff or one part-time staff. Many individuals sit on a council as part of their position with another organization or agency or strictly on a voluntary basis. Limitation of resources certainly makes it difficult to offer compensation for participation. Lack of transportation support and childcare can make it almost impossible for certain demographics, such as low-income parents, to attend meetings.

Lack of diverse participation is a noted challenge for many FPCs. Diversity in this context means both diversity from socio-economic and cultural groups, but also diversity in representatives of the food system. For example, Food First (2010) found that many FPCs did not have representation for distribution or waste. In terms of diversity in a minority context, it can be difficult to address inequities in a community food system, if very few of the individuals participating in FPCs are from the communities experiencing the inequities (minority communities). Allen (2010) believes local communities and food councils will only be successful in supporting equity if they first identify the inherent *inequity* of a place, particularly the "differences in wealth, power and privilege [that] exist both among regions and within regions" (296).

Despite these challenges, FPCs across the nation are transforming food systems beginning at the local level. Food First (2010) proclaims "local and state governments are the testing ground for innovative policy ideas that often become part of the national norm." Taking action at a local level will resonate through our

country and serve as the foundation for necessary policy shifts at all levels. The

most unique aspect of FPCs among food justice endeavors is their ability to create

"democratic spaces for convergence in diversity" (Food First 2009a, p. 7). Changes

are taking place because everyday people are demanding a new way to relate to

food – FPCs are structures to ensure an organized method for amplifying citizens'

voices. FPCs become a mechanism for increasing food democracy.

Chapter 4: Thurston County Profile

"If food-system localization efforts are to work toward equity, they must consider inherited material and discursive asymmetries within frameworks of economy, demography, geography and democracy."
-Allen 2010

Analysis of the Thurston County Food Systems Council (TFSC) offers insight to

challenges of achieving food democracy at the local level. The following section will

explore the broad geography of Thurston County, that is the spatial relationships of

not just the physical realm, but also the social and political. Factors that encompass

the overall geography of Thurston County, and inevitably have impact on

participation in the TFSC, include demographic composition, existing infrastructure

for food access and emergency food services, and the presence of actors in the

alternative agro-food movement. Research data sheds light on how these

geographic dynamics are related to food democracy

Landscape, History, and Demography

Thurston County (Map 4.1) is located in Western Washington on the southern end

of the Puget Sound, and is commonly referred to as the "south sound." The larger

cities of Seattle and Tacoma lie to the north of the county, while to the south lies the

Columbia River and the city of Portland, OR.   Thurston County, population 252,264,

is home to the state capitol, Olympia, WA. Abutting Olympia to the south and north

are the cities of Tumwater and Lacey.   Besides these three urban areas, there is a

smattering of several smaller towns throughout Thurston County including Yelm,

Tenino, Rainier, and Rochester (Map 4.2). Approximately 26 percent of county

residents live in rural areas, which is significantly higher than the statewide average of 16 percent (WA Public Health and Social Services 2013). As the following sections reveal, rural communities in Thurston County have significantly less access to both emergency food resources and alternative agro-food activities.

Thurston County Vicinity Map

Map 4.1. Thurston County in vicinity of the state of Washington. Source: TRPC Website.

Directly outside Thurston County boundaries lies Joint Base Lewis McChord in neighboring Pierce County. It is felt that the presence of this large military base should be factored when considering the overall composition of Thurston County. The combined Army and Airforce Base covers 415,000 acres making it the largest military installment on the West Coast and supports an estimated 125,000 people that includes military personnel, families, civilians, and contract employees (City of Lakewood Website). Many of these individuals live outside the base, including in Thurston County. The presence and inclusion of military as a typically underserved

population, although not a focus in this study, was mentioned in more than one study interview.

Historically, Thurston County was inhabited by Coastal Salish tribes, including what is known today as the Nisqually Indian Tribe, Squaxin Island Tribe, and the Confederated Tribes of Chehalis. These peoples inhabited and lived off the land until the arrival of white settlers in the early 1800s when tribal populations were decimated from European disease. In the aftermath, following countless treaties that were never followed through on and several violent disputes, many tribes were forced onto reservation land. Tribal nations are active players in the culture of the region, and are an increasingly prominent voice in the political management of local resources (TRPC 2011). The boundaries of Thurston County encompass the tribal reservations of the Confederated Tribes of Chehalis and the Nisqually Indian Tribe (Map 4.2). Native American populations are some of the highest at risk of poverty and food insecurity. In the United States, poverty rates reach nearly 50% for Native Americans while poverty rates for whites is 13% (Cromartie 1999 as quoted in Allen 2010).

Today the population of Thurston County is predominantly white (82%) and overall is less ethnically diverse than the state of Washington (Table 4.1). Having a predominantly white population creates an additional barrier in engaging ethnic diversity in the Thurston County alternative agro-food movement. The capitol city

Map 4.2. Cities, tribal reservations, and land owned by Fort Lewis within Thurston County boundaries.
Source: US Department of Transportation website.

of Olympia is even less diverse in ethnicity and race with 84% of the population

being white. Olympia is the site for much of the alternative food activity, including

the Thurston Food Systems Council (TFSC), which suggested to the researcher that

participants in the local food movement would not adequately represent the ethnic

diversity present in the greater Thurston County. Survey results presented in the

next chapter corroborate this assumption. Data collected by the WA Public Health

and Social Services (2013) show a 10% increase in the county's minority population

from 2000 to 2010 and indicate ethnic diversity will continue to increase.

Race/Ethnicity	Washington State	Thurston County	City of Olympia
White	77%	82%	84%
Black	4%	3%	2%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	2%	1%	1%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, Other Pacific Islander	8%	6%	6%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	11%	7%	6%

Table 4.1. Race/Ethnicity of WA State, Thurston County, and Olympia. Non-white populations are disproportionately underrepresented in the alternative agro-food movement and are at higher risk to food insecurity and inequity. Source: TRPC 2012.

Thurston County does not have any neighborhoods meeting the HUD definition as an ethnically or racially segregated area of poverty,[2] however there are areas that show higher percentages of minority groups; particularly east Lacey and the surrounding unincorporated areas to the south (Map 4.3). An exception appears on the Nisqually Indian Reservation in which the population is predominantly Native American and has a poverty rate between 21% and 44% (Public Health and Social Services 2013). Being able to identify areas with higher percentages of minority (underserved) populations means being able to identify physical areas in which community members may be more susceptible to issues of inequity.

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[2] Defined as an area less than 50% white and with a poverty rate over 40% or that is three times the average tract poverty rate for the country.
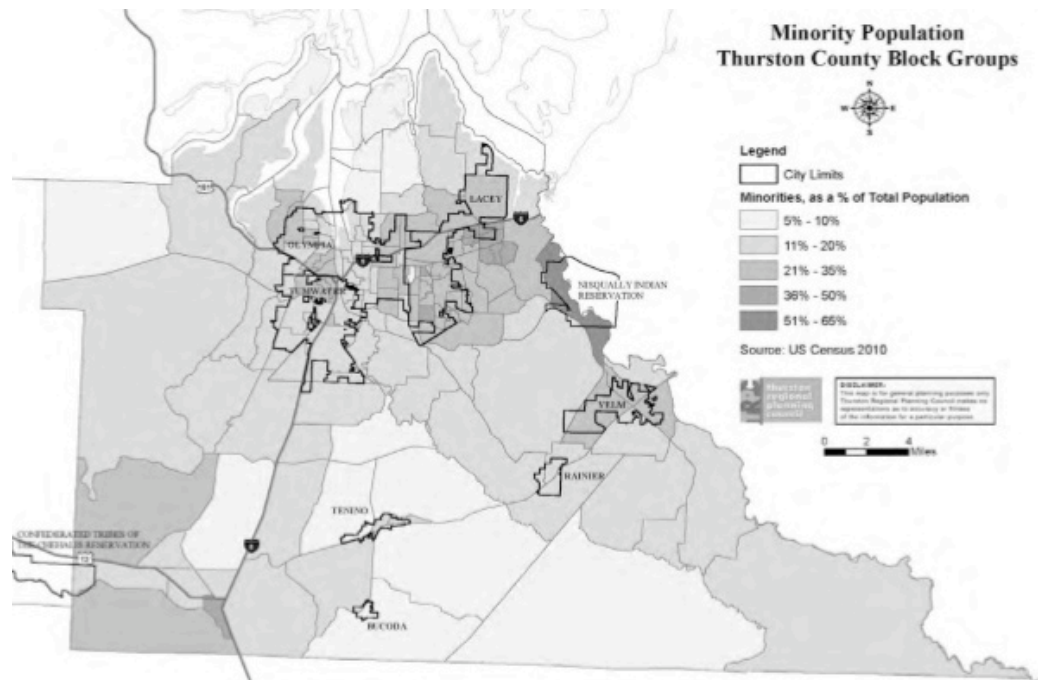
Map 4.3. Distribution of Minority Populations in Thurston County. Larger concentrations of minority populations are evident in areas surrounding Lacey and in tribal reservations. Source: Thurston County Regional Consolidated Plan 2012.

Who is at Risk? —Food Insecurity in Thurston County

In Thurston County, 4.6% of the population, or 11,650 individuals ages 18 & up, reported going hungry because they did not have money for food, while an additional 9.2% of the population, or 23,310 individuals, said food does not last with the money they have (Edwards 2011). Overall the county has a 10% food insecurity rate meaning 1 in 10 people are not sure where their next meal will come from (Edwards 2011). Arguably, the biggest indicators of food insecurity are income level and race/ethnicity. The USDA Economic Research Service (2011) found 41.1% of U.S. households with incomes below official poverty line were food insecure, compared to 7% of those with incomes above 185% of the poverty line. In

Thurston County, 16% of people of all ages are in poverty, and it is estimated one in four are at or below 200% of poverty level (TCFB 2011).

Poverty Status by Demographic Categories		Thurston County % below poverty threshold	Olympia % below poverty threshold
All	All Residents	11.5%	16.5%
Age	Children (0-17 years old)	15%	15.5%
	Adults (18-64)	11.3%	17.9%
	Seniors	6.4%	10.0%
Gender	Male	10.3%	16.6%
	Female	12.6%	16.4%
Race	White	10.7%	14.6%
	Black or African American	19.1%	Not available
	American Indian or Alaska Native	18.6%	Not available
	Asian	9.3%	19%
	Two or more races	20.4%	35.3%
	Hispanic or Latino Origin	18.3%	Not available
Household Type	All families	7.7%	10.3%
	Married couple families	2.3%	3.7%
	Female householder, w/children <18	38.5%	35.2%
	Female householder, w/children <5	50.8%	38.5%
Employment	Employed	6.1%	10.3%
	Unemployed	26.2%	46.6%
Education Level	Less than high school graduate	22.4%	26.8%
	High school graduate	7.8%	15.1%
	Bachelor's degree or higher	3.9%	4.7%

Figure 4.1. Poverty Status by Demographic Category in Thurston County and Olympia. Source: American Community Survey 2011.

In Thurston County, the populations with the highest percentage of poverty are individuals of two or more races, single mothers, unemployed individuals, and individuals with less than a high school degree (Figure 4.1). While poverty is explicitly linked to issues of food insecurity, Feeding America (2011) claims that in the United States "unemployment rather than poverty is a stronger predictor of food insecurity (website)." The unemployment rate for Thurston County rose from 7.5% to 8.1% from April to May 2012. Overall it is expected the number of people

experiencing unemployment, poverty, and food insecurity in Thurston County will

increase.
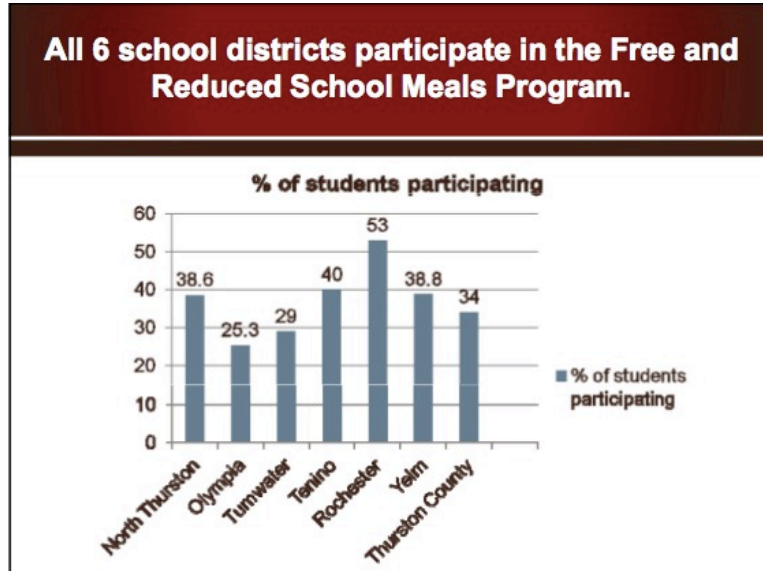
Figure 4.2. Participation in Free and Reduced School Meals Program for Thurston County school districts. School districts in rural areas have a higher percentage of participating students. Source Edwards 2011.

Emergency Food Services in Thurston County

Thurston County is home to a number of food assistance programs including

numerous food banks, mobile food banks, and soup kitchens; however these are

insufficient for meeting the needs of all those experiencing food insecurity in

Thurston County. Additionally, much of the programming is centered in the urban

core of Olympia. All six school districts participate in the Free and Reduced School

Meals Program with a range of 25.3% (in Olympia) to 53% (in Rochester) students

participating, indicating a higher need in rural areas (Figure 4.2). All Thurston

County food banks saw at least a 6% increase in visitors from 2009 to 2010 with the

urban core having a 21% increase (123,906 visits to 150,122 visits).   Map 4.4 shows

the distribution of emergency food programs throughout the county.

Many Thurston County residents experiencing food insecurity utilize government

assistance programs, however 43% of individuals defined as food insecure do not

meet qualifications for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP,

*Map 4.4. Locations of Emergency Food Programs in Thurston County. Programs
are more heavily concentrated in the urban core. Source: Edwards 2011.*

previously called Food Stamp Program) indicating current government assistance is

not sufficient (Edwards 2011). In 2009, 42,240 clients were part of SNAP (an

increase from 13.9% to 16.9% of the population from the previous year), and almost

5,000 pregnant and nursing women participated in the Woman, Infant, & Children

(WIC) program (Edwards 2011). The Nisqually and the Confederated Tribes of the

Chehalis Reservation also participate in the Food Distribution Program on Indian

Reservations (FDPIR). Food Lifeline (2011) estimates it would take 11 million more meals to feed low-income individuals in Thurston County.

The Thurston County Food Bank (TCFB) is one of the largest emergency food providers in the county. TCFB strives to increase the amount of local, fresh produce and diverse food options available to clients, which has resulted in direct relationships to farmers as well as a gleaning volunteer program. Additionally, several community partners grow food specifically for TCFB. Groups include the Wendell Berry Community Garden, St. Mark Lutheran Church, and the Kiwanis.   The Kiwanis have planted and harvested gardens in four locations purely for the food bank and in 2011 produced 36,225 pounds of fresh produce for the Food Bank (TCFB website).   TCFB offers a wonderful example of emergency food services participating in the alternative agro-food movement.

The Alternative Agro-Food Movement in Thurston County

The alternative agro-food movement is visible in many forms in Thurston County and the surrounding region. Small, organic local farms are actually on the rise even as working farmland decreases; community and school gardens are consistently forming; a number of the youth and low-income food programs are known throughout the nation; farmland is being preserved through land trusts; city regulations are evolving to support urban farming; and local tribes are conducting their own food sovereignty projects.   Leadership and action for these projects is seen both at a grassroots and governmental levels. While specific examples actively

engage underserved populations, much of the alternative agro-food activity focuses on local food markets and is concentrated in the urban cores. Local food markets in Thurston County risk reproducing existing economic relations, thus being exclusive to underserved populations.

Community and School Gardens

There are currently eleven community gardens in Thurston County, as defined by Thurston County Public Health and Social Services. Seven of these are in Olympia city limits, two in Lacey, one in Rochester, and one in Rainier (Map 4.5). Public Health and Social Services serves as the department for community gardens because "improved access to healthful foods such as fruits and vegetables improves the consumption of them, in turn decreasing the risk of chronic disease (TC Public Health & Social Services website)." This is a prime example of how food related issues fall under a range of government agencies. Currently community and school gardens are not as accessible in low-income areas of the county (Edwardes 2011).
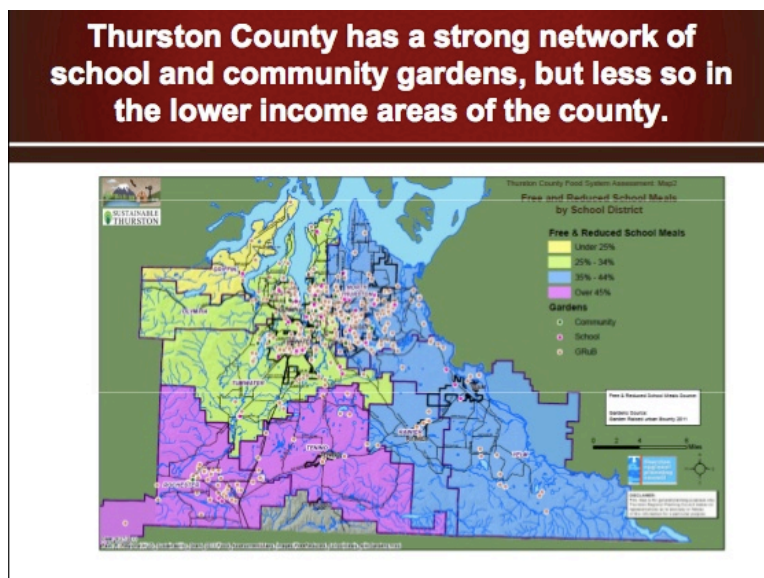
Map 4.5. Distribution of School & Community Gardens in Thurston County.
Source: Edwards 2011.

Direct Market Models

Local, organic food is a growing sector in Thurston County, particularly in Olympia. Currently 42.5% of total farmland (working and non-working) is now dedicated to organic production (TRPC 2011). The South of Sound Community Farmland Trust issues a Thurston County Farm Map each year that lists farms engaging in direct-market sales. Farms include Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), pick your owns, and farmers markets. For the year of 2013, 55 local farms will be included on the map. WSU Extension Agency (website) notes access to local markets, such as the six operating farmers' markets, is what drives much of the economic viability for local farmers. Direct markets, considered a large piece of the local alternative agro-food movement, are disproportionately located and utilized in the urban core of Olympia (Edwards 2011).

Olympia is well known for both the Olympia Farmer's Market and the Olympia Food Co-op, with the farmer market being the second largest in the state. A Co-op, or Cooperative, signifies ownership by all members and relies on consensus decision-making; an organizational form congruent with food democracy in which citizens actively have an input on how the co-op is run. Both markets have established mechanisms for participation by underserved populations, including accepting EBT benefits, free memberships, discounts, and getting food in exchange for volunteering. As readers will see in the discussion section in the following chapter, there is debate on whether the Olympia Food Co-op and Farmer's Market are "inclusive."

Direct food markets fall under the principles of Community Food Security through supporting local farmers and community resources (Ganapathy 2005), however Allen (1998) argues direct markets overall are not successful in creating equity because they support existing relationships that have created inequity in the first place. The CSA consumer base in the United States is dominated by upper middle-class, white individuals concerned mostly with environmental issues (Forbes 2007; Guthman et al 2006). Potential barriers to people with low-incomes and other underserved populations include up-front payment, limitations on time and transportation, and the inability to utilize EBT benefits. Many CSA farms have intentions to engage underserved populations, but have expressed they do not have adequate resources to do so and that government entitlements or higher income customers should meet this need (Guthman 2006).

Tribal Food Sovereignty

Tribal community food sovereignty projects are increasing throughout the region. Food sovereignty is a sector of the alternative agro-food movement focused on "the rights of peoples to define their own food and agriculture" (Rosset 2003, p. 1) and provides a policy framework geared towards food democracy (Windfuhr & Jonsen 2005). Tribal communities are responding in innovative ways to take control of their food resources to preserve and nurture the health and culture of their people. Examples in Washington include the Suquamish Tribe's food policy council, community education programs through the Tulalip Tribe, and a garden program

through the Nisqually Tribe. In Western Washington, native foods are considered superior to conventional foods both nutritionally and because of their deep cultural connection to indigenous groups (NWIC website). Access to tribal foods is profoundly connected to U.S. policy – treaty rights concerning fishing, hunting and gathering of traditional foods were not upheld until the "Boldt Decision" in 1974 and tribal reservations have been inundated by U.S. government commodity foods that are connected to the development of chronic diseases such as diabetes (NWIC website). Many of the goals defined by tribal food sovereignty align with goals of food democracy and equity that is often lacking in Food Policy Councils.

Local Politics

Local regulations and policymakers are a significant indicator of the alternative agro-food movement in a community and can be the forerunner for changes across the country. The Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) is the most prominent example of a local government agency active in the Thurston County agro-food movement. TRPC recently initiated the project Sustainable Thurston, "a community conversation that will result in a vision for a vibrant, healthy, and resilient future" (TRPC Website). The community-envisioning project includes several panels, including a "local food systems panel," to gather comprehensive data on community topics such as housing, solid waste, education, and public safety. The local food systems panel, made up of many of the prominent food activists in the community, noted several policies in progress that support the local food system, including urban agriculture ordinances, transfer of development rights, and agritourism

(TRPC website).   Additionally the Thurston County Board of County Commissioners is adding food as a topic to the health section of their comprehensive plan.

Specific examples and actions indicate food is becoming recognized as a crucial consideration in many facets of local government. Sustainable Thurston is in its initial phases, but could potentially offer political leadership in identifying and implementing policies geared towards food equity. Fortunately, the TRPC has been directly supportive and involved in the TFSC process. Many local policymakers have been vocal proponents of a food policy council or similar organizations, indicating the support of nurturing local food democracy.

Overall, the majority of the alternative agro-food activity, as well as emergency food services, are taking place in the Olympia urban core, which may skew definition and participation in the county's alternative agro-food movement. Olympia is composed predominantly of well-educated, white, middle class individuals and demographically does not represent the entire county.   Underserved populations and rural sectors of the community are at higher risk of inequity and currently have less access to alternative food activities. The information above identifies power inequities through patterns of ethnicity, poverty, and food insecurity.   Power and privilege are also connected to the discourse surrounding a movement, meaning those who define the problems and solutions are those with the power (Allen 1998). As the TFSC gains momentum it represents the opportunity to nurture food democracy, however if visions are defined by a specific demographic sector of the

community, inevitably there is a power distribution within the movement at a local level. The following chapter discusses methods utilized in this study, including the presence of the Thurston Food Systems Council (TFSC), and other non-profit and community organizations that have the potential to overcome potential barriers to local food democracy.

Thurston Food Systems Council

In 2012, two entities in Thurston County independently suggested the formation of a Food Policy Council (FPC); one came from local government in the form of the Sustainable Thurston local food systems panel, and the other from grassroots community organizing. Many non-profit organizations in the community, particularly Hunger Free Thurston County[3], have considered initiating a council for several years, however grassroots efforts did not solidify until the Food Summit; a one-day community gathering in October 2012 attended by over 200 participants to discuss local food systems. The resulting formation of the Thurston Food Systems Council (TFSC) is the backdrop for the research presented in this paper. In March 2012, TFSC was created by a combination of those involved in Sustainable Thurston and in the Food Summit, however it is unclear how the relationships between these two projects will emerge. As of March 2013, the TFSC had developed a vision and mission statement, launched an initial website, and were finalizing the leadership and organizational structure (Appendix B).

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[3] Hunger Free Thurston County (HFTC) was a coalition composed of Growing Raised Bounty, the Thurston County Food Bank, Left Foot Organics, and Sustainable South Sound. The goals of HFTC included the development of a Food Policy Council, however HFTC disbanded in hopes that TFSC would continue this work

Currently TFSC members are considering many of the issues faced by FPCs, including lack of diversity in membership. Members recognize TFSC is lacking in socio-economic and ethnic diversity in both members and public participants, and while social justice is a mentioned goal in the TFSC framework, it is not an area that many current members are familiar. At the time of this study, Growing Raised Bounty (GRuB) and the Thurston County Food Bank (TCFB) were the only groups represented that work specifically with underserved populations in the area, however it is unclear what their involvement will be past formative stages. Members have also expressed the want to engage social justice organizations in the area, however it is not evident this is a high priority at the time. The researcher was invited to present preliminary research results to the TFSC in the spring 2012, in hopes of providing potential avenues for engaging underserved populations and social justice organizations.

Chapter 4: Methods & Results

Research Design

In undertaking this study, two major forms of data collection were utilized. Survey data was collected to provide a profile of participants of the Thurston Food Systems Council (TFSC) planning process in a quantitative manner meant to support or refute the subjective perception that underserved populations are missing. A qualitative interviewing method was utilized to interview representatives of organizations that serve a particular underserved population for a deeper understanding of inequitable participation. Additionally, the researcher was a consistent participant in the activities and meetings surrounding the formation of the TFSC, as well as an active volunteer with numerous food and social justice focused organizations in the community. Two years of community work and networking gave the researcher a personal connection and understanding of food-related organizing in the local community. This lent valuable insight into which organizers in the community would serve as the foundation of this research. It cannot be stressed enough that this paper is but a shadow of the work organizers and activists participate in every day, and that the opportunity to interview these individuals gives tremendous depth and profundity to the research topic.

Survey Methods

Questionnaires were distributed at eight separate meetings that were organized as follow-up meetings to the Food Summit, the initial public planning for the TFSC and other local food projects. The intention of the meetings was to maintain excitement

and organizing momentum within the community, and to solidify specific projects.

Meetings were held at the Timberland Library in Lacey, WA in January 2012.

Meetings were open to the general public and announcements were passed along

via email listservs connected to the Food Summit and participating community

organizations. Appendix C provides a timeline of the Food Summit in comparison to

the formation of TFSC, the formation of the Local Food Systems Panel for

Sustainable Thurston, and this research.

Thirty-five questions comprised the survey with 23 being multiple choice and the

remaining 12 being open-ended responses. The full survey can be viewed in

Appendix A. Surveys were divided into three sections:

> 1. Feedback on the current public planning process;

> 2. Personal identification of participants' demographics, socio-economic
>
> characteristics, food behaviors, and connection to food system; and

> 3. Perceptions on groups missing from planning process and suggestions for
>
> collaborations.

The primary intentions of the questionnaires/surveys was to establish a profile of

who was involved in the public planning process, both on an organizational level

and on a citizen level (concerning socio-economic characteristics and connection to

food system). Additionally the survey was utilized to gauge overall perception of

the effectiveness of the current planning process and whether participants

perceived certain groups were missing from the overall process. The survey had

stakeholder groups defined in two different ways: one set of questions asked

participants if certain minority or typically underrepresented peoples were missing

(e.g. low-income, Hispanic, military, individuals with disabilities) while another set

of questions asked if groups connected to the food system were missing (e.g.

farmers, business owners, politicians, consumers). These two ways of defining

stakeholders represent different approaches for gauging diversity of participants.

This research paper takes a social justice approach in analyzing participation and

therefore focuses on involvement of socio-economic groups.

Interview Methods

Interviews were considered ethnographic, meaning the interviewer had a list of pre-

meditated topics and questions as a guide to ensure specific areas of inquiry were

addressed in all interviews, however the conversation was allowed to flow

depending upon the knowledge and interest of the individual interviewee.

Questions evolved throughout the interview process as themes emerged, but all

interviews encompassed these major topics:

- Participation of Underserved Populations in Community Organizing

    - Methods for successful engagement and participation of a particular

      underserved population

    - Dynamics of the local community that influence (positively and

      negatively) the participation of the population with which the

      organization serves

- Dynamics of political systems/policies that influence (positively and negatively) the participation of the population with which the organization serves

- Perceptions on Food Policy Councils and the Role of Social Justice in Agro-Food Movements

- Level of Interviewee's Knowledge and Participation in Local Food Organizing (specifically the Food Summit and Thurston Food Systems Council)

Overall questions led to an exploration of physical and perceptual barriers for engaging underserved populations in democratic participation with a particular focus on local minority participation in food-related organizing. These topics were discussed mostly on a local scale, but have implications that reflect the larger social structures of agro-food movements and political structures that influences democratic accessibility.

Interviews were held at a time and location chosen by the interviewee, often their office or a local coffee shop. All interviews were conducted in August and September of 2012. Depending on time availability of the interviewee, interviews lasted from 45 min to 2.5 hours, with the majority lasting approximately 1.5 hours. This range in interview lengths should be noted when comparing the prevalence of themes and subthemes among interviews. Ideally, interviews would be a standard length for direct comparison, but because the same questions were asked in all interviews regardless of time, it is felt depth of topics, not necessarily appearance of

themes, was hindered in shorter interviews. Interviews were recorded in full and downloaded immediately to the researcher's personal computer.

Profile of Interview Participants

Interviewees were chosen because of their recognized commitment to organizing with a particular underserved population in the local community. All of the individuals and their affiliated organizations are prominent players in social justice work being done in the Olympia area and greater Thurston County. Many interviewees, although not all, are founders or original members of their respective organization and have worked in the field of social justice for over a decade. A number of the organizations specifically incorporate food justice into their work, however the only connecting factor among all organizations is that they are recognized, established local organizations that work with a defined underserved population. Additionally, a few of the organizations have been main participants in the TFSC planning process, while the remaining has varying degrees of involvement and knowledge. This was intentional on the interviewer's part as a way of identifying why certain organizations and peoples are already connected to local food-related organizing, while others are not.

Nine representatives from different organizations were interviewed. Five of these organizations serve individuals who are low-income or homeless, or underserved populations defined by class or income. Two of the organizations work with particular ethnic or racial peoples, while the two remaining organizations represent

the elderly/senior populations, and individuals with developmental disabilities. The

organizations and individual representatives who were interviewed are described

on the following pages. The heading above each description includes the

interviewee's position within the respective organization, the underserved

population that the organization serves, and the level of involvement in the TFSC

process at the time of this study. A descriptive paragraph elaborates the history and

main programs of each organization, noting their significant contributions to the

local community.   These descriptions are valuable to not only give context to this

study, but as a profile of prominent activists in the community.   Identification of

major players in the community allows for strategic coalition building and planning

in a movement.

Kim Gaffi, Executive Director & Co-founder,
Growing Raised Bounty (GRuB)
GRuB Serves: Low-income families and youth
TFSC Involvement: Primary Organizer

Organization Description:

The non-profit GRuB was co-founded in 1993 by Kim Gaffi and Blue Peetz as they

saw a need to connect low-income households to food justice in Thurston and

Mason counties. The organization has several well-established programs including

the Kitchen Garden Project, in which volunteers have built over 2,200 backyard and

community gardens for lower-income households. Other programs are focused on

youth engagement and include the School Summer Employment Program in which

local high school youth are employed at GRuB's Olympia-based farm and participate

in farming, leadership, and communication workshops; and the Farm Field Trip

Program in which elementary and middle school student gain hands-on garden

experience. Last year marked the beginning of the GRuB in the Schools Pilot Project

which has evolved from the Cultivating Youth Employment & Drop-out Prevention

Program to allow high-schoolers who are low-income and/or disengaged to gain

valuable life skills *and* school credits through work at GRuB.   GRuB is well known

throughout the Olympia community and has been recognized for its amazing food

justice work, including a 3-year USDA Community Food Project Grant.   GRuB, and

Kim Gaffi specifically, have been a strong presence through the Food Summit and

TFSC process.

Robert Coit, Executive Director,
Thurston County Food Bank (TCFB)
TCFB Serves: Low-income and individuals who are Homeless
TFSC Involvement: Consistent Attendant, Future Involvement Questionable

Organization Description:

The primary mission of the non-profit TCFB is to eliminate hunger throughout

Thurston County. TCFB's service area includes the urban cores of Olympia, Lacey,

and Tumwater as well as underserved locations within Thurston County. The major

food bank headquarters is located in Olympia, WA and there are an additional

fifteen satellite food banks as well as nine mobile food banks. Additionally TCFB

partners with food banks in Rochester, Tenino, and Yelm to address hunger among

rural residents, and participates in a number of youth programs including school

food bags and school gardens. TCFB is known for the client choice model, in which

food bank users are able to choose the food they want, and for the large amounts of

fresh, local produce brought in through community partnerships and the TCFB

gleaning coalition. Robert Coit was personally asked to serve as the chair for the

Sustainable Thurston's local food systems panel, indicating his prominent position

as a food justice activist in the community.

Monica Peabody, Director & Founder,
Parents Organizing for
Welfare & Economic Rights (POWER)
POWER Serves: Low-income Parents
TFSC Involvement: Minimal & Inconsistent Involvement

Organization Description:

POWER is a low-income member led non-profit dedicated to advocating for and empowering low-income parents. POWER believes the United States is facing the most dangerous time for low-income families since the Great Depression and is determined to move forward towards a future in which poverty is eradicated. POWER works towards these goals through advocacy, welfare witness, outreach, policy change, and workshops.   POWER has strong values in recognizing the essential work of mothers and caretakers within a community. Education and policy change are considered key to systemic change with the first step being self-education on individual rights. POWER has been a constant presence at the Capitol over the years and has been instrumental in the passing of several pieces of legislation. Monica Peabody, a low-income single mother, founded POWER after several years of working with Welfare Rights Organizing Coalition in Seattle, WA.

Jill Severn, President,
Panza – organization serving Camp Quixote
Camp Quixote & Panza Serve:
Individuals who are Homeless
TFSC Involvement: No Knowledge or Involvement

Organization Description:

Camp Quixote is a community of adults who are homeless that came together with the belief that no individual should have to live in a tent. The community is self-governed by those who are homeless and includes elected officers and an established code of conduct. Camp Quixote is supported by the non-profit Panza, whose members raise funds, volunteer, and create connections within the community. Faith communities host the Camp for 90-days at a time a—a time limit mandated by law. The vision of Camp Quixote is to establish a permanent Quixote Village that includes personal dwellings and community spaces and facilities. As of summer 2012 Camp Quixote and Panza had identified potential land for the village. Jill Severn became president of Panza after volunteering for the Camp at the church she was attending and recognizing the amazing work being done and the need for strong advocacy for people who are homeless.

Various members,
Food Not Bombs (FNB)
FNB Serves: Low-income and
individuals who are Homeless
TFSC Involvement:
Minimal Knowledge or Involvement

Organization Description:

Food Not Bombs was founded in 1980 in Boston as a protest to nuclear

disarmament and other acts of global violence. Today hundreds of chapters

throughout the world continue to distribute free vegetarian food in protest of war

and poverty. FNB is an all-volunteer organization with no formal leaders and is

unique to each chapter's community.   Recovered food that would otherwise be

thrown away is prepared and served in a public place for all to enjoy freely. The

strategy of FNB is considered nonviolent direct action, using the act of providing

free, nutritious meals as a symbol of resistance. The Olympia chapter of FNB is

currently organized through Media Island, a resource and networking center, and

food is served outside the Olympia Timberland Library. The several members that

participated in the study interview had been involved varying lengths of time

exemplifying the fluid nature of the FNB volunteer base in Olympia.

NISQUALLY INDIAN TRIBE

Nemah Choubaquak, Cultural Programs Director
& Caitlin Krenn, Farm Manager,
Nisqually Indian Tribe
Nisqually Indian Tribe Serves: Nisqually tribal members
TFSC Involvement: Minimal Knowledge or Involvement

The Nisqually Indian Tribe calls their people "the people of the river, the people of the grass;" peoples who thrived in the south Puget Sound long before white settlers arrived. The heavily disputed Medicine Creek Treaty in 1854 moved the Nisqually people onto reservation land, which currently includes 4,717 acres next to the Nisqually River. Currently the tribe has over 650 enrolled members and is constantly growing as a sovereign nation. Tribal government is conducted under the tribe's Constitution and is led by a General Council comprised of tribal members. Programs include financial, health and community services as well as natural resource management.   The Nisqually Culture Program was established to revitalize Nisqually culture and traditional ways of life. Included in the Nisqually Culture Program is a community farm and several native food sovereignty projects, including a community gathering similar to the Food Summit in which community members envisioned a more holistic local food system. Nemah Choubaquak is a Nisqually tribal member who grew up on reservation lands. Caitlin Krenn, is a non-tribal member who has been farm manager for three years after completing her education at The Evergreen State College.

Stefanie Gottschalk Huerta,
Advocacy and Outreach Coordinator, CIELO
CIELO Serves: Latinos
TFSC Involvement: Minimal Knowledge or Involvement

Organization Description:

CIELO, centrally located in Olympia, offers family centered programming for all Latinos and underserved populations in the south Puget Sound community. The mission of the non-profit is to promote community, self-sufficiency and leadership among the groups they serve by increasing knowledge and access to education and mental health services, and social and cultural activities. Programs, such as GED preparation, Spanish and computer literacy, build skills for individuals to interact in the larger community. Other programs, such as Proyecto Familia and the Sewing Project provide safe, empowering spaces centered on social and educational services. Social justice and cultural expression and celebration are founding principles for all the work done through CIELO. Stefanie Gottschalk Huerta has been involved with CIELO since 2009 when she came to the organization as an intern through The Evergreen State College.

Cathy Visser, Senior Nutrition Director,
Senior Services for South Sound (SSSS)
SSSS Serves: Seniors
TFSC Involvement: Minimal Knowledge or Involvement

<u>Organization Description:</u>

The non-profit SSSS operates seven sites in Thurston and Mason counties as well senior centers in both Olympia and Lacey. Programs intended to keep seniors vital and independent in the community include adult daycare, case management, nutrition, transportation, and various living programs. The Senior Nutrition programs include congregate meals where seniors can gather and share nutritious meals for affordable prices, and meal on wheels in which meals are delivered to seniors confined to their homes.   These programs serve approximately 10,000 meals a month. Over the years local, fresh food has become integrated in the nutrition programs and the Olympia senior center buys from local sources when possible. Cathy Visser has served as Senior Nutrition Director for five years and provides a strong background in community nutrition, public health, and dietetics.

Ann Vandeman, former Executive Director,
Left Foot Organics
Left Foot Serves: Individuals with Developmental Disabilities
TFSC Involvement: Minimal Knowledge or Involvement

Organization Description:

The non-profit LFO was founded in 2001 with the mission of connecting individuals

of all abilities with food and farming. LFO established a five-acre, organic farm

where they focused on employment for individuals with disabilities and rural youth.

Employment programs allowed individuals of all abilities to learn and work with

one another while gaining valuable farming and marketing skills. Much of the

organization was funded through produce sales at market stands and in CSA shares.

Ann Vandeman founded the organization and is well known through the community

as a prominent food justice activist and farmer. Her inspiration to engage folks of all

abilities comes from personal experience as mother of a child with a development

disability. Unfortunately LFO ceased operation in February 2013, citing funds were

not sufficient to support the social programs offered at the farm. Unsustainable

funding in the non-profit food justice sector is discussed in the following sections.

Data Analysis

Surveys

To analyze survey data, all answers were coded by number and entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Graphs and tables were generated to identify and compare prevalence of answers of a question. Correlations were performed among certain variables to investigate relationships. Open-ended responses were analyzed in both a quantitative and qualitative manner. Responses were coded and frequencies were calculated and answers were also used to contribute to themes identified in the interview data.

Interviews

To analyze interview data, the researcher produced typed transcripts verbatim from audio recordings and notes. Comments and insights were also typed in the margins of the transcripts during the transcription process. Interview coding was a blend of an open coding framework and responsive interview modeling. Open coding is an approach where the researcher codes the interview data as they initially read through the transcripts with no pre-determined list of concepts or themes, while responsive interview modeling demands researchers to first utilize literature, interview questions, and knowledge of interview content to first develop concepts or themes before physical coding takes place. For this particular research, the initial coding was done in open coding framework in which the researcher noted all emerging themes and concepts, but then themes and concepts were more clearly defined and organized for the final rounds of coding and analysis. The benefit of this

hybrid approach blends the strength of a more unbiased lens of coding used in open

coding approaches, and the systematic, thorough nature of responsive interviewing

approaches. Ultimately the codes were organized into a system of themes and

subthemes as seen below, which are further defined and discussed in the discussion

section:

I. Serving the Minority
   a. Participation Needs (Physical, Social, Cultural)
   b. Intersectionality of Interests & Needs
   c. Institutionalized Oppression
   d. Balancing Short-Term and Long-Term Goals
II. Communication & Relationship Building
   a. Message Across Social/Cultural Barriers
   b. Quality of Invite
   c. Mutual Commitment/Reciprocity
III. Cultural Differences
   a. Experiences/Relevancy
   b. Meeting Skills & Structures
   c. Intent vs. Action
   d. Indigenous Cultures
IV. On Systems
   a. Leadership
   b. Organization Structure & Decision-making
   c. Non-profit Industrial Complex
   d. Democracy in Our System

The frequency of the themes was analyzed and compared within and among the

interviews. These themes formed the basis of the subsequent discussion and

conclusions of this research paper. Although each individual theme carries its own

significance, there is much overlap and association between and among the themes. These connections and potential causations are examined further in the discussion section.

Results

Survey Results

Survey data captures a profile of the individuals who were attending public

participation meetings. This profile includes socio-economic and demographic

information such as racial identity, income levels, education level, and location of

residence. The profile also includes indicators on how the respondents' primarily

interact with the agro-food system, including shopping behaviors and knowledge of

food movements. The final section of the results gives a summary of the overall

perceptions of the public planning process. This information includes the greatest

benefits of the planning process as identified by participants as well specific

stakeholder and minority groups that were or were not perceived as being included

in the overall process. Together this data allows us to see who is involved currently

and can perhaps be used as a method for identifying priorities of the community

already involved, insights of assumptions or biases held by the current group, and a

tool to evaluate future inclusion in the process.

Demographic & Socio-economic Characteristics

Ethnicity

Considering ethnic and racial identities, the majority of attendants identified as

Caucasian (89%, n=70), 4% identified as Native American (n=3), 3% identified as

Hispanic (n=2), and 2% identified as Asian (n=2).   None of the attendants marked

that they identified as African American or Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, however 7%

(n=6) marked "other" on the survey in which one individual identified as Mexican,

three indicated associations with a specific Native American tribe (Samish, Hackfoot, Sioux), and two noted they were of mixed ethnicities (mixed, black/Caucasian). (Figure 5.1)

Ethnic/Racial Distribution of Participants
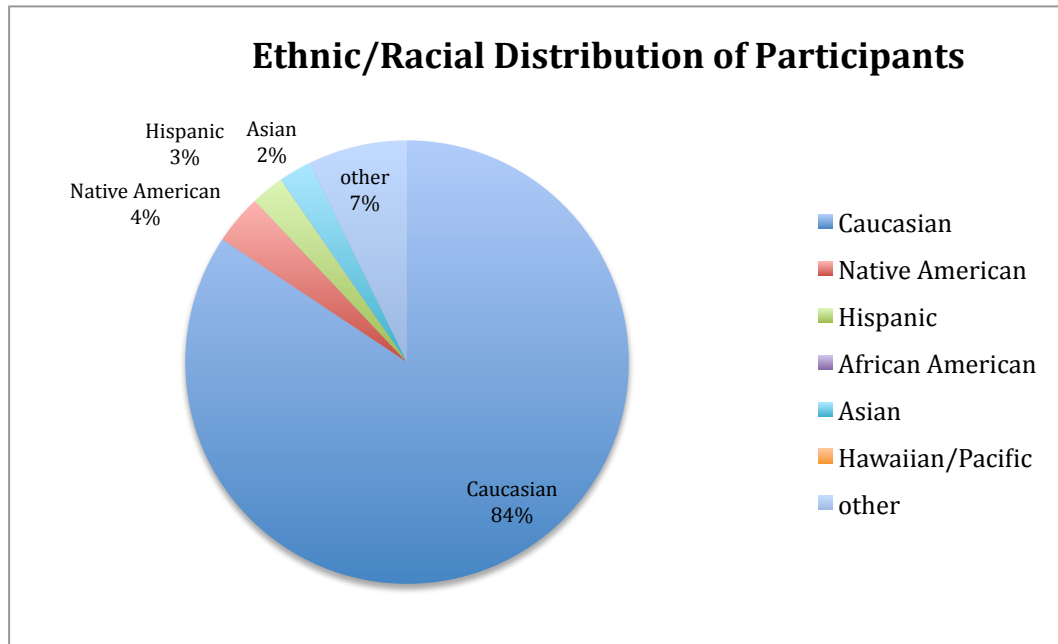
Figure 5.1 Ethnic/Racial Distribution of Survey Participants. Surveys indicate the majority of participants in the Thurston County public planning process identify as Caucasian.

Residency

The majority of attendants also considered themselves residents of Olympia (75%, n=55). An additional 11% (n=9) were residents of Lacey and Tumwater, two of the cities directly bordering Olympia city limits (Map 4.2), while the remaining 14% (n=12) were scattered among the outlying communities of Yelm (1%, n=1), Tenino (3%, n=2), Rural North (4%, n=3), and Rural South (3%, n=2). None of the attendants were residents of the Nisqually Reservation, the Chehalis Reservation, or several other outlying communities listed on the survey (Figure 5.2). Considering that most of the participants reside in Olympia, it is not surprising the racial/ethnic profile of the public meetings reflects the racial/ethnic distribution in Olympia itself.

Residence of Participants

Bucoda
Tenino
Lacey
Grand Mound
Tumwater
Yelm
Rochester
Olympia
Rainier
Rural North
Rural South
Nisqually Rez
Chehalis Rez
Outside TC

Rural South 3%
Tenino 3%
Rural North 4%
Outside TC 1%
Tumwater 7%
Lacey 6%
Yelm 1%
Olympia 75%
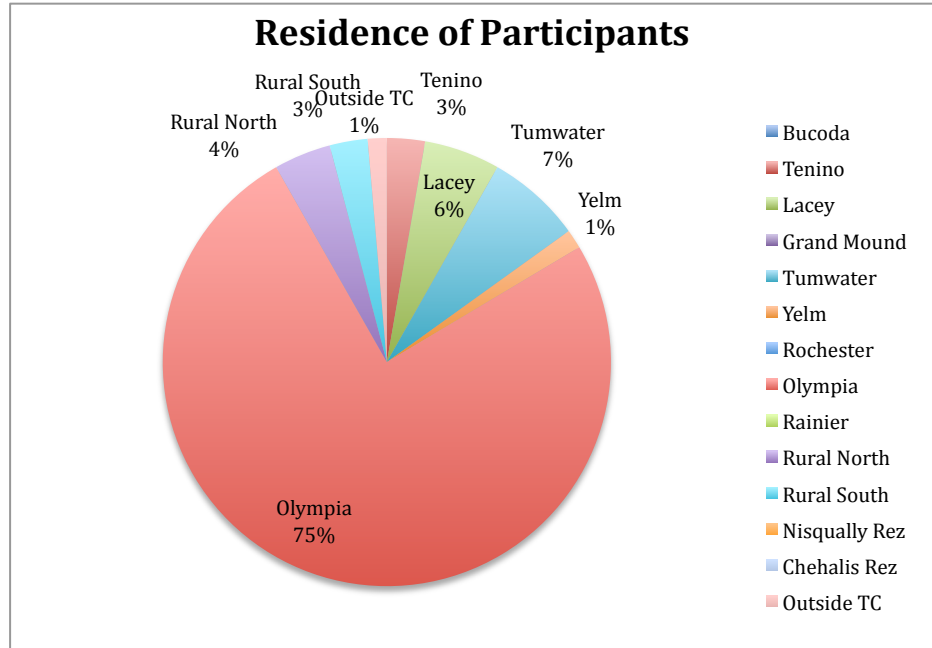
Figure 5.2. Residence Distribution of Survey Participants. Location of residence within Thurston County of participants of the local food-systems community meetings. None of the participants resided in Bucoda, Grand Mound, Rochester, Rainier, the Chehalis Indian Reservation, or the Nisqually Indian Reservation.

Income

The most prominent income level was an average annual income of $60,000 - $100,000 (27%, n=20). Interestingly, the second most prominent income level was an average annual income of under $10,000 (23%, n=17). According to 2012 poverty guidelines (Federal Register 2012) the combination of family size and income puts 26% of respondents (n=20) at or below poverty level. Further analysis reveals that the majority of individuals who claim an income level under $10,000 also identify as students (65%, 11 of 17 individuals) and two additional individuals are AmeriCorps members. Therefore although quantitatively the public process shows a distribution of income levels, over half of those considered at poverty levels are students. This is important because students living under the financial

constraints of academia are a distinctive population that is unique from the larger

low-income population. (Figure 5.3)

Income Levels of Participants

over 100,000
7%

under 10,000
23%

60-100,000
27%

10-15,000
9%

40-60,000
12%

20-40,000
15%

15-20,000
7%

- under 10,000
- 10-15,000
- 15-20,000
- 20-40,000
- 40-60,000
- 60-100,000
- over 100,000
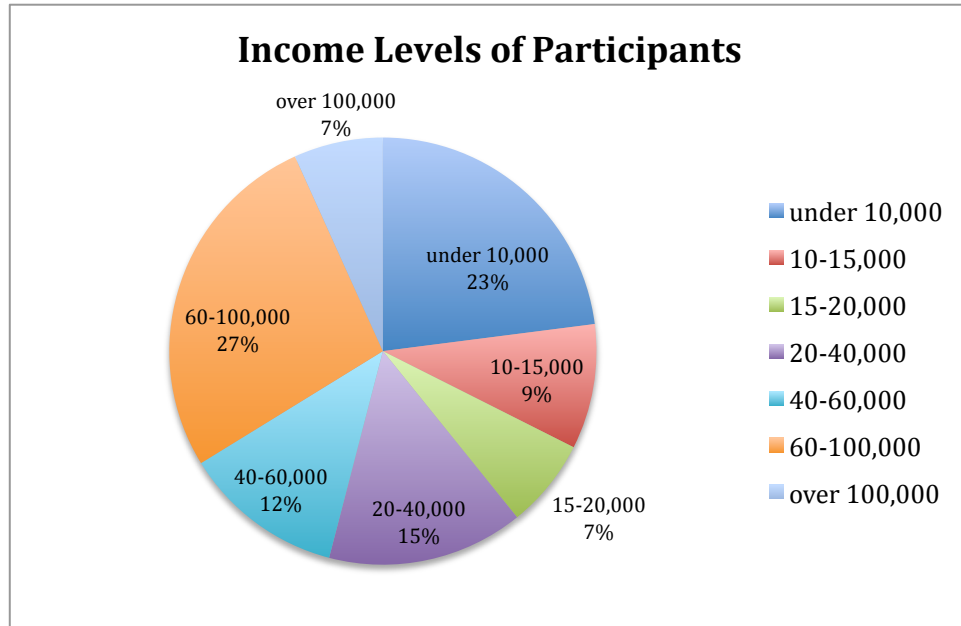
Figure 5.3. Distribution of Income Levels for participants at local food-systems community meetings.

Age

The dominant age group was 19-29 years of age (34%, n=25). The second largest

age group was 40-49 years of age (20%, n= 15). Both age groups of 30-39 and Over

60 represented 16% (n=12) of the attendants and 13% (n=10) were 50-59. (Figure

5.4)

Age of Participants
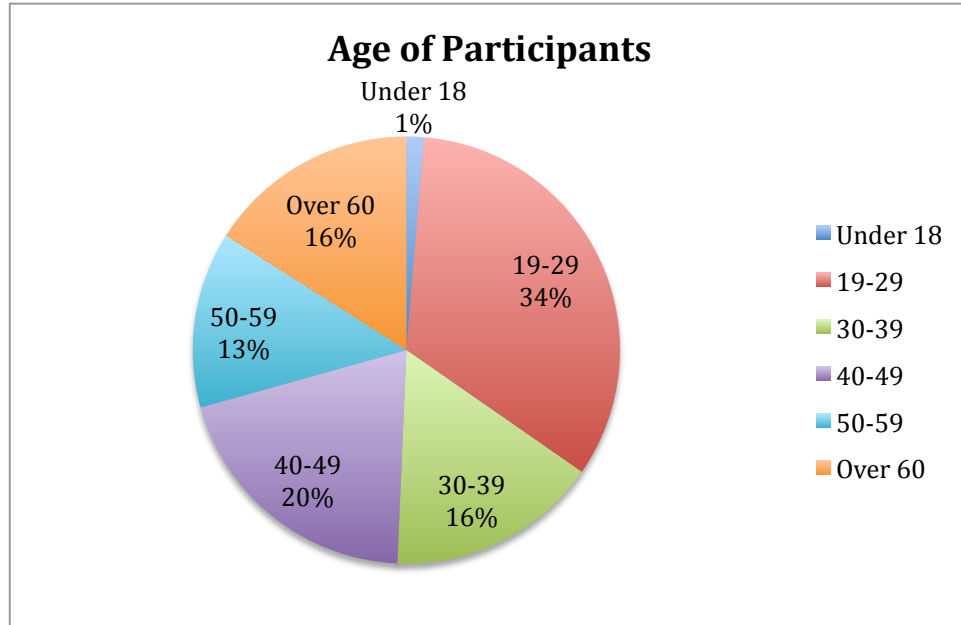
Figure 5.4. Age distribution of participants at local food-systems community meetings

Education

A total of 85% of participants indicated a college degree as their current education level with 44% (n=33) marking a Bachelor degree as their highest level of education, and 33% (n=25) indicated a Master or PhD degree as their highest level of education. Of the remaining participants, 12% (n=9) indicated a High school degree or GED as their highest level of education. It is highly likely participants in both the High school/GED category and Bachelor category are in the process of attending school since this distinction was not made on the survey. (Figure 5.5)
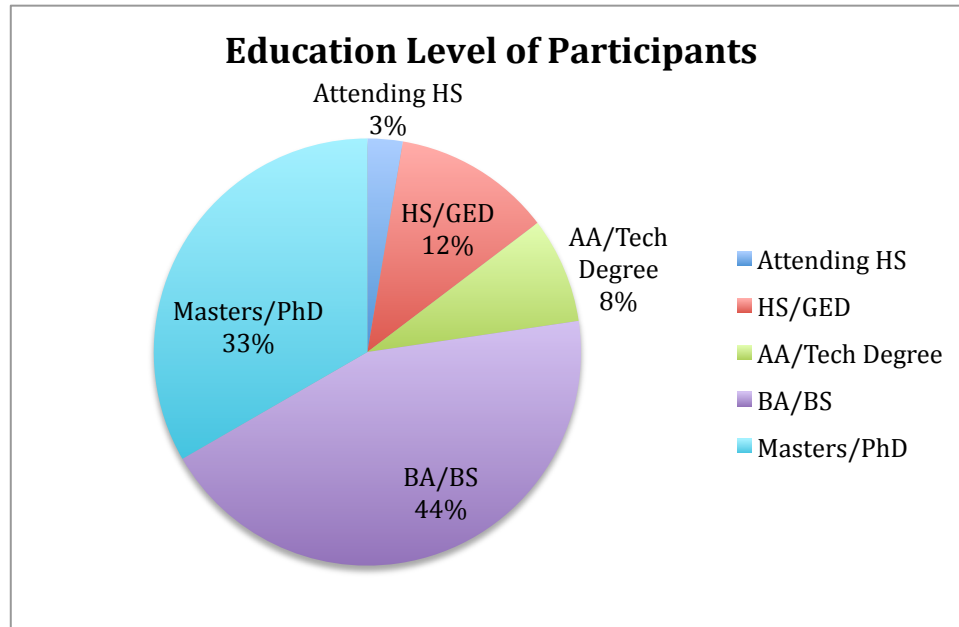
Figure 5.5. Distribution of Education Level of Survey Participants. Highest level of education   attained by participants at local food-systems community meetings. 85% of participants indicated some form of college degree.

Interaction with Local Food Movement & Food Systems

Level of Involvement

Fifty-seven percent (57%) of the public participants that attended these community meetings had also attended the October Food Summit. This indicates that the Food Summit was a large source of inspiration for public participation, however it was not the sole driver for the large community involvement. Over half of the attendants (60%, n=43) indicated they had been involved in food activism for at least one year (29% = 1-5 years; 9% =5-10 years; 22% = 10+ years) while another 18% claimed involvement at least 6 months to a year (18%) (Figure 5.6). The remaining 21% (n=16) had become involved in food activism presumably because of the activity occurring around the Food Summit since it was their first experience in food activism.
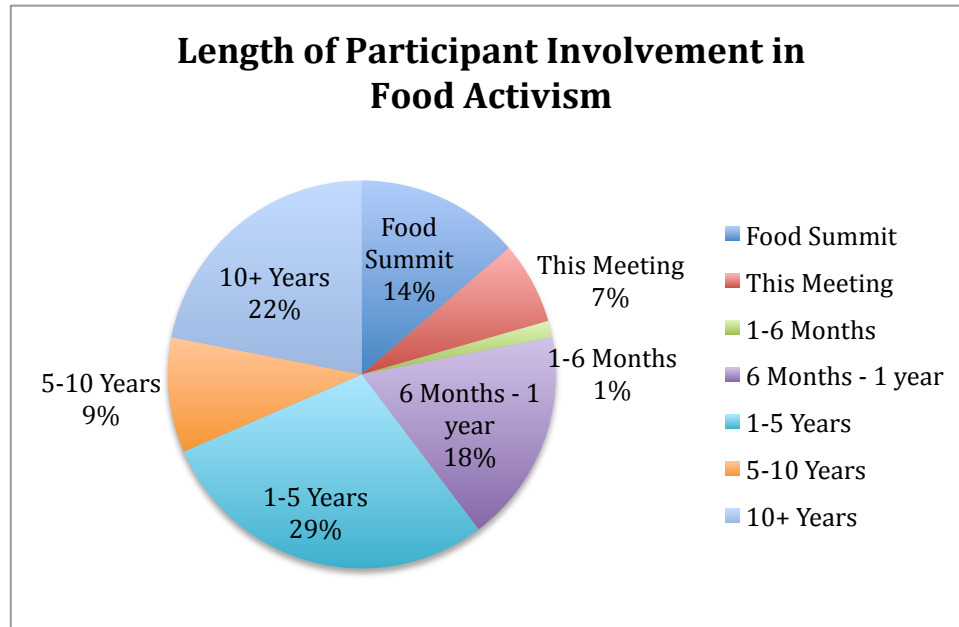
Figure 5.6. Length of time participants at local food-systems community meetings had been involved in local food activism.

Participants were also asked how they had become informed about the Food Summit. The majority of respondents, 51% (n=38), had been informed by word of mouth. Additionally, 36%% (n=27) marked other, 35% (n=26) were informed through an organization, 17% (n=16) were informed by a flyer in the community, and 21% (n=16) were informed through an internet source (Figure 5.7). Percentages add up to over 100% because many of the participants marked more than one source. Of the participants whom marked other, 20 out of the 27 indicated were informed of the Food Summit through The Evergreen State College, specifically many of these respondents noted they were informed through the Ecological Agriculture class taught by TJ Johnson, a local activist and primary organizer of the Food Summit. The most prominent organization connections among participants were GRuB and the food bank.
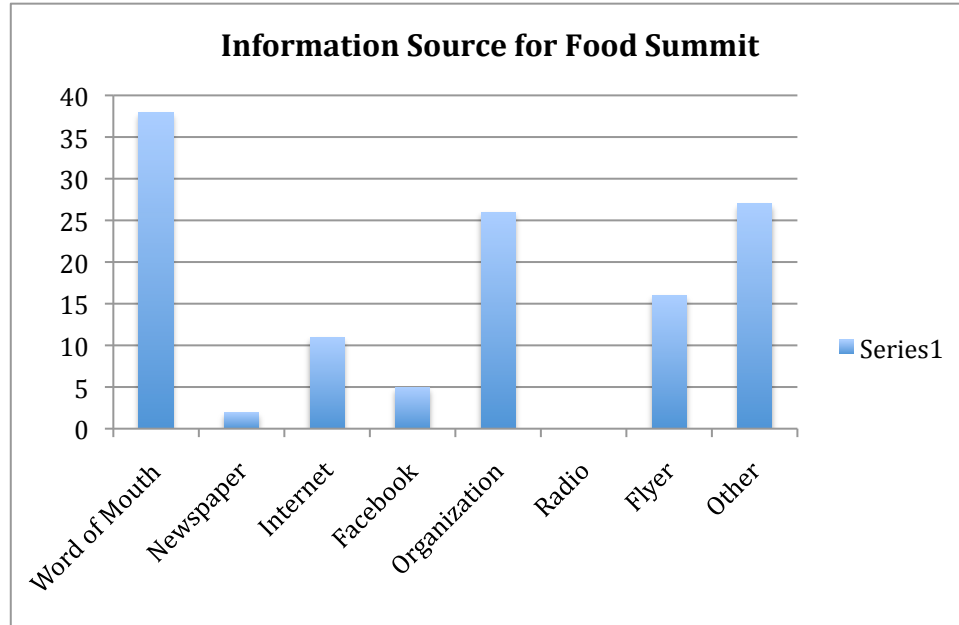
Figure 5.7. Source of Information for Food Summit of Survey Participants. Responses of participants at local food-systems community meetings indicating how they were informed about the Food Summit.

Shopping Behaviors/Locations

Questions were asked on how often individuals shopped at or utilized the following:

the Olympia Food Co-op, the Olympia Farmer's Market, the Thurston County Food

Bank (main headquarters located in Olympia), and food stamps. There was also an

open-ended question for individuals to list the main places they acquired food. Of

the 76 respondents, 8% (n=6) said they never shop at the Olympia Food Co-op,

while 63% (n= 45) shop there every week (Figure 5.8). Overall, 88% of participants

(n=63) shop at the Olympia Food Co-op at least every other month.

Concerning the usage of the Olympia Farmer's Market, 5% (n= 4) said they never

shop at the Olympia's Farmer Market, while 21% (n= 15) shop there every week,

37% (n=27) shop there every month, and 21% (n= 15) shop there every 2-3 months

(Figure 5.8). Overall 79% of participants (n=57) shop at the Olympia Food Co-op at least every other month.

Frequency of Shopping Locations for Participants
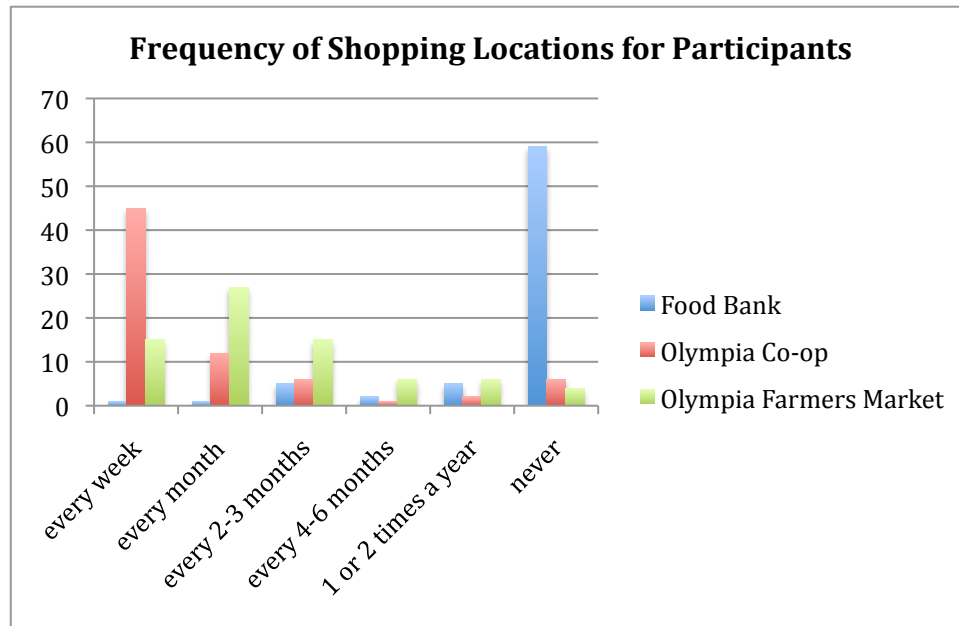
Figure 5.8. Comparison of frequency of various shopping locations used by participants at local food-systems community meetings. Participants significantly utilized the Olympia Food Co-op and Olympia Farmers Market, while a small number (14 of 76 participants) use the Thurston County Food Bank (located in Olympia) as a food source.

Alternately, 81% (n= 59) said they never visit the Thurston County Food Bank, while out of the remaining 19%, 1% (n= 1) visit there every week, 1% (n=1) shop visit every month, 7% (n=5) visit there every 2-3 months, 3% (n= 2) visit there every 4-6 months, and 7% (n= 5) visit there one or two times a year (Figure 5.8). Overall this shows that 9% of participants (n=7) visit the Thurston County Food Bank at least every other month. Eighty-six percent (86%) of respondents (n=65) were not currently on food stamps, meaning 14% (n=11) were on food stamps at the time of this meeting (Figure 5.9).
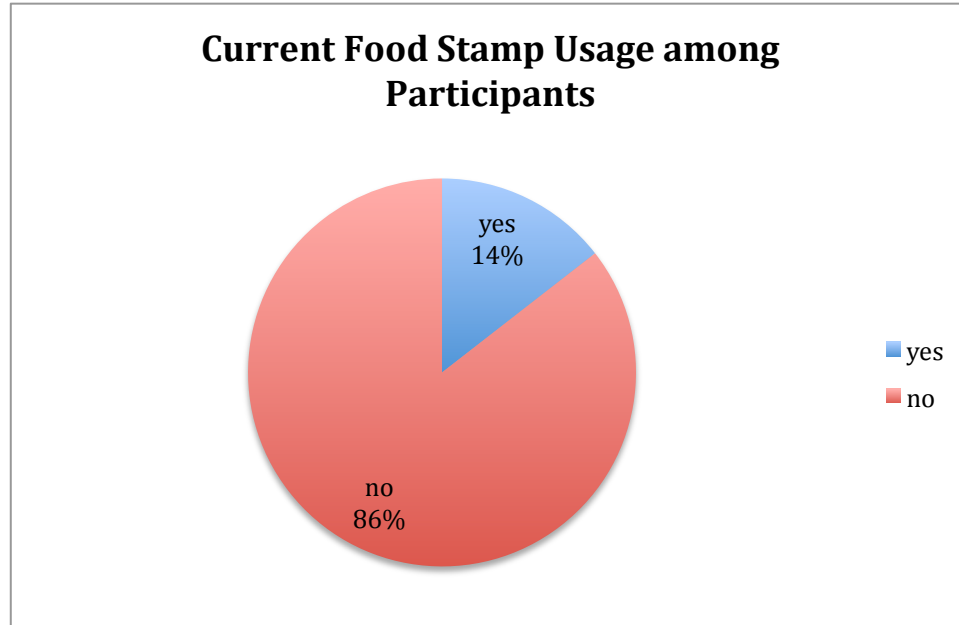
Figure 5.9. Current food stamp usage of participants at local food-systems community meetings. An additional 12 individuals (15.7%) indicated they had utilized food stamps at one time in their life.

Of those not currently on food stamps, 12 individuals stated they had been on food stamps at one time. Overall this indicates 30% of all respondents (n=23) have at one time used food stamps. Further analysis indicates that three of the food stamp users identified as students, three identified as AmeriCorps members, and the remaining five showed connections to Growing Raised Bounty (GRuB). The importance of these connections is elaborated in the discussion section.

Perception of Local Food System Planning Process

The questionnaire included a list of underserved populations and asked participants to mark all that they felt were missing for the current local food systems planning process. In total 78% of the participants (n=59) identified that at least one (if not more) underserved population was missing from the planning process.   Of the

participants whom responded to the questions, 64% (n=38) felt the Hispanic

population was missing, 61% (n=36) felt the Native American population was

missing, 61% (n=36) felt the immigrant population was missing, 58% (n=34) felt

the African American population was missing, 54% (n=32) felt the Asian population

was missing, 51% (n=30) felt the individuals with disabilities population was

missing, 46% (n=27) felt the veteran/military population was missing, 41% (n=24)

felt the individuals with low incomes population was missing, 36% (n=21) felt the

youth population was missing, 29% (n=17) felt the elderly population was missing,

and 15% (n=9) felt another population not listed was missing (Figure 5.10).
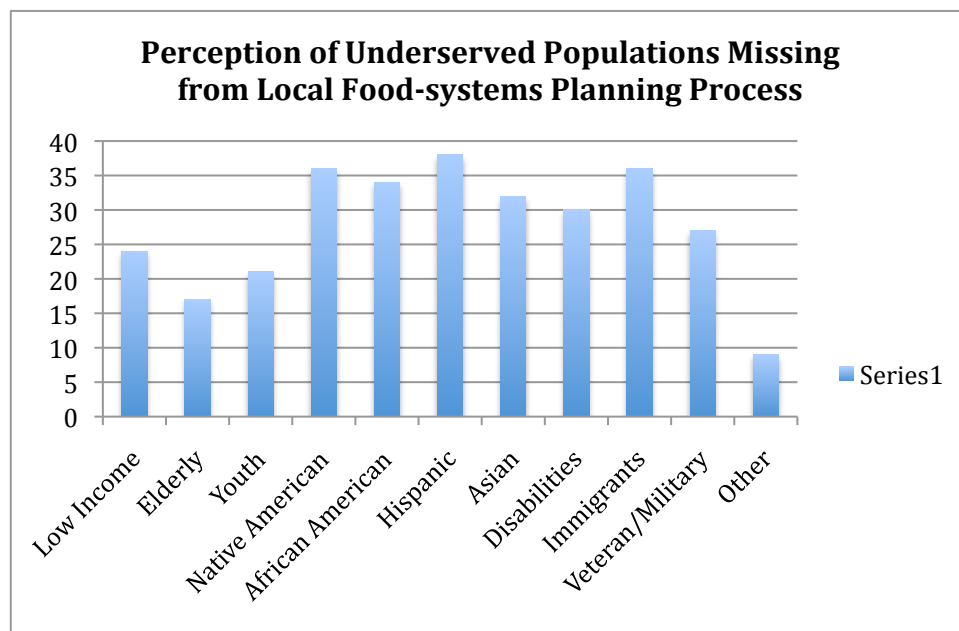
Figure 5.10. Perception of Underserved Populations Missing from Local Food-systems Planning Process.

Interview Results

Theme frequencies

Serving the Minority was the most dominant theme for all interviews while there was variation in frequency ranking for the remaining three themes. Serving the Minority ranged from 30%-45% among the interviews with an average of 36% for all interviews. When considering the average of all interviews the three themes, Cultural Differences, Communication & Relationship Building, and On Systems were evenly distributed (22%, 21%, and 21% respectively) as can be seen on Figure 5.11. However, when comparing
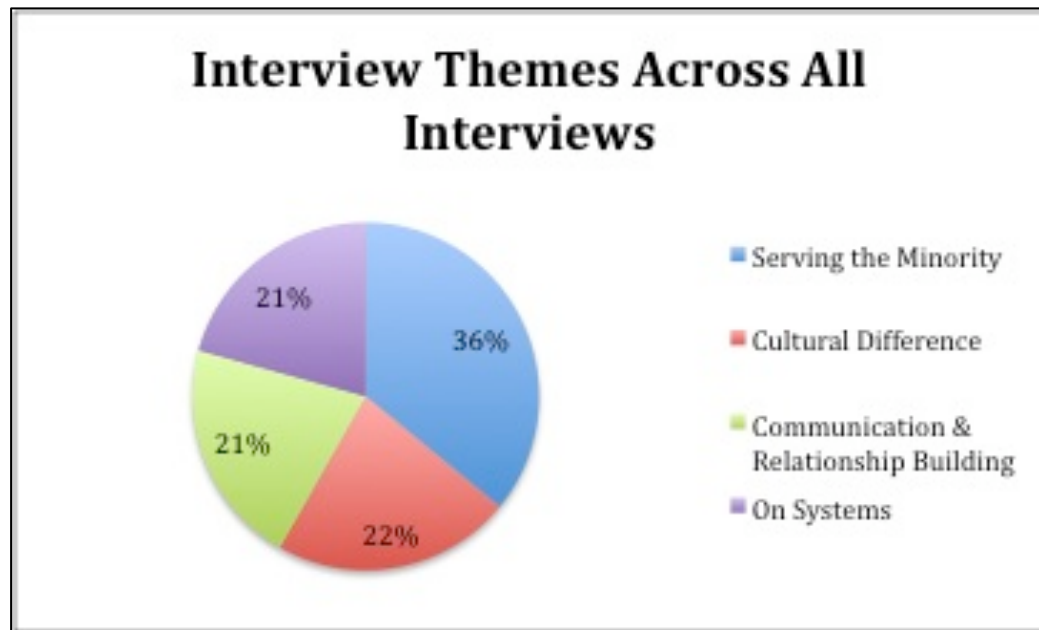
Figure 5.11. Frequency of Interview Themes for all Interviews.

individual interviews there is some amount of disparity. Cultural Differences ranges from 17%-29%, Communication & Relationship Building ranges from 12%-29%, and On Systems ranges from 10%-27%. The entire distribution of theme frequencies can be viewed in Figure 5.12**.**

Communications and Relationship-building was most commonly ranked as the second most frequent theme (five of the nine interviews), while Cultural Differences was the second most frequent theme for four of the interviews, and On Systems was second most frequent for only one of the interviews.
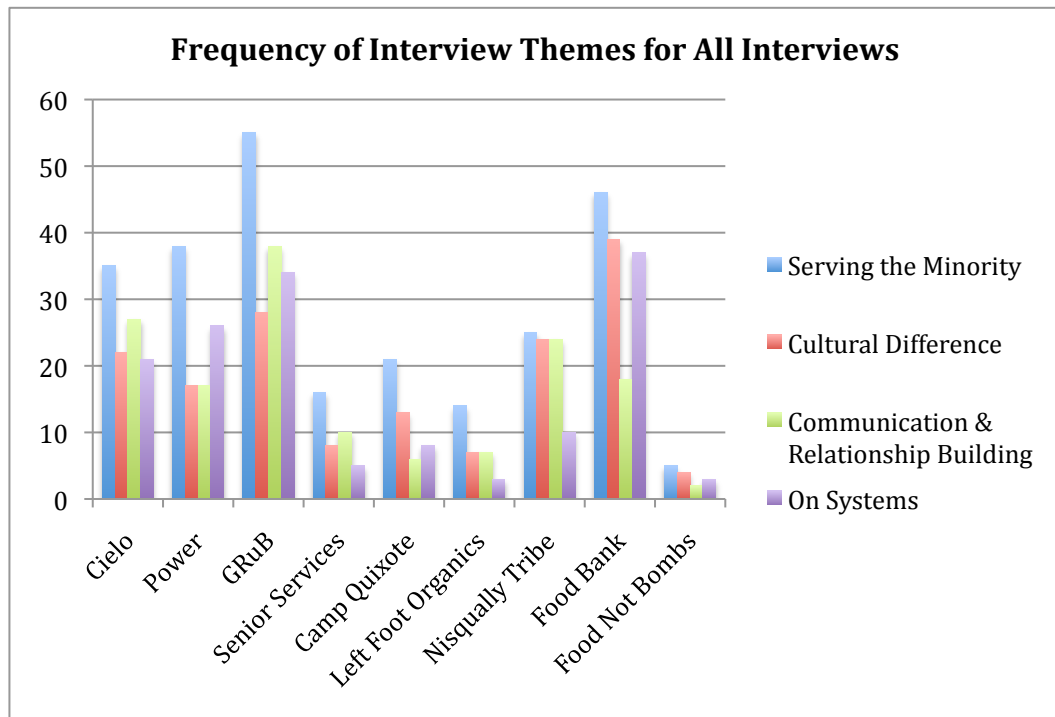
Figure 5.12. Comparison of frequencies of interview themes across all interviews. Serving the Minority was the most prominent theme for all interviews, however the other three themes were ranked differently depending on interview.

Discrepancies among interviews could be dependent upon the differences in governing philosophies and programs for each organization, as well as differences in interview questions and lengths. As is mentioned in the Methods section, interview questions evolved as themes emerged thus influencing the focuses of latter interviews. Specifically questions concerning political barriers and influence to minority participation were more highly emphasized in the later interviews.

Additionally questions to encourage elaboration on the role of meeting and decision-making processes were more highly emphasized in the later interviews. Interviews ranged drastically in length from 45 min to 2.5 hours dependant upon interviewee availability. Potential reasons for major differences are commented upon in the following Discussion section.

Subtheme frequencies

Most prominent subthemes (in order of frequency out of fifteen subthemes) were Participation (16%), Intersectionality (15%), both of these subthemes fall under the Serving Minority theme, which was the most prominent theme for all interviews, and Experiences and Relevancy (13%), which is under the theme Cultural Differences. Leadership, which is a subtheme under On Systems, was the fourth most prominent subtheme with 8% frequency, while the remaining subthemes were within 3%-6%.

Ultimately these themes and subthemes represent a subjective manner in which the researcher was able to organize the data. Many of these topics are highly intertwined and related making it difficult to categorize. It is clear, objectively, that certain areas are much more prominent. The discussion section uses these facts, plus the knowledge gained through the research process, to analyze and discuss why certain topics appear more often. Through investigation one can identify the largest needs and barriers to inclusive participation of underserved populations. The focus of the study is conducted through the lens of food, however many of the

barriers and opportunities revealed are applicable to creating a more just, inclusive

society in general.

Chapter 6: Data Analysis & Discussion

There are many avenues for analysis that this research could elaborate upon due to the variety and amount of data collected. This paper focuses primarily on the interview data. Survey data was crucial to identifying quantitatively the diversity and perceptions of current participants, but the deep understanding of inclusiveness and diversity comes from the interviewees' knowledge. Data from the survey is used to complement the major themes and topics discovered during the interviews. Summative conclusions gathered from the data analysis of both surveys and interviews are presented at the end of this chapter.

Survey Interpretation & Discussion

The survey data confirmed that public participation surrounding the TFSC planning process was lacking in socio-economic diversity. The majority of individuals at the public planning meetings were Caucasian/white (84%), residents of Olympia (75%) or the surrounding urban centers of Lacey and Tumwater (additional 13%), had an education level above a high school degree (85%), shop at the Olympia Farmer's Market (92%) and Olympia Food Co-op (95%), and heard about the Food Summit and related TFSC activity through word of mouth (51%), a connection with an organization (17%), or The Evergreen State College (26%). Overall participant demographics reflect the city of Olympia more accurately than the entire Thurston County population. While a number of participants utilize the food bank (19%) and/or food stamps (14%), the majority of public participants do not interact with

emergency food sources. The lacking of socio-economic diversity indicates the public process is not engaging underserved populations at a high level.

Interview data indicates mixed perceptions on the inclusiveness, or exclusiveness, that both the Olympia Farmers Market and Olympia Food Co-op markets embody. While some interviewees specifically noted that there were great opportunities for low-income individuals to participate, other interviewees specifically called both the Olympia Farmers' Market and Olympia Food Co-op "exclusive."   Regardless of whether this presence is a positive or negative indicator considering inclusion, it does indicate the majority of people share similar behaviors interacting with the local agro-food systems and markets. Furthermore the public participants statistically lack the same knowledge of the agro-food system from the perspective of utilizing food stamps and the local food bank.   It should also be noted that almost half of the participants put a large grocery store as a primary food source, yet these stores are not currently involved in the TFSC. TFSC members have recognized the importance of including these stakeholders, but faced a number of challenges in actually engaging them.

While the group was homogenous concerning race/ethnicity, residency, education level, and shopping behaviors, there was diversity among participants concerning age, income level, and length of involvement in food activism. There was a slightly higher percentage of participants between ages 19-29 (34%), however the age groups of 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, and over 60 were evenly distributed (16%, 20%,

13%, 16%).   The two predominate income levels were at either end of the

spectrum with 27% having a household income between $60,000-$100,000 and

23% having a household income of under $10,000. The large percentages of both

younger participants and low-income participants is thought to be correlated with

three specific entities: Growing Raised Bounty (GRuB), the Thurston County Food

Bank (TCFB), and The Evergreen State College (TESC). As is mentioned in the

results section, over half of the individuals with income levels below $10,000

identified as students. Many individuals with low-incomes also noted

organizational connections with GRuB or TCFB.

The fact that most individuals heard about the public meetings through word of

mouth or an organization exemplifies personal relationships as a successful avenue

for community engagement.   The resulting demographics at the public meetings

suggest underserved communities are not yet a part of this set of connections,

however GRuB, TCFB, and TESC all represent entities that appear to bridge the "food

community" with underserved populations. Additionally there are a high

percentage of participants who were new to food activism in the community

indicating the groups and individuals involved are not stagnant and have the

potential to continue to increase participation.

The connection to TESC can predominantly be traced back to one individual, TJ

Johnson. TJ Johnson wears many hats in the food activism community including

lead organizer of the Food Summit, coordinator of the Wendell Berry Community

Garden, member of Sustainable South Sound, and lead organizer in the TFSC. At the time of the Food Summit TJ was also co-teaching a course entitled Ecological Agriculture at TESC and actively involved his students in the entire community planning process. While the community no doubt benefits from TJ's efforts and actions, research surrounding Food Policy Councils warns of the dependence on one strong personality, organization, or figure (Food First 2009). Precautions of dependency on strong figures should also be considered for the TFSC by recognizing GRuB and TCFB are currently the only organizations connecting underserved populations – a connection which could be lost.

It was clear public participants felt underserved populations were missing from the public planning process. Open-ended responses included comments indicated strong feelings among some participants: when indicating who was missing responses included "99% of the community that are not food activists," and "the whole county other than North Urban and Olympia Center." While the majority of participants may agree voices are missing, there was not clear consensus on which groups should be prioritized. An open-ended question asking which groups are the most important populations for representation on the TFSC received answers ranging from specific organizations, specific socio-economic populations, to simply "everyone." Overall the range of answers exemplifies the subjective nature of defining a local agro-food system and exemplifies the difficulty of truly creating a collective community vision. The task of prioritizing stakeholders and projects will

be skewed if the TFSC does not have the voices of underserved groups and individuals that interact with the agro-food system in drastically different ways.

While critiques on diverse participation arose from the survey both quantitatively and qualitatively, there were also equal amounts of support and praise for the public planning process and the continuing growth of the alternative agro-food movement in the community. A total 83% of participants indicated they were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the public planning process, and none of the participants marked they were dissatisfied. When asked what the most beneficial part of the planning process had been, almost all responses included a reference to networking and relationship-building. The following discussion on interview data dives deeper into how the network can be more inclusive of underserved populations.

Interview Interpretation & Discussion

Serving the Minority

Serving the Minority was the most prevalent theme for all the interviews. Many of the organizations in this study identify as a group that "serves" a particular population – a common term for social justice organizations that radiates the mentality of working with underserved peoples. "Serving the Minority" summarizes the most relevant, and immediate considerations and actions for connecting underserved populations to local movements. Topics fall under the subthemes of Participation, Intersectionality, Institutionalized Oppression, and Short Term versus Long Term.

Participation

All of the interviewees spent time talking about needs that have to be met in order for participation to occur. When participation was discussed, the interviewees focused primarily on both tangible needs and creating a sense of empowerment or ownership. Tangible needs that were discussed commonly included transportation, childcare, and compensation for time. These are needs that particularly for underserved populations can be the deciding factor on attending a meeting or event. Many of the organizations interviewed have spent time overcoming these barriers. For example POWER provides childcare at events and offers transportation vouchers. The Food Bank gives away extra food for the completion of surveys. CIELO ensures food and childcare are present at meetings. It is obvious a major barrier to meeting these needs is the presence of money or resources, however intentional organizations find creative ways of making this happen. The Food Bank relies on large volunteer base and being imaginative in volunteer work so even children can assist. POWER utilizes the help of a local childcare collective. Olympia specifically has many opportunities to create partnerships and share resources. The Thurston Food Systems Council (TFSC) currently has no funding, however budget plans to meet some of these needs could be considered. Interviewees warn that not having these resources available will indeed impact participation, saying:

> "...if you do have a meeting and you don't include child care and transportation support and food then you're leaving out a really vital voice..."

A few of the interviewees talked about tangible needs on a deeper level, such as the hindrance of poverty and hunger for one's ability to interact or care about an issue. For example the two following quotes speak to the fact that before an individual can be expected to participate, they must first be able to care for themselves in the most basic ways:

> "First you have to be able to answer the question what am I going to eat tonight before you can get people to think about what they are going to eat five years from now."

> "…it's kind of a continuum of self-sufficiency… like where you're meeting your basic needs and then once you start to get more settled in your community then you can become actively participatory…"

Organizations such as the TFSC are crucial in addressing larger systemic issues, but in the meantime they can ensure meetings and events are as accessible as possible.

The need to foster empowerment or ownership by underserved populations was also a large factor when considering participation. Interviewees held the sentiment that members of the dominant culture have to consciously share the power that is disproportionately available to them. Many of these populations have little room to feel empowered in their day-to-day life, whether it is because they are culturally oppressed or because they have no home to speak of. Typically many become "clients" in the world of social services, which contributes to a feeling of not having control over one's life. When interviewees talked about empowerment, they talked about members having a significant role in creating an organization's agenda and goals. Most of the organizations interviewed are member-led to some degree. One interviewee discussed this approach versus the traditional Alinsky-style organizing that stems from labor unions. The Alinsky model is a top down structure in which

the organizer goes into the community to have individuals work on their agenda. Quite adversely the organizations in this study seek for those most impacted to voice what they need, thus the people define their own needs in an effort to foster their own power.   For GRuB, empowerment also means showing the impact individuals can have:

> "...the reason they (GRuB youth) are so engaged is because they realize that by participating they're impacting the world."
> -Kim Gaffi, GRuB Director

The exact mechanisms for creating an empowering space vary, but all give individuals a pathway to have their voices heard and result in a feeling of contribution. Jill Severn claims the success of Camp Quixote, a camp for those who are homeless, is connected to empowerment.

> "... they have power over their own internal governance...and I think its that feeling of giving people agency over their own lives that is the most important prerequisite to engaging people." -- Jill Severns, Panza President

POWER uses political activism as a means for empowerment. By giving people the skills to fight for their rights, individuals are given that feeling of agency. The TFSC is in a position to ensure individuals' know their rights around food and the avenues they can take to secure these. An organization that promotes food democracy, such as a Food Policy Council and the TFSC, has the potential to be an empowering tool for all in a community, but conscious efforts have to be made so that power is distributed to all.   The public organizing leading up to the TFSC indicates the organizations' want to be defined by the community, but they do not have representatives from all of the many sectors of the community.

A few interviewees also mentioned the need to create a physical and social space that was culturally safe. This requires a keen sense that those outside the dominant culture have formal and informal differences connected to class or ethnicity. One interviewee gives the example:

> "…I think that's why low-income people like to get together because you know you're not going to be embarrassed by talking about your food bank dinner…"

For initial engagement this may mean relying on focus groups or organization liaisons for feedback from a particular population. Additionally groups can openly discuss perceptions they have on the topic they are organizing so they can identify underlying presumptions. Overall it will take time and conscious efforts to create spaces that do not unconsciously inhibit or oppress certain peoples.

Intersectionality

The subtheme intersectionality refers to both the presence and absence for the agro-food movement to overlap, or intersect, with social justice organizations and the peoples they serve. Intersectionality was the second highest subtheme among interviews. A main critique of the alternative agro-food movement is the inability to align goals across the movement, particularly social justice goals (Allen 2010). This section discusses the larger issues of intersectionality and then focuses more directly on intersectionality with the Thurston County agro-food movement and the TFSC. When asked about ways to engage underserved populations some interviewees were confused on why a Food Policy Council (FPC) would even want, or expect, a group to be involved:

> "It's sort of a Maslow's hierarchy issue... I mean people who are struggling with life times of abuse and trauma, and mental illness and addiction, and having been on the street, and the anxiety disorders...to get them to focus on food policy is...challenging."

This sentiment reflects the perception that FPCs work primarily at a policy level, and it also reflects a perceived disconnect of disenfranchised peoples from policy work. It demonstrates that FPCs and the agro-food movement will have to make clear how people of all walks of live are connected, and how they can contribute. This perspective makes it difficult to understand how an organization can expect input from individuals who are struggling each day just to survive. If FPCs seek to address food democracy in which *everyone* has a voice, then these obvious hindrances will have to be recognized. A potential solution is creating a plethora of avenues to be involved. Robert Coit, Director of Thurston County Food Bank (TCFB), explains that the volunteer model utilized at the TCFB is unique in that it focuses on getting as many people as possible involved. The volunteer tasks are broken down to the most miniscule and mundane of tasks so persons of limited skills or abilities can perform them. Many organizations and businesses would consider this inefficient in terms of achieving work, however Robert feels the community connections compensate for any work losses. Perhaps TFSC and other FPCs can take similar approaches in gathering input from the community. This means gauging effectiveness and progress in new ways. Sadly these hardships are symptoms of the same broken system that alternative agro-food practitioners are addressing, but organizations can't wait for a new system to be designed. As systems transition, it is crucial agro-food movements start the hard work of connecting the impoverished and underserved to the systems that perpetuate their

own poverty, hunger, and oppression. Food justice practitioners can do a better job of articulating how democracy can make a difference.

At the beginning of this research it was believed that the concept of FPCs and the local formation of the TFSC were commonly held knowledge in the Olympia area, particularly among organizers. Therefore it was interesting to observe that many of the interviewees had not heard of these activities or were falsely informed about local efforts in the agro-food movement. Even among those correctly informed, most were not impressed with the ability of the Thurston County agro-food movement to engage underserved populations. One interviewee who attended the Food Summit commented she saw "a room full of people that could afford to be there." Another interviewee blatantly stated that besides TCFB, there are no other avenues that engage low-income individuals in local food organizing. This individual went as far to say, "I'm not sure anyone is really willing to invest that much to reach that target population." One other simply answered "no" when asked if she had seen evidence of efforts to connect to underserved populations in the TFSC process. A few of the interviewees recognized efforts by Food Summit organizers, specifically that scholarships were given to attend and that the meeting was intentionally held in Lacey at the fairgrounds as a more "inclusive" location. Food Summit organizers did have many social justice and minority organizations listed on their outreach list, however they were only slightly successful in engagement. One of the interviewees who is also a Food Summit organizer admits that she tried to connect with the local tribes, but that her efforts could have gone

much farther to become a more "quality invite." Collectively the interviewees felt

that the voices of their constituents are missing from the current food conversations

in Thurston County and beyond.

One individual was adamant that the TFSC was too narrowly focused on *local*

agriculture versus the food system as a whole. Particularly for low-income

populations, this may alienate a large group of people who do not currently have the

privilege to support local agriculture.   There was a feeling that Olympia specifically

has a unique ability to focus on topics such as local agriculture that is not possible in

all communities:

> "… I don't know if there's a lot of opportunity for
> anybody in the community to get involved with food
> policy and where our food comes from – maybe in
> Olympia because we are privileged…and a lot of us who
> are able to afford good healthy organic food are also
> connected to the community in a way that allows us to
> get involved with food policy with this whole local foods
> movement…"

This supports the view that the agro-food movement can be elitist and exclusive to

those who have the time and money.   Furthermore it suggests that interacting with

policy level work is exclusive in a country that defines itself as a democracy. A few

of the interviewees expressed the concern that the TFSC will be more characteristic

of Olympia, not necessarily Thurston County as a whole.   As one commented, "…it

can't be about Olympia, it has to be about Thurston County." Survey results

corroborate these concerns. Other interviewees didn't explicitly express concerns

about Olympia being disproportionately represented, but did comment they didn't

feel the topics being addressed by the TFSC would concern the populations they

served. There is obviously a gap in understanding how underserved populations fit into the TFSC. If this gap is present among lead organizers in the area, then it is likely exacerbated among the general public.

Although currently unfulfilled, there was much hope among the interviewees that food has an ability to make connections across groups. Most of the interviewees said meals are an important part of their organization because of the social aspect associated with food. One interviewee commented, "I feel like sharing food with someone gives you the chance to nourish more than just your physical body." Another interviewee revealed surprise at the range of political beliefs held by supporters of her organizations' food programs.   An interviewee summed it up when he said your religion, your political affiliation, your beliefs – none of that mattered because we all need food. So even though on a theoretical and political level interviewees could not always see the connections, connections were very obvious when considering the very basic act of eating. Potlucks and events centered on food have the potential to create spaces for all.

In the Thurston County community, GRuB and the TCFB are organizations that connect the food movement to underserved populations. These two groups were mentioned in almost every interview either as an established or potential partner, which coincides with survey data. Both groups have been connected to the TFSC in some manner and should not be underestimated for their strength as collaborators. Interviewees gave other suggestions of entities that naturally seem to bridge social,

cultural, and economic classes. CIELO representative, Stefanie, pointed out that many farmworkers are Latinos therefore connecting with the Latino population could bring diversity in two ways. Similarly the former LeftFoot Organics director noted that individuals with developmental disabilities hold many food service jobs. Furthermore, she noted individuals with disabilities are unique in that they are not a distinct social class and therefore are connected to the community in many ways.

Social entities such as schools, places of worship, military, and larger grocery stores connect people from many socio-economic backgrounds. Disenfranchised populations are also connected to health departments, nutrition programs, and social services. Most importantly many underserved populations, particularly in Western Washington, have formed groups specifically for that population. For example all of the organizations interviewed said they would be willing to work with TFSC as long as some of the previously mentioned mechanisms for meeting tangible needs and empowerment were put in place. Prioritizing connections with these community groups, service providers, and non-profits may increase the diversity within the TFSC.

Ultimately all groups and individuals need to work together to find where projects and goals can intersect. One interviewee expressed her hope that greater collaborations could be made for all those wanting a better world:

> "...everyone is working on their issues, and I feel if there was more cohesion of really understanding that all struggles are inter-related...all of our liberation is combined."

Institutionalized oppression

Although there was critique of the TFSC process specifically, most interviewees identified that disconnection between social, economic, and cultural groups is not unique to the specific situation. There was an overtone that disconnection within the agro-food movement stems from larger issues of institutionalized oppression and racism. Some of examples are quite obvious such in the case of undocumented workers. How is an individual supposed to feel safe and interact with a system that could deport them at any moment? What about migrant populations that do not speak the language? Monica Peabody, Director of POWER, explained how welfare policies inherently perpetuate poverty, particularly for single parents. She explained budget cuts have led to welfare equaling 30% of poverty level, meaning individuals receive one third of what they need to get their basic needs. This poverty puts hindrances on your ability to interact in the community. Furthermore it is passed on to their children –

> "...[your kids] don't have the same opportunities...so they're maybe not as well rounded or you know have as good behavior because they're not going to do things that build their learning and bodies...extracurricular activities... cost money... access to healthy food [costs money]."

This goes back to the idea that democratic learning comes from both formal institutions and informal social settings. Starting at an early age, poverty creates divisions among people, leaving those who are poor with fewer opportunities. This division of classes will grow as our economic system increases the number of individuals who will need assistance in this country:

> "...It's crazy making to think that someone can work at a minimum wage job where you probably never quite get 40

hr/wk and manage to pay rent and eat...that's becoming
beyond the capacity for more and more people."

Oppression is also connected to a plethora of social misperceptions. Single mothers

are viewed as "welfare mothers" who can't properly take care of their children.

Individuals are surprised that undocumented workers actually live in Olympia.

People who are homeless must have brought it on themselves. Many of the

interviewees agreed there is simply a lack of places in modern society for

individuals from different background to mingle and learn from one another.

Class separation was talked about numerous times and one interviewee felt

"...federal policies have promoted the division of wealth and poverty." One group

talked about the gentrification that occurs in much of Olympia's organizing. The

term gentrification is typically used in terms of urban development in which "...the

influx of middle-class or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces

poorer residents" (Merriam-Webster website). In the context of organizing it was

meant that middle-class individuals dominate many of the organizations and events

in Olympia, which inherently drives out minority groups. This is not to say that this

is intentional, but bringing awareness to this process may assist in preventing it.

Institutionalized oppression means certain groups are inherently at a disadvantage

in our systems, and that the dominant culture disproportionately has access. In

terms of democratic participation the dominant culture has more access to influence

policy, and more access to learning and passing on the skills needed to do so. The

TFSC can work to eliminate these disadvantages from their organization.

Balancing Short-term & Long-term

Engaging underserved populations through a social justice lens means finding a balance between short-term and long-term goals and programming. This was reflected throughout the interviews. On the one side, hands-on activities are essential for engaging groups such as those with limited abilities or who have not reached a place of conceptually discussing food issues. In reality, some people just prefer the hands-on activities regardless of ability or knowledge. On the other side, it is obvious that issues of an unsustainable food system, poverty, and hunger need particularly long-term considerations. Interviewees revealed the way to create initial investment is showing how people are connected in a real immediate way. GRuB finds this balance by focusing their program on actually growing food:

> "…having a garden to build [is] something that's immediate,
> something that is relevant to my life and it's a doorway to
> other conversations and other engagement. "

Sometimes providing a place to gather is all that is needed for larger discussions to occur. Food again is unique in that the practice of growing and eating are very hands-on and relevant to everyone, but that the systems that influence these practices will require long-term visions and planning.

The balance of long-term and short-term was often discussed in the context of keeping a consistent volunteer base. It was identified that people are often motivated to volunteer because they want to create change in the world. One interviewee connected this directly to Food Policy Councils (FPCs):

> "One of the reasons FPCs start and then fail because its all
> volunteer, we're all going to change the world and we don't

change the world fast enough and they lose sight of the smaller incremental positive changes."

Arguably this becomes even more evident as the world focuses on concepts like sustainability that urge citizens to make choices for the *future* generations. It is impossible that we will see all the impacts immediately if they are truly designed for long-term change. Robert Coit, Director of Thurston County Food Bank, says for him what is more important is that there are no steps backwards. This is his gauge for success. He says:

> "...my professional philosophy has always been as long as change happens and as long as its positive, I'm ok with the pace...what drives me is ongoing positive change, even if it takes a lot longer...."

Long-term goals are reflected in both the philosophies and missions of the groups, as well as their internal structure. Interviewees discussed hindrances for them to serve as a representative of their organization on the TFSC. Most talked about the need for funding, or the frustration of being with groups before that "had no teeth." Therefore it seemed like long-term sustainability of an organization is connected to consistent funding and clear avenues for influencing change. For many of the groups this meant that they would want to know how TFSC could truly influence policy.

A major challenge for the Thurston Food Systems Council (TFSC) is the balance of gathering diverse community and stakeholder input with forging ahead to solidify the organization. Currently they are moving forward with organization

infrastructure, but interviewees are wary on whether this will decrease the

potential for diverse engagement:

> "…you do need to move forward, you can't wait for everyone
> to be in the room… it will never happen. Then as you move
> forward how do you make that activity both really enticing
> and safe for lots of kinds of people, and for me that part we
> [TFSC] haven't successfully done…"

In other words the TFSC isn't necessarily being critiqued for moving forward, but

for doing so without clearly stating how they will continue to engage diverse

participants. Moving forward too quickly can take away the opportunity for initial

ownership. On the other hand, it is obvious that there is a gap in understanding how

these groups are, or can be involved in the food movement. This requires a clear

message on potential areas of participation. So should priority lie in getting more

involvement or forming a more clear organization for people to become involved

with? Kim Gaffi of GRuB is currently involved with TFSC and suggests a both/and

approach. She promotes the ideas of mini-Food Summits, in which different

communities come together to define what they want their food system to look like.

This creates an empowering, culturally safe environment for individuals to create

their own agenda. Subsequently agendas can be compared across communities thus

finding natural alliances and connections. The TFSC can serve as a hub for this

work.

Perhaps the key to a balance of short-term and long-term is being adaptive. If we

are part of a movement that is seeking a new form then there will be a transition

period. And even then, the form we aim for will need to be adjusted and evolve, for

we never know what the future holds.   Sustainability is not about certainty but about living fluidly with the world around us.

Communication & Relationship-Building

Communication & Relationship-building was the second highest theme for five out of the nine interviews. All interviewees saw communication and relationship building as crucial prerequisites for engagement and for overcoming barriers among diverse groups. Relationships were talked about both on an organizational level and a people level. The alternative food movement in particular has the potential to bring together all people and can unite organizations across a wide range of expertise. This theme is divided into the subthemes of: Message Across Barriers, Quality of Invite, and Mutual Commitment/Reciprocity.

Message Across Barriers

The presence of informal social networks has been mentioned several times throughout this paper. Furthermore, these networks have been identified as a crucial step in developing democratic skills. This section reveals a primary reason for the lack of diversity in the Thurston County food movement is the failure to deliver messages across different social networks.

When asking interviewees about the best way to get a message out into the community, the answer was unanimous: word of mouth. Almost every single individual said word of mouth is the most effective way to communicate and

perform outreach. Survey results reveal that Food Summit attendants heard about

the event primarily through: word of mouth (30%); The Evergreen State College

(22%); or through an affiliated organization (21%), exemplifying this claim.   As one

interviewee exclaims:

> "… a satisfied client is the best form of outreach…if someone
> comes here an feels like they've been welcomed into this
> community… they will spread the word…"

Another interviewee explains that poor people specifically have to form a

community for support of one another, and that alternately "people who are

wealthy live segregated." For those on the fringes of the dominant culture it has

been crucial to maintain networks among others with whom they identity, and who

often share similar hardships. The lack of diversity in the Thurston County food

movement, coupled with the lack of knowledge by interviewees not actively

involved, insinuates these groups are not yet a part of the informal "food network."

The groups represented by the interviewees (low-income youth, low-income single

parents, individuals with developmental disabilities, individual whom are homeless,

Latinos, the elderly, and Tribes) cover a large range of typically under-represented

populations. The fact that society has informal networks defined by socio-economic

characteristics traces back to divisions in society created by oppressive systems.

Many of the groups are disproportionately impacted by poverty and hunger. Class

division was brought up multiple times throughout interviews.

> "… one of the primary problems with our country is the
> chasm, which grows bigger by the year, between affluence
> and poverty…building relationships between people of

> different classes is critical to ever sort of closing that ever
> growing gap…"

One interviewee commented on the Occupy Movement as the national symbol of wanting to create these relationships. It is essential to create spaces where diverse groups interact and get to know each other as people, not a superficial thing that defines them. Several interviewees again pointed out faith-based communities and schools as existing entities that do this.

Regardless of why these divisions are present, it is crucial that food organizers identify ways of reaching different communities. Language was identified as a potential barrier for communication. Particularly when working with new concepts and progressive ideas, jargon can be confusing to someone just joining an organization or movement.   An interviewee warns that just because your intentions are to serve a group does not mean this group will understand or be receptive of your message:

> "…in our community some of the inclusion is difficult …your
> message though it may be on behalf of disenfranchised
> people…does not resonate with a sector of that community
> because you are using the language that's not accessible –
> they're like what the hell is food justice…"

This issue can go both ways. Social justice organizers utilize concepts and language that is ever changing to be more "appropriate." Those in the food movement may not be well versed in these areas making it difficult for them to adequately incorporate social justice goals. Groups from all walks should be observant of whether the language they are using is potentially exclusive.

So how do we begin to cross these social network and discourse barriers? First and foremost, almost every interviewee said you have to "go where they are." The organizations interviewed represent sites that intentionally gather specific groups. There needs to be recognition that the newspapers and radio stations that seem familiar for the majority of the community may not reach all peoples. Furthermore, illiteracy is connected to issues of poverty so verbal outreach may be necessary. Simply asking people can be illuminating – focus groups would be ideal in gathering feedback. It seems if any community can make these connections it can be Olympia, as one interviewee commented, "… I think Olympia is just kind of human size…its small enough that a lot of people know each other." The next subtheme captures a critical component of communication: the importance of a quality invite and what that looks like.

Quality of Invite

Many interviewees talked about the difference between an invitation and a *quality* invitation. Again the first step in a good invitation is to "go where the people are." If an organization seeks feedback or participation by a particular group that organization needs to actively seek out gathering places. Interviewees explained that it is simply not enough to dub an organization or event "inclusive." Particularly for underserved populations it is crucial to make an invitation that is convenient and empowering. For example, by going to an existing meeting with a Latino-based group and delivering an invite when they are already gathered, you are honoring the fact that people have limited time.   Many interviewees recognized that those of the

dominant culture do not realize when they may be exhibiting oppressive behaviors. By going to a space that is already a gathering spot for a group, you are making it convenient and also entering a space that is safe for them.

Above all a quality invitation is empowering in that it shows a person or group how they are needed. Most of the interviewees agreed that it is crucial to frame an invite as a request for help.   It needs to be clear that people are meaningful to the process. It is apparent that many individuals and groups are not yet clear on how they fit in the community food movement. This can quickly become a contested issue because many organizations feel like they have already attempted to invite diverse groups, but often there are two major assumptions: 1. The invitation was done in an appropriate, effective manner. 2. It was clear how, and why, the group should contribute. As one interviewee put it:

> "…there will be the sentiment of well you know we invited all those groups. And so okay well invite them again…in that case something was done and its more about evaluation that strategy and also evaluating the assumptions underneath it."

It is easy to want to put "blame" on one group or the other – "we invited them, they should be here" versus "they haven't tried hard enough to invite us/them," but it shouldn't be about who's "wrong." It is a reality that we live in a world where communication across groups is lacking.   The Nisqually Indian Tribe was unsure on what an effective invite would be for them: "…probably most tribes are not going to the table without an invitation, but I don't know actually how to do it either." We are simply at a stage where we are finding ways of being inclusive and this road will require many steps of trying, re-assessing, and trying again. Our cultural and social

surroundings build a large number of assumptions that many are not aware they hold, "...it's like you invite someone that feels appropriate for you, you might not realize that you are not engaging in a way that makes sense for that person."

When an organization is seeking diverse input, it cannot be assumed that people will be able to prioritize that issue. Ideally we would live in a world where we all had enough time to invest in all organizing and events, but that is not the case. In the case of the agro-food movement, it is up to practitioners to show people how they can help – this is very different then telling someone how it will help them. One interviewee exclaimed:

> "...just because we list them on this list of we want all these people doesn't mean this is the burning issue for them right now and yet we still want their perspective. So we can't expect them to spend their time at that table all the time."

When we start dealing with issues as encompassing as agro-food systems where everyone is impacted, we have to realize that the way people become connected should accommodate a wide range of abilities and availabilities. Food democracy recognizes the need to uplift voices of citizens, but if it is understood that certain groups are limited in access, then food democracy activists will need to develop diversity in access for a diversity of peoples.

It was felt by a few of the interviewees that the Food Summit and TFSC has not yet put energy into quality invites for certain groups. In the world of technology and established networks it is easy to click a button to spread your message. But quality of invite comes down to the need for taking time to build relationships with the

people. One way to connect with peoples who identify with a specific group is to identify leaders in those communities – this notion is elaborated upon in a following section. Another comes back to articulating how people can help you, and how you can help them.

Mutual Commitment/Reciprocity

Reciprocity was discussed for both engaging organizations and individuals in a movement. The general sentiment was if it is the dominant culture seeking the participation of underserved populations, then it is the responsibility of the dominant culture to identify how they can assist:

> " ...there is a give and take, but ultimately if you are working in solidarity with a community, you know working in infinity with a community different than yours, then you have to have this awareness about not placing your needs first kind of thing."

Examples of reciprocity were as simple as someone from an interested organization simply spending *time* with people, getting to know them first before asking for help. One way of understanding how reciprocity may occur is first asking a group what they are already doing so you can speak in terms of their work. For many of the interviewees, they ensure they are giving back to their members by getting consistent feedback. The Food Bank particularly relies on a consistent feedback cycle from its clients and finds community support comes from those they have helped in the past. The Food Bank specifically could be a large source of outreach for the TFSC. Individuals that are not part of a formal group visit the Food Bank on a consistent basis.

The sustainability and agro-food movements exemplify the need for community members to support one another. Non-profit and community organizations are already strapped for time and resources making it crucial that we learn how to mutually support one another. It was commented in one interview that people simply don't want to take the time anymore in building relationships, but this is crucial as we face a world with pertinent issues of climate change, environmental destruction, and hunger. Another interviewee commented that inviting people and building relationships is ultimately "only half of it." The other half entails finding new ways to organize and work together.

Cultural Differences

The Cultural Differences theme recognizes that certain characteristics are unique to a group, whether that group is a formally or informally defined culture. In the interviews the presence of cultural differences came up in three ways: Experiences/Relevancy, Meeting Skills & Structures, and Intent vs. Action.

Experiences/Relevancy

Experiences & Relevancy was the third highest subtheme among interviews and is definitely connected to many of the other themes and subthemes. Each one of us is at our own place with how we interact with the world and it's easy to forget it took millions of inputs to get to that place. It's also easy to forget that these experiences are greatly varied among individuals and even more so among groups, especially in a world so divided by class and ethnicity. How is it possible to create effective,

quality invites that connect to a person if one assumes that's persons view of the world? For the alternative food movement this means learning how different people interact with the agro-food system, and the potential different views on how they would change the system.

Survey results from this research identified that the majority of individuals had similar shopping preferences, namely many purchased locally from the Farmer's Market and Olympia Co-op. This group had much less experience in visiting the Food Bank or utilizing food stamps, two avenues of food interaction that are much higher among disenfranchised populations. Differences in food culture are not just connected to income, but also ethnicity. And sadly the current food system has greatly limited the variety of foods, leaving many with no choice on how they eat. The resulting disconnect from food sources and culturally diverse foods hinders our ability to reach out to diverse groups.   Regardless of where the differences stem it is crucial to be aware that others may not hold your same beliefs:

> "…the cultural divide in our community is a challenge because
> we have a lot of progressive folks who the very people they
> may feel they are advocating for, sometimes they don't actually
> share their political beliefs…"

One of the dangers of not recognizing diversity in views, is it makes it easier to think your viewpoint is right. It may also make one limited in creative solutions.

Interviewees offered various approaches they use in their organizations to connect people of different backgrounds. For instance, although CIELO clients all identify as Latino, there is a large variation in educational backgrounds. Some individuals may

be illiterate while others have various college degrees. The concept CIELO takes is not to point out these differences, but to focus on " finding a common ground for all students that come from all different walks of life." These individuals have obviously come around a common identity as Latino, so there is a connection. Although it is important to recognize differences, initially it may be more powerful to talk about what connects us. There are intrinsic human connectors, and thankfully for the alternative agro-food movement, food is also a basic need and thus a basic connector.

CIELO, POWER, and GRuB all identified using the concept of "popular education" in their organizations. Popular education refers to having participants "use the lens of their own experience and the wisdom of their own experience as a key to their education." Essentially, this means starting from where people are at, and building from there, which will require spaces that allow for sharing. This in turn can be an empowering experience:

> "...placing the power back in the hands of students, you're not coming in here as a vessel to be filled up with information, you're coming here with a hell of a lot of experience of your own, you know your own life, a lot of stories to tell, your own knowledge and have that be the starting point, really building that up."

When Ann worked with Left Foot Organics, she recognized the power for intentionally creating a space for those with development disabilities:

> "... makes the work fun to have a more diverse, an intellectually diverse work force...it's concrete, I don't think most typically developing people can conceptualize what that's like by just talking about it, they have to go do it."

Food Policy Councils should recognize that one individual gives only a partial glimpse into a group they identify with. It is undeniable that many underserved populations face the same issues with the current agro-food system. Many do not have the funds to purchase local or organic food; many utilize resources such as food stamps and food banks; and many do not have access to food they consider culturally or ethically appropriate; however one person cannot represent a whole group within an organization or a movement.   This means that FPCs and similar groups will have to tap into the informal networks and create spaces to learn from a whole community of people. As we learn differences among groups, we will also learn where we can come together on common ground.

Meeting Skills & Structures

A few of the interviewees focused on the hindrances of typical dominant culture skills and mannerisms with organizing. There was consensus that what is considered professional in dominant culture creates an exclusive environment. It makes sense that structures that were created by the dominant culture would naturally support the dominant culture. Meeting styles embodied by the dominant culture were described as factual, "left-brained," and highly structured. One interviewee suggested meetings that incorporated more celebration and creativity, which are conducive to the idea of popular education and creating more of a learning environment.   Additionally a few of the interviewees discussed the underlying skills needed for the typical "professional" setting. Things that may seem

simple to some, such as filling out forms or following Robert's Rules, may be intimidating or unknown to others.   Disenfranchised groups typically have less access formally and informally to gain these skills.

Many interviewees agreed we are limited in different organizing models and approaches, particularly in the United States. An interviewee commented that the education system is a good example of how limited we are in gauging success – in our schools a "good student" falls within very defined parameters. Current education reformers are recognizing the oppression present in standardized tests. Organizations are attempting to break out of the conventional mode, but it is hard without more examples. A number of the groups talked about having a space for people to share: "…its not just I'm reporting on my organization but its people around a table saying this how I'm doing right now, so you're showing up as a person, a full person."

Intent versus Action

A few of the interviewees were adamant in recognizing that Olympia and Western Washington seem more progressive than other parts of the country. In the same right, it was warned that intention does not always equal to effective action. Again it came back to recognizing that the methods being utilized to increase inclusion may not be the best methods. Additionally, organizations cannot just incorporate social justice terms into their goals; they must be reflected in how the organization is run. One interviewee commented how even though the Northwest has a more

"developed vocabulary and awareness" around oppression and diversity that it doesn't necessarily mean progress, and that "we just might have different words." Ultimately, however, all of the organizations interviewed receive enormous support from the community and their fellow organizers. Although there is much work to done it was recognized that there are amazing community projects in Thurston County, including the TFSC.

Indigenous Cultures

The hardships and oppression suffered by Native American peoples is connected to the oppression of other underserved populations, but the history and extent of this oppression runs deeper in the specific place of Thurston County. Indigenous cultures also hold intrinsically different worldviews. Many of the underlying values and concepts underlying these worldviews have the potential to align with emerging sustainability and justice principles. The insights received through the connection to one tribe in no way speaks for all indigenous groups or the nature of relations between natives and non-natives, but can serve as a starting point on how the alternative agro-food movement can learn, and hopefully collaborate, with indigenous peoples.

The Nisqually tribal representative explained "the tribe has a history of cultivating food and actually having gardens with individuals," but interview questions were focused on the specific project of a large community garden started three years ago. The garden now encompasses an acre of land where vegetables, fruits, traditional

foods, and medicinal herbs are grown for members of the Nisqually Indian Tribe. Community planning and input has been the driving force for the evolution of the garden. In this garden "productivity isn't measure in pounds of produce." It was described in having further importance including serving as a healing space, a gathering space, and a space to bring together the community and the land. The alternative agro-food movement could drastically shift emerging agro-food systems if productivity and the overall worth of food were re-considered in holistic ways.

The Nisqually Indian Tribe views, and has always viewed, food in a holistic manner. There was confusion when the interviewer asked where food was managed in the government since conceptually it is connected to all for the Nisqually people. One of the interview subjects replied, "I can't think of an area they wouldn't include it in...." and continued to give examples of how food is present when considering culture, health, retained rights under treaties, natural resources, and education to name a few. FPCs and the TFSC are attempting to connect various government sectors through the lens of food. The example of the Nisqually Indian Tribe suggests that to achieve this goal, organizations and individuals may have to shift their entire paradigm of food.

A significant barrier for native and non-native collaboration was identified in the mentality towards current farmland. Preservation of small farms is often a platform in the alternative agro-food movement. Thurston County specifically is an ideal environment for small-scale agriculture. Images of small family farms may

represent a back to the land mentality for the dominant culture, but for indigenous peoples this farmland is land that was taken and drastically altered from a more "natural" state. The small farms that are endearing to many in Thurston County can easily be a symbol of oppression for tribes. This example symbolizes the deep, and painful, history of indigenous cultures and how it can be reflected in the landscape.

The above is not meant to discourage collaborations among natives and non-natives, but to bring forward the reality of how we go to the point we are today. Progress in building relationships among all peoples will likely require uncomfortable recognition that our current society is partially based on the abominations of our ancestors. Healing cannot take place without a reconciliation process. Building relationships is the first step in doing so.

The philosophies held by indigenous groups symbolize potential areas of powerful collaboration for the alternative agro-food movement. The intrinsic holistic views around food and its connection to all of life resonate with the want for a just and sustainable food systems. Nemah, the Nisqually tribal member interviewed, explains, "...food isn't just food, it's also the water, the air, the land that our food needs to survive and thrive." A philosophy that is reflected in concepts of environmental sustainability, however the Nisqually Indian Tribe knows people are part of this cycle as well:

> "....we consider food necessary to survival and that the success
> of survival of other species is a direct reflection of how
> successful we are as a species, as animals, so that our success is

dependent on their success...that is not a view that is held
outside indigenous cultures."

Organizers in the agro-food movement should seek advice from tribal members to ensure their organizations and programs are not subconsciously insensitive to indigenous peoples. Other interviewees mentioned indigenous cultures and local tribes as groups that can teach non-natives about more inclusive governance. As the next section reveals, a lack of organization structures can hinder the creation of diverse democratic participation.

On Systems

The final theme was labeled "On Systems" and elaborates characteristics present and lacking in dominant culture systems that influence participation by underserved populations. On Systems is divided into the subthemes of Leadership, Organizations Structure, the Nonprofit Industrial Complex, and Democracy in our Systems.

Leadership

Leadership was the forth-highest subtheme among all the interviews. Primarily interviewees discussed the lack of diverse leaders in our country, and the associated need to identify and empower leaders who identify with underserved populations. Kim Gaffi says the youth at GRuB need these role models:

"...until they see people that look like them and talk like them in positions of power they assume there's not a place for them..."

Many of these organizations strive to empower their members by supporting

leadership skills among them, however there can also be disconnect between

members and those in power in the organization. Board members or Executive

Directors often do not identify with the group they serve:

> "…true low-income based organizing is incredibly rare…a lot of
> anti-poverty groups that talk about being grassroots…they have
> low-income members but they hire college graduate staff that
> are not from the population that they're working with…"

This does not mean that those of the dominant culture shouldn't work with such

organizations, but empowering underserved populations means consciously

uplifting leaders from those communities. Identifying and empowering these

leaders may be the key to tapping into the informal networks and engaging a whole

community not just an individual. It was mentioned several times that this

approach is beneficial for engaging any community. In the context of the TFSC, the

approach of identifying and empowering leaders was mentioned several times for

connecting with rural communities throughout Thurston County – a population not

included in this study, but one currently missing from the TFSC.

Organization Structure

Many of the interviewees are attempting to run their organizations in more

inclusive and empowering ways: Camp Quixote is self-governed by individuals who

are homeless; POWER is member-led and utilizes consensus decision-making;

CIELO recently let students sit on the Board and identifies Latinos to teach courses;

GRuB is attempting to diversify their Board and finding ways to let the youth and

members define the organization; and Food Not Bombs is an unofficial non-profit

that utilizes direct action. All of these groups recognize that changing their

organization structures is a learning process, particularly because diverse models

are lacking:

> "..this is kind of groundbreaking in the sense that there's not
> really that many models for within marginalized communities
> of just having this cycle of leadership…"

One interviewee thinks ultimately a hybrid approach is possible that blends

components of mainstream organizing with newer methods. A number of the

interviewees felt examples for different methods of organizing and decision-making

may only truly exist outside the U.S.   Organizations will have to be adaptive, have

avenues for constant input, and seek advice from within and without our country on

different organizing skills. The alternative agro-food movement can be a forerunner

of envisioning new arrangements for community organizing.

Non-profit Industrial Complex

Throughout the interviews it became obvious that all of the organizations are

greatly hindered by limited budgets and resources. For some of the organizations,

these restraints have led to decisions that went against their philosophies or

founding values. One of the interviewees frequently referred to running their

organization as a corporation. Grants fund a large number of non-profit

organizations and budget cuts are taking their toll.   Unfortunately this leads to

competition among many organizations fighting for the same causes,"…because a lot

of funds come from one pot of money." It can be argued that funding dependent

upon singular grants and donations is unsustainable.

There is a positive aspect of limited funds, however: as money becomes tighter,

organizers have to shift their focus to finding creative ways to collaborate:

> "…conversations have happened about what it is to contribute to your
> community, I definitely don't think the only way you can do it is
> through money."

Collaborations have the potential to bring organizations and peoples together for

stronger social movements. It was mentioned that organizations are often too

focused on singular issues and that much work can be done on aligning goals and

thus resources. One interviewee discussed the notion of sharing volunteers across

organizations and having a collaborative volunteer training program. Sharing space

is a potential approach for community organizers. It was felt that mainstream

organizations typically have more access to resources – consciously partnering with

underserved groups would be a way of sharing the power.

The concept of the "non-profit industrial complex" seeks to explain the issues of

running non-profits in a capitalist society. It explains the relationships among

government entities, the dominant class, foundations, and non-profits leads to

control of alternative movements by existing power forces (INCITE! Website). Many

non-profit organizations are value-based organizations that seek to solve issues

created by the very system they exist within. Ultimately, financial resources are

controlled by outside entities, potentially disempowering the organization's ability

to affect change depending on the interest of funders. Therefore the discourse and

power is often controlled once again by those with money. Interviews suggest

issues connected to relationships explained in the non-profit industrial complex, however cannot be expanded upon within the scope of this research.

Democracy in Our System

Previous sections discussed how democratic participation requires certain skills, and access to these skills is disproportionately available to the dominant culture. Additionally, a number of the interviewees discussed the perceptual barriers to participating in the political system. One interviewee identified that the attitude of, "I'm not into politics...like its sports or something," is rampant in our country among people of all walks of life. Another interviewee proclaimed that "the personal is political" and that it may be easier for individuals of the dominant culture to disconnect from politics because they are the ones that are least impacted. On the other side, individuals who are low-income will likely feel changes in social programming every day of their lives. Perceptions will only change if people understand how they are influenced by their political systems and how they can influence these systems. Jill Severns explains the shift she saw with Camp Quixote residents (individuals who are homeless):

> "....camp residents have been involved in that political process. And that has been a big deal for people in the camp who had never had any contact with civic life before... you couldn't say there was actually a structural barrier to their participation in civic life, but on the other hand they had never been drawn into it before...never felt that it related to them or that politicians represented or cared about them..."

Physical barriers were not viewed as the main hindrance, but simply the perceptual barrier that they could not make a difference through democratic participation.

One interviewee believes one reason Americans don't participate actively in the political system is because "…we tend to think in our country that the government does beneficial or hurtful things to us and that we are passive recipients." For this interviewee talking about the history of movements exemplifies that this is not the case,

> "…we don't talk about civil rights as something the government decided to do differently one day…no people worked their butts off and went to jail and got killed."

Democratic action has been a part of all movements and is needed to push forward in the alternative agro-food movement. Interviewees recognized "it's not easy for anyone to be actively involved in the [political] system," but most interviewees felt people have to strive to influence political systems because it influences every day of their life.

A few of the interviewees recognized that the potential for democratic input were quite high in Olympia and Thurston County. The local government is literally in the backyard, and government officials especially at city and county levels are active in much of the community organizing. Food Policy Councils, and the TFSC, can build off this to show all individuals the empowering process of food democracy.

Conclusion and TFSC Recommendations

Overall, data affirmed the TFSC is disproportionally composed of, and influenced by, individuals whom identify with the dominant culture. It must be recognized that Thurston County itself is predominantly inhabited by middle-class, Caucasian individuals, and that Olympia, the hub of food organizing, lacks even more socio-economic diversity. However, input from underserved populations is readily accessible with the most prominent examples being organizations that were interviewed in this study. Thurston County as a whole has regionally significant populations, particularly the Nisqually Indian Tribe and the Confederated Tribes of Chehalis, whom are not yet connected to TFSC. The capacity for collaboration and true policy change is amplified when considering the political activity of Olympia as the capitol. Data presented in this study has the potential to increase the diversity of voices that are shaping the vision of a more just agro-food system for Thurston County. It is recommended that the TFSC, particularly in the formative stages, incorporate the following knowledge into their infrastructure and goals as a means to prevent re-producing the same inequity and inaccessibility created by the current system.

Interview and survey data indicated that simple practical mechanisms are the first step in creating inclusiveness on a local, immediate scale. Inclusion of childcare, transportation, and compensation for time increase the accessibility of organizing to underserved populations, not just in the alternative agro-food movement, but community organizing in general. Choosing meeting styles and decision-making

structures geared towards popular education and consensus challenges systemic oppression built into organization structures supported by the dominant culture. Unfortunately, organizers in the United States appear limited in organization models. Several interviewees suggested researching traditional models used by indigenous groups to seek alternative models. If the Thurston Food Systems Council (TFSC) continues to support social justice as an underlying goal then such considerations are crucial, particularly in the formative stages of the organization. These factors will not guarantee participation of underserved populations, but they will be essential in developing an environment that is accessible to a wider population. Mechanisms encouraging immediate participation cannot deny, however the need for deep systemic change, particularly the connection of inequity to systemic ideologies inherent to capitalism.

The research revealed informal social networks, or simply individuals talking to one another, are still the most effective way of spreading a message. Therefore, the fact that the message of food organizing in Thurston County is not reaching certain populations exemplifies the lack of personal connections among individuals from different socio-economic groups. Societal divisions based on power and privileges construct the everyday interactions and relationships that are nurtured. Lack of relationships across classes and cultures makes it easy to take for granted the experiences that shape an individual's, or collective group's, perception. Often times the alternative agro-food movement insinuates local or community is inherently just, which assumes those within a community agree on a vision of justice. TFSC

organizers risk defining a community vision before including voices of identifiable

groups in the county.

One of the largest barriers to diverse participation highlighted in the interviews was

the lack of leadership within underserved communities. Even if the TFSC were to

engage a more diverse socio-economic participation, the ownership and leadership

of the organization is held by those of the dominant culture. If TFSC, and other

players in the agro-food movement, truly want to include voices of underserved

individuals, then resources should be utilized to identify, support, and empower

individuals outside of the dominant culture.   It is important to start building

relationships that challenge existing divisions, but it cannot be denied that different

people face different realities. Bringing underserved individuals into a setting

already envisioned by members of the dominant culture will support oppressive

behaviors no matter how unintentional. The very nature of privilege and power sets

this stage, for the dominant power is just that, *dominant,* and power inequities

become "normal" for the functioning of society.

Interviewees agreed that regardless of these barriers, there is much potential for the

alternative agro-food movement to include the voices of underserved populations,

both for the specific case of Thurston County, and beyond.   The intention of the

TFSC was recognized, but critique fell on the methods that have thus far been

utilized to invite underserved populations to the table. A quality invite first and

foremost is brought to the individuals or groups being asked for input. TFSC must

recognize that to penetrate the informal social networks present, organizers must

first make attempts to advertise and actively go where such groups gather. These

actions not only indicate respect, but also allow individuals to be approached in a

space that is potentially more "culturally safe." An invitation must also be

empowering, meaning there is a clear message of asking for assistance, and an

attempt to see what the group itself needs so strategic collaborations can be made

that "help everyone." At the time of this study it appears TFSC is failing to connect

with local social justice organizations in ways that could infuse TFSC and the overall

movement with a more distinguished knowledge and implementation of social

justice, and uplift the voices and leadership of underserved populations.

Ultimately, equity does not mean bringing others into the same way of doing things,

but instead means supporting others in the opportunity to develop and implement

their own visions and creative solutions. In other words, equity means supporting

democratic participation. TFSC currently represents Olympia and lacks voices of

other communities present in Thurston County. Instead of denying this reality,

TFSC can intentionally assist other communities in their own portion of the agro-

food movement. Tribal nations, rural communities, and groups that gather around a

common identity should have the opportunity to gather and analyze their unique

relationships to the agro-food system. Power and privilege are created and

perpetuated through language and can either reinforce, or alternately break down,

existing power relations. As Thurston County develops its own discourse around

the alternative agro-food movement, diverse groups should be empowered to

develop their own definitions without the influence of the dominant culture.

Collaborations can then be made across communities, instead of forcing a diverse

collection of individuals and groups into one community vision. Such empowering

approaches can radiate to a global scale.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The issues present in Thurston County are not unique to the specific place; the Thurston Food Systems Council (TFSC) mirrors the alternative agro-food movement's inability to proportionately address social equity issues, and the tendency to be championed by an overall homogenous group of the dominant culture. Inequities concerning both resources and process are undeniably correlated with socio-economic characteristics, meaning individuals outside the dominant culture are not only the most susceptible to food insecurity, but are also the least likely to have their voices heard in community organizing. The agro-food movement symbolizes a shift in the structure of human relations around food, but in the context of social equity, it appears humans are simply changing the scale. The same inequities connected to lack of food democracy on a global scale are being re-produced in local landscapes, which is coupled with the delusion that shifting to a focus on the local inherently will ensure a more "just" system.

As it stands, underserved populations remain largely voiceless, and therefore powerless, in the agro-food movement. Perpetuation of inequity in the movement does not appear intentional, but instead stems from ignorance and the inability to identify and name the true underlying ideologies and sources of oppression in the first place. The resulting barriers for inclusive organizing identified in this study range from the practical to conceptual. Practical barriers include: failure to increase accessibility to meetings with practical mechanisms, such as childcare and transportation; lack of diverse organizational structures that challenge the notion of

"professional" as defined in Western society; and failure to administer quality invites that empower individuals and communities. Conceptual barriers include: misperceptions of the discourse and actions surrounding the alternative agro-food movement, and manifestation of institutionalized oppression and racism in local physical and social landscapes.

All of these barriers ultimately represent barriers to democratic participation. A political ecology lens recognizes the significant role of politics as a major influence on relations among humans and the environment. A political ecology of the agro-food system reveals a political infrastructure that supports corporations over people, and measures productivity through quantity and money. Democratic participation and influence are correlated with distribution of power, and in our current capitalist system power is undeniably correlated with money. The existing political environment supports the consolidation of ownership and power, therefore directly perpetuating inequity. Through this lens, the current system appears to simultaneously identify as a democracy while supporting ideologies that counter equitable democratic participation. An assessment of our current state of democracy within the agro-food system reveals it is a largely inaccessible system, both perceptually and practically, and this inaccessibility is repeated through the political structure. The structure of these relations is not being challenged in the agro-food movement.

Continued analysis of agro-food systems can give greater transparency to the interconnections among humans, society, and nature. Defining amorphous concepts such as justice and democracy is a continuous process of investigation, and the myriad of influences that shape these concepts in practice will require critical analyses of underlying ideologies. Individuals, communities, and movements can be deeply examined to reveal the truth of the relationships that are practiced so we can begin to understand our systems and what shapes them. Our current systems are not only environmentally and socially destructive, but lack a resilient and adaptive nature. A resonating call across the globe for sustainability and justice demands humans, and their systems, will need to constantly change and mold to live fluidly with their surroundings. Political ecology strives to bring transparency to the inter-relationships among and within systems so in practice humans can have a more holistic understanding. Research should continue to investigate the ideologies underlying capitalism and their correlation with inequity, particularly the relationships present within the non-profit industrial complex.

Ultimately, food is a nourishment that connects all deeply to the Earth, as well as to each other. However, while the act of eating is a basic and necessary human act, the reality of the processes and interactions with food are socially constructed and defined. The agro-food movement signifies a challenge to what is perceived as "normal" regarding human-human and human-environment interactions. As alternative systems evolve, players in the movement can recognize the mechanisms preventing equitable food democracy and actively incorporate voices oppressed by

the current system. This support of equitable democratic participation has capacity

for social change on a larger scale as it re-defines the image of a just and democratic

society.   Case studies, such as the Thurston Food Systems Council, provide critical

insight for communities to build successful collaborations within their unique

physical and social landscape.

Food indeed has the capacity to link "red" and "green" movements, thereby

diminishing a perceptual division between justice for people and justice for the

environment. The undeniable connection and integration of humans and Earth is

exemplified in relationships surrounding food. Through a combined effort of

shifting policies and structural paradigms, while simultaneously forging personal

relationships within our community, there is grand potential to intentionally re-

structure the notions, and the reality, of justice, equity, and democracy. By

simultaneously celebrating our collective connection to food, and also our right to

choose what this connection looks like, there remains potential for an agro-food

system that supports equal democratic participation. Although this appears a

daunting task, it is hopeful to know the path to equity and justice can start with

simply sharing a meal with a neighbor.

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Appendix A:
Stakeholder Assessment Survey
Analyzing Current Stakeholder Involvement in the Thurston County
Food Policy Public Planning Processes

Section I: Feedback on Current Public Planning Process

1. Did you attend the Thurston County Food Summit on Saturday, Oct 15, 2011?

    ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. If No, what was the primary reason you did not attend the Food Summit on Oct. 15, 2011? (check all that apply)

    ☐ Did Not Know About It ☐ Lack of Transportation ☐ Inconvenient Location

    ☐ Price of Registration Ticket ☐ Could Not Attend All Day ☐ Needed Child Care

    ☐ Other, please specify _____

3. If Yes, which Whole Measures breakout sessions did you attend (check all that apply)

    ☐ Fairness & Justice ☐ Strong Communities ☐ Vibrant Farms ☐ Healthy People

    ☐ Sustainable Ecosystems ☐ Thriving Local Economies ☐ N/A

4. Did you attend Food Summit Debriefing at The Evergreen State College?

    ☐ Yes ☐ No

5. Which Whole Measures meetings do you plan or did you attend over January 14 and 21? (check all that apply)

    ☐ Fairness & Justice ☐ Strong Communities ☐ Vibrant Farms ☐ Healthy People

    ☐ Sustainable Ecosystems ☐ Thriving Local Economies ☐ N/A

6. How did you learn about these efforts to create a Thurston County Food Policy Council (TCFPC)? (check all that apply)

    ☐ Word of Mouth ☐ Newspaper ☐ Internet ☐ Facebook ☐ Through an Organization

    ☐ Radio ☐ Flyer ☐ Other, please specify _____

7. Thus far what is your overall satisfaction with the meeting format being utilized to include community input in the planning of a TCFPC? (e.g. the Food Summit, brainstorming sessions and open discussions)

    ☐ Extremely Satisfied ☐ Satisfied ☐ Somewhat Satisfied ☐ Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied

    ☐ Somewhat Dissatisfied ☐ Dissatisfied ☐ Extremely Dissatisfied

8. What is your overall satisfaction with utilizing the Whole Measures Framework as a way to divide and discuss the local food system?

☐ Extremely Satisfied ☐ Satisfied ☐ Somewhat Satisfied ☐ Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied

☐ Somewhat Dissatisfied ☐ Dissatisfied ☐ Extremely Dissatisfied

9. What do you feel are effective methods for incorporating community input into a Thurston County Food Policy Council? (check all that apply)

☐ Surveys ☐ Focus Groups ☐ Community Potlucks ☐ Larger Public Meetings

☐ Smaller Public Meetings at Various Locations ☐ Neighborhood Organizations

☐ Email ☐ Other, please specify _____

10. What has been the most beneficial part of these open planning sessions for you?

_____

_____

_____

11. What has been the least beneficial part of these open planning sessions for you?

_____

_____

_____

12. General comments about current or future planning processes:

_____

_____

_____

Section II: Which Stakeholders are Currently Represented in the Planning Process

This section seeks feedback on how you define yourself as a stakeholder and your current involvement with the Thurston County food system. Organizers would also like your opinion on any groups you perceive are missing from the current planning process.

Section II a: Who Are You?

1. Please indicate the community in which you live:

☐ Bucoda ☐ Tenino ☐ Lacey ☐ Grand Mound ☐ Tumwater ☐ Yelm ☐ Rochester

☐ Olympia ☐ Rainier ☐ Rural-north of Tumwater Airport ☐ Rural South of Tumwater Airport ☐ Nisqually Indian Reservation ☐ Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation

☐ Outside of Thurston County

2. What is your age?

☐ Under 18 ☐ 19-29 ☐ 30-39 ☐ 40-49 ☐ 50-59 ☐ Over 60

3. What is your current education level?

☐ Attending High School ☐ High School/GED ☐ Associates Degree/Technical Degree
☐ Bachelors Degree ☐ Masters/PhD

4. What is your ethnicity?

☐ Caucasian ☐ Native American ☐ Hispanic ☐ African American ☐ Asian

☐ Hawaiian Pacific Islander ☐ Other, please specify_____

5. What is your average household salary range?

☐ Under $20,000 ☐ $20,000-40,000 ☐ $40,000-60,000 ☐ $60,000-100,000 ☐ Over
$100,000

6. Do you currently utilize food stamps?

☐ Yes ☐ No

7. Have you ever utilized food stamps in the past?

☐ Yes ☐ No

8. Do you consistently utilize services provided by the Thurston County Food Bank?

☐ Yes ☐ No

9. Do you consistently purchase food at the Olympia Food Co-op?

☐ Yes ☐ No

10. Do you consistently purchase food at the Olympia Farmer's Market?

☐ Yes ☐ No

11. What are your primary sources for food purchase?

_____

12. What sector of the food system do you represent? (check all that apply)

☐ Producer/Grower ☐ Processor ☐ Distributor ☐ Retailer ☐ Consumer ☐ Waste
Recovery
☐ Policy Maker ☐ Educator ☐ Community Member ☐ Student ☐ Non-Profit ☐
Government ☐ Private ☐ Other (please specify)_____

13. Please list any specific businesses or companies that you represent with these sectors:

_____

14. Please list any organizations you are actively involved with in the community:

_____

15. Do you or your organization or business intend to have a representative sit on a future Food Policy Council if possible?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Maybe ☐ Don't Know

16. How long have you been involved in local food issues and/or activism?
☐ It started with the Food Summit ☐ 1-6 months ☐ 6 months – 1 year ☐ 1-5 years ☐ 5-10 years ☐ over 10 years

17. Why are you involved in local food issues?

_____

_____

_____

Section II b: Who Is Missing?

1. Do you feel any of the following food sectors are not currently represented in the planning process? (check all that apply)

☐ Producer/Grower ☐ Processor ☐ Distributor ☐ Retailer ☐ Consumer ☐ Waste Recovery ☐ Policy Maker ☐ Educator ☐ Community Member ☐ Student ☐ Non-Profit
☐ Government ☐ Private ☐ Other (please specify)_____ ☐ Don't Know

2. Do you feel any of the following underserved populations are not currently represented in the planning process? (check all that apply)

☐ Low-Income ☐ Elderly ☐ Youth ☐ Native American ☐ African American ☐ Hispanic
☐ Asian ☐ Disabled ☐ Other, please specify _____

3. Do you have suggestions for organizations to contact that you feel should be involved in the current or future operation of a TCFPC? Any specific contacts?

_____

4. In your opinion, what are the most important groups that should be part of the planning process for the TCFPC and should be represented in the organization?

_____

5. In your opinion, what are the areas of priority for action and/or policy changes for the Thurston County local food system?

_____

6. Any additional comments?

Thurston Food Systems Council (TFSC)
Vision, Mission Statement, and Goals
March 2012

TFSC Vision:
A vibrant food system where everyone in Thurston County has the right and access to healthy, local, affordable, culturally appropriate, sustainably produced food.

TFSC Mission:
To bring together the community resources and programs to develop and strengthen the local food system.

TFSC Goals:

1) Evaluate and influence food system policy
2) Support urban agriculture and foster food-friendly neighborhoods

3) Promote social justice

4) Encourage healthy lifestyles and disease prevention through food and nutrition education

5) Create a diverse and resilient local food economy

    a. Encourage increased investment in food system infrastructure (transportation, distribution and processing)

    b. Support existing farmers and programs to encourage new farmers

    c. Recognize the value of commercial and non-commercial food production

6) Protect natural resources and sustain the environment

7) Ensure preservation, protection and expansion of farmland
8) Strengthen links and relationships within and between urban and rural communities.

Appendix C:

Timeline of Thurston County Food Summit
Comparison with Thesis Research & Local Food Systems Panel

Summer – Fall 2011
- "Focus on Food" events
  - Farm tours
  - Speakers
  - Community Potluck
- Planning for Food Summit

Oct 2011
- Thurston County Food Summit
  - 200+ participants
  - Community envisioning breakout sessions
  - Use of Whole Measures Framework

Nov 2011
- Presentation of Food Summit Results
  - Created by students at The Evergreen State College
- Local Food Systems Panel created by Sustainable Thurston

Jan-Feb 2012
- Presentation of White Paper by Local Food Systems Panel
- Public Meetings following Food Summit
  - Site for research surveys
  - Organized by Whole Measures Framework

March 2012
- Formation Thurston Food Systems Council (TFSC)
  - Action created during public follow-up meeting
  - Includes members of Local Food Systems Panel

Aug 2012
- Research Interviews
  - Researcher also attending TFSC meetings
  - A few interviewees involved with TFSC

Fall 2012
- Preliminary research presented to TFSC