

WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT THE ALTERNATIVE? UNDERSTANDING
MOTIVATIONS FOR PARTICIPATING IN HUMBOLDT COUNTY
ALTERNATIVE FOOD NETWORKS

By

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ABSTRACT

WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT THE ALTERNATIVE? UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATIONS FOR PARTICIPATING IN HUMBOLDT COUNTY ALTERNATIVE FOOD NETWORKS

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Participation in alternative food networks such as farmer's markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), and community gardens has become an increasingly popular way to express opposition to the current industrial food system. Food justice scholars often criticize alternative food networks for operating within a neoliberal economic framework and suggest that structural inequalities within the food system are not able to be addressed by alternative food networks in the same way they are through food justice or food sovereignty. The goal of this research is to discover individual motivation behind participation in local alternative food networks in Humboldt County. I am curious about how individuals understand or define their participation, if they are aware of structural inequalities in the current food system, and if they believe their participation addresses the socioeconomic and race related injustices inherent in the current food system. I utilized a mix-methods approach including autoethnography, participant observation, a survey, and qualitative in-depth interviews.

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INTRODUCTION

As a self-declared participant in alternative food networks, perusing the local farmer's market is not foreign to me. Sometimes it is a social event that takes up an hour or two of my day; running into familiar faces and having conversations, grabbing a bite to eat at the prepared-food vendors, sitting on the grass enjoying my freshly purchased fruits or veggies. Other times it's a quick visit to get the items I know I need without the added enjoyment of a few, slow and casual circles around the plaza. In either case, my underlying desire to go to the farmer's market remains the same: to support small-scale, local¹ and sustainable agriculture. In supporting this kind of food production, I am making an assumption that this choice will help lessen my ecological footprint, and I am hoping that this choice will also support the fair and equal treatment of farm laborers. I acknowledge that there are few people of color who occupy booth space at the Arcata Farmer's Market, so I wonder if my participation will ever help farmers of color who, like other people of color, have been historically marginalized (Green, Green, and Kleiner 2011). I also recognize that because of the demographics of the area, most of the people that frequent the market are white. What about the people of color in our community, especially Native folks whose families have inhabited these lands long

¹ The word local, and the accompanying concept of localism or localization in the context of food, has become highly contested. Much of the current literature (outside of food studies, e.g. sociology, human geography) on alternative food networks consider localism and localization a site of elitism, exclusivity, and inequality. DuPuis and Goodman (2005) make a case for creating a localist politics through the use of reflexive localism which does not "rely on the naming and following of a particular set of norms or imaginaries about place" (2005;360), i.e. norms based on purity or perfection, the way that unreflexive localism does.

before local farmers? Do they feel welcomed at the market? Do they feel like the vendors provide culturally appropriate and ethically grown and harvested food? Do farmers consider the reality that they are growing food on stolen land? Are Native and non-native communities working together to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to “return to the land” either through food production or subsistence practices such as fishing, hunting, and gathering?

These are not questions that inhabited my mind when I first decided I wanted to participate in alternative food networks. Mostly, I believed that organic food tasted better, that it was better for me, and would have more nutritional value if I could get it before it travelled hundreds of miles. I believed that small-scale organic farming practices were better for the environment, and I acknowledged that free-range, grass fed meat and dairy and cage-free or pasture raised eggs promoted greater animal welfare. It was not until further exploration that I realized how dense the topic of food was, especially when talking about the global food system and food policy. As I began to dig deeper into the literature I started to realize that my beliefs and ideals that led me to participate in alternative food networks were not inclusive of other social issues related to food. Specifically, I had not seriously taken into consideration the exploitative nature of food production, even by farms that produce organic or sustainable food. I knew little about food deserts or the concepts of food justice or food sovereignty. I began to understand that having access to quality food wasn't always enough; what about other resources like time, a consistent place to live and store food, the money to keep the electricity on so you can cook? This is when I began to ask myself, how does my

participation in alternative food networks make a difference? I wondered if anybody else asked the same questions. I wondered if other participants in alternative food networks (AFNs) recognized their privilege to make a choice to participate in the first place. It was these questions and considerations that led me to develop this research, and settle on a final research question: in what ways do individuals within alternative food networks in Humboldt county understand their participation, and how might they use it to address social and environmental injustices that result from the current industrial food system?

The following begins with a review of relevant literature pertaining to the current industrial food system and the way it harms the environment, the way it can be harmful to our bodies, and the ways in which race, class, and gender inequalities are created and perpetuated. After exploring the problematic elements of our current food system, I then examine literature on the Alternative Food Movement (AFM) as a response to these issues, looking specifically at how scholars have explained its definitions and goals, who participates and their reasons for doing so, the ways in which neoliberal ideology has influenced the movement, and whether scholars believe the AFM does an adequate job at addressing race, class, and gender inequalities within the industrial food system. Next, I highlight the methods used to conduct my research which included participant observation, a survey, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and autoethnography. Following my methods section are my findings, which are broken down by research site. The findings section describes in more detail who is participating at each research site, looking closely at whether people who may be experiencing varying levels of food insecurity are also participating, and why these individuals choose to participate in

alternative food networks. I end this section with a brief description of the emerging themes I found through my in-depth interviews. I follow with a more robust discussion about these four major themes, including how individuals become interested in and engaged with AFNs, what they believe an alternative food network is and what their participation looks like, why individuals choose to participate, and the ways in which individuals have come to understand their participation in a variety of ways. I conclude with a brief discussion of the limitations to my research and how these findings and the research of others engaged in food justice and food sovereignty might be used to continue the work towards creating a more just and equitable food system.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This section is a review of scholarly literature that describes the rise of the current corporate, industrial food system and elucidates scholarly claims about the ways in which this system has caused harm to the environment, to our bodies, and has perpetuated race, class, and gender inequalities. This context aids in a better understanding of the Alternative Food Movement, a movement comprised of varying alternative food networks/initiatives (AFNs/AFIs) which stand in opposition to a globalized, corporatized, industrial food system. The examined literature will help clarify the varying definitions and goals of alternative food networks, some of the reasons individuals choose to participate, and the ways in which neoliberal ideology—that of de-regulation, privatization, entrepreneurialism, and self-regulation (Harvey 2005; Busch 2014)—influence the movement; an influence considered by many scholars to hinder alternative food networks in adequately addressing race, class, and gender inequalities within the current food system. In contrast to the Alternative Food Movement, Food Sovereignty—a movement and concept rooted in rural International Peasant Movements of the global south, specifically La Via Campesina (Clendenning, Dressler, and Richards 2015)—may be more successful at addressing systemic and institutionalized inequalities within the food system and creating a truly equitable food system, as it advocates for land rights and the ability of communities to have complete control over their food system, including where and how food is grown and distributed. Literature on participant motivations as well as literature pertaining to the AFM addressing race, class, and gender inequalities is most specifically related to my thesis, as my research question asks, in what ways do

individuals within alternative food networks in Humboldt county understand their participation, and how might they use it to address social and environmental injustices that result from the current industrial food system?

The Industrial Food System

Our current food system—which is often characterized by critics using terms such as corporate, industrial, mainstream, globalized, and conventional—has its earliest beginnings in the 18th and 19th centuries (Broad 2016). During the Industrial Revolution, Europe was home to proponents of “scientific agriculture,” an approach that aimed to maximize agricultural output “while using less land and fewer farmworkers” (Broad 2016:37). Advances in chemistry also began affecting agribusiness, with the introduction of petroleum-based pesticides, nitrogen-rich inorganic fertilizers, and specialized plants bred to survive the changing landscape. Entering the 20th century, intensification became even more pertinent to agricultural practices (Broad 2016; Lang and Heasman 2004). This practice of heightened intensification during the Cold War era, also known as the “Green Revolution,” was characterized by the industrialization of farm inputs, including the use of agrochemicals and petrochemical fertilizers, the introduction of machinery to replace animal and rural labor (Broad 2016; Lang and Heasman 2004; Pratt 2007), and a change in labor practices which would result in fewer workers producing more output (Lang and Heasman 2004). The industrialization of agriculture resulted in consolidation, a greater share of the food supply being grown by fewer farmers with bigger tracts of land, and thereby necessitated the use of monoculture farming practices, a practice in

which “the same crop is grown year after year in the same field or very simple rotations are used” (Lang and Heasman 2004:148). Pratt (2007) makes note of other processes that have led to our more recent mainstream agro-industrial food system, including national and global market demand for food, transnational corporations providing fertilizers, seeds, and machinery, giant supermarket chains such as Walmart that now “sell more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the food eaten in most of Europe and North America” (2007:287), as well as changes in our eating patterns (where we eat, how much we eat) and diet.

As noted above, the global market demand for food began to increase, as well as transnational corporation’s investments in agriculture. These factors helped to create a more globalized food system shaped by neoliberal economics, one that emphasizes marketization, de-regulation, entrepreneurialism, and liberalized trade relations (Busch 2014). Three of the earliest international neoliberal institutions created to increase trade and enforce ‘global’ market rules that often override democratically elected bodies as well as cultural differences (Busch 2014) include the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). These organizations encourage privatization and competition and impose market rationale on all other institutions, from healthcare, to education, as well as agriculture. The World Trade Organization (WTO), created in 1995, is a more contemporary institution that is considered by McMichael (2009:38) to be the epitome of neoliberal development, as it has created a “regime of liberalization and privatization facilitating the integration of transnational agribusiness and food markets.”

At first glance, the Green Revolution of the 20th century and the creation of a globalized food system appeared to have positive impacts. State-led development projects and food-centered policies in the U.S. and abroad were sold as tools to mitigate the growing levels of world-wide hunger and food shortages (Broad 2016; Lang and Heasman 2004). As populations continued to increase and became more urbanized, industrialized, petro-chemical intensive agriculture promised to supply more efficient labor and higher levels of production. Although self-sufficient agricultural practices and higher levels of production were achieved in the U.S. and other developed countries, traditional, self-sufficient practices in developing countries were weakened by the universalization of the American model of energy-intensive, industrialized agriculture (Lang and Heasman 2004; McMichael 2009). Indeed, Allen and Wilson (2008) recognize the way in which the U.S. commodity farming model has been replicated globally, often disrupting traditional agricultural systems in developing nations. Furthermore, the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture, which uses trade restrictions, production controls and state trading boards to outlaw artificial price support, has resulted in the displacement of small producers into "urban slums or as labor on plantations and agricultural estates dedicated to exporting food to relatively affluent global consumers" (McMichael 2009:39).

While neoliberal trade agreements and privatization has greatly impacted farmers of the global south, producers and consumers in the U.S. also experience the consequences of an industrial food system ruled by neoliberal economics. Scholars who critique the industrial food system often cite the detrimental impacts it has on the

environment and on our individual health, as well as issues related to race, class, and gender inequalities. Understanding these critiques helps to contextualize the formation and popularity of the Alternative Food Movement.

Harms to the natural environment

As described above, the mainstream industrialized food system is heavily dependent upon fossil fuels, agrochemicals, pesticides, fertilizers, and an overall intensification of farming practices. Although the use of some pesticides has decreased, the toxicity of current pesticides “has increased by an estimated factor of 10- to 100- fold since 1975” (Lang and Heasman 2004:228). These industrialized methods have led to a variety of environmental harms including the pollution and depletion of freshwater sources, the loss of agricultural and ecological diversity, soil erosion, dead zones, and an increase in greenhouse emissions which in turn affects global climate change (Allen and Wilson 2008; Broad 2016; Capra 2015; Lang and Heasman 2004; Tilman 1999).

According to an estimate by Tilman (1999:5997), doubling global food production would result in ecosystem destruction that “would vastly increase the proportion of the world’s species threatened with extinction. It also would cause a massive release of CO₂ from land clearing and tilling...the conversion of less-fertile ecosystems to agriculture would disproportionately impact world biodiversity.”

According to Broad (2016:43), our current agricultural practices are “ultimately causing fresh water, available land, and valuable energy inputs to rapidly disappear...” Likewise, Lang and Heasman (2004) explain that agriculture accounts for 70% of freshwater

withdrawals worldwide, while the Food and Agriculture Organization acknowledge agriculture as primarily responsible for freshwater scarcity. Runoffs of agricultural nitrates and phosphates from heavy use of synthetic fertilizers and herbicides have resulted in oxygen depletion in rivers and record-size dead zones in the Gulf of Mexico (Allen and Wilson 2008; Broad 2016; Capra 2015). Tilman (1999:5997) also notes that “additional [agricultural] irrigation would divert more water from aquatic ecosystems and impact groundwaters and surface waters via additional leaching of agrochemicals.” Soil erosion is also a common effect of the intensification and expansion of industrial agriculture. According to Lang and Heasman (2004:229), soil cannot be replaced in the short term once it is lost, and the “average loss of soil humus in recent decades has been around 30 times more than the rate throughout the ten millennia of settled agriculture.” Similarly, Capra (2015) explains that the “degrading of healthy organic soil by chemical fertilizers and pesticides increases the soil’s vulnerability to drought by reducing its capacity to capture water and keep it available for crops.” Industrial agriculture also contributes about 25 to 30 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, which further accelerates climate change. Capra (2015) describes the distinct ways in which industrial agriculture contributes to greenhouse gas emissions:

directly through the fuel burnt by agricultural machinery, during food processing, and by transporting the average ounce of food over a thousand miles “from the farm to the table”; indirectly in the manufacture of its synthetic inputs, e.g. of nitrogen fertilizer from nitrogen and natural gas; and finally, by breaking down the organic matter in the soil into carbon dioxide (during large-scale tillage and as a consequence of excessive synthetic inputs), which is released into the atmosphere as a greenhouse gas.

Furthermore, beyond having a reputation for cruel mistreatment of animals, industrial farm animal production, commonly referred to as factory farming, is considered the leading cause of air pollution, water pollution, and soil degradation (Broad 2016).

Industrial cattle ranching is also responsible for the release of methane, “a greenhouse gas many times more potent than CO₂” (Capra 2015).

Harms to our personal health

Lang and Heasman (2004) have used the Productionist paradigm as a theoretical framework to describe the way in which local, small-scale production of food is shifted to concentrated production, mass distribution, and an overall effort to increase output. The agricultural revolution, chemical revolution, transport revolution, and the industrialization of food have all contributed to this Productionist paradigm, which has been the dominant food system paradigm since the mid-20th century. Personal health has also been situated within this Productionist paradigm, and has been “portrayed as being enhanced, above all, by increasing production, which required investment in both monetary and scientific terms” (2004:34). This paradigm assumed that under-production and under-consumption were key threats to health and suggested that an increase in the production of milk, meat, wheat and other industrial agriculture commodities was the proper solution. While the Productionist paradigm still exists today (although it is being challenged more and more), our understanding of health has changed significantly, and we now see a very mixed human health profile throughout the world. While industrial agriculture successfully raised the caloric value of food, it has failed at addressing quality

issues. We now see diet-related diseases in both developed and developing nations due to under and over consumption of food.

The pattern of diet that 30 years ago was associated with the affluent West is increasingly appearing in the developing countries, in a phenomenon known as the 'nutrition transition': while the incidence of certain diet related diseases has decreased, such as heart disease in the West, others are increasing, particularly diabetes and obesity worldwide, and heart disease in the developing world (2004:47).

While global food production has reached a point where every human on the planet can be fed, there are still billions of people worldwide who are either hungry or are malnourished. According to the Agriculture Organization of the United Nations:

during the years from 2010 to 2014, somewhere between 925 million and 805 million people did not have enough food to eat, with 98 percent of those people residing in developing nations. Many more suffer from micronutrient vitamin and mineral deficiencies due to lack of diversity in their diets (Broad 2016:39-40).

The irony of the industrial food system is that it has created a situation in which over-consumption and under-consumption can coexist; where obese and underweight individuals live side by side in the same communities.

Harms to society

Beyond harms to individual health and to the environment, the mainstream industrial food system is responsible for socioeconomic harms, manifested as race, class, and gender inequalities. It really is no surprise, as industrialized food is situated within a neoliberal, capitalist economy, whereby agricultural practices can be de-regulated, privatized, corporatized, and individual consumers are forced to be entrepreneurial consumers and workers, fully responsible for their own successes and failures (Busch

2014). Furthermore, the combination of neoliberal policies seen in globalized trade agreements, and the replication of the US agribusiness model worldwide has resulted in the loss of traditional farming practices, has caused farmers to lose their land, countries to export more food than they keep for their own communities (Allen and Wilson 2008; Broad 2016; Brown and Getz 2011; Green et al. 2011; Walker et al. 2010), and according to McMichael (2009:39), has “enabled ‘food security’ to be privatized in the hands of corporations.”

Setting aside neoliberal ideology, capitalism alone provides a foundation for an exploitable system such that industrial agriculture can flourish. Key to a healthy capitalist economy is the maximization of profit while minimizing costs. Minimalization often comes in the form of using cheaper (exploitable) labor (Allen and Sachs 2012; Brown and Getz 2011) or less labor all together, as well as farm subsidies that benefit large-scale, conventional farms while ignoring small-scale family farms, women farmers, and farmers of color (Green et al. 2011). While there is enough food being produced globally, the unequal distribution of food leaves women, children, people of color—including the migrant workers who produce our food—and low-income communities more vulnerable to food insecurity (Allen and Wilson 2008; Broad 2016; Brown and Getz 2011; Green et al. 2011; Walker et al. 2010).

Racial discrimination in the food system

When considering the inequalities experienced by small scale farmers, women farmers, and farmers of color working within the confines of the industrial food system, it is pertinent to acknowledge the history of black farmers in the U.S. Green et al (2011)

outlines the ways in which black farmers have been devalued and discriminated against, both historically and presently, personally as well as institutionally, through policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture:

From their beginning days in the United States, black farmers were defined institutionally as being less worthy than white farmers, first through slavery, then via tenancy and sharecropping. Even today, black farmers are viewed with indifference at best and contempt at worst by the mainstream agricultural establishment (2011:65).

Black farmers have traditionally been disadvantaged in the areas of land ownership, decision making, and scale of production. They receive limited government assistance and cannot compete with farmers at the highest level of commercial production, who subsequently benefit the most from government funded agricultural programs. This has resulted in blacks exiting agricultural production “at rates disproportionately faster and more severe than those of whites” (2011:70). While this kind of discrimination is not indicative of neoliberal ideology, it does remind us that our food system has always been exploitative, as our earliest agriculture labor was provided by Black slaves.

Brown and Getz (2011) discuss the exploitation and devaluation experienced by migrant farmworkers in California, and the way in which neoliberal trade policies and U.S. immigration politics place workers from Mexico in vulnerable situations.

These deregulatory policies:

privilege corporate agribusiness over small farmers in Mexico, forcing many off their land. Many of these same farmers then find themselves working as wage laborers on the U.S. side of the border, within the same agrifood regime that rendered it impossible for them to sustain their families through small-scale farming in Mexico (2011:122).

Consequently, while California's agricultural profits continue to increase, farmworker's incomes continue to decline. Using a racialized immigration policy, California agribusiness continues its exploitation and devaluation of farm laborers:

The significance of border and immigration politics in mobilizing anti-immigrant sentiment and undermining the bargaining power of farmworkers cannot be overstated. Immigration policy has historically served as a mechanism, not only for managing labor flow, but also for actively producing an "other," in this case a labor force that can be viewed as undeserving of the rights and benefits afforded citizen workers and that can be scapegoated during periods of economic downturn... Through immigration policy, as well as a variety of exemptions to federal labor laws, based on notions of "agricultural exceptionalism," the state has intervened to secure a labor force for growers and to maintain its vulnerability (2011:136).

Exposure to harmful, disease-causing herbicides and pesticides, along with being "forced to operate at hazardous and exhausting speeds" on industrial animal feed lots are indicative of neoliberal policies and speak to the ongoing devaluation of migrant farmworkers (Broad 2016:43).

Not only do workers suffer from low wages and discriminatory practices, but much of the migrant farmworker population experiences food insecurity—the inability to access or afford the very food they cultivate (Brown and Getz 2011). This experience of food insecurity and hunger is not the result of a natural process but is instead indicative of unequal power relations and resource access within the industrial food system (Brown and Getz 2011). When trying to address these issues of food security, much of the domestic food security movement has focused on self-empowerment and a do-it-yourself approach that is often anti-state in nature. While food security seems to be a symptom of neoliberal, agribusiness policies, social movement's responses to food security that

bypass structural critiques and de-emphasize the state's role in addressing food insecurity only act to reinforce a neoliberal system.

Economic and sexual exploitation of women in the food system

Although discussed less frequently amongst scholars of food studies, women on the production end of the industrial food system also experience marginalization.

According to Allen and Sachs (2012), while women perform much of the food-related work at home and within society, they control very few resources, have little decision-making power in food policy and the food industry, and often fail to nourish themselves as adequately as they do others. Women farm laborers are exploited economically, generally receiving lower wages and fewer benefits than men (Allen and Sachs 2012).

Women farmers generally have lower farm wages than men and own smaller, less-capitalized farms. In the U.S. women are also preferred for low-level, high-intensity food processing jobs, while men are more likely to be supervisors (Allen and Sachs 2012).

Female migrant farmworkers are also exploited sexually. Twenty-four percent of the 1.4 million crop workers in the United States are women, and according to a recent report, "as many as eighty percent of female farmworkers surveyed are regularly exposed...[to] episode that range from continuous sexual advances over years of seasonal work to isolated, violent attacks" (Conry 2015:122-123). Women farmworkers are made vulnerable to harassment, abuse, and exploitation by their supervisors and colleagues based on their intersectional identity as women, undocumented citizens, and low-income workers (Conry 2015). This vulnerability also makes reporting instances of harassment more difficult, as women are often afraid of losing their jobs, being deported, or breaking

cultural norms “that require obedience to male figures in positions of authority” (Conry 2015:123).

Food insecurity and food deserts in low-income communities of color

Consumers within the industrial food system are also victims of race, class, and gender disparities. Food insecurity, or the inability to access an adequate amount of safe, nutritious food to meet dietary needs, is disproportionately experienced by low-income households, households of color, households headed by women, and/or households that include children (Allen and Wilson 2008). Food deserts, places where people are unable to access affordable and nutritious foods, are more generally found in low-income communities and communities of color (Broad 2016; Walker et al. 2010). Likewise, predominantly black neighborhoods have been found to have fewer supermarkets compared to predominantly white neighborhoods, as supermarkets will only stay invested in neighborhoods they deem profitable, which are most often white neighborhoods (Walker et al. 2010). Without access to healthy food, obesity, poor nutrition, and other diet related diseases have also been found to exist disproportionately among American Indian, Latino, and African American communities (Slocum 2006).

Although the industrial food system has promised society an end to hunger, it has not delivered. In fact, in 2014, over 46 million low-income Americans utilized food stamps, now referred to as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (Broad 2016). Similarly, between 2012 and 2013, 21.5 million school kids received free or reduced-price lunches from the National School Lunch Program. Broad goes on to state:

In the wake of the Green Revolution, widespread poverty, inadequate food distribution, geopolitical power imbalances, and a market-driven global agricultural system that emphasized the production of a limited set of commodity crops ensured that the promise of feeding the world would remain unfulfilled (2016:40).

As outlined above, the mainstream industrial food system has failed at feeding the world, it has failed at protecting the environment, and it has failed at providing everyone an equal opportunity to access nutritionally and culturally appropriate food. Policies and practices of the industrial food system do not benefit all consumers equally, nor does it value the labor required to produce food. It is this reality that has led many farmers, activists, consumers, and scholars to advocate for the emergence of an alternative movement which challenges industrial agriculture by valuing small-scale, sustainable, local, organic, and equitable farming and distribution practices.

The Alternative Food Movement

The Alternative Food Movement (AFM)—which I use here as a term to describe the varying sub-movements, networks, and initiatives within it—is the result of mounting concerns from farmers, activists, consumers, and scholars over the detrimental effects that the current industrial food system is having on the environment, our health, and on society at large. While the networks, movements and initiatives within the AFM have several commonalities, they also have a variety of unique definitions and goals. Consequently, those who participate and the reasons for their participation also vary, including environmental reasons, health and nutrition reasons, supporting local farmers, and being part of a community. While the word “alternative” suggests the AFM offers a

different way of accessing, connecting with, and eating food than that of the industrial food system, there are critics of the AFM who suggest that it is still constrained by neoliberal, market-based forces as it asks its participants (consumers) to be responsible for fixing the current food system by making “correct” alternative food purchases, i.e. voting with their dollar. In this way, alternative food networks and initiatives may remain primarily alternative as opposed to significantly oppositional to the mainstream industrial food system (Allen et al. 2003). A similar concern questions whether the AFM can do an adequate job at addressing race, class, and gender inequalities within the current food system while still utilizing market-based approaches that hold consumers, instead of the system itself, accountable for addressing these inequalities. I suggest that the AFM and its individual participants may benefit from incorporating a food sovereignty framework into their activism if a transformative and equitable food system is what they truly seek.

Definitions and goals

The Alternative Food Movement, existing as an assemblage of several different alternative food networks (AFNs) and alternative food initiatives (AFIs), has been conceptualized by farmers, scholars, activists, and consumers in a multitude of ways. One of the more commonly referenced explanations of the AFM in the U.S. comes from Gail Feenstra (1997:28) who states,

People throughout the United States are designing and implementing sustainable, local food systems that are rooted in particular places, aim to be economically viable for farmers and consumers, use ecologically sound production and distribution practices, and enhance social equity and democracy for all members of the community.

Indeed, the idea of a localized, sustainable food system is commonly cited throughout the literature on AFNs and AFIs (Allen 2010; Allen et al. 2003; Feenstra 2001; Levkoe 2011; Kloppenburg et al. 2000). In describing localized AFIs specific to California, Allen et al. (2003:62) states,

...And they are also works in place, in situations and circumstances strongly influenced by the geographies of urban and rural, of landscape and region, which in turn have been formed and framed by the structures and hegemonies of the dominant agrifood system.

Similarly, the UC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SAREP), an organization that funds and supports sustainable food systems projects, defines a community food system as,

A collaborative effort to build more locally based, self-reliant food economies—one in which sustainable food production, processing, distribution and consumption is integrated to enhance the economic, environmental and social health of a particular place (Feenstra 2001:100).

In order to better understand and define what a sustainable food system might look like (according to actual AFI/AFN participants and not just scholars), Kloppenburg et al. (2000) gathered responses from 125 people representing the alternative farm/food community at the 1998 Michael Fields Agricultural Institute Conference. Based on the responses, a set of attributes descriptive of a sustainable food system were developed. These attributes included relational, proximate, diverse, ecologically sustainable, economically sustaining, just/ethical, sacred, knowledgeable/communicative, seasonal/temporal, healthful, participatory, culturally nourishing, and sustainably regulated.

Since the value of a localized food system is understood in contrast to an industrial, globalized one, some movements choose to emphasize their anti-globalization stance, even though their movement is also centered around a localized food economy. According to Allen and Wilson (2008:537), the “most explicitly anti-globalization agrifood movements in the US are constituted by Slow Food USA and Buy Local food campaigns.”

Although goals may vary amongst different networks, there is a general consensus that actors within the AFM are working to combat injustices created by the dominant industrial food system. Allen et al. (2003:62-63) states,

AFIs seek to construct and portray alternatives to the construction and reproduction of hegemonies of food (and agriculture) in the conventional food system...New, locally situated and decentralized agrifood initiatives are framed as counter-movements that challenge the control of corporations and other national and global institutions and resist the ecologically and socially destructive practices of the contemporary global agrifood system.

Some of the more specific goals of AFIs include reconnecting farmers and consumers, the economic support of small family farms, developing community based/localized food systems, supporting and empowering marginalized communities with urban community gardens or food-based micro-enterprise, and educating people about ecological or sustainable agriculture (Allen et al. 2003; Levkoe 2011). To get a more comprehensive picture of the work being done by alternative food initiatives, Levkoe (2011) divides AFIs into distinct, goal-based categories: social justice based initiatives most commonly focus on urban food security, migrant farm worker’s rights, and fair/direct trade; initiatives based on ecological sustainability often focus on agroecology and eco-

certifications; community health initiatives put their efforts into community-shared agriculture projects, farmer's markets, food literacy projects, and community supported agriculture (CSAs); democracy enhancing food initiatives work towards achieving public participation in decision making through the use of cooperatives, food policy councils and food charters. Understanding the various conceptualizations of AFNs/AFIs as well as their varying goals should better assist me in analyzing and discussing the findings of my own research by allowing me to situate Humboldt County alternative food network participants in existing categories based on their understanding of AFNs and their reasons for participation.

Who participates and why

Considering the multiplicity of characterizations and goals which describe AFIs and AFNs, it should be no surprise that the individual actors, along with their reasons for participating in the AFM, are just as varied. Ariel Knoebel (2016) describes how individuals interested in traditional food provisioning practices such as farming, canning and preserving, use their participation in alternative food communities to stand in opposition to the current food system. While some individuals are interested in rejecting the capitalist food system all together, others participate in a sharing economy, situated between radical anti-capitalism and status-quo industrial consumerism. Knoebel (2016:2) states,

Alternative food communities develop the importance of cultural capital for their members. In a series of small daily choices, participants in these communities choose to place cultural capital over economic capital by increasing their time spent on food provisioning and domestic labour, valuing traditionally un-waged

labour more than labour within the capitalist system, and building relationships and networks of cultural importance over economic importance. In doing so, these provisioners are creating an alternative to the capitalist, consumption-oriented food system of their greater society by operating as a revolutionary alternative within the capitalist system. By opting not to reject it completely, they are working to redefine what alternative economy means, beginning with the foodspace.

Other individuals make environmental concerns their priority when choosing to participate in alternative food networks such as farmer's markets or CSAs. Bougherara et al. (2009) sampled 264 French households to determine whether their long-term engagement with local farmers through CSAs was motivated by their desire to reduce environmental impacts of their food consumption. Their findings suggest that environmental considerations—specifically the use of fewer chemicals and a shorter transport from farm to table—play an important role in a household's decision to participate in a CSA. Similarly, Cox et al. (2008) conducted a case study in which subscribers to a CSA project in Scotland were asked about their reasons for participating. The findings suggested that concerns for the environment, as well as the desire to support local farmers and to access healthy, quality food were common reasons for participating.

Although many participants are primarily interested in their own ability to engage in alternative food networks, others are interested in helping marginalized communities have better access to local, healthy food. Situated under the banner of food justice, individuals who are already able to participate in alternative food systems work on projects to bring the same privileges to marginalized communities, often communities of color. They attempt to bring fresh fruits and vegetables into these communities or try to

educate people about the benefits of eating local, organic, seasonal food. Yet, according to Julie Guthman (2008c:431), the desire to bring good food to others is often “hailed by a set of discourses that reflect whitened cultural histories...” and that current activism often “reflects white desires more than those of the communities they serve.”

Furthermore, these projects commonly “lack resonance in the communities in which they are located,” meaning that while individuals are eager to bring alternative food options to communities that would otherwise go without them, these same communities are not eager to receive the alternative food options. When one is unfamiliar with the alternative—cannot afford it or does not know how to cook it—then there is no reason to be excited if it becomes available.

While discourse within the Alternative Food Movement often centers around broader political, social, and environmental goals, some participants are more focused on personal concerns, and fail to make the connection between their own participation and larger societal concerns (Busa and Garder 2015). Upon interviewing five white, middle to upper-class individuals from Holyoke, Massachusetts who participate in their regional food movement, Community Involved in Supporting Agriculture (CISA), Busa and Garder (2015) found that beyond understanding the idea that local food purchases support local economies, the interviewees were unable to recognize political connections to their food choices. These interviewees suggested that environmental sustainability and supporting the local economy were motivating factors for their participation yet placed the individualized factors of quality and freshness of food, physical health, and food

safety as their highest ranking motivating factors. Likewise, the concept of ethical consumption provides individuals a market-based opportunity to address social and ecological problems through the consumption of ethical food products such as organic or fair trade. Yet this approach of ‘eating for change’ is considered by many critics to be an elite social practice that maintains class inequalities (Johnston et al. 2011). These individualized, market-based approaches to participation in the AFM is indicative of neoliberalism’s continuing influence on the movement and is one of the more highly criticized elements of alternative food networks.

Neoliberalism within the alternative food movement

There is general consensus that the AFM’s desire to address environmental and socioeconomic harms within the mainstream industrial food system is beneficial. But there is a growing body of literature that is more closely examining problems and contradictions embodied specifically by the AFM in the United States (Alkon 2014). The first critique, that of food justice, examines how race, class, and gender inequalities still exist within alternative food systems, and calls for a food system that responds to racial and economic disparities. The second critique pertains to neoliberalism, a political economic philosophy that calls for free-markets with minimal intervention from the state. Specifically, this critique acknowledges that while the AFM often explicitly opposes aspects of neoliberalism, the practice of relying on individual market engagement as a way to enact change is in fact supportive of neoliberal policies. (Alkon 2014). These two critiques are interrelated, as neoliberal market-based strategies are generally less

accessible to low-income or marginalized people. The case of the West Oakland Farmer's Market clarifies this connection (Alkon and Mares 2012). The market was designed to expand economic opportunities for black farmers, while also providing its low-income residents with fresh, local food. The farmers and founders of the market utilized a food justice and food sovereignty framework, openly discussing race and class inequalities that affected the community's access to food, as well as the need for a food system created and controlled by their marginalized community. Even so, neighborhood residents were unable to afford the food being sold, even with its discounted prices. Instead, middle to upper class black and white residents from outside of the community were the ones who frequented the market, and even their presence was not enough to keep the market open. While the Oakland Farmer's Market "coheres with a vision of food sovereignty in which a community defines its own food and agricultural system," Alkon and Mares argue that it also reproduces "neoliberal practices and subjectivities" because "positing a farmer's market as a way to address social problems like racism and lack of access to healthy food names the market, rather than the state or civil society, as the site of reform" (2012:354).

In addition to using the market as a solution to social problems, proponents of the AFM, as well as some food justice organizations, "embody neoliberalism by doing the work that was once considered the province of the state. This work includes protecting the environment (through organic production) and feeding the hungry (through provisions of food in food insecure communities)" (Alkon 2014:30). Instead of holding the state accountable for cuts to social programs or policies that are detrimental to the environment, movement leaders take over the work, and ask for support from their

communities, as well as “third sector” actors—NGOs and non-profits. Furthermore, Guthman (2008b:1175) believes that “agro-food scholarship and politics have made a significant contribution to neoliberal governmentalities.” More specifically, she examines how food politics in our everyday lives reflect the neoliberal approach of individualized purchasing decisions, or “politics via markets.” This can be seen in the rise of foodie-ism, “the unprecedented mass interest (some would say obsession) in rarified, specialized and/or health-oriented food preparation and eating” (Guthman 2008b:1175). Making the choice to eat this way is considered political in today’s society, and in order to make the most ethical food choices, you must be knowledgeable about where your food comes from. Indeed, books, celebrity chefs, and organizations that focus on consumer knowledge and responsibility instead of calling for better wages for farm workers, or tighter regulations on industrial production, are merely perpetuating neoliberal mentalities and spaces of governance (Guthman 2008).

The AFM: addressing race, class, and gender inequalities

Neoliberal tensions within the AFM, as well as its appeal to mostly white, middle- to upper-class participants has resulted in several scholarly critiques on whether the movement adequately addresses race, class, and gender inequalities in the current industrial food system (Alkon and McCullen 2010; Allen 2008; Broad 2016; Burdick 2014; Guthman 2008; Lambert-Pennington and Hicks 2016; Myers and Sbicca 2015; Slocum 2006). Power dynamics and inequalities indicative of the industrial food system will continue to be replicated within the AFM if its participants maintain a reformist

scope and fail to focus on creating a more equitable food system (Allen 2008; Broad 2016). Food justice scholar Patricia Allen states,

Without a direct focus on justice issues, alternative agrifood efforts may only create marginal, safe spaces for the privileged that may simply serve as a bleeder valve for the dominant agrifood system. Privileged people may participate and be “protected,” and therefore fail to agitate for a better food system, leaving the vast majority of the world’s population to cope with the problems wrought by the conventional agrifood system. Without an explicit focus on justice, we may be ushering in this type of two-tiered food system, based on a politics of complacency among the privileged who benefit from the alternative agrifood system (2008:159).

Organizers in the AFM must create projects that not only seek to dismantle structural inequalities in the industrial food system but must also acknowledge and work to dismantle power dynamics that exist within their own movement.

According to Broad (2016), alternative food networks disproportionately benefit the already economically advantaged, who are most often also white. He suggests that the movement is “permeated by a normative whiteness and an ethos of ‘color blindness’” (2016:52), while Slocum (2006:331) contends that the “white face of the movement is perceived as a diversity problem rather than as a relational process embedded in society that constitutes community food.” Similarly, Myers and Sbicca (2015:18) suggest that the priorities held by the AFM— environmental sustainability, supporting small farmers, and championing an economic model that supports paying more for food—promotes “a niche market rooted in affluent, often white, consumers voting with their forks.” Accordingly, organizations are created, projects are started, and power positions are held by well-meaning, but uninformed privileged white folks who lack cultural competency. Slocum

(2006:330) acknowledges how individuals most affected by food system injustices are often “objects of the work but not the leaders of it,” or are put “on the table” rather than “at the table.”

Within the AFM, the desire to champion environmental sustainability and support small farmers often takes precedence over challenging race and class inequalities within the current industrial food system. Myers and Sbicca (2015) refer to this approach as the secessionist wing of the movement. This wing avoids direct confrontation with the state, and instead focuses on creating an alternative food system for people to participate in:

The primary concern of this wing is the negative effects that emerge from the alienation of the food producer and consumer from each other and the land; a problem whose solution is said to require the relocalization and repersonalization of food production and consumption (2015:18).

While advocating for environmental sustainability, better food, and the support of small-scale local farmers is not inherently problematic, ignoring structural issues pertaining to race and class inequalities not only ignores the work being done by low-income communities and communities of color to shape their own economic development, but often results in corporate agribusiness co-opting the AFM’s “consumer-centric and health-centric framings to legitimate low-wage big-box retail development in low-income urban communities” (2015:17). Similarly, maintaining a farmer-centric politics ignores the problems of marginalization and exploitation experienced by the predominantly Black and Latinx wagedworkers in food production, processing and retail. Indeed, the authors argue that the secessionist wing of the AFM is committed to a politics that often:

reinforces a neoliberal consumer-based social change model and marginalizes the voices of those in the movement fighting the structural conditions of the conventional agrifood system. In doing so, the AFM has generally ignored the working conditions and livelihoods of food chain workers in the urban centers where the AFM is most prevalent (2015:17-18).

In order to more effectively address race and class inequalities in the industrial food system, the Alternative Food Movement as a whole would likely benefit from tactics employed by the confrontational wing. This wing, in contrast to the secessionist wing, seeks state-based reforms and structural changes, actively pushes to ban pesticides, supports labor rights, aims to remove GMO seeds and/or promotes the labelling of GMO containing products, and works to affect public policy related to food safety.

Considering once again the role that neoliberalism plays in alternative food networks, Lambert-Pennington and Hicks (2016) suggest that, even if organizations start out with a food justice framework, if they are relying upon the neoliberal approach of using market logic as their main strategy to solve social problems then they are unlikely to sustain their food justice goals, as they “need to meet priorities of funders, maintain economic viability, and attract higher income patrons” (2016:58). As suggested by other food justice scholars (Broad 2016; Burdick 2014; Myers and Sbicca 2015; Slocum 2006), alternative food networks such as farmers markets predominantly engage middle- and upper-class whites and contain a “colorblindness,” which gives the appearance that these networks are promoting equality, while in reality they often ignore “both historic and ongoing forms of racial exclusion, allowing these practices to continue unchallenged” (Lambert-Pennington and Hicks 2016:59). This is not a phenomenon unique to more

contemporary movements, as Burdick (2014) points out that food initiatives emerging in the 1960's were primarily white, and acted as:

self-styled, countercultural utopian projects and back to the land movements, formed in part to escape both the strife and privileges of city life. While these numerous alternative food projects emerged under the pretext of moral, ethical, and environmental justifications, many simultaneously exuded a discourse driven by racially exclusionary and color-blind rhetoric that undercut its ability to fully address the ways by which the corporate domination of the food system disproportionately impacts low income communities and communities of color (2014:23).

Indeed, leaving a whitewashed rhetoric within the AFM unchecked, while continuing to thrust the aims of the movement into racialized communities, denies these communities food-based autonomy, and ignores the historical significance of certain food choices or cuisines used to maintain cultural identity. For example, soul food has been used by African Americans to reject racial oppression from the time of slavery through the Civil Rights Movement (Burdick 2014). Additionally, it is not soul food that should be blamed for high rates of heart disease, diabetes, or obesity in the African American community, but instead the industrialization of the food system and the creation of food deserts in low-income communities of color that result in insufficient access to healthy, affordable food.

Further elucidating the performance and perpetuation of whiteness in the AFM, Alkon and McCullen (2010:937) discuss the ways in which Davis and North Berkeley Farmer's Market managers, vendors, and customers maintain notions of what "farmers and community members should be that both reflect and inform an affluent, liberal habitus of whiteness." They go on to further explain the "white farm imaginary" whereby

market participants valorize the predominantly white vendors who “grow their food”, rendering invisible the low-paid, predominantly Latino/a workers who do the bulk of the cultivation. Customers draw upon the complimentary community imaginary to depict themselves, as well as their friends and neighbors, as ethically motivated supporters of struggling family farmers... This imaginary ignores the justification of Native American displacement by white homesteaders, the enslavement of African-Americans, the masses of underpaid Asian immigrants who worked California’s first factory farms, and the mostly Mexican farm laborers who harvest the majority of food grown in the USA today. This romanticizing of agriculture, we argue, is one reason that whites are disproportionately drawn to farmers markets that espouse the alternative agriculture movement’s discourse. (2010:938-939; 945).

As these scholars have illustrated, this imaginary not only de-emphasizes the important role people of color play in the food system, but also creates a discourse that represents only affluent, white individuals, which subsequently discourages low-income and people of color from participating in alternative food networks.

Upon considering these and all other aforementioned critiques of the AFM, I believe that the goals, tactics, and values of the Food Sovereignty Movement—the opposition to trade liberalization, the dismantling of monopolies within the corporate, industrial food system, and the creation of regionally based, democratically controlled food systems (Alkon and Mares 2012)—would greatly improve the AFM’s ability to adequately address race, class, and gender inequalities within the industrial food system, as well as the Alternative Food Movement. With food sovereignty and a total transformation of our food system in mind, I began this research in hopes of better understanding whether fellow participants in Humboldt County alternative food networks were also aware of the inequalities within the industrial food system and the AFM, and

whether they understand their participation as a form of social justice or activism that stands in opposition to these inequalities. The following methods section details how I attempted to find answers to these inquiries.

METHODS

As a participant in alternative food networks, this research not only aims to discover the ways in which other individuals understand and address social and environmental injustice through their participation, but is also meant to help me better understand my own positionality within this movement and how I might help to make it better. I therefore acknowledge that reflexivity and honoring the location of my-self (Berg and Lune 2012; Richardson 2008) plays a fundamental role in this research, including my methodological decisions.

I used a mix methods approach that utilized a survey, semi-structured, in-depth interviews (Berg and Lune 2012; Johnson 2002; Saylor 2016), participant observation (Saylor 2016), and autoethnography (Berg and Lune 2012; Ellis and Berger 2002; Richardson and St. Pierre 2008). Data collection took place from May, 2017 until September, 2017, with a final interview occurring in January, 2018. The sun begins to shine more from May to September in Arcata, and food begins to grow in abundance, meaning more people head outside to the farmer's market, community gardens, and sign up for CSA shares.

Setting

This research took place in the coastal region of Humboldt County in Northern California. Humboldt is a beautiful, rural county marked by a rugged coast line and giant redwood trees. It has a population of 136,646 people, with 83.5% being white (United States Census Bureau 2016). While Humboldt County was and still is home to multiple

Indigenous nations, some of which include the Wiyot, Tolowa, Hupa, Yurok, Karuk, and Sinkyone, only 6.4% of the Humboldt County population is American Indian or Alaska Native (United States Census Bureau 2016). Furthermore, only 2.9% of the population is Asian, 1.4% is Black or African American, 0.3% is Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, 11.3% is Hispanic or Latino, and 5.5% of the population is two or more races (United States Census Bureau 2016). Although I was not previously aware of exact demographic numbers, I was aware of the overall “whiteness” of Humboldt County, the knowledge of which has played an important role in my decision to do this research.

The sites and organizations involved in this research are located in the Humboldt Bay region, specifically Arcata and Bayside, and included Open Door Community Health and Wellness Garden in Arcata, the Saturday Arcata Farmer’s Market, Bayside Park Farm, and Redwood Roots Farm in Bayside. While there are many community gardens, farmer’s markets, and CSA farms in the county, these sites were conveniently selected based on my existing knowledge about them and their accessibility.

Sampling

The locations and participants in this research were selected using purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling (Berge and Lune 2012; Rubin and Babbie 2008; Saylor 2016). In using purposive sampling, my selection of research sites was based on the special knowledge I have about the kinds of people who frequent these sites (Berg and Lune 2012), specifically those who identify themselves as participants in alternative food networks. Purposive sampling is useful when a researcher has specific perspectives

in mind that she wishes to examine. She will then find participants who represent the full range of those perspectives (Saylor 2016). In my case, I wanted to understand the ways in which participants in alternative food networks understand and address social and environmental injustices that result from the current industrial food system. By selecting these research sites, I hoped to get a full range of responses from people of different genders, socioeconomic classes, race and ethnicities, different upbringings, and different geographic locations.

While all locations were chosen using purposive sampling, participants at these locations were chosen using convenience sampling (Rubin and Babbie 2008). Convenience sampling, also referred to as availability sampling, relies on participants available at the time of research. While spending time at the farmer's market, community garden, and CSA farms, I would ask attendees if they were interested in taking my survey. Although availability sampling will produce findings that only represent the opinions of the specific kinds of people around during the time of your research (Rubin and Babbie 2008), the fact that I am only interested in a very specific sample of the population (individuals who participate in alternative food networks) and do not intend to make my findings generalizable, makes this sampling technique appropriate. The remaining participants were chosen using snowball sampling from a contact I made through the Humboldt Food Policy Council. Snowball sampling identifies individuals who represent the sample of people being researched—in my case participants in alternative food networks—then asks those individuals to supply names of other people who also represent the sample being studied (Berg and Lune 2012). Being a member of

the Humboldt Food Policy Council positioned me as an insider, and the director agreed to send out an email I created to the council listserv to help me recruit participants.

The Arcata Farmer's Market was chosen based on convenience, my experience as a patron, and geographic location; as a regular attendee, my knowledge of the size of the market and its ability to accept WIC and CalFresh influenced my assumption that participants would somewhat vary in age, gender, education level and socioeconomic level, and would therefore have unique understandings of social and environmental injustice, along with unique approaches to addressing these issues. In choosing the Open Door Community Health and Wellness garden, it was again my hope to understand varying perspectives from the organization, based on the main population it serves. Upon volunteering with Open Door garden, I wasn't aware that the food was being grown specifically for Open Door clients at Humboldt Open Door Clinic and North Country Clinic. Volunteers are also allowed to take food, but the garden is not specifically intended for the neighboring community at large. Finally, the CSAs were chosen based on their varying prices, \$450 for a 21 week (June to November) full farm share from Bayside Park Farm and \$500 for a 22 week (June to October) full farm share from Redwood Roots.

Data Collection

In total, 57 surveys were completed, and 10 interviews were conducted. Survey data was analyzed using SPSS Statistical Software and interviews were transcribed using Express Scribe Transcription Software. Once interviews were transcribed, the process of

searching for and highlighting reoccurring themes, known as coding, was done by hand and included searching for pre-determined themes based on my research question.

Survey instrument

My survey was created using SNAP Survey software but distributed in paper form at all research sites. Included on the front page of the survey was a consent form (Appendix A). Upon IRB approval, I sent out an email to Open Door Community Garden, Bayside Park Farm, and Redwood Roots explaining my research and asking permission to distribute surveys on-site during CSA pick-up times and community garden volunteer hours. I also attended the Saturday Arcata Farmer's Market and recruited participants on site.

Key to creating an effective survey was understanding the kind of information I was hoping to collect (Salant and Dillman 1994). The goal of my research was to better understand individual attitudes and beliefs about participation in AFNs, including the reasons individuals choose to participate, as well as the ways in which they may address social and environmental injustice through their participation. While many of these questions would be answered in more detail via in-depth interviews, the survey questions were able to gather broader demographics as well as individual's reasons for participating in AFNs. Although I asked survey respondents to choose only one answer that best describes their reason for participating, almost all respondents selected multiple reasons. These reasons included environmental, personal health, political, economic, social justice, to support local farmers, to be part of a community, or an "other" option which

allowed respondents to write in alternative reasons. I also wanted to understand whether lower-income individuals were able to participate in AFNs, so I included questions about whether participants ever struggled to access food, if they use any nutrition assistance programs such as CalFresh or WIC, or if they utilize other food services such as pantries, dumpster diving, gleaning, or community food shares. Regarding survey structure, I used a combination of open-ended questions, close-ended questions with unordered response choices, and partially close-ended questions in which an “other,” write-in space is provided (Salant and Dillman 1994). In using multiple question structures, I hoped to retrieve the most clear and detailed answers from respondents.

In-depth interviews

In order to gain the deepest possible understanding of my participant’s lived experiences, values, decisions, and perceptions, I utilized in-depth interviews (Johnson 2002). In doing so, I would come to better understand participant’s attitudes and beliefs—initially, but vaguely captured by the survey—as well as participant’s behaviors or attributes in relation to their participation; how (if at all) individuals use their participation in alternative food networks as a tool for social and environmental justice. Surveys can be limited in that they often collect quantitative data that may lack greater depth and detail. This kind of depth and detail can be acquired using in-depth interviewing. According to Johnson (2002:105),

If one is interested in questions of greater depth, where the knowledge sought is often taken for granted and not readily articulated by most members, where the research question involves highly conflicted emotions, where different individuals or groups involved in the same line of activity have complicated, multiple

perspectives on some phenomenon, then in-depth interviewing is likely the best approach.

In considering my own participation in alternative food networks—how, why and when I became interested, what my participation looks like now, and my beliefs about how my participation should serve social and environmental justice goals—I decided that my research participants would likely have unique and varying understandings of alternative food networks, the issues that they as individuals may or may not address through their participation, and even their initial introduction to AFNs. It was this reflexive consideration and acknowledgment of my own position and participation within this group (Berg and Lune 2012; Johnson 2002; Richardson and St. Pierre 2008) that guided my decision to utilize in-depth interviewing.

I began each interview by reviewing the consent form (Appendix B) with my participant, making sure they understood that they could refrain from answering any question, could stop at any time, and would likely experience little discomfort based on the questions being asked. The interview guide that I created (Appendix C) utilized a semi-standardized structure in which predetermined questions were used and were asked in a systematic and mostly consistent order each time, but also allowed participants the freedom to take the conversation in different directions (Berg and Lune 2012). Even though predetermined questions and scheduled probes were included in the interview guide, there were times that the conversation would turn in a different direction. Following these directions and helping them to unfold through the use of unscheduled probes (Berge and Lune 2012) allowed me to better understand the perspectives of my

participants, and the ways in which they use these perspectives to understand the world around them.

Participant demographics

In total, 57 people participated in the survey and nine in in-depth interviews. While 57 people participated, not all participants answered every question. Percentages are based on the number of participants who answered each question, not on the total number of participants. As can be seen in Table 1, the number of total female survey respondents is almost twice the number of male respondents. While this may be due to my own sampling bias, i.e. feeling more comfortable approaching women, I did notice many more women than men attending CSA pick-ups. At Redwood Roots CSA only six men completed the survey, compared to 16 women. Five women at Bayside Park Farm completed the survey compared to two men. Only one of the four respondents recruited via snowball sampling identified as male, and the only respondent from Open Door Community Health and Wellness Garden identified as female. Gender was more equally represented at the Arcata Farmer's Market, with 12 respondents identifying as female and 11 identifying as male. The majority of respondents were white, and while the "whiteness" of alternative food networks is a common critique amongst food scholars (Alkon and McCullen Broad 2016; Burdick 2014; Myers and Sbicca 2015; Slocum 2006), these findings are comparable to the overall racial/ethnic demographics of Humboldt County as a whole. Even so, I have wondered whether people of color in the area feel like the market is also meant for them, whether they find it accessible, affordable, or if it provides culturally appropriate foods. City of residence was distributed

across several northern Humboldt County cities, with participants living as far north as Trinidad, as far east as Kneeland, and as far south as Bridgeville. Respondents varied in age from 20 to 79, with over half being between 20 and 39.

Table 1. Survey Respondent Demographics (All Locations)

	Total (N)	Percentage (%)
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	20	35%
Female	36	63
Other	1	2
<u>Total</u>	<u>57</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>		
Latino/Hispanic	1	2%
Multi-racial (more than one selected)	10	18
White	43	80
<u>Total</u>	<u>54</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>Age</u>		
20-29	12	22%
30-39	16	29
40-49	10	18
50-59	5	9
60-69	9	16
70-79	3	6
<u>Total</u>	<u>55</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>City of Residence</u>		
Arcata	23	41%
Bayside	4	7
Blue Lake	2	4
Bridgeville	2	4
Earth	1	2
Eureka	9	16
Fieldbrook	1	2
Fortuna	1	2
Kneeland	1	2
Mckinleyville	9	16
Trinidad	2	4
<u>Total</u>	<u>55</u>	<u>100</u>

The 10 interview participants were recruited from all research sites, including two from Redwood Roots Farm, one from Open Door Community Garden, three from the

Arcata Farmer's Market, two from Bayside Park Farm, and two participants came from snowball sampling.

Table 2. Interview Participant demographics

	Total (N)	Percentage (%)
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	3	33.3%
Female	6	66.7
<u>Total</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>		
White	7	77.8%
White and Italian American	1	11.1
Colombiano	1	11.1
<u>Total</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>Age</u>		
20-29	2	22.2%
30-39	4	44.5
40-49	1	11.1
60-69	1	11.1
70-79	1	11.1
<u>Total</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>City of Residence</u>		
Arcata	5	55.6%
Arcata/Blue Lake	1	11.1
Bayside	1	11.1
Eureka	1	11.1
Trinidad	1	11.1
<u>Total</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>Childhood City of Residence</u>		
Humboldt County native	1	11%
California native	4	44.5
Out of state	4	44.5
<u>Total</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>100</u>

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a methodology used to describe and analyze personal experiences in order to better understand cultural experience (Ellis et al. 2011). It is my position as a participant in alternative food networks that has sparked my interest in better understanding other people's reasons for participating, as well as the goals and influence of AFNs. The more I began to question my own reasons for participation, and the more curious I became about whether my participation was benefitting not just the environment or my personal health, but also actors at all levels of the food system, the more I wondered if other participants were asking similar questions. Was this idea of food justice that I was slowly becoming more aware of something specific to academia, or were other AFN participants concerned with issues of inequality and injustice in the food system? Describing and analyzing my own experiences within AFNs has allowed to me create survey and interview questions that will hopefully help me better understand and articulate other individual's experiences.

Autoethnography is both a process and product and utilizes tenets of autobiography and ethnography. As a researcher, I participate in the process of autoethnography by selectively writing about retrospective epiphanies that were made possible by possessing a particular cultural identity—in my case, the identity of a participant in an alternative food network. Not only does autoethnography allow me to engage in and talk about these experiences, but it also provides a space for me to analyze them (Ellis et al. 2011). Regarding the production aspect of autoethnography, detailed descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience will be included in the discussion of

my findings, limitations, and recommendations, and will be written in a manner that will be accessible to a larger audience.

Using autoethnography as a method has helped me to describe my own position and experience within alternative food networks, and momentarily made my personal experience the focus of this research (Ellis and Berger 2002). I was also able to use my own voice and take a self-reflective approach (Berge and Lune 2012; Richardson and St. Pierre 2008), all in hopes of creating a deeper and richer understanding for participants, readers, and for myself.

Participant observation

From 2010 to 2016 I lived in Santa Cruz, California and spent many Wednesdays at the Downtown Farmer's Market. I would visit friends working the flower booth, I would consistently pay a dollar more to buy summer strawberries from the only vendor who was fair labor certified, and I couldn't leave without a visit to the oyster booth for three raw oysters shucked on site. Before starting this research and shortly after I moved back to Humboldt County in the summer of 2016, I had spent many Saturdays at the Arcata Farmer's Market purchasing local produce and lounging on the plush, green grass with friends. In considering potential sites for my research, I decided that I would continue to go to the Arcata market, and would also include Open Door Community Health and Wellness Garden, Bayside Community Farm, and Redwood Roots farm as research sites. Not only would I observe people at the market, community garden, and CSA pick-ups, but I would also participate in each location, either volunteering at the

garden, purchasing food from vendors at the Arcata Farmer's Market, or picking flowers from Redwood Roots CSA. This act of both participating and observing during research is a methodology known as participant observation (Saylor 2016). There exists a kind of continuum of participant observation, where on one end a researcher may only be engaged in observation, and on the other she is a full participant (Saylor 2016). There are pros and cons to being a complete observer or a complete participant. As a complete observer, researchers may miss certain aspects of group interaction and may not be able to fully experience what life is like for the participants they observe. Yet, they may also be able to catch interactions they would have otherwise missed if they had been more involved (Saylor 2016). As a complete participant, researchers get a real feel for what life is like for the group they are studying. Yet, because of their commitment to being a full participant, they may find themselves in a situation they cannot excuse themselves from, especially if they make the ethically questionable decision of participating without revealing themselves as a researcher (Saylor 2016). All of my sites and research participants were aware of my position as a researcher, and I usually found myself somewhere in the middle of the participant observation continuum, sometimes fully engaged in volunteering, chatting with farmers and other shoppers, while other times I would simply sit and observe the naturally unfolding conversations, activities, and spontaneous moments experienced by other participants (Berg and Lune 2012).

Leisurely Saturdays at the Arcata Farmer's Market

The Arcata Farmer's Market is set up on the Plaza, with produce vendors, as well as a few vendors that sell prepared items such as hot sauce, soap, and balls of yarn made

from rabbit fur, situated around the perimeter of the Plaza. Prepared food vendors are situated in the middle area, surrounded by soft, green grass. The prepared food vendors provide breakfast and lunch items, coffee and chai, and sweet treats like cookies and muffins. Local Bakeries that set up booths include Arise (a gluten free bakery), Brio, and Beck's. You can find Humboldt Hotdogs, Lighthouse Grill, Henry's Olives, and Los Bagels for more savory bites. If you're interested in ethnic food, Ethiopian International Café, Celebrations Tamales, and Humboldt Kimchi has you covered. Vegan food is available from Sistah's Vegan booth, and Planet Teas is your stop for the well-known Planet Chai Tea. Most weekends there was live music, including reggae, funk, blue grass, and HSU's Calypso band. The grassy area in the middle of the Plaza was always filled with people, especially families and kids. There was always a section of hula-hoopers and people doing partner-acro yoga. There was also a group of slack-liners, carefully balancing on a slack-line tied between two trees. Participants seemed to vary in age, with plenty of college students, families with babies and toddlers, and individuals well into their senior years. During the summer, especially if the sun was out and the wind was low, people not only shopped at the market, but they sat for hours enjoying the weather and market ambiance.

While attending the Arcata Farmer's Market each Saturday, I watched people engage with farmers, carefully pick the perfect piece of fruit, laugh and chat with one another, and enjoy local, artisan pastries. I would usually make a few laps around the market and pick up anything I might need before settling into observe the market

happenings. It also gave me time to work up courage to engage people and recruit them for my research; this fear of bothering people while they enjoyed their Saturday market experience prevented me from talking to people on multiple occasions, until I finally broke the ice with a group of old-school hippies in their 40's who were more than happy to talk to me. After this first experience, I found that all the other participants I talked to were willing to take my survey and were interested in hearing more about my research. I found it easiest to approach people as they were sitting on the grass, and if they were together in larger groups, this made distributing surveys even easier.

Amidst flowers and families at Redwood Roots CSA

While at Redwood Roots, I did much more observing than participating. I would show up weekly on Wednesdays or Thursdays, usually between 3 and 5pm, and sit on a wooden bench between the farm stand, which was accessible to non-shareholders, and the covered area where the CSA produce was kept. There was a list in this area that told participants what was available and how much they could take.



Figure 1. Redwood Roots CSA

Besides having access to the already harvested produce, shareholders were usually allowed to pick sweet pea flowers and beautiful dahlias straight from the garden. The dahlias varied in color from bright red, to orange, fuchsia, pink, yellow, white with pink trim, and pure white. Janet, the head farmer, invited me to pick a bouquet one day. I chose a pink, blue, and purple color palette, and collected both sweet pea flowers and dahlias. Sweet peas have an amazing scent, and their fragrance travels throughout the farm. Janet knew many of her shareholders by name and greeted them as they arrived. Some of the older participants, as well as mothers who had their hands full with babies and children, would ask Janet and her farm assistants to help them pick bouquets. I noticed that many of the participants were mothers who brought their children, and to my surprise, most of the kids were thrilled to be at the farm. They weren't afraid to eat raw carrots or tomatoes fresh from the ground. They also had toy trucks and wagons to play with, but many were happy to accompany mom or grandma into the garden to pick flowers. As shareholders finished gathering their produce and flowers, I would ask them if they were interested in taking my survey. Many of them had to get back home to start dinner or get their kids to dance or soccer practice. People were much less likely to linger at the farm the way they did at the Arcata Farmer's Market, but there were still some participants who took their time at the farm and were able to enjoy its serene ambiance.

Quiet afternoons at Bayside park farm CSA

Bayside Park Farm was located relatively close to Redwood Roots but was smaller and had fewer shareholders. The head farmer told me that she usually had a rush of people after 5pm, but I was only ever able to visit before that time. Again, I noticed

participants coming with their children, and the children being eager to participate. I sat at a wood table next to the covered area where the CSA produce was kept and asked participants if they were interested in taking my survey once they were done picking up their farm share. Like Redwood Roots, shareholders at Bayside Park Farm were able to pick flowers, kale and chard themselves. This farm also had a pen of goats, yet I seemed to be the only one ever interested in visiting with them. Even the goats themselves didn't seem that interested in visiting with me, and instead leisurely grazed and laid around their pen.

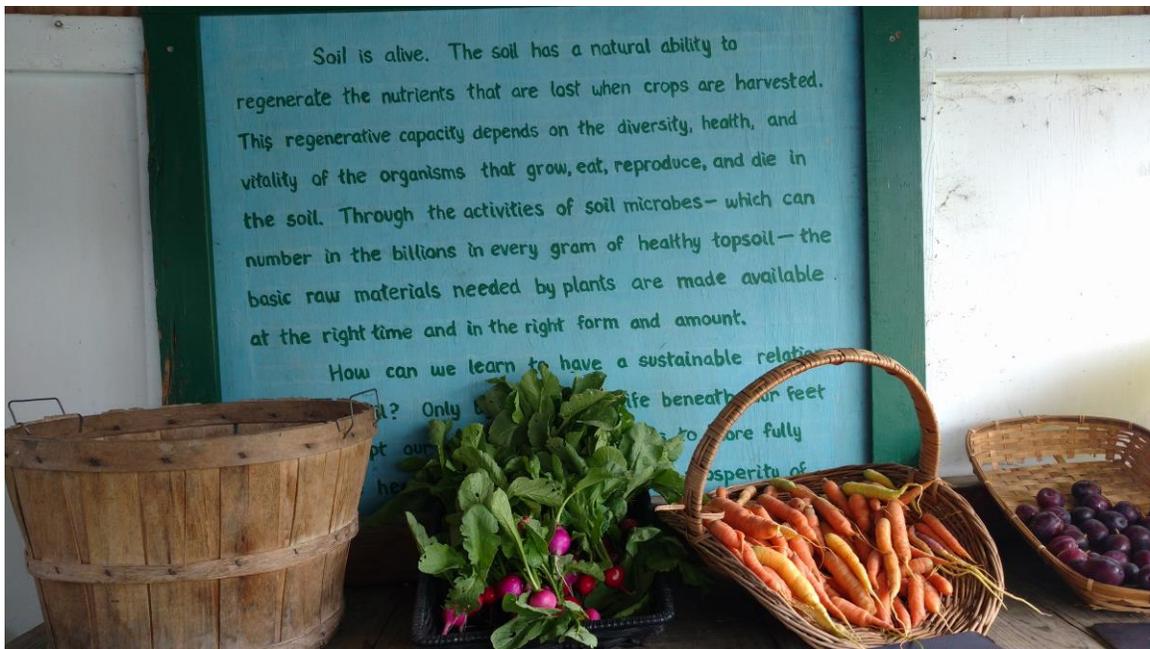


Figure 2. Bayside Park Farm CSA

FINDINGS

The following section describes survey results and highlights the emergent themes gathered from the in-depth interviews. Survey results are divided and discussed based on each research site and sample of participants: the Arcata Farmer's Market, Redwood Roots CSA, Bayside Park Farm CSA, participants gathered via snowball sampling, and Open Door Community Health and Wellness Garden. The purpose of examining results based on location/sample population is to help determine whether reasons for participation or demographics of people who participate vary across different alternative food networks, and to highlight the potential uniqueness of each network/population. Data gathered via snowball sampling and from Bayside Park Farm CSA has been combined and examined together because of the small sample sizes. Some tables display totals (N) that are greater than the number of respondents who answered that specific question. This is because some questions allowed for multiple responses to be selected. When this is the case, the total number of respondents who answered (N) will be placed in the first column next to the appropriate descriptor.

Survey Results

My survey was designed to understand which Humboldt County residents are participating in local alternative food networks, why people choose to participate, if they understand their participation as a form of social and/or environmental justice, which networks they participate in, if participants have trouble accessing food, and if so, which services or nutrition assistance programs they use to help them access food. According to

the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), when individuals have “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable way[s]” they are experiencing food insecurity (United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service 2017). The USDA describes household food security as existing along a continuum which is divided into four ranges: high food security, marginal food security, low food security, and very low food security. Where households fall on this continuum is determined by their responses to a series of questions “about behaviors and experiences associated with difficulty in meeting food needs” (United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service 2017). While my survey does not include official USDA questions meant to measure food security, it includes similar questions meant to understand whether participants have ever struggled to access enough food, if they’ve utilized services or methods such as food pantries, gleaning, or dumpster diving to access food, and if participants have ever utilized government funded nutrition assistance programs such as CalFresh or WIC.

While I am concerned with understanding whether low-income families and people of color in Humboldt County are able or willing to participate in alternative food networks, and have considered the relatively high poverty rate in our county (20%) and in Arcata more specifically (40.1%) (United States Census Bureau 2016), given the assumption that the majority of people utilizing AFNs are less likely to be living in poverty, the dominant focus of my research is on the reasons why these people choose to

participate, and whether they understand or use their participation as a form of social and/or environmental justice.

Arcata Farmer's Market

Twenty-three of the 57 surveys (40%) were collected from the Arcata Farmer's Market. Respondents varied in age from 20-67, with the average age being 37. More than half of the respondents were female (52%), mostly white (64%), and employed full or part time (69.6%). Over half of respondents had a college degree (56.6%), and most were not currently students (62%).

Table 3. Demographics (Arcata Farmer's Market)

	Total (N)	Percentage (%)
<u>Employment Status</u>		
Full time	11	47.9%
Part time	5	21.7
Unemployed	1	4.3
Retired	2	8.7
Other	4	17.4
<u>Total</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>Education Level</u>		
High school diploma	3	13.1%
Some college	7	30.4
AA degree	3	13.1
Bachelor's degree	9	39.1
Master's degree	1	4.3
<u>Total</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>		
White	14	64%
Multi-racial (more than one selected)	7	32
Other- (Jewish)	1	4
<u>Total</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	11	48
Female	12	52
<u>Total</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>100</u>

Included in my survey was a question that asked which option best describes the reason people participate in AFNs. Options included personal health, environmental reasons, political reasons, economic reasons, social justice reasons, to support local farmers, to be part of a community, and an "other" option whereby survey respondents could write in other reasons for participating. I originally intended for survey respondents to choose all reasons that applied, but I ended up phrasing the question so that only one

option could be selected, as I was concerned that people would uncritically go down the list and select all answers. Even though the question directed survey respondents to select only one option (see Appendix A), almost all respondents selected multiple reasons for participation. Whereas my initial concern was partially legitimated, I believe that even if respondents selected the majority of given options, the options left unmarked may still reveal a story about what participants do not consider when they engage in AFNs. While this question is not able to uncover the depth of respondent's understanding of their participation, it does provide a snapshot into motivations for participation. Questions from the in-depth interviews are meant to address this question more deeply.

Table 4. Which of the following best describes your reason for participating in alternative food networks? (Arcata Farmer's Market)

Reasons for Participation (N=23)	Total (N)	Percentage (%)¹
Personal health	20	87%
Environmental	18	78
Political	11	48
Economic	11	48
Social justice	5	22
Support local farmers	20	87
To belong to a community	17	74
Other	3	13

¹Total percentage does not equal 100% because multiple options were selected

Scholars and activists who are critical of alternative food networks such as farmer's markets and CSAs suggest that high prices for locally grown food paired with CSA and market locations existing in mostly white, affluent neighborhoods perpetuates unequal access to fresh, nutritious foods (Lambert-Pennington and Hicks 2016; Macias 2008). Even when farmer's markets accept food stamps or WIC, low-income individuals, many of whom may be working multiple jobs to support their families, lack the time

investment required to turn unprocessed foods into a meal, making clear the way in which “unpaid labor involved in preparing unprocessed food is itself a major impediment to the equitable distribution of healthy food...” (Macias 2008:1088). While Humboldt County is a haven for alternative food networks, including farmer’s markets that accept nutrition assistance benefits, and CSAs that have payment plan options, a 2015 report on Humboldt County food access and pantry services found that 56% of respondents were experiencing very low food security and 21% of respondents were experiencing low food security (Wilcox 2015). By including survey questions about food access and nutrition assistance services I hoped to better understand whether local participants who may be experiencing varying levels of food insecurity are able or willing to participate in alternative food networks alongside their more affluent counterparts.

Table 5. Do you or anyone else in your household currently struggle to get enough to eat? If yes, how often? (Arcata Farmer’s Market)

	Total (N)	Percentage (%)
<u>Struggle to Access Food</u>		
Yes	2	8.7%
No	18	78.2
Not sure	3	13.1
<u>Total</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>How Often</u>		
Never	12	52.3%
Rarely	5	21.7
Sometimes	5	21.7
Often	1	4.3
<u>Total</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>100</u>

Table 6. Have you used any of the following services to access food? How often? (Arcata Farmer's Market)

	Total (N)	Percentage (%)
<u>Food Services Used</u>		
Food pantry	4	20%
Free meal at church	2	10
Community food share	3	15
Gleaning	5	25
Free meal at a shelter	2	10
Dumpster diving	4	20
<u>Total</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>How Often</u>		
Never	14	61%
Rarely	7	30
Sometimes	2	9
<u>Total</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>100</u>

Table 7. Do you or anyone else in your household use any of the following nutrition assistance programs? (Arcata Farmer's Market)

Nutrition Assistance Programs	Total (N)	Percentage (%)
CalFresh	6	60%
National School Lunch Program	2	20
School Breakfast Program	1	10
Other- (Food Not Bombs)	1	10
<u>Total</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>100</u>

Redwood Roots CSA

Twenty-two of the 57 surveys (39%) were collected from Redwood Roots CSA.

While many of the respondents at the Arcata Farmers Market were between the ages of 20 and 49, individuals at Redwood Roots were more likely to fall between the ages of 30 and 69. The average age at Redwood Roots was 51, with the youngest respondent being 27 and the oldest 74. Sixteen respondents identified as female (73%) and six identified as

male (27%). This was a common theme I noticed while conducting participant observation at the CSA; most shareholders who came to pick up their produce were women with children, older women, and even multiple generations of mothers, grandmothers, and children coming together to enjoy the farm. Eighteen respondents identified as white (86%), three identified with more than one race (14%), and one respondent did not answer; these findings indicate a higher percentage of white attendees than that of the Arcata Farmer's Market. Finally, likely because of the higher age average, six respondents indicated being retired (27%), while eleven worked either full or part time (50%).

Table 8. Employment Status (Redwood Roots CSA)

Employment Status	Total (N)	Percentage (%)
Full time	6	27
Part time	5	23
Seasonal	2	9
Retired	6	27
Other	3	14
<u>Total</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>100</u>

Two of the three respondents who indicated "other" as their employment status indicated they were full time moms. Seventeen respondents indicated their student status; fifteen indicated they were not currently enrolled in school (88%), one respondent indicated taking classes for fun or personal enrichment (6%), and one respondent indicated they were pursuing their bachelor's degree (6%). Similar to the Arcata Farmer's Market, education level varied across participants at Redwood Roots CSA. Yet, at the CSA I

discovered more respondents with master's degrees and one individual with a PhD/Post-Doctoral degree.

Table 9. Education Level (Redwood Roots CSA)

Education Level	Total (N)	Percentage (%)
High school diploma	1	4.5%
Some college	6	27.3
AA degree	2	9.1
Bachelor's degree	8	36.4
Master's degree	4	18.2
PhD/Post Doctorate	1	4.5
<u>Total</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>100</u>

Twenty-one respondents indicated that they did not struggle to access food.

Although they responded this way, two individuals indicated in the subsequent question that they rarely struggled to access food, perhaps alluding to a previous experience of struggle. These findings differ from the Arcata Farmer's Market where I found two individuals who did struggle to access food, and six respondents who indicated they had struggled to access food sometimes or often (27%). Similarly, Redwood Roots participants indicated using fewer food services, and only two respondents indicated using nutrition assistance programs.

Table 10. Have you used any of the following services to access food? How often? Do you or anyone else in your household use any of the following nutrition assistance programs? (Redwood Roots CSA)

	Total (N)	Percentage (%) ²
<u>Food Services Used¹</u>		
Food pantry (N=9)	4	44%
Community food share (N=9)	1	11
Gleaning (N=10)	7	70
Dumpster diving (N=8)	2	25
<u>How Often</u>		
Never	12	60%
Rarely	4	20
Sometimes	1	5
Often	3	15
<u>Total</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>Nutrition Assistance Programs (N=2)</u>		
CalFresh	2	100%
WIC	1	50

¹Number of respondents (N) who answered this question varied.

²Total percentage does not equal 100% because multiple options were selected.

Reasons for participation were very similar between Redwood Roots patrons and Arcata Farmer's Market patrons. The most notable difference was that twice the number of Redwood Roots participants indicated social justice as a reason for participating (45%). Even so, social justice was the least commonly selected reason by respondents across all research sites. Fourteen Redwood Roots participants indicated political and economic reasons for participating, compared to the eleven farmer's market participants. Three Redwood Roots respondents indicated they participated in alternative food networks for other reasons, including exposing children to their food source, accessing fresh food, and to have a healthier diet.

Table 11. Which of the following best describes your reason for participating in alternative food networks? (Redwood Roots CSA)

Reasons for Participation (N=22)	Total (N)	Percentage (%)¹
Personal health	21	95%
Environmental	17	77
Political	14	64
Economic	14	64
Social justice	10	45
Support local farmers	22	100
To belong to a community	17	77
Other	3	13

¹Total percentage does not equal 100% because multiple options were selected.

Bayside Park Farm CSA and additional respondents

Seven of the 57 surveys (12%) were collected from Bayside Park Farm CSA, while four surveys (9%) came from individuals recruited via snowball sampling; an email was sent out by the director of the Humboldt Food Policy Council, and four respondents indicated their interest in participating. Similar to Redwood Roots, many of the participants I saw coming to Bayside Park Farm were women with their children, although I did see a father there twice with his two daughters during my participant observation. Between Bayside and respondents recruited via snowball sampling, seven identified as female (64%), three as male (27%), and one indicated Other as their gender identity (9%). Two respondents were in their 20's, four in their 30's, one in their 50's, and two in their 70's. Ten respondents identified as white and one respondent recruited via snowball sampling identified as Latino/Hispanic. Only one respondent indicated they were pursuing a bachelor's degree, while one indicated taking classes for fun/personal enrichment. Nine respondents indicated their highest education level, and all but one had

a college degree. Of the nine respondents who indicated their employment status, six were employed (66.7%).

Table 12. Education Level (Bayside Park Farm CSA and additional respondents)

Education Level	Total (N)	Percentage (%)
Some college	1	11.1%
AA degree	1	11.1
Bachelor's degree	3	33.3
Master's degree	4	44.5
<u>Total</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>100</u>

Table 13. Employment Status (Bayside Park Farm CSA and additional respondents)

Employment Status	Total (N)	Percentage (%)
Full time	4	44.5%
Seasonal	2	22.2
Retired	2	22.2
Other	1	11.1
<u>Total</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>100</u>

Five respondents from Bayside Park Farm CSA indicated they struggled to access food. While none of the respondents recruited via snowball sampling indicated struggling to access food, one respondent did note that they rarely struggled to access food, perhaps alluding to previous experiences of struggle. From Bayside Park Farm CSA, one respondent indicated they struggled sometimes and one indicated they struggled to access food often. Almost all respondents indicated using multiple food services and nutrition assistance programs. Compared to other options, gleaning and community food shares seem to be resources more aligned with building community within alternative food networks as well as sharing surplus from home gardens and small-scale farms, whereas

free church meals, dumpster diving, and food pantries are ways to access food for those who may not always be able to afford it.

Table 14. Have you used any of the following services to access food? How often? (Bayside Park Farm CSA and additional respondents)

	Total (N)	Percentage (%)¹
<u>Food Services Used (N=10)</u>		
Food pantry	2	20%
Free church meal	1	10%
Gleaning	5	50%
Community food share	4	40%
Dumpster diving	1	10%
<u>How Often</u>		
Never	6	71.4%
Sometimes	4	14.3
Often	1	14.3
<u>Total</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>100</u>

Table 15. Do you or anyone else in your household use any of the following nutrition assistance programs? (Bayside Park Farm CSA only)

Nutrition Assistance Programs (N=3)	Total (N)	Percentage (%)
CalFresh	1	33%
WIC	1	33
National School Lunch Program	1	33
School Breakfast Program	1	33

Finally, compared to the Arcata Farmer's Market and Redwood Roots, participants at Bayside Park Farm CSA were less likely to indicate political, economic, or social justice reasons for their participation.

Table 16. Which of the following best describes your reason for participating in alternative food networks? (Bayside Park Farm CSA)

Reasons for Participation (N=7)	Total (N)	Percentage (%)¹
Personal health	6	85.7%
Environmental	6	85.7
Political	1	14.3
Economic	2	28.6
Social justice	1	14/3
Support local farmers	6	85.7
To belong to a community	4	57.1

¹Total percentage does not equal 100% because multiple options were selected

Additional respondents' reasons for participating in alternative food networks were more evenly distributed across potential responses, with health reasons and environmental reasons being the only two selected by all participants.

Table 17. Which of the following best describes your reason for participating in alternative food networks? (additional respondents)

Reasons for Participation (N=4)	Total (N)	Percentage (%)¹
Personal health	4	100%
Environmental	4	100
Political	3	75
Economic	3	75
Social justice	3	75
Support local farmers	3	75
To belong to a community	3	75

¹Total percentage does not equal 100% because multiple options were selected

Open Door Community Health and Wellness Garden

Only one respondent from Open Door Community Garden completed the survey. She has a long history of studying and working in the field of food and environmental justice and was helping at the garden as an employee of Open Door Health Clinic while

the usual garden manager was out of town. She is white, 35 years old, and indicated being employed full time. She is not currently a student but does have her master's degree. She indicated that she sometimes struggles to access food and that she sometimes uses the food pantry and gleaning as food services to help her access food. She also indicated previously using CalFresh as a nutrition assistance program that helped her access food. Finally, she selected all possible reasons for why she participates in alternative food networks.

This site was particularly interesting in that it is a community garden that provides food specifically for Open Door Health Clinic patients. Volunteers can take food home as well, and residents experiencing homelessness often pick fruit or sleep in the garden. While this issue may seem troublesome to an organization trying to grow food for a specific population, Open Door must also consider the overall goal of a community garden—to feed the local community—in which case it might be determined that the garden is still serving its purpose, even when a different population ends up eating the food.

During my participant observation I found that there was only one consistent volunteer, an older gentleman who preferred to water the garden. The temporary garden manager informed me that this garden has a difficult time keeping regular volunteers, even though they have several connections with the local community, including a service learning agreement with HSU that allows students to volunteer for class credit. She informed me that the Open Door Garden in Eureka has a more consistent group of senior volunteers, as it is located next to a senior living center.

Interview Results

Eight interviews were conducted face to face and one was conducted over the phone. Two interviewees were recruited from Bayside Park Farm, two were recruited from the Arcata Farmer's Market, two from Redwood Roots, and three interviewees were recruited via snowball sampling. One interviewee was retired and a volunteer, another was a stay at home mom, and the other seven interviewees were employed across a range of professions, including education, healthcare, food service, and the Coast Guard. Four interviewees indicated either currently or previously being enrolled in CalFresh, and only two indicated they were currently students. Additional demographics can be found in Table 2 of the Methods section.

The primary goal of this research was to better comprehend the ways in which individuals understand their participation in alternative food networks and whether they use their participation as a form of social justice or activism. Fundamental to this understanding was determining the reasons people choose to participate. One of the survey questions was meant to provide this information at a very superficial level, but it was the in-depth interviews that proved to uncover more detailed descriptions of why individuals choose to participate and what their participation means to them. As I had assumed when I initially started this research, all respondents discussed at least one reason for participating that has been described in previous literature (Bougherara et al. 2009; Busa and Garder 2015; Cox et al. 2009; Knoebel 2016; Guthman 2008; Myers and Sbicca 2015). It was my belief that the majority of interviewees would discuss their

participation in relation to addressing environmental issues, personal health and nutrition, the desire to support local farmers, and the desire to engage with a likeminded community, while speaking less to political, economic, or social justice concerns. My findings confirmed this assumption, and while individuals often touched on multiple reasons for participating, they were inclined to center one concern over the rest. While issues of social justice, inequality and privilege did not infiltrate all conversations, there were respondents who chose to spend much of their time discussing these topics, illustrating an awareness of the need for a more equitable food system, and how their ability to participate in AFNs is a position of privilege. The following section will provide a more robust discussion about the dominant themes that emerged from this research.

DISCUSSION

The in-depth interviews I conducted provided me with a wealth of information about how individuals first got involved in AFNs, how they define alternative food networks, why they participate and the degree of their involvement, and the ways in which they understand their participation. Several of the interviewees had childhood experiences with farming or gardening, and a few revealed definitions of AFNs that I had not previously thought about extensively. Some interviewees talked about their participation in very personal terms; as a way to eat healthy or provide healthy food to their families. Others acknowledged the structural inequalities in the current industrial food system as well as the issues of elitism and lack of accessibility within alternative food networks. Almost everyone mentioned issues of climate change and environmental degradation caused by industrial farming. Overall, interviewees seemed committed to their participation, whether it be strictly for personal reasons, for the environment, to address injustice, or a mix of some or all of the above.

After listening to all my interviews and coding by hand, I identified four main themes that that would help me conceptualize my findings in relation to previous literature as well as my research question: in what ways do individuals within alternative food networks in Humboldt county understand their participation, and how might they use it to address social and environmental injustices that result from the current industrial food system?

Entering Alternative Food Networks: Early Influences and Initial Introductions

One of the first questions I asked my interviewees was about their experience with food growing up. I wanted a better understanding about the relationships people formed with eating, cooking, and possibly even growing their own food early in life, and whether those relationships had any impact on their desire to be involved with alternative food networks. Although not explicitly stated by all respondents, it seemed that early life experiences with food did in fact play some kind of role in many of the interviewee's desire to participate in AFNs, and in some cases dictated what they thought an alternative food network was. One interviewee who grew up spending time on her family's ranch in Southern California didn't consider Redwood Roots CSA "alternative" because having a connection to a farm and knowing where her food came from was something she always had in her life.

...our family has had a farm share for, probably since Janet started doing it. We live right up the road. And because of my experience growing up I really like driving by the farm every day and seeing the different seasons of the farm and watching the food grow, that gives me a lot of satisfaction...I really feel privileged to have that access, and I'm very happy to support it. It is a great pleasure and privilege to participate in that whole system, but I hadn't really thought of it as alternative because for me it's so normal.

Another interviewee, a woman who grew up in Hawaii, also discussed how her early experiences in her grandparent's garden shaped her understanding of food, and likely influenced her decision to be involved in AFNs later in life.

my grandfather was an urban farmer before that was a cool thing. His entire backyard was all garden, and he grew corn and carrots and a lot of stuff, tomatoes. And I spent a lot of my time with them because my parents both worked... My brother is eight years younger than me, and so by the time he was older my

grandfather had died, my grandmother had cancer, so there was no more farming. And he doesn't, he hates vegetables. He's a meat and potatoes kind of guy, my dad too. So, if I didn't have those first years with my grandparents I probably, I don't know if I would be so adventurous too.

Other respondents talked about their early experiences with food being very different from how they relate to food now. Some discussed being picky eaters or having issues with food insecurity growing up, which meant they ended up eating lots of processed foods. One interviewee, a student at HSU, told me, "when I was younger my mom was a single mom. She met my step dad when I was four. Before that we were on food stamps and I remember boxes of mac and cheese." Similarly, an interviewee who has helped his mom run her booth at the farmer's market since he was young, explained some of his experiences with food insecurity. It seemed like these experiences shaped his understanding of food and nourishment, as he expressed his gratitude for just being able to eat, focusing less on the need to eat 100% organic, locally grown, unprocessed foods all the time.

For my mom, we had a small amount of money, so we ate a lot of top ramen, fish sticks and kid cuisine, a lot of dry cereal...we probably did eat less than we should have. Top ramen and kid cuisine isn't particularly substantial... I'm frugal in the same sense as my dad. I get my 52 oatmeals from Costco and have toast and two eggs and oatmeal for breakfast every day, which some people think is mundane, but I'm very pleased to eat breakfast every day.

A few respondents indicated that, similar to my own experience, their initial introductions to alternative food networks came later in life and had less to do with their early experiences with food. One woman who lived in LA for much of her life decided to retire in Humboldt County where her daughter works as a farmer. She told me, "almost all of my interest in alternative foods have been since I moved here, very little if any,

really none before. My daughter was a farmer, organic, and so she was getting into my head...” This interviewee also made friends who happened to be food activists, so she slowly became “more aware of the whole thing.” Another respondent who grew up eating traditional Colombian food but was a very picky eater, didn’t get interested in AFNs until he was going to school at College of the Redwoods. He said he “started getting into agriculture there, their ag program.” Then he read some books on the topic, “the book *Plenty*, about local food, some folks who did a hundred-mile diet for a year. I read some stuff by Joel Salatin... That whole idea of sustainable agriculture got planted in my head then.” One respondent, a woman who grew up on the East Coast, said that although she grew up watching her Italian grandmothers cook from scratch, and that her parents started a garden when she was an undergrad, she didn’t actually start gardening until she was working her first job out of college, where she met a woman named Mary who inspired her to start doing it.

While having early experiences growing your own food and eating organic seems to influence later involvement in alternative food networks, it was not always a necessary criterion for my interviewees. Many individuals, including myself, had very little experience with gardening, farmer’s markets, or organic food early on in life, but still somehow ended up interested in AFNs. Furthermore, while some of my interviewees described financial burdens and experiences with food insecurity early in life or even more recently, they still managed to participate within their means, though not always as consistently as other respondents. For at least two interviewees, their ability to use

CalFresh at the market or trade food with other vendors made the farmer's market more accessible.

What Exactly is an AFN and What Does Your Participation Look Like?

Before starting this research, I had a casual conversation with a friend about alternative food networks. To my surprise, we ended up talking about vegetarianism. As I began developing my interview guide, I realized that I might have been taking the definition of an AFN for granted. Perhaps there are people who think beyond farmer's markets, CSAs, and community gardens. Indeed, these networks are often bound by neoliberal constraints and are considered by many scholars to be sites that reproduce inequality and elitism (Alkon and McCullen 2010; Broad 2016; Burdick 2014; Myers and Sbicca 2015; Slocum 2006). I decided that asking people what they thought an alternative food network was, and whether they believed they were a participant in one would alleviate the problem of limiting the definition to networks that generally fall within a neoliberal/capitalist model. While many respondents mentioned things like farmer's market and natural food stores, others alluded to activities and networks that seemed more anti-capitalist in nature and fell in line with food justice and food sovereignty ideologies.

All interviewees positioned AFNs in contrast to the dominant food system and mainstream grocery stores. Many suggested that shopping at stores like Wildberries or the Co-Op would be considered alternative, as well as utilizing networks such as community gardens, farmer's markets, and CSAs. Supporting and purchasing from small,

local farms was also considered an alternative, and seven interviewees talked about growing their own food. One interviewee acknowledged that bartering would likely be considered an alternative, but because she grew up on her family ranch and saw it happening all the time, it was something she considered to be normal.

I think because of my experience growing up...my grandfather who ran the ranch was really into bartering, and so he would very often trade either milk from the dairy for something, or I remember him trading a bushel basket of tomatoes with someone for abalones...So when I think of AFNs I think of that neighbor to neighbor exchange, because it very often revolved around food of some sort.

Another respondent who helps his mom at the farmer's market and also works at Wildberries suggested that an alternative food network would be any method of acquiring food that's different from shopping at a grocery store, and identified his participation in AFNs as helping out at the farmer's market, trading with other vendors, and his ability to take free food home after his shift at Wildberries.

At the farmer's market during the season I work every Saturday, or most Saturdays. And at the end of the market we have vendors just give us veggies and food, along with if we want to trade for stuff like bread or whatever. And that's something I regularly do... I tell all the new people at work that it's a pretty fantastic thing to work at a place that feeds you. You take home a fair amount of food, and a lot of it is pretty nice.

A third interviewee suggested that looking beyond price and focusing more on where your food is coming from and the ethics behind how it is produced is indicative of an AFN. An interviewee that works at Open Door, who is also very involved in education and activism around food access and food justice issues, talked about her neighborhood's lack of a major alternative food network, and suggested that her ability to use her own

garden to feed neighborhood children experiencing food insecurity was a very small-scale AFN.

I think maybe in my neighborhood, like there's a bunch of little kids in my neighborhood—it's not the nicest neighborhood in Eureka. And so, a lot of the kids that live in the neighborhood, I would venture to guess, are food insecure. They eat horribly, like I want to cry sometimes when I see what they're eating. And they ask to come eat at my house every meal of the day. And I have a big garden, relatively speaking to my apartment. And all the kids in the neighborhood are super interested in everything, they come and harvest. So, I would say even just the fact that I give them a head of lettuce when I have extra or give them some strawberries, I would say that on a very micro level, that's obviously part of my neighborhood's non-existent alternative food system.

Overall, interviewees seemed to conceptualize an AFN as a way to purchase food outside of mainstream, big box stores. There was a fair amount of conversation about local food, sharing and bartering within the community, and even hunting, fishing, and wild harvesting as an alternative system to corporate, industrial agriculture. While there was quite a bit of overlap in definitions, the level or consistency of involvement seemed to fluctuate more. Four interviewees believed that they were mostly consistent in their participation but would still shop outside of AFNs or didn't feel like they always had the time or money to purchase as much local, organically grown food as they'd like. One interviewee, a member of the Coast Guard, said his participation was about 50/50 in the summer and 80/20 in the winter, meaning that during the summer when he utilized his CSA, half of his food came from Bayside Park Farm while half came from Costco, and in the winter, he ended up purchasing mostly from Costco. He also spoke to his participation as being a matter of convenience and noted that “organic is not necessarily a selling point.” Similarly, one of the HSU students I spoke to said that while organic is

important to her, she would rather eat something that was not organic but was produced locally. She also stated that her ability to use AFNs as frequently as she would like was inhibited by her lack of transportation, lack of time, and her financial situation.

I do my best to stay frequent. I do get EBT (Electronic Benefit Transfer/CalFresh), so I definitely have more money at the beginning of the month to go to the Co-Op. I've learned myself, I know I go to the Co-Op for the cheapest organic vegetables, I know that Wildberries will have the cheapest meat, and I know Safeway will have the cheapest dairy. I come to the farmer's market. When I have my EBT I can use that here. So, but I don't have a car, so I don't do as much as I want to be able to do with my funds and transportation, but as much as I can, I try...being a student and working, I don't have a lot of time. That's my biggest thing.

Another HSU student also spoke about being very busy and having some financial burdens that prevented him from participating in AFNs other than as a part time ethical consumer. He told me, "when money was tighter, when working minimum wage jobs and barely scraping by every month, you don't really have the luxury to spend nine dollars on spinach...I'm just more of an ethical consumer these days. I work like five jobs and school, so I stay really busy." The issue of accessibility is a common critique amongst food justice scholars who claim that farmer's markets and CSAs remain either too expensive for or too far away from low-income individuals, and that it also takes valuable time to not only get to the AFN location but to turn raw produce into a meal (Lambert-Pennington and Hicks 2016; Macias 2008).

Three interviewees suggested that they always ate food that came from an AFN, whether it be a CSA, the farmers market, a natural food store like the Co-Op, hunting and fishing, or a home garden. Two interviewees not only purchased food from AFNs but were more actively involved in activism and education related to food. The respondent

who feeds children in her neighborhood told me that she felt like she was being kind of lazy in her participation because there's already a strong and stable alternative food system in the Humboldt Bay region, so she didn't feel like she needed to fight to create a new one. She also called herself an auxiliary member but went on to speak about the multitude of ways she engages with issues pertaining to food, leading me to believe that she is not only a regular patron of AFNs, but also works to incorporate a food justice framework into her participation.

I wouldn't say I was a major player. I have at times been. When I was the coordinator...I started and ran a food bank and community garden after Hurricane Sandy for my neighborhood for like three years. And I wrote a grant to do like classes and workshops, and so at that time I would say that I was. Now I'm kind of like an auxiliary member. I provide support to grants that do a lot of work for alternative food systems. And I'm in the [Open Door] garden sometimes. And I work for the farmers market as an assistant manager. Just recently I told them I need to back away from it for a while because I'm teaching a class. I teach undergraduate at a university on the east coast and I have to teach a class this fall. I was also, this summer I did a contract job with Humboldt County Office of Education to do a junior master gardener program for the summer camps. So that was about food and gardening. At Open Door I teach a class for pediatrics called staying healthy together, and we do talk about accessing food locally. I do work for employment at Open Door in their gardens and food resource program...support growing fresh food for patients through the RX for wellness program. All of that doesn't feel super radical, but I have to remind myself that it's part of the solution.

The second respondent told me that she started out as just a consumer participating in AFNs, most frequently growing her own food, getting her food from her daughter's farm, or shopping at the farmer's market or the Co-Op. She then became more of an activist and advocate of local food, beginning as an early member of the group Locally Delicious, and then began participating in the Humboldt Food Policy Council.

...I was beginning to change my buying habits primarily. And then it was after I sold my business about 9 or 10 years ago that I became more of an activist. At first, I just started being aware of the need for buying organic as much as I could. I purchase as a customer and then promoting local food through Locally Delicious primarily, but then with other organizations working toward that goal, like the food policy council.

Thinking back to Levkoe's (2011) conceptualization of the various types and goals of AFNs, it seems that most of my respondents participate in AFNs either concerned with community health, whereby efforts are put into CSAs, farmer's markets, and food literacy projects, or democracy enhancing AFNs such as food cooperatives and food policy councils. Other distinctive categorizations described by Levkoe (2011) include social justice based initiatives that focus on urban food security, migrant farm worker's rights, and fair/direct trade, and AFNs with an ecological sustainability focus that put their efforts toward agroecology and eco-certifications. While these categorizations are useful for defining and understanding the broader goals of AFNs, I found that my interviewees had more specific reasons for participating and understood their participation in a multitude of ways.

Why Do You Participate? Healthy Bodies, Healthy Planet, Healthy Economy

These final two themes emerged from respondent's answers to the following questions: what respondent's participation means to them, why they stay involved, if they feel like they're making a difference, who benefits from AFNs and how might those benefits be unequally distributed, and if they believe their participation is addressing any sort of social or political issues. The major reasons gleaned from my interviews about why people participate are the same reasons discussed in much of the literature about

AFNs (Bougherara et al. 2009; Cox et al. 2008; Busa and Garder 2015). The individuals I interviewed focused primarily on providing healthy, nutritious food and food related education to themselves and their family, supporting local farmers and the local economy, building or being part of a community, and the desire to mitigate the effects of climate change by eating sustainably grown food. While respondents discussed several of these options as reasons for participating, the conversation often made clear which of these were most important to each participant.

Considering the number of women with children present at the farmer's market and CSAs, and the way this emphasizes "the traditional association of food provisioning as women's work" (Alkon 2012:116), it's not surprising that two of my interviewees talked in-depth about the importance of connecting children with the food system.

I love that my children are getting into it, and they go fishing with their father. And we haven't been able to get clams in a while, but that used to be really fun, going to Clam Heach and digging for clams, that was a really fun activity we like to do. I like that they are connected to the land and the ocean that we get everything from. And they see, and they help gut the fish and stuff like that. So, that's good. It's not just from the store.

Another interviewee explained that she thought it was important for all children, not just her own, to know where their food comes from and to build healthy relationships with food and nutrition.

...And going to the farm makes me feel like other people are going to have equally meaningful experiences with growing food, and that makes me happy because that's important. And it's important for their children, and I see a lot of children at the farm. And they talk to Janet about what's happening, and they talk with their families when they're out in the fields walking around, and they're eating carrots that have dirt on them. That intimacy with food and food production is so important. It's just so important for their understanding of food and for them

to learn how to make healthy choices going forward and have a healthy relationship with food.

Listening to this interviewee made me think about my experiences with my little brother. He lives in Arizona and always eats pre-washed, packaged fruits and veggies straight out of the refrigerator. I've seen him eat blackberries purchased from a grocery store, so I was confused when he wouldn't eat the fresh blackberries we picked on a walk while he was visiting last summer. I eventually realized eating unwashed, unpackaged blackberries was foreign to him; eating something that possibly had dirt on it was not something he had ever considered doing. Perhaps a more robust education about where food comes from, or more contact with farms would help him overcome this fear of dirt. Nevertheless, this is not a phenomenon unique to my little brother, and it is evident that parents consider these issues when they decide to participate in AFNs.

Interviewees also talked about the importance of building and being part of a community of people interested in the production of nutritious and sustainably grown food. One interviewee said she enjoyed being part of a “physical and social community that is enriching,” while another interviewee described her experience seeing familiar community faces when shopping at the Co-Op.

I do like the idea of being part of the food community. Like, at the Co-Op there are people you'll see every single week and you'll make friends that way, and again you're really socializing over food and local produce.

While supporting local farms and farmers was mentioned numerous times, only one interviewee mentioned anything about farm laborers and the concern she had for their well-being.

Not to bring up some old news, but I didn't eat grapes or lettuce for years because of the boycott. That was something that I took very seriously because I know how farm workers get treated. And we need to think about them every time we put food on the table. We need to think about them every time we buy food in the store, and that doesn't happen because we are so separated. I don't want to participate in that. And I have the privilege of not having to. I have the privilege of having enough money to have a farm share and to be able to vote with my money for something more local. Not everyone does. And I realize that is a privilege and I need to use it responsibly.

Not only does this interviewee want to participate in a network that she believes values farm worker's rights, but she illustrates how she understands her participation as a form of privilege that needs to be used responsibly. She participates in AFNs because she believes they value workers and help reconnect people to the food system. This was evident at both Redwood Roots CSA and Bayside Park Farm; not only was I able to meet Farmer Janet and Farmer Jamie, but I also watched paid and volunteer workers tend to the farm. This is not to say that all "local," organic farms treat their workers fairly. The boycott of Sakuma Brothers Farm and berry distributor giant Driscoll's is case in point. The Washington state farm is family owned, grows organic berries, and hires seasonal workers, the majority of whom are Indigenous Mixteco or Triqui from the state of Oaxaca, Mexico (Varner 2016). These workers are also undocumented, leaving them at greater risk for exploitation; the fear of deportation prevents many from speaking out against injustices they experience, especially women (Conry 2015). Workers, organized under Familias Unidas por la Justicia (Families United for Justice), asked the public to join them in their boycott of Sakuma Bros. and their distributor Driscoll's, claiming they suffered from "systematic wage theft, poverty wages, hostile working conditions and unattainable production standards" (Familias Unidas por la Justicia as cited by Varner

2016). Indeed, it is not uncommon for farmers with small, local, organic farms who sell their food at farmer's markets to place their economic concerns over farm worker's rights (Alkon 2012).

Individuals also spoke about participating in a network that values sustainable agriculture and is less detrimental to the environment. After experiencing Hurricane Sandy, one respondent had her fears about climate change solidified, and believed that supporting and participating in an AFN was a way of addressing this pressing issue.

I was evangelistically in the mindset that we needed to start producing our own food, seed saving, canning, all that... Then hurricane Sandy hit, and we were directly hit by the storm. We had no electricity for three weeks and the whole region had no electricity. So, you had to drive 45 minutes to an hour to get to an open grocery store. Hurricane Sandy really solidified a fear and concern that was already motivating me into this work which was like, we don't even need climate change to creep up on us and the collapse of the fossil fuel economy to happen all at once for us to need to be less dependent on the current food system.

This respondent brings up the very real issue of emergency preparedness and the capacities of autonomous food systems. Consider for a moment our rural and isolated location. If a bad enough storm hit and all the highways in and out of Humboldt county get shut down (which sometimes happens during winter months), will we have enough food to sustain us while trucks are unable to get through? Imagine all the people who struggle with food insecurity every day, then add hundreds if not thousands more during a natural disaster. Does our local food system produce enough food so that, if necessary, we don't need food to be shipped in from out of the area? Are there enough places to store and distribute food, especially if the power goes out? These are important questions that all communities need to consider. Although we are isolated, because much of

Humboldt county has a strong and vibrant local food shed, perhaps we would fare better during a time of crisis than a large town or city fully dependent on non-local food. Food Policy Councils, which can be valuable resources within AFNs, may be able to address issues of emergency preparedness, and share knowledge with the community about what to do during a time of crisis. Our local Food Policy Council's Policy Subcommittee, of which I belong, has considered this issue and is working towards better understanding the capacity of our local food system during a time of crisis, as well as any emergency preparedness plans already put in place by the county. Once collected, this valuable information can be shared with the community.

Understanding Participation: Neoliberal/capitalist model versus food justice/food sovereignty model

This fourth and final theme is the culmination of the previous three, and it is meant to gauge whether scholarly critiques of AFNs are warranted within Humboldt County's alternative food system. While my findings are in no way meant to be generalizable, the responses gleaned from my nine interviews provide a small snapshot into the beliefs held by some AFN participants. For the sake of this research, these beliefs can be situated in either a neoliberal/capitalist framework or a food justice/anti-capitalist framework. And often, when talking with interviewees, they discussed their understanding of their participation in terms of each framework simultaneously. Many understood their participation as a way to be more responsible for their personal health, for the health of the environment, and as a way to vote with their fork or dollar, so as to

put money towards the local economy instead of large, multi-national corporations. These beliefs belong to the neoliberal/capitalist model, in which we are all individual consumers and entrepreneurs, solely responsible for our well-being and responsible for addressing problems such as climate change, all by making better (see healthier, more sustainable, more “green”) purchasing decisions. For those of us who fail—who are hungry, or poor, or sick, or unable to participate—we are the only ones to blame, not the food system in place that’s perpetuating hunger, poverty, and illness. For some respondents, this understanding was situated alongside a more radical, food justice model whereby participants acknowledged how both the industrial food system and AFNs often perpetuate inequalities. While one interviewee understood her participation being a way to vote with her dollar, she also acknowledged the way in which AFNs still remain inaccessible to many low-income people, and how her participation was one of privilege.

Agribusiness doesn’t work for us. It doesn’t work for individual consumers, it doesn’t work for communities. It’s putting money in the pockets of very few people and everyone else gets to experience crappy food that isn’t good for them. That doesn’t seem right to me...I have the privilege of having enough money to have a farm share and to be able to vote with my money... you have to be able to pay for it. And if you don't have the money to pay for it then you don't have the opportunity to benefit from it. You have to be able to get there, and it's not in the middle of town. So, in terms of financial barriers there are financial barriers and there's access, to just getting there.

This respondent also believed that the more people participated in AFNs the more affordable they would become because they would eventually become the norm. While her intentions were to use her privilege to make AFNs accessible to all people, this is once again a neoliberal approach which uses market forces to address social injustice. Similarly, another interviewee, a student in his twenties, acknowledged how food from

AFNs are often more expensive and can be hard to access for economically insecure people. Yet he also believes a common neoliberal narrative that many people just don't care, are spending their money frivolously, or aren't trying hard enough to access organizations that provide free food.

...And I had this debate with people before. Oh, I can't afford to eat healthy, I can't afford to eat locally, it's like maybe you can if you weren't spending ten bucks on beer every night or whatever else you're wasting your money on. I think it's just a matter of priorities. Not to say that some people aren't really strapped for cash. I've been there, we've all been there. Like, I got five bucks, this is dinner. What can I buy with five dollars? So yeah, it's tough. I guess it's not always easy and it's not always practical to do so if you're really strapped. But I feel like if you're working hard enough and you got enough income coming in, you can definitely make it happen. A lot of those people, it's like what do you do for a job? And they don't have a job, and it's like why don't you have a job? You talk about your standard of living, and you're not trying to do anything to improve it, what are you doing?

Two respondents who actively participate in work that addresses inequalities in the food system also understood and utilized their participation in ways that echoed both the neoliberal and food justice model. While one respondent stated that by participating in AFNs she was making a difference with her dollar, she also went on to give a very direct and poignant critique of the AFN and how it can better incorporate a food justice framework.

I think that mainstream participants and leaders in AFNs don't really vocally prioritize the need for racial and economic justice in the food system. I think a lot of people, they do it for all different reasons. Like people are part of this for pure health reasons, some for environmental, so they think of it as this other part of it, but I would like for it to be more fully integrated, like the primary reason. And I think that there's so much benefit that could come from creating more solidarity between the people who do it for all different reasons. Like it's not really a movement if there's all these subsets doing it for different things. Like there are people who are anti-GMO, people who are anti-pesticides and like save the bees. And then there are the people who are for racial justice in the food system. I feel

like I represent someone who gets it and understands how all those things are important and you have to tackle them all, and you kind of do if you tackle the racial justice piece. Because there's the environmental justice piece. So, I would like to see that become more fully integrated.

Indeed, this respondent's point about varying reasons for participation and the need to address racial and economic justice speaks to the experience of another interviewee who participates in the Humboldt Food Policy Council and Locally Delicious. While she acknowledges inequalities and is concerned with the often-expensive prices of food from local farms, her efforts are directed primarily towards supporting local farmers and the local economy.

I'm always concerned about the cost of local, organic food; it can be higher than something you might buy at WinCo for example, or some packaged ramen or macaroni and cheese or something. And I always am aware, what can we do to make local food not an elite issue, but food for everybody? But we're not there yet. It's a process...And the food policy council has a broader range of interests than mine I think. I'm interested, but I don't work...there's a lot of social service agencies involved, and so issues like food deserts are real important, and issues of CalFresh and getting food for people who are more needy economically, have economic issues, and also dealing with health issues. And of course, I'm interested in that but that's not where I focus my own time.

Three respondents spoke predominantly about their own personal experiences with AFNs, and while they acknowledged the ways in which AFNs benefit either the environment or their health, they failed to situate their participation in relation to larger social, economic, or political issues. On the other hand, one respondent spent time accessing food almost exclusively outside of the capitalist system, either growing food, foraging, hunting, fishing, or even acquiring road kill. This interviewee also had a very personal and spiritual relationship with the way she acquired food, and had trouble putting words to exactly how she felt about or understood her participation.

Upon reflection of my interview and survey findings, it is clear that people hold complex and often conflicting ideas about their participation in AFNs. While four respondents acknowledged how AFNs may still perpetuate inequalities, two offered concrete solutions to potentially address the problem, while one acknowledged that the organizations she belongs to are in a slow process to make equal access a reality. One interviewee suggested that communities could buy CSA shares and hold a raffle for families interested in participating, but who are unable to afford one. While this is a generous idea, it does not address the root cause of why CSAs, and AFNs more generally, are less accessible than corporate, industrial, and processed food. The other respondent talked about her desire to see AFN leaders and participants better address race and class issues within alternative food networks, and works diligently in both her personal participation and in her career to ensure all people have the proper resources and education to access healthy, locally produced food.

Limitations

This research has been limited by the small sample size and my inability to access AFNs outside of the Humboldt Bay region. Furthermore, all of my research sites were in Arcata or Bayside. While I had originally intended to include the McKinville Farmer's Market and Potowat Community Garden in my research, conflicting schedules and communication issues prevented me from collecting data from these two sites. Collecting data from not only these two sites, but AFNs in more rural parts of southern and eastern Humboldt as well as Del Norte would provide an even bigger picture of our local AFNs.

Summary

This section has outlined four major themes gleaned from my nine in-depth interviews. I examined the way in which early experiences with food influenced respondent's future participation in AFNs, how respondents defined AFNs and what their participation entailed, reasons why individuals choose to participate, including personal health and nutrition reasons, connecting children to the food system, building and being apart of a community, mitigating the effects of climate change, and supporting local farmers and the local economy. I also discussed how one interviewee used her participation to address the unfair treatment of farm laborers. Finally, I discussed the ways in which interviewees understand their participation, situating these understandings either in a neoliberal/capitalist framework or a food justice/anti-capitalist framework. I also illustrated the way that participants often understood their participation in relation to both frameworks simultaneously, creating complex reasons for and understandings of participation in AFNs.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Beyond accessing more sites, I believe it would be extremely beneficial to collect perspectives from the local Tribal Nations. It is likely that their definitions and understandings of AFNs differ from those of settler populations, and bearing in mind Tribal led movements to restore salmon populations and un-damn the Klamath, it is also likely that settler food production inhibits Indigenous populations from producing and acquiring food in culturally appropriate ways. Although this is research that I am interested in, I am aware of my position as an outsider, and perhaps this is research that doesn't interest our local Tribal Communities. Only upon building strong and mutual relationships might this research come to fruition. In the meantime, the Humboldt Food Policy Council is working to diversify our membership as well as learn about other culturally diverse food systems in Humboldt county, so that the policy we support and the education we provide benefits everyone in the region.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has highlighted the complex and varying reasons individuals have for participating in alternative food networks, as well as how they understand their participation. I was pleased to hear from several individuals that the questions I asked had led them to think more deeply about how they define AFNs, what their participation means to them, and what issues they might be addressing by participating. I have situated their reasons for participation and conceptualizations of AFNs within a neoliberal/capitalist model and/or a food justice/anti-capitalist model. Based on survey responses and interviews, it has become clear that participants are not always aware of or concerned with social justice issues related to food production, such as land rights, farm worker's rights or equal accessibility to local, organic, nutritious food. If they are aware of these issues, a neoliberal approach that relies on market-forces is touted as being the primary solution; if all individuals able to participate in AFNs do participate, then eventually the price for locally grown, organic food will go down. Similarly, while networks such as farmer's markets or CSAs utilize programs and payment plant to make their produce more affordable, individuals who have to use these resources are situated as "others," as people in need of assistance to access something that should be automatically available to all people.

Thinking about my own history with food, I was always surprised that I somehow ended up involved in alternative food networks, as I grew up eating a lot of processed foods, nothing organic, spending little time in the kitchen, and had no idea how to grow my own food. I did eat plenty of vegetables thanks to grandma and spent an adequate

amount of time outside. I was also part of the Camp Fire USA organization which gave me more experience with camping and cooking. It wasn't until I was living on my own working on my undergraduate degree at HSU that I learned about farmer's markets and organic food. It did not take long for me to realize that this was something I wanted to be involved with. I still maintained many of my old habits—eating at Subway and Taco Bell, shopping at Safeway, cooking very little at home. Even so, this initial introduction eventually led to a more dedicated participation, and a greater understanding of exactly what I was participating in and why. I now understand that my goal is to continue educating myself and others on the work that still needs to be done to ensure a truly equitable food system, whether that be through the AFM or something even more transformative.

It is my hope that we can begin educating farmers and privileged AFN participants about the topics of food justice and food sovereignty, instead of just focusing on educating marginalized communities about how to access a food system that still perpetuates inequalities. If we can begin thinking about transforming our food system completely, instead of just providing an alternative to people who have the economic means to access it, then we truly create an equitable and just food system. Levkoe (2011:688) describes a transformative food politics as being a collection of initiatives which “attempt[s] to address the root causes of current challenges within the industrial food system, rather than just the symptoms.” He suggests taking a whole food system approach whereby a transformative food politics integrates social justice, sustainability, community health, and democracy and recognizes food as an entry point to “analyze and

contest broader social, political, and economic relations from production to consumption” (2011:695). This is not an impossible task, as one of my interviewees described food as an entry point to discussing broader social, political, or economic issues. While I understand the need for small, local farmers to create a livelihood for themselves, I also believe conversations about issues of race, class, and gender issues within the food system must become more common within AFNs and amongst participants. If we are all working towards a transformative food system that is truly inclusive and operates outside of neoliberal market-rationale, then marginalized communities will no longer have to worry about accessing food, farm laborers will no longer have to worry about exploitation, and small farmers will no longer have to worry about being unable to make ends meet.

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APPENDIX A

Participation in Alternative Food Networks Survey

This survey is part of research being done on individual participation in Alternative Food Networks. Your participation in this survey is voluntary, without risk, and you may stop at any time. There are no monetary benefits for your participation, however, the results of this research may clarify different reasons people choose to participate in AFNs, thereby strengthening the work done by Alternative Food Networks. It should take about 5-10 minutes to complete the survey. Your answers to all questions are completely confidential; your name and all other information that could potentially reveal your identity will not be connected to your answers. Once I have collected the data, I will retain it securely in my possession for 3 years.

If you have any questions about this survey, please feel free to contact me: Jessica Smith, at (707) 672-4542 or jss53@humboldt.edu or my instructor, Anthony Silvaggio, Professor of Sociology, at (707) 826-3142 or anthony.silvaggio@humboldt.edu.

If you have any concerns with this study or questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at irb@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-5165.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research as described, please check the box below. Thank you for your participation in this research.

I have read and understood this consent information and agree to participate in the survey.

YES

NO

If you are interested in participating in a more in-depth interview that can be scheduled for a time and place of your convenience, please leave your information below and I will contact you.

Name:

Phone:

Email:

1. Do you participate in any of the following Alternative Food Networks? If yes, mark all that apply.

- Farmer's Markets
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
- Community Gardens
- Home garden that produces food
- Other

If other, please specify

- I do not participate in Alternative Food Networks

2. Which of the following best describes your reason for participating in alternative food networks?

- Personal health
- Environmental
- Political
- Economic
- Social justice
- To support local farmers
- To be part of a community
- Other

If other, please specify

3. Do you or anyone in your household currently struggle with accessing enough food to eat?

- Yes

- No
 - Not sure
4. How often would you say you or anyone else in your household struggle with accessing enough food to eat?
- Never
 - Rarely
 - Sometimes
 - Often
5. Have you ever used any of the following services to access food? (Mark all that apply)
- Food pantry
 - Free meal provided by church
 - Free meal at a shelter
 - Community food share/exchange
 - Dumpster diving
 - Gleaning (collecting leftover food from farms or neighbors yards)
6. How often do you use these services?
- Never
 - Rarely
 - Sometimes
 - Often
7. Do you or anyone in your household currently use any of the following nutrition assistance programs? (Mark all that apply)
- CalFresh (food stamps)
 - WIC

- National School Lunch Program
- School Breakfast Program
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
- Summer Food Service Program
- Other _____

8. In what city do you live? _____.

9. What is your self-identified gender?

- Male
- Female
- Agender
- Transgender female
- Transgender male
- Other _____.

10. Race/Ethnicity (Mark all that apply)

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Latino or Hispanic
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- White
- Other _____

11. How old are you? _____.

12. What is your employment status?

- Currently employed- full time
- Currently employed- part time
- Seasonal worker
- Currently unemployed
- Retired
- Never been employed
- Other

13. Are you currently a student? If so, what degree are you pursuing?

- Associates degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Ph.D. or Post doctorate
- I am taking classes for fun/personal enrichment
- I am currently not a student

14. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Some high school
- High school diploma
- Some college
- Associates degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Ph.D. or post-doctorate

APPENDIX B

Participation in Alternative Food Networks (AFNs)
Consent Form

The purpose of this study is to better participation in Alternative Food Networks (AFNs). You are being invited to answer several questions about your introduction to and participation in AFNs through this interview. As a graduate student in the Public Sociology program at Humboldt State University, I, Jessica Smith, under the advisement of Anthony Silvaggio, will use the information provided for writing my Master's thesis. This work may also be used in conference presentations, publications, and other professional contexts.

During the interview I will ask you questions about yourself and your participation in Alternative Food Networks. The interview will take about 30-45 minutes to complete. Each interview will be recorded for transcription. The recordings will be deleted once transcribed, and those transcriptions will be secured on my password protected laptop.

Participation is completely voluntary, and declining to participate will not result in any penalty; you are free to skip any question or stop at any time. I do not anticipate any discomfort during your participation and risk is minimal. The interview data will be stored securely for the federally mandated minimum time of 3 years.

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your responses. In the analysis and reporting of any information linked to this research, all identifying information will be removed. If I use any quotations from your interview, I may change some information so that your identity will not be revealed. If using a quotation could compromise your privacy, I will not use that quotation.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me, Jessica Smith, at (707)672-4542 or jss53@humboldt.edu, or my instructor, Anthony Silvaggio, Professor of Sociology, at (707) 826-3142 or anthony.silvaggio@humboldt.edu.

If you have any concerns with this study or questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at irb@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-5165.

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me about your experiences.

I am at least 18 years old. I understand the above and consent to participate in this research.

Print Name:

Signature:

Date:

_____ I give my consent to be recorded _____ I do NOT give my consent to be recorded

_____ It is okay to use direct quotes, as long as there is no identifiable information.

_____ It is NOT okay to use direct quotes from this interview.

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

1. Can you start by telling me a little bit about yourself?
Probes: where you grew up, family composition and dynamics, socioeconomic status growing up and currently (did/do you consider yourself working class, middle class, poor?), current occupation
2. Can you tell me about your experiences with food growing up?
Probes: best/worst food experiences, shopping/food prep, frequency of family meals, frequency of missed meals/days with no food
 -How did these experiences make you feel?
3. How would you define/describe the term “Alternative Food Network?”
4. Based on your definition, do you consider yourself to be a participant in an AFN?
Probes: if yes, do you play a major role? Are you casually/occasionally involved?
 -if you don’t consider yourself a participant, could you explain why?
 -what would need to happen in order for you to feel like/want to be a participant?
5. Talk to me about your initial introduction to alternative food networks
Probes: when/where, books, movies, intellectuals, friends/family, health
6. Can you explain how you became interested in participating in AFNs?
Probes: what did your initial involvement look like? Frequency, degree of commitment
7. Could you describe your current involvement in AFNs?
Probes: Frequency of involvement
 -Which organizations or networks (Farmers markets, CSAs, community gardens, other?) do you participate in the most?
 -Do you hold any leadership roles? If so, can you explain?
 -Do you actively persuade others to be involved? How do you go about doing that?
8. What does your participation in an AFN mean to you?
Probes: in regards to your relationship with food? Relationship with others? Acknowledging/addressing inequalities/need for change?
9. How are you making a difference by participating in an AFN? If you don’t believe your participation makes a difference could you please explain why?

Probes: If you don't feel like you're making a difference, what do you think it would take for you to feel like you were?

10. Talk to me about the benefits of participating in an AFN

Probes: Who benefits? Yourself, other people, farmers, the environment?

-Is there anyone or anything that doesn't benefit from Alternative Food Networks?

-How might the distribution of benefits be unequal?

11. Can you explain the different social or political issues you believe your participation is addressing?

Probes: Why are these issues important for you to address?

-If you don't want your participation to address any social or political issues, could you explain why?

-If you want to, but don't believe you are addressing any issues, could you explain further?

-What do you think you could do differently in order to address the issues that are important to you?

-How might AFNs as a whole better address the issues that are important to you?

12. Why do you stay involved in AFNs?

13. Can you talk to me about any other movements in which you participate? (alternative health, home/"natural" birth, political, environmental?)

Probes: Why do you choose to participate in these other movements?

-Can you describe any overlapping goals or benefits between these movements and AFNs?

14. Is there anything else you would like to discuss about your participation in or the dynamics of Alternative Food Networks?

Demographics:

Age

Gender

Race/ethnicity

Current city of residence

Childhood city of residence

Student?

Occupation/Employed?

Enrolled in CalFresh (current or previously)?