GROWING A SUSTAINABLE URBAN FOOD SYSTEM:
PEOPLE, PRODUCE, AND PROFITS

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Dedication

To kohlrabi and beets and to all who savor their flavors.

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Dedication

In the course of researching and writing, I have been struck by how many experiences I have stumbled upon or been drawn to do throughout my life which have shaped my perceptions of food. These include, but are not limited to, the magical encounter with a community garden while visiting friends in Brooklyn, NY, in the early 1990s; trips to the Bloomington, Indiana, Farmers Market, shopping at co-ops such as Bloomington foods, in Bloomington, Indiana, and the Maple City Market, in Freeport, Indiana; food gardening at home with my family; and serving in and with AmeriCorps National Service programs. The farmers markets got me out of bed even after working late nights because the visits provided a rich sensory experience of color, textures, smells, and conversations, and provided me with delicious food. They instilled in me a love for local food, local farmers, and local markets. The co-ops offered local and organic foods and an alternative model for operating a business. The nurturing and role modeling from my grandfathers, who gardened in both victory gardens and home gardens, showed me how growing food was a normal, fascinating, and fun activity. My experience with the Earth EnviroCorps AmeriCorps program was invaluable for the chance it gave me to conduct environmental education, start a community garden, and develop community programs. I have not stopped using the skills I gained during those years.

Being part of the Masters of Liberal Studies program at IU South Bend (thanks to Gail Spitzer), and learning from and with instructors including Becky Tostrick, April Lidsky, Ken Smith, Deb Mann, and Mike Kace have made interdisciplinary studies a challenge, a thrill, and a new way of learning and communicating. I have loved every moment of the program.

The South Bend community has a wealth of people eager to participate in solutions, and I am very grateful for that energy, as well as for the deep conversations, wide and true laughter, and good food that accompanied many planning meetings, harvests, and working sessions. In particular, a debt of gratitude goes to my good neighbors who dream big, are great listeners, and who have networking skills beyond my own. Together, we can make anything happen.

My parents' unquestioning and unwavering support has been a blessing. I am also thankful for them not giving up on the idea of me someday liking homegrown tomatoes! New tastes and new experiences are truly a joy. My sister Jo has spent hours listening and offering advice and has boosted my morale and made me laugh. The biggest and best support has been from my Greg, my Madison, and my Owen. The long hours of studying, writing, traveling, attending meetings, writing, gardening, and talking with so many different people in person, over email, and on the phone were accepted and accommodated and celebrated. I love you.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 1

The Food System of Today: Environmental, Societal, and Economic Impacts 7
   Environmental Impacts 7
   Societal Impacts 12
   Economic Impacts 16

What Brought Us Here? 20
   The Rise and Fall and Rise of Community Gardens 20
   Changes to Markets and Access to Food 28

The Seeds to Grow Local Change 33
   In Gardens 35
   In Markets 38

Growing a Sustainable Urban Food System: 43
   Examples from South Bend, IN 47
   Gardens – Who Plants the Seeds? 47
   Unity Gardens 50
   Urban Garden Market 57
   Purple Porch Co-op 68

Conclusion 76

Next Steps 82

Bibliography 85

Curriculum Vitae
# List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1: Comparison of the structure and marketing approaches in global and local food systems</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2: Comparison of the Relationship of Food Systems to the Development of Social Capital</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3: The Amount of Energy Consumed by Agriculture</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4 Selected External Costs of Industrial Agriculture to the Natural Environment</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5 Amount of land dedicated to gardening and the national ranking of Indiana in 1934</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6: Victory Garden Goals</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7: How food dollars are spent</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

The impact of the current prevailing food system is far reaching and disruptive on many levels. Some may point solely to the economic or environmental or human health impacts of the current mainstream food system, but it is difficult to separate the three. In a study on the external costs of agricultural production in the U.S., researchers Tetgemeier and Duffy note that “consumers pay for food well beyond the grocery store checkout. We pay for food in our utility bills and taxes and in our declining environmental and personal health.”¹ This awareness is growing as individuals and communities begin to understand how food security is economic security is national security.²

Our home garden has provided our family with fresh, readily available, practically free food for years. What we don’t grow, or grow in sufficient quantity, at home, we bring home from a nearby community garden. To complement what we grow and harvest, we purchase eggs and dairy from a local farmer, and have recently begun purchasing grains and flours from another. I know our food is readily available, free from contaminants, that much of it has only traveled from the yard to the table, and that even if the stores closed we would be able to eat.

Reorganizing our food system by reestablishing our ability to grow our own food privately and communally, while reconnecting to local growers to create a secure and sustaining source of nutritious food, has many positive rewards. A restructuring of how

we get food has the potential to lower food budgets for individuals and families, support small, local, family farms which support local families, and ensure that as a nation all people can eat healthy, fresh, local food. As a result, changing the food system will improve our economic, environmental, and social systems.

Today, cities and urban residents are largely removed from food production, with troubling consequences to the urban economy, to the quality of the environment, and to human health. A sustainable urban food system would bring into harmony what is often referred to as the triple bottom line by balancing its social, economic, and environmental aspects. Energy use, markets and grocery stores, soil degradation and fresh water conservation, and food justice issues must all be examined in the course of developing sustainable urban food systems. At minimum, such systems would be affordable financially, conserve and restore natural resources, and foster community connections and community development. It can take many shapes and styles depending on the city, but it will require each community to see their need and meet their need in unique ways in order to create and support a system that will feed it in mind, body, and spirit.

Redesigning the food system and the way people live, work, and eat is more than just a matter of balancing the food system’s triple bottom line, it is a matter of local food security. This has widespread implications for developing agricultural policies which avoid excessive dependence on imported food. A new food system must also focus on the growth of an environmentally sustainable economy. Growing a new food economy towards the development of a sustainable urban food system can yield multiple benefits.

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4 Ibid., 64.
Not only could it provide job opportunities for farmers, but it could also support economic development in local communities and encourage environmental responsibility. Having a localized food system brings healthy, fresh food close to home, thereby encouraging and supporting increased consumption of fruits and vegetables. It promotes community development by creating connections between growers, cooks, and eaters, and helps to reduce the production of greenhouse gases and the abuse and overuse of water and other natural resources.5

It has been argued, and I agree, that we cannot achieve sustainability without revamping the food system. Since most people in the United States live in urban areas, most of whom have no intention of leaving behind city conveniences for the country, how can we begin to produce enough food from where we live to feed ourselves and our neighbors? The answer lies in a balance of relationships between rural and urban growing, and in creating and preserving spaces for both. However, the effects of our globalized food market have permeated and negatively impacted local economies. Change needs to take place regarding how food is produced and by addressing the politics as well.6 Peggy Van Esterik claims that “Political forces control people’s access to food by permitting corporate interests to profit from delocalization by encouraging food hegemony.”7 These forces and others have played out over the last century, as entire

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regions of the country have moved from being primarily self-sufficient in terms of their food production to becoming dependent on products from outside their region and often outside the borders of the U.S. Globalization has provided an economic benefit to national and international food companies, but it has drained local economies socially, environmentally, and economically.

I propose that changing how a society functions is best done by focusing on the dinner table. After all, what brings people together better than food? As Francis and Anna Lappe describe it, “...food is about more than fueling our bodies. Embedded in family life and in cultural and religious ritual, food has always been our most direct, intimate tie to a nurturing earth as well as a primary means of binding with each other.”8 The customs associated with eating have changed, and so have food systems. Fast food, eating in the car, packaged snacks, grocery stores, and processed food have shifted the way we interact with our food. By moving away from local food and markets and preparing our own meals, society has gained a global marketplace and convenience. What this offers is more than tropical fruits and easy heat-and-eat dinners. As evidenced in Table 1, taken from Thomas Lyson’s research on agricultural marketplaces in the Northeast, it offers less to the farmer and more to the packaging and shipping industries. It has led to fewer landholders and more volatility in agricultural regions. What values will we derive from meals made from these foods versus foods from a local food system? With less diversity, and less value for diversity in terms of what food is available from which sources, how can society reawaken to the pleasures of small, diversified farms which support families

Table 1: Comparison of the structure and marketing approaches in global and local food systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global Food System</th>
<th>Local Food System</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relies on relatively small number of large-scale industrialized farms</td>
<td>Depends on relatively larger number of farms of different types and sizes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farms highly capital intensive, highly mechanized, highly specialized</td>
<td>Farms structured according to unique production, marketing, financial and labor situations of families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing consists of large, publicly held corporations</td>
<td>Serve diverse array of local or regional markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly concentrated and vertically integrated system</td>
<td>Consists of smaller, privately owned or cooperative firms engaged in diverse production, processing and distribution processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global sourcing contributes to unstable markets for one regions’ agricultural products</td>
<td>Marketing primarily at local or regional level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food prices reflect expenditures for advertising, packaging, processing, transportation</td>
<td>Marketing relationships tend to be based on established networks, personal trust, and reliability. Modest expenditures for advertising, packaging, processing, and transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic returns to farming sector extremely low</td>
<td>Products highly diverse &amp; regionally unique product mixes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

instead of corporations? Moving beyond the economics, Lyson also describes the impact of food systems on community as outlined briefly in Table 2. He argues that a local food system actually increases the diversity of interactions and helps grow social capital which can yield greater potential for self-reliance and conflict resolution. To develop a truly sustainable urban food system, we need to be working towards a shift in the marketplace and in our food culture towards systems which support the growth of not just profits, but of communities.

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Table 2: Comparison of the Relationship of Food Systems to the Development of Social Capital

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global Food System</th>
<th>Local Food System</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tends to degrade social capital in communities across the world</td>
<td>Serves as powerful catalyst for developing social capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System shaped by large corporations seeking to maximize profits</td>
<td>Provides context for recurring social interactions: draws diverse sectors together, build community capacity for self-reliance, creative problems solving and conflict resolution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this thesis I will investigate the current state of the food system, how it got into an unsustainable situation, and examine the environmental, economic, and social effects. Drawing on historical data and current information, I will investigate some of the changes that have taken place in agriculture and community development. While much has been written about the challenges society faces from the current food system, few offer solutions based on growing urban community food projects. I will illustrate how change can begin and how seeds can be planted to grow a sustainable urban food system by highlighting case studies from South Bend, Indiana. This community is typical in many ways in terms of how the food system has shifted from a regional one to one that is reliant on a global marketplace. To provide examples of how and why a sustainable urban food system develops, the projects and programs that have begun in this city offer a reasonable starting place which can serve to inspire other communities and inspire widespread food system changes.

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10 Ibid., 141-142.
Environmental Impacts

All agricultural practices impact the environment. Industrial agriculture is increasingly being recognized for its negative consequences on the environment... Soil loss and erosion reduce crop yields and impair natural and man-made water systems. Runoff of agricultural chemicals from farm fields contaminates groundwater and disrupts aquatic ecosystems. Monocropping and feedlot livestock production threaten diversity and may increase food-borne pathogens and antibiotic resistance in humans, as well as pest resistance to chemical controls.\footnote{Tegtmeier and Duffy, "External Costs of Agricultural Production in the United States," 64.}


Large scale, long distance food production contributes to the degradation of human and natural communities. The effects of the current food system have been succinctly presented by Jeffrey O’Hara in the Union of Concerned Scientists publication “Market Forces: Creating Jobs Through Public Investment in Local and Regional Food Systems.” He explains that the environmental impact of food production includes “emissions of heat-trapping gases, ammonia, particulates, and odors; impairment of lakes and rivers from sediment and nutrient runoff; extensive use of surface water and groundwater; and adverse impacts on soil quality, wildlife, grasslands, and wetlands.”\footnote{Ibid., 25.}

The environmental impact of agriculture is increased by large and small oil spills, soil and water contamination, and from the production and use of the tools and machinery relied on to deliver fuel-central farming, shipping, and growing methods. Chemical use, along with the energy and water used by agriculture, make a mighty impact. Croplands in the United States use an excess of 140 million tons of fertilizer. This represents a
tenfold rise in fertilizer between 1950 and 1990.\textsuperscript{13} The need for a constant water supply for agriculture has resulted in 70% of all the water pumped from underground or diverted from rivers is used for irrigation.\textsuperscript{14} This may pose a significant risk to the nation’s food security as water resources become more and more scarce. Reliance on imported inputs such as water and chemical fertilizers puts the system out of balance as natural resources are consumed and contaminated.

In addition to directly impacting natural resources, food production uses a significant amount of energy for processing, transportation, storage, and preparation (see Table 3). Of all the energy used in the United States, 16% of it runs and supports the current food system.\textsuperscript{17} Modern, commercial agriculture is completely

<table>
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<th>Table 3: The Amount of Energy Consumed by Agriculture</th>
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<td>In the United States, 400 gallons of oil equivalents are expended annually to feed each American (as of data provided in 1994).\textsuperscript{15}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manufacture of inorganic fertilizer</td>
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<tr>
<td>operation of field machinery</td>
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<tr>
<td>transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>irrigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>raising livestock (not including livestock feed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crop drying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pesticide production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>miscellaneous\textsuperscript{16}</td>
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</tbody>
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\textsuperscript{13} Brown, "The Agricultural Link," 35.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{17} O’Hara, "Market Forces," 2.
dependent on the flow, processing, and distribution of oil. Oil is used to run tractors and other farm vehicles used to plant, spray, harvest, and transport food. Petroleum-based herbicides and pesticides are used to assist in the large scale growing of crops. After harvest, crops are delivered to food processing centers primarily via diesel trucks. Raw food products are transformed using oil-based additives and preservatives. Once processed, food products are packaged in boxes, cans, petroleum-based plastic trays and wraps, and covered in printed paper or plastic labels. Each packaging material created — many, as with plastics, from petroleum-based compounds — is shipped via fossil-fuel fed vehicles to a processing center. Next, the items are shipped to warehouses and distribution centers, mostly by diesel-fueled and possibly refrigerated trucks, where they await transport to grocery stores and other outlets. After arriving there on yet another diesel-fueled and possibly refrigerated truck, they are placed in a climate-controlled environment, most of which uses fossil-fuel fed HVAC systems, awaiting purchase and pick-up by shoppers who often transport the item home in a gas-fueled car. There, the item is again placed in a climate-controlled environment (i.e. — a refrigerator), which is operated by fossil-fuel fed cooling systems and electric lights. After consumption, the packaging is discarded and removed by fuel-fed trucks and either recycled (which requires fossil-fuel energy) or placed in a landfill. The large inputs of fuel used on farms and in transport have created an unstable situation in terms of energy use. Industrial agriculture and the processing and shipping of food across the nation and across the globe.

have, according to Carlo Petrini, founder of the Slow Food movement, combined to make the food sector one of the most unsustainable spheres of human activity.\(^{19}\)

This energy imbalance has resulted in food production being one of the highest greenhouse gas emitters on the planet.\(^{20}\) So much energy goes into the delivery of food to our tables that in the United States today it takes an estimated 7 units of fossil energy to produce 1 unit of food energy.\(^{21}\) There are many ways to address these issues. Changing how farms are operated ("conventional" vs. organic), selecting different forms of transport (trains vs. truck, electric vs. gas-fueled), and adjusting food prices and subsidies to support local fresh food options to as many people as possible, are all options that have been discussed and attempted in a variety of ways across the country. Another option that is beginning to receive more attention is the idea of growing food where we live. Whether rural, suburban, or urban, integrating food production spaces into urban landscapes, farms into urban and suburban planning, and developing edible landscapes where people live could help address the challenge of developing a sustainable urban food system.

A more sustainable approach to agriculture includes utilizing organic growing methods. Switching to organic can mitigate the environmental damage from the intensive, industrial, mechanized agriculture methods of spraying, shipping, and selling of food and food products. The improved energy efficiency of organic systems, due to lower fertilizer and pesticide use, can reduce up to 80% of the energy consumed in

\(^{19}\) Carlo Petrini, *terra madre*, (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2009), 63.  
\(^{21}\) Deumling, Wackernagel, and Monfreda, “Eating up the Earth,” 4.
industrially-raised vegetable crops. While organic farming reduces fossil fuel use and greenhouse gas emissions, if the produce is shipped over long distances or processed into food products, energy use remains high and the damage done from burning fuel and packaging can nearly negate the benefits from the less energy intensive, low-chemical growing practices. Food that is processed, packaged, and shipped does more than impact energy use; it ultimately impacts the natural environment through the creation and use of materials required to prepare and process each item, increased packaging waste, and increased pollution from shipping. Even the recently promoted baby carrot can be implicated. An organic carrot destined to end up in a small bag of baby carrots must first be processed into a "baby" carrot, cleaned and prepped for packaging, sealed in a plastic bag, boxed up with other bags of baby carrots, shipped to a distribution center, warehouse, grocery store, and ultimately transported to a home refrigerator. What would the world be like without such intensive prep and travel by our food? Petrini observes,

> If food was no longer obliged to make intercontinental journeys, but stayed part of a system in which it can be consumed over short distances, we would save a lot of energy and carbon dioxide emissions. And just think of what we would save in ecological terms without long-distance transportation, refrigeration, packaging – which ends up on the garbage dump anyway – and storage, which steals time, space, and vast portions of nature and beauty.

Therefore, local, organic foods are in the best interest not only of local economies and energy use, and are ultimately best for the beauty of the earth.

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22 Ibid.
The choices we make about the food we eat have a direct effect on other people and the land we live on – it is one of the most important votes we have.\textsuperscript{24} ~Diana Deumling, Mathis Wackernagel, and Chad Monfreda, “Eating up the Earth: How Sustainable Food Systems Shrink Our Ecological Footprint.”

Beyond the environmental damage from fossil-fuel based modes of crop treatment and transport, industrial agriculture practices are harming members of society and society itself. Soil loss combined with agricultural chemical run-off has damaged natural and man-made water systems and groundwater. Chemical use, along with combined animal feeding operations and monocropping, has led to a decrease in species diversity and to an increase in rates of pathogenic infection from food, antibiotic resistance, and resistance to chemical controls for pests.\textsuperscript{25} The result is an overall decline in the health of individuals, of rural communities from soil, water, and chemical contamination, and a social decline due to loss of the vibrant and resilient farm community structure of the past.\textsuperscript{26}

Urban areas are equally affected by these changes, and perhaps more so than rural communities. For example, most produce reaching stores in urban areas are traveling for at least 5-10 days before reaching our dinner plates. This lag leads to losses of 30-50\% of some nutrients,\textsuperscript{27} which has a direct impact on human health. Some studies have shown that organic produce contains higher amounts of nutrients and do not contain any additives or preservatives.\textsuperscript{28} At least one other study indicates an increased risk of

\textsuperscript{24} Deumling, Wackernagel, and Monfreda, “Eating up the Earth,” 6.
\textsuperscript{25} Tegtmeier and Duffy, “External Costs of Agricultural Production in the United States,” 64.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{28} “It’s Easy Being Green: Organic vs. Conventional Foods—The Gloves Come Off,” 12
toxicity, especially in newborns, from airborne contamination from agricultural applications of organophosphates, which are commonly used on orchards. 29 This suggests a high risk to human health for both agricultural workers and families living close to agricultural areas. As Sara J. Scherr and Sajal Sthapit note in the Worldwatch Report, *Mitigating Climate Change through Food and Land Use*, “Human well-being is wrapped up with how food is produced.” 30 Beyond nutrition, long distance food lacks the community connection and the knowledge of where it came from and how it was grown — knowledge gained from direct interactions between the grower and the soil, and between producers and consumers.

One major social impact of the global, industrial agriculture system is the disparity of access to food. Concerns about food security have become increasingly tied to local food systems, and rightfully so. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization has defined food security as meaning that “food is available at all times; that all persons have means of access to it; that it is nutritionally adequate in terms of quantity, quality and variety; and that it is acceptable within the given culture.” 31 In order to make food more available, local farmers need to be able to have a sustainable economic and natural environment in which to grow, and people need a variety of ways to access that food. Local campaigns such as “People Gotta Eat,” the title of a United Way of St. Joseph County’s initiative, highlight the fact that there are those in the greater South Bend community without the means to eat or to secure adequate food for their

families.\textsuperscript{32} While some local campaigns are addressing food security, available, nutritious food is not a guarantee for all the residents of any given city in the United States. Francis and Anna Lappé note in \textit{Hope's Edge} that “food is becoming frighteningly impersonal, further and further removed from something we feel we control.”\textsuperscript{33} Despite the highly personal nature of food in every culture around the globe, the Lappés write about a sense of fear commonly held around the world about the ability to safely access and consume food. Re-integrating food production into where people live, especially within urban communities, can help alleviate this fear and help with access to fresh, nutritious foods.

Without an agricultural awareness and regular contact with farming and gardening systems, urban areas are more prone to unstable food economies, to indirect sources of pollution in their water and contaminants in their food, and to greater class divisions based on the ability to buy and eat healthy food. No matter the location, it is the people who are bearing the brunt of the social and economic costs of industrial agriculture directly and indirectly. For example, as the cost of fuel and petroleum-based chemicals continue to rise, the cost of farming and the cost of food will rise. Beyond direct cost impacts, as evidenced in Table 4, the external costs associated with low-cost food and food products produced by the industrial agricultural system are steep. Contamination from chemicals and disruptive soil management are negatively impacting water, air, and land resources along with the health and biodiversity of living creatures, including humans. Water use is of particular concern, since agricultural crops consume four out of


\textsuperscript{33} Lappé and Lappé, \textit{Hope's Edge}, 14.
every five gallons of fresh river water,\textsuperscript{34} often returning it to rivers or water tables laced with particles and chemicals. Clearly, a different approach to producing and procuring food must take place in order to remedy these and other environmental, economic, and social disruptions.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Selected External Costs of Industrial Agriculture to the Natural Environment}
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Selected Annual External Costs of US Agricultural Production (2002, million \$)} \textsuperscript{35} & \\
\hline
Damage to water resources (microbial pathogens, nitrate treatment, pesticide treatment) & 419.4 \\
\hline
Damage to soil resources (local capacity of reservoirs, flood damages, damage to recreational activities, cost to navigation/dredging) & 2,242.7-13,394.7 \\
\hline
Damage to air resources (cost of greenhouse gas emissions from cropland & livestock production) & 450.5 \\
\hline
Damage to wildlife and ecosystem biodiversity (bee loss from pesticide use, loss of beneficial predators due to pesticide applications, fish kills from pesticides & manure spills, bird kills from pesticides) & 1,144.9-1,174.1 \\
\hline
Damage to human health – pathogens (cost of illnesses from common foodborne pathogens, cost to industry to comply with Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point [HACCP] rule) & 416.4-441.5 \\
\hline
Cost to human health – pesticides (poisonings and related illnesses) & 1,009.00 \\
\hline
\textbf{Total External Costs} & 4,673,900-16,889,200 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
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Societal factors are increasing the momentum locally and nationally towards growing a more local and a more just food system. Peer pressure plays a huge role in creating any sort of change within individual and groups. The local food movement has been boosted recently by the passionate endorsement of First Lady Michelle Obama, who has planted an organic garden on the White House lawn, encouraged gardening and

\textsuperscript{34} Gary Paul Nabhan, \textit{Coming Home to Eat}, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002), 84.

\textsuperscript{35} Tegtmeier and Duffy, "External Costs of Agricultural Production in the United States," 4-5.
healthy eating, and pushed supermarkets to open in underserved areas.\textsuperscript{36} Public education from a flurry of books, movies, and videos from novelists, journalists, activists, and concerned citizens has raised public awareness, provided options, and offered encouragement to budding local foodies. Academic work on food issues has expanded, which solidifies the legitimacy of food studies and the necessity for further research.

**Economic Impacts**

Local food systems offer long-term sustainable solutions, both for the environment and for local and regional economic development. By linking the productive activities in the surrounding bioregion to the consumers in metropolitan centres, local food systems can reduce the vulnerability of food-supply systems ... and create the potential for local development and employment opportunities.\textsuperscript{37}  

~Koc et al., *For Hunger-proof Cities: Sustainable urban food systems*

Over the past fifty years, food production has become controlled by a shrinking number of international corporations. Beginning in earnest in the 1970s and 1980s, changes in the processing side of the food industry began to take place. Mergers and acquisitions changed the system of large, national food companies into multinational food giants and changed the relations between growers and buyers.\textsuperscript{38} Today, large scale companies procure most foods from large-scale producers, and the ten largest multinational food processors control over 60\% of the food and beverages sold in the United States.\textsuperscript{39} With suppliers becoming larger to meet the demands of large corporate food product companies, small scale growers and family farmers end up with less market ability to sell food to support themselves and their community. In turn, this has reduced

\begin{itemize}
\item 36 Obama, "Remarks."
\item 37 Koc, et al., *For Hunger-proof Cities*, 4.
\item 38 Lyson and Green, "The Agricultural Marketscape," 50.
\item 39 Ibid., 49.
\end{itemize}
the opportunity to grow local economies which support local production, local business, and local families.

In many areas of the U.S., there is no locally produced food available to local people to purchase and eat directly from the farm. As Thomas Lyson and Judy Green report in “The Agricultural Marketscape: A Framework for Sustaining Agriculture and Communities in the Northeast,” their study of food systems of the Northeast, “Locally-interdependent systems of production and consumption have given way to a globally-oriented system where production is geographically uncoupled from consumption.” As a result, individuals who once worked the land to produce food for their region have physically left the land and been spiritually disconnected from it. Although driven by economic demands, leaving the farm has impacted both family and community life.

There are increasing numbers of farmers without adequate income from their farms to succeed in the local marketplace and without adequate farm employment opportunities to continue working on and learning from the land. In the 21st century, mechanized farming, combined with increased use and reliance on fertilizer and pesticides, which have increased yields to a point, have resulted in reduced employment for full-time farmers. As a result, farmers have had to relocate to cities for work. Less opportunity to make a living in agriculture has contributed to the shift of populations from rural to urban, and has shifted the foundation of community life. Rural communities, and rural economies, have withered, and urban communities have become

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40 Ibid., 137.
41 Ibid.
flooded with residents who have been forced away from their livelihood and into a foreign environment. Individuals who used to participate in and care about rural community life and the life of the land have been transplanted; uprooted from the network of natural and social support systems. This has had profound impacts on society, economic systems, and on the natural environment.

As industrial agriculture expands, individual farmers spend less time learning about and caring for small parcels of land and water in lieu of mass tilling, planting, spraying, watering, and harvesting. This has led to the erosion of the personal connections to hillside, sun, and soil. There is so little left at the small scale level, and the global food system has become so dominant in the market and in its impact on the ecosystem, that sustainability cannot be realized without revamping the food system. 43 Farmer and writer Wendell Berry has been calling attention to this issue for decades.

For at least half a century we have taken for granted that the methods of farming could safely be determined by the mechanisms of industry, and that the economies of farming could safely be determined by the economic interests of industrial corporations. We are now running rapidly to the end of the possibility of that assumption. The social, ecological, and even the economic costs have become too great, and the costs are still increasing, all over the world. 44

Food has become central to national and international economic systems and as a result has become a threat to growing a sustainable society. What is not yet clear to all involved with the food economy is how a shift to local and regional sales can realistically and

43 Deumling, Wackernagel, and Monfreda, “Eating up the Earth,” 2.
44 Wendell Berry, “Conservationist and Agrarian,” in Bringing it to the Table (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2009), 72.
sustainably support local economies, environments, and people during and beyond such a transition.

The Fall and Rise of Community Gardens

Growing food and non-food crops in and near cities contributes to healthy communities by engaging residents in work and recreation that improves individual and public well-being. Urban gardening and farming involve city dwellers in healthy, active work and recreation. Urban agriculture builds safe, healthy, and green environments in neighborhoods, schools, and abandoned areas. 45

Anne C. Bellows, Katherine Brown, and Jae Soon. "Health Benefits of Urban Agriculture."

The effort to develop and sustain urban food production inside cities builds social capital — trust, civic engagement, the development of community leaders, and the sharing of goods, services, and information. 46

Anne C. Bellows, Katherine Brown, and Jae Soon. "Health Benefits of Urban Agriculture."

Community gardening has come and gone over the last century or so, rising and falling in response to the economy and in response to times of war and peace. The benefits described by Bellows, above, are not new ideas. They have been lauded, in part, at a variety of times for over a century. Securing urban food systems by growing food in cities through the actions of individuals and groups, with varying degrees of organization, has taken many forms. Youth education gardens, war gardens, and the "back to the land" efforts of the 1970s have come and gone. A few die-hard gardens, holding fast to urban land through the 1980s and 1990s, have led the way for current gardens to grow and thrive based on their best practices. In her thorough historical account, City Bountiful: A Century of Community Gardening in America, Laura Lawson explores the roots of the variety of styles of gardens. She notes that "Each phase of urban garden promotion - vacant-lot cultivation associations, school gardens, civic beautification gardens, war gardens, relief gardens, victory gardens, and community

45 Bellows, Brown, and Soon, "Health Benefits of Urban Agriculture."
46 Ibid., 8.
What Brought Us Here?

The Rise and Fall and Rise of Community Gardens

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46 Ibid., 8.
gardens – has been shaped by its own social, political, economic, and environmental context."47 Today, community gardens play a vital role in securing a sustainable urban food system by integrating food production in urban areas while engaging city residents in the growing process. Where these gardens go in the future is dependent on where they have been in the past, as well as what opportunities can be found in the present. By looking back and examining the opportunities that have been used and could be utilized in the present, I will clarify the role community gardens can play in securing a sustainable urban food system.

Schoolyards and Garden Armies

In the late 1800s, youth education gardens were first grown in earnest, along with the cultivation of urban vacant lots and the promotion of home gardens, as a display of civic pride. They were originally viewed as a way to save children from the “urban congestion, immigration, economic instability, and environmental degradation”48 that city leaders saw as detrimental to the health of the younger generation. In 1914, the United States School Garden Army (USSGA) began in response to World War I as a way “to increase food production and to train children in thrift, industry, service, patriotism, and responsibility.”49 Although the program was designed in part to produce food and to teach and engage children and adults in home food

48 Ibid., 21.
49 Ibid., 126.
production, patriotic slogans such as “He who produces is a patriot — a good citizen,” were key to the program’s success and funding. Gardening, the campaign implied, could grow a good person and a good citizen. Perhaps the lasting legacy of this program is the sheer number of people who became and remained actively engaged in teaching, learning, planting, and harvesting. The USSGA estimated several million children “enlisting” as “soldiers of the soil,” 50,000 teachers utilizing the USSGA curriculum, and thousands of community volunteers leading or working with youth gardening projects.51

The USSGA “sought to educate, reform, and shape cultural values and practices,”52 noble goals for any government program, but it did not last long. After World War I, the program withered as funding was diverted to other areas. The leadership and organization that led the USSGA and other World War I gardens relied on federal agencies and national organizations which flew the garden flag high in times of national crises. After the war, these same agencies and organizations focused on new priorities, and many gardens dissolved without federal support and encouragement.53 Instead, national campaigns promoted backyard gardening within the context of suburban home ownership,54 signaling a shift from supporting and improving urban life to promoting a lifestyle not quite urban, not quite rural, yet still desiring to keep a connection to rural roots and the ability for households to provide fresh vegetables for themselves.

51 Ibid., 9.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 114.
54 Ibid., 142.
From Relief to Victory

Between the two world wars and during the depression years, gardens were encouraged, and in some cases required, as a way to provide aid to hungry families and individuals. Although designed to support and inspire families during hard times, these gardens were not integrated into public land or as permanent places for food production.

The relief, or subsistence, gardens were grown on borrowed ground which was often located at the edge of the city. They were recognized as a temporary benefit in terms of nutritional, recreational, and social benefits, but did little to instill gardening as a long-term community resource. This is regretful, for the results of this effort suggest that a strong urban and suburban gardening habit could have gone a long way towards establishing a secure local food source. For example, from 1931-1935 the gardens supplied more than 36 percent of all the fresh and canned fruit and vegetables used for relief efforts. However, it was the very approach to these garden programs which likely led to their demise. Gardening was often required instead of strongly encouraged, and resentment, along with increased economic capability and increased food availability as grocery stores sprouted up in communities across the country, contributed to a shift in food priorities. Gardening became a forced necessity for everyone, not just those on relief. Sayings such as “no garden, no relief,” and the policy to eliminate produce from groceries during the summer left limited choices to those applying for relief. In Indiana, a state law permitted trustees to withhold relief to clients who refused to work, including

55 Ibid., 169.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., 145.
58 Ibid., 162.
work done in relief gardens.\textsuperscript{59} The effect of these compounded pressures for food – personal need, government requirements, and personal desire and enjoyment – had Indiana growing (see Table 5). Such an impressive effort, especially considered on a national scale, suggests that Hoosiers could have taken a lead on developing a regional and strongly self-sufficient system for producing their own food.

\textbf{Table 5: Amount of land dedicated to gardening and the national ranking of Indiana in 1934}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indiana Garden Program Acreage, 1934\textsuperscript{60}</th>
<th>Home or vacant lot</th>
<th>Community garden</th>
<th>Municipal garden</th>
<th>Industrial garden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acreage</td>
<td>11,610</td>
<td>3,278</td>
<td>1,713</td>
<td>581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana’s ranking among states</td>
<td>8\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>4\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd}</td>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the nation entered another world war, while struggling to get out of a depression, one of the first large responses by the public to assist in preparing for war was to grow “victory gardens.” Twelve days after Pearl Harbor, citizen groups and garden advocates started the American victory garden program.\textsuperscript{61} Government officials took note of this great upwelling of desire by the public to assist with war preparedness and were convinced that federal support was key to this program. They understood victory gardening was “not just about food but was also for health, recreation, and morale.”\textsuperscript{62} In the first year of the program, an estimated 15 million gardeners produced 7.5 billion pounds of food. By 1944, M.L. Wilson, director of extension programs for

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 163.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 156-157.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 170.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
the U.S. Department of Agriculture, reported that up to twenty million American families had victory gardens and had provided 40 percent of the total vegetable supply. This broad, widespread support changed the way Americans approached and supported gardening. Earlier garden programs were promoted for their role in positively addressing food security, nutrition, recreation for the poor, and moral uplift for immigrants and children. Victory gardens grew from the popular support of all and from a desire to participate in the war effort at home. After the war, even without a national school garden program or organized national effort to encourage gardening by urban, rural, and suburban citizens, the spirit lived on in people who saw the direct benefit of gardening to individuals and communities. One victory gardener who worked for the Civil Defense

Table 6: Victory Garden Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase the production and consumption of fresh vegetables and fruits by more and better home, school, and community gardens, and to the end that we become a stronger and healthier nation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage the proper storage and preservation of the surplus from such gardens for distribution and use by families producing it, local school lunches, welfare agencies, and for local emergency food needs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable families and institutions to save on the cost of vegetables and to apply this saving to other necessary foods which must be purchased.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide, through the medium of community gardens, an opportunity for gardening by urban dwellers and others who lack suitable home garden facilities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain and improve the morale and spiritual well-being of the individual, family and nation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

64 Ibid., 171.
65 Ibid., 113
Victory Garden program reported that her experience with gardens was key to improving neighborhoods: “That was when I first saw the value of a community garden, saw the difference it could make in the way people thought about where they live and how they live; even such simple things as not littering a block.” She went on to remain involved in community development efforts in urban neighborhoods after her experience with the Civil Defense gardens. Insights and experiences such as these are likely underreported, but perhaps more widespread than many may imagine. While community gardens clung to a fringe existence during the first two decades after World War II, inspired individuals gardened, educated, and revisioned an approach to gardens for all communities.

Losing Ground, Gaining Industry

Following World War II, gardening and farming techniques shifted to support a more industrial approach. Food “experts” were focused on efficient and technological approaches to agriculture. Concern about food scarcity took a back seat to the government’s goal of growing “the right amount of the right things in the right places.”

During World War II, the federal government established policies in production selection, price controls, and rationing of materials. After the war, this approach undoubtedly encouraged the development of large monocropping agriculture on farms that would eventually out-compete smaller family farms. The large monocrop lands became too large to be managed by a single family. Farms were destined to become businesses focused on feeding the country instead of community assets focused on nourishing local environments, families, and community life.

66 Levine, 40
67 Lawson, City Bountiful, 171.
Gardening in the post-war era exhibited a familiar response pattern, one that had been followed since the turn of the century. Despite the obvious benefits to citizens' health, income, job training, and even moral uplift, most pleas for permanent land for gardens were denied. Several issues led to this response both in the early 1900s and through post-World War II: rising economic prosperity, garden lands developed for urban and industrial needs, and increasing numbers of families leaving the city for the country or suburbs and acquiring their own land. The few community gardens that remained on secured land eventually became models for the next wave of garden programs. These, however, were not government run, sponsored, supported, or promoted. Garden activities notably increased in the early 1970s as "back to the land" movements and increased concern for the environment and for neighborhood and community development gained prominence in communities. Many different types of programs — neighborhood community gardens, company-sponsored community gardens, children's gardens, and job training gardens — helped widen the field of possibility to involve people in more ways. The gardens of the 1970s, reports Lawson, "reappeared in neighborhoods, [and] often built acts of resistance to urban abandonment as well as to provide resources to address inflation, express a new environmental ethic, and reconnect neighbors during a time of social unrest." Gardens began growing in response to a weak economy and in response to times of domestic and international war and peace.

What makes the response of the 1970s significant is the dual, organized approach to supporting garden programs from both federal and community efforts. By 1978,

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68 Ibid., 50.
69 Ibid., 233.
70 Ibid., 2.
community gardens were growing in most major cities. The USDA Cooperative Extension developed its Urban Gardening Program in 1976, and by 1985 it was operating in 21 cities with a $3.3 million budget and producing approximately $20 million worth of produce. However, the funding for the Urban Garden Program was eliminated in 1993. In 1979, gardeners and garden activists established the American Community Gardening Association (ACGA), which still operates today, to provide a national network and support organization. Currently, community gardening is experiencing a resurgence in the midst of an economic crises. Assuming that the economy will recover, the fate of the gardens is uncertain. Their necessity and continued support will hinge on the importance given to food security concerns, a continued awareness of the health benefits of fresh local produce, and to the value placed on the community connections made in the garden.

Changes to Markets and Access to Food
A safer food system will require much more decentralization and democratic input than exists currently.

Over the last century, and especially over the past fifty years, decreasing community connection to food production and increasing control by international corporations has resulted in limited choices at the grocery store. These limitations began in the early 1900s as neighborhood market halls, which had been supported by city

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71 Ibid., 206.
72 Ibid., 226.
73 Ibid., 228.
74 Ibid., 215.
governments, lost basic maintenance support from municipalities. As city governments began spending market-rent revenues on municipal obligations rather than on repair and maintenance of the market halls, the markets deteriorated. As private grocers began emerging, there was less reason for governments to support neighborhood markets. By the 1940s, the small, independent groceries were quickly being replaced and outcompeted by chain supermarkets which increasingly utilized large food corporations for production and distribution. This gradual shift from market to small retail grocery to large supermarket also shifted the source of the food being sold in the stores. Shoppers were still able to get what they needed and wanted, and were offered an increasing variety of foods and food products from across the globe. As a result, shoppers’ personal connection between their food and the people in their community who grew it deteriorated. The anticipation for and reliance on seasonal fruits and vegetables waned as popular produce — both familiar and exotic — could be shipped in year-round. Individuals gladly bought into the convenience of the supermarket but as a result lost their sense of control, responsibility for, and knowledge about the food they purchased and consumed. Today, this loss of control and connection with the source of our food has led to increased food insecurity. An integration of food production into where people live is one way to help alleviate food insecurity by improving access to fresh and nutritious foods even within urban communities.

Enabling families to produce at least some of their own food can not only improve home and community life, but can expand the availability of healthy choices. Today, notes Janet Flammang in *A Taste for Civilization*, “meal preparation involves daily

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economic choices, whether to support fast-food chains, supermarkets, farmers markets, organic producers, or new cuisines. ...Food is a universal way to feel connected and civilized. It needs to become everyone’s responsibility." With increased availability and conveniently presented options at the supermarket, choosing healthy options should be easy. Recognizing that although it appears that choices are endless, there are fewer choices than ever at the supermarket in terms of who profits. Ironically, although a vast array of foods is available in supermarkets and restaurants, the health of the nation is in decline.

Health concerns over diseases that were once rare, such as diabetes, and a generally acknowledged obesity epidemic, have become the norm across age groups and racial and socio-economic demographics. One theory focuses on the prevalent consumer culture and lack of direct connection to food. “[When] we lose touch with food as nourishment,” writes Dylan Clark in *The Raw and the Rotten: Punk Cuisine*, “we begin to construct for ourselves personae based on what we consume, treating products as projections for our yearnings for the authentic.” This way of life stands in stark contrast to Peggy Van Esterik’s theory of cooking, feeding, and eating, who describes them as “metaphors for interdependence, nurture, mutual support, and pleasure in a world full of metaphors for independence, greed, ambition, and pain.” Food can shape economies and personal mental and physical well-being. It influences relationships in the marketplace as well as those between individuals. After examining all the issues

77 Ibid., 19.
influenced by the current food system, and the positive ways it can be shifted toward a more sustainable system, it is clear, as Carole Counihan explains in the introduction to *Food and Culture*, that “...food touches everything and is the foundation of every economy, marking social differences, boundaries, bonds, and contradictions – an endlessly evolving enactment of gender, family and community relationships.”

In short, what we eat can change the world, for better or for worse.

Consider again the example of the baby carrot. If we stopped buying the packaged, prepared snack-sized carrots, but still wanted to eat carrots, several things would have to change in the story of the carrot from field to plate. We would have to buy whole carrots, perhaps even loose carrots that are not sold in a bag. This would eliminate the need for carrot processing machines and the energy required to run them, and could eliminate the need for plastic packaging of carrots, thereby reducing energy and packaging costs and associated environmental and economic impacts. If we decide to cut up the carrots into smaller, snack-sized pieces, we create (recreate?) a relationship to our food through its preparation, even at the minimal level of washing and cutting, and allow at least one household member to take on the task of communing with the carrots and caring for the carrot needs of the household. We may decide to buy the carrots from a local farmers market or farmer, or perhaps even grow them ourselves. This re/creates a relationship with the carrots, with the local farming community, the local economy, and possibly with our own yards. Through one or more of these baby carrot steps, we could realign our food needs with the needs of the local economy, environment, and with the

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social and nutritional needs of our own household. This is no small task, requiring many
small steps supported by reprioritizing food preparation and by large quantities of passion
for an environmentally healthy, economically viable, and pleasant world in which to live.

Creating a balanced food system requires a system-wide shift. It will require less
shopping and more efficient shopping methods, local and regional food networks, less
emphasis on processing and packaging, and more of an emphasis on organic growing
methods which support both the health of the soil and the health of the people who grow
and consume the food. The priority, writes Norman Church, is to develop local and
regional food systems to ensure food security, the health of the environment, and stronger
regional economies. A renewed interest in and support for local community supporting
agriculture must arise and be supported in public, private, and political spheres in order to
counter the effects of a globalized food market and give rise to a less energy intensive
and a more interconnected food system.

Limiting international shipping of food and food products will also shift the
control of food from international corporations to more local and regional markets. The
increasing control of food production by large businesses has largely been assumed to be
a good thing—until recent years, when attention has been given to the economic, health,
and community development opportunities that local food systems offer. Wendell Berry
describes how over the last half century society has assumed that "the mechanisms of
industry" could provide safe farming practices and that "the economies of farming could
The Seeds to Grow Local Change

The priority must be the development of local and regional food systems, preferably organically based, in which a large percentage of demand is met within the locality or region. This approach, combined with fair trade, will ensure secure food supplies, minimise fossil fuel consumption and reduce the vulnerability associated with a dependency on food exports (as well as imports).\(^1\)

-Norman Church, “Why Our Food is So Dependent on Oil.”

Creating a balanced food system requires a system-wide shift. It will require less shipping and more efficient shipping methods, local and regional food networks, less emphasis on processing and packaging, and more of an emphasis on organic growing methods which support both the health of the soil and the health of the people who grow and consume the food. The priority, writes Norman Church, is to develop local and regional food systems to ensure food security, the health of the environment, and stronger regional economies. A renewed interest in and support for local community supporting agriculture must arise and be supported in public, private, and political spheres in order to counter the effects of a globalized food market and give rise to a less energy intensive and a more interconnected food system.

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\(^1\) Church, “Why Our Food is So Dependent on Oil.”
safely be determined by the economic interests of industrial corporations." He describes how the social, ecological, and economic costs of today's system have become too great and that the assumption that the industrial farming model will support and sustain us is ending. In many regions of the United States, food needs were once met almost entirely from that region. Today, note Lyson and Green, no region is truly self-sufficient in terms of food production. In fact, they found that in many areas there is "no locally produced food available to consumers. Locally-interdependent systems of production and consumption have given way to a globally-oriented system where production is geographically uncoupled from consumption." There are several implications from shifting production and consumption, not the least of which is lack of local control over local food systems.

Developing local foodsheds can benefit local markets and improve food security. The desire for this kind of local resource and local knowledge has grown steadily since the E.coli contamination scares that plagued the fresh spinach industry a few years ago. If a spinach grower provided contaminated spinach in a local market setting, the scale of the crises would have been localized and it would have been possible to quickly trace the problem to the source. A more localized food system would allow for a more nimble food system as well. As Laura DeLind explains in her article "Safe at any scale?," local and regional food networks may be the best solution for food production, processing, and distribution in order to "deter the possibility of nation-wide food-borne illness or terrorist attack on the nation's food supply far better than any uniform and bureaucratically

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82 Berry, "Conservationist and Agrarian," 72
83 Lyson and Green, "The Agricultural Marketscape," 137.
84 DeLind, "Safe at Any Scale?" 303.
centralized regulatory defense."\(^{85}\) The key ingredients to implementing a safe and sustainable urban food system may be strengthening community ties while simultaneously encouraging regional self-sufficiency. Looking not only to rural, but especially at urban, areas may help address the challenges society is facing. After all, as Anne C. Bellows notes in *Health Benefits of Urban Agriculture*, "Community and educational land dedicated to food production encourages participation in the vigor of a positive urban environment."\(^{86}\) Creating such spaces must occur everywhere. The effects will be seen and felt throughout communities. Creating beautiful and functional spaces in dense residential areas "builds a constructive, collective consciousness. Growing vegetable gardens in inner-city neighborhoods is positively correlated with decreases in trash dumping, juvenile delinquency, violent deaths, and mental illness."\(^{87}\)

**In Gardens**

Whether it is physical health, the health of the surrounding environment, or the availability of healthy food, community gardens can meet many basic needs and contribute to overall safety, health, wellness, and sustainability of neighborhoods, communities, and environments. Gardens, writes Darrin Nordahl in his book, *Public Produce: The New Urban Agriculture*, "can help us get by a little easier, give us space to breathe, to learn from the earth, and to begin to reweave relationships based on respect for the land and for the people around us."\(^{88}\) In fact, urban gardens could do more than help us get by, they could provide food for the community’s environmental improvement.

\(^{85}\) Ibid., 313,
\(^{87}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^{88}\) Nordahl, *Public Produce*, 135.
and community development. Community gardens provide space to grow and connect with others through the experience of producing and sharing food.

Advocacy and sponsorship from federal programs, the ACGA, or citywide garden organizations, can help to promote and support a garden, but community involvement is key to the long term success of community garden programs. Local involvement and grassroots efforts plant the seeds from which the strongest gardens and garden programs grow. Lawson notes, based on her review of community gardening efforts over the past 100-plus years, that

...local involvement was essential for (a garden’s) survival. Hard lessons were learned by city agencies and others who jumped on the community garden bandwagon without local support or commitment to follow through on maintenance. ...“Handed-over” gardens, although developed with the best intentions, were often abandoned because the communities were not involved in their development.\(^89\)

In other words, it takes community to grow a community garden. Lawson stresses that garden organizers must insist that neighborhood gardens be grown with neighborhood assistance, with a focus on enabling residents to build the garden themselves, to develop a sense of ownership, and to nurture community investment and local leadership.\(^90\) This mirrors the advice provided by the ACGA on its website, encouraging those wishing to start a garden to first determine if there really is a need and desire for a garden, to decide who the garden will serve (youth, seniors, etc.), and to be aware that it is essential that the group or neighborhood be involved in all phases of its planning and development.

Engaging citizens in urban greening and food growing efforts, versus allowing large,

\(^89\) Lawson, *City Bountiful*, 229.
\(^90\) Ibid., 244.
governmental and corporate entities to control how urban areas are designed and how they function, is required to truly develop sustainable urban areas with secure food systems. The key ingredient is community. This has deteriorated in recent decades, as control over the food system has slowly eroded.

Prior to World War II, markets with locations across urban areas and supported by local municipalities may have been the norm, but the post-war decline of publicly supported markets, the emergence of private grocers, and chain supermarkets have led to the increased reliance on corporations and agribusinesses for food production and distribution. During and after World War II, the focus of U.S. agricultural policy became focused more and more on promoting select commodity crop production. "The programs that support commodity crop producers," writes O'Hara, "are not conducive for farmers who sell through local food markets." The loss of local support for markets, and federal programs shifting support from local to national agriculture, led to a severe decline in the number of markets in urban areas in the post-war years.

Today, not only have markets left urban areas, but grocers and supermarkets as well. This has led to inner city neighborhoods without access to fresh produce, contributing to a "food desert" effect, as grocery stores have left inner city neighborhoods. The term food deserts, explains O'Hara, "refers to the inability of people living in low-income neighborhoods to obtain healthy and affordable food—they lack ready access to a supermarket or discount retailer—even though they live in a well-

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"Ormonde, The Taste for Civilization, 156.
In Markets

For those who can’t or won’t grow their own food, there needs to be a place for them to purchase fresh local food. Farmers markets are by no means a new approach to getting food into urban areas. Prior to World War II, markets with locations across urban areas and supported by local municipalities may have been the norm, but the post-war decline of publicly supported markets, the emergence of private grocers, and chain supermarkets have led to the increased reliance on corporations and agribusinesses for food production and distribution. 91 During and after World War II, the focus of U.S. agricultural policy became focused more and more on promoting select commodity crop production. “The programs that support commodity crop producers,” writes O’Hara, “are not conducive for farmers who sell through local food markets.” 92 The loss of local support for markets, and federal programs shifting support from local to national agriculture, led to a severe decline in the number of markets in urban areas in the post war years.

Today, not only have markets left urban areas, but groceries and supermarkets as well. This has led to inner city neighborhoods without access to fresh produce, contributing to a “food desert” effect, as grocery stores have left inner city neighborhoods. The term food deserts, explains O’Hara, “refer(s) to the inability of people living in low-income neighborhoods to obtain healthful and affordable food—they lack ready access to a supermarket or discount retailer—even though they live in a well-
populated geographic area." Food deserts contribute to an area becoming "food insecure," meaning that all household members do not always have access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Across the United States, 14.6% of households are classified as food insecure by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 2009 numbers.

The ramifications of this situation are far reaching, as has been exemplified in many of Mari Gallagher's studies on the impact of food deserts on public health in urban areas. She concludes that "communities that have no or distant grocery stores but nearby fast food restaurants instead... will likely have increased premature death and chronic health conditions." Health care costs of chronic illness, obesity, and cardiac disease, correlated to poor nutrition and decreased per capita productivity, are a problem for the United States and for South Bend. In the 2010 St. Joseph County Community Health Assessment, 61% of county residents are reported as being overweight or obese, 22% reported not doing activities such as walking or gardening in the past month, and nearly 70% report "Insufficient activity to meet vigorous recommendations or no vigorous physical activity." These results are likely due in part to the lack of healthy food or access to it. It would seem that when people can't eat well, they can't feel well, and this can impact their energy and motivation to be active. While this is a dire situation for individuals whose quality and length of life are impacted, the impact of food deserts is felt by society as a whole. Gallagher points out that "The costs associated with this effect

93 Ibid., 24.
96 Ibid., 14.
97 Ibid., 15.
(of food deserts) will be borne ...indirectly by the health care industry, by employers, by government agencies and by others who take on the financial burden of pre-death treatments." Increasing access to fresh food can serve to improve quality of life and improve the health of local economies as well.

To create more food secure cities, a plethora of markets must be supported to create an oasis for fresh produce in all neighborhoods. Additionally, creating more local markets encourages an expanded local agricultural system. Currently, fresh fruit and vegetable production in the United States utilizes 2.82 million acres -- less than 0.7 percent of all cropland in the country -- with only 15 vegetables comprising 80 percent of the acreage. A study published by the Leopold Institute investigated what it would take for geographic regions to produce the food needed to feed the people living within it. After examining 28 selected fruits and vegetables, they determined that 160 people could eat from each acre taken out of corn or soybean production. By converting less than 100 acres of commodity cropland to consumable cropland at a national level, the annual food needs could be provided for 10,000 people. Changing the structure of rural production can help support sustainable urban food systems, but change must come from within and without urban areas in order to reduce the reliance on foods imported from outside a particular foodshed. "Urban agriculture," argues Anne Bellows, "contributes to community food security." It is based, she points out, on the interaction between local

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99 Swenson, Selected Measures, 24.
100 Ibid., 2.
consumers and farmers. It can also serve to increase awareness of local food options and increase the diversity of foods available.

Local food markets can support agricultural and economic diversity as well. At the Oklahoma Food Co-op (OFC), which, according to data on their website, provides local food to over 3,000 members, processes up to 700 orders each month, supports 200 producers, and generates around $70,000 in sales of 4,000 locally produced products each month. The OFC has a large distribution network, and utilizes both warehouse space for storage and several trucks to deliver food to various pick up locations in their geographic area. The agricultural diversity supported by the OFC far outreaches the reported variety of 15 fruits and vegetables grown on most agricultural land in this country. An expanded local food system has the potential to produce the food needed to feed any who are interested in purchasing local, and the potential to grow into a regional, self-sufficient production system.

In the meantime, successful local markets and food hubs such as the Purple Porch Co-op in South Bend exemplify the rising popularity of fresh and local foods and the willingness of people to change their shopping and eating habits if it means that they can know more about their food and know more about their farmer. This is by no means a local phenomenon. The number of farmers markets has exploded from only 340 in 1970 to over 7,000 today, with annual sales of direct marketed food by over 136,000 farms reaching $1.2 billion by 2007.\textsuperscript{102} Although 6 percent of farms are engaged in direct

\textsuperscript{102} O'Hara, "Market Forces," 2.
market sales, they account for only 0.4 percent of total agricultural sales, indicating the potential for even more growth in future direct sales endeavors.

For ordinary people who are thinking about what they eat and from where it comes, how can they begin to connect more with local food and with their community? In doing so, how can they work towards bringing about change in terms of how people eat, where and how food is grown, and the way their community and local economy operate? Leopold Center Fellow Fred Kirschenmann has insisted that “…the new food ethic must be expanded beyond the need to make healthy, affordable and satisfying food available for ourselves. We need to create a new economy that empowers citizens everywhere to achieve these same goals…” Local efforts can and are working to make a difference to change the prevailing food ethic. For example, in Chicago, LaManda Joy has reclaimed land once used as a victory garden and turned it back into a garden space for the community. After being used as a victory garden during World War II, it was developed. Recent demolition of the building left the land vacant. After asking for assistance from her alderman, she secured use of the land for a community garden.

Today, it is one of the largest edible gardens in Chicago, feeding 130 families. Not only is it providing food to a neighborhood in need, but it is growing community as well. She

--- I.ind., 3.
--- ibid., 7.

103 ibid., 7.
Growing A Sustainable Urban Food System: Examples from South Bend, Indiana

The demand for local food has been driven by consumers who wish to support local farms and other businesses, to purchase healthful food that is fresh and tends to be sustainably produced, to interact with farmers, and to learn more about the food they grow and that consumers eat. The enthusiasm for local and regional foods has also arisen, at least in part, as a backlash against the deficiencies of our consolidated food production, processing, and distribution system.\(^\text{104}\)

~ Jeffrey K. O’Hara, “Market Forces: Creating Jobs Through Public Investment in Local and Regional Food Systems.”

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\(^\text{104}\) Ibid., 2.

says the garden "has made such a huge difference in that neighborhood and in people's lives, it's shocking. There is a lot of talk these days about how people are contentious and they can't get along, but that's not true, they just need a place to get along."\textsuperscript{106}

Within the last five years, the way individuals and groups in South Bend, Indiana have worked to meet their food needs and create opportunities in the community offers examples and possibilities for other cities across the country. Although South Bend has several universities and colleges, it is not a college town. It has long been a manufacturing hub and union stronghold, but after experiencing decades of diminishing factory work, it is not a blue collar town. Although once a diverse mix of German and Hungarian immigrants,\textsuperscript{107} today it is primarily a mix of Caucasian, Hispanic, and African American residents.\textsuperscript{108} Once centered on a thriving downtown, the typical American pattern of sprawl has created large suburban tracts in place of farmland, and has damaged the urban core. This has reduced the available farmland and has detracted from efforts to make a livable urban area, complete with gardens, markets, and corner grocers. The downtown area is working hard to recover a strong business district and to attract residents to shop, dine, and recreate in the city even as housing developments continue to take root at the edge of city limits and into the county. South Bend, nestled in the Midwest, has nothing and everything special about it. Nothing is special because it does not easily fall into one category to describe the city. Everything is special because of the


great diversity it supports: higher education, strong neighborhood associations, a diverse population, many thriving non-profits, an active volunteer community, businesses developed to meet the needs of the service, health, and banking industries, and the quickly expanding realm of nanotechnology and innovative local, regional, and global business opportunities. Because it is both unique and typical, South Bend can serve as a model community to highlight how local food opportunities that can be met through a variety of paths.

The local economy in which South Bend is located is known as “Michiana,” encompassing Northwest Indiana and Southwest Michigan. It is a fertile and productive area for agriculture, producing vast quantities of grains, meats, dairy, vegetables, and fruits. Seasonal fluctuations in production and a broad diversity of crops provide an ever-changing bounty of local foods. In the winter, local foods are limited to meats, potatoes, squash, and grains, as well as other long lasting items and value added or preserved foods, and an expanding availability of greenhouse greens. The region is capable of producing a high quality, varied diet based largely, if not completely, on local resources. However, the current centralized food system gets in the way of a functional local food system. This region is capable of changing to a local and regionally sourced food system. Such a shift would, at minimum, save energy and resources through minimal conversion of crop land.

Converting to a local food system would add jobs and increase local revenue, as outlined in the 2010 report by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture in Iowa. They calculated how much land it would take, and how many workers, to produce
enough of the top fruits and vegetables consumed in a six-state midwestern area that
includes Indiana. What they found was that in Indiana alone, switching 39,709 acres over
to fruit and vegetable production would feed Indiana residents and would add nearly
2,200 jobs and yield over 244 million dollars in annual sales. As a nation, they
calculated that fewer than 100 acres could produce the annual fruit and vegetable needs
of 10,000 people, but in the Midwest, each acre dedicated to the top fruits and
vegetables consumed would feed 160 people, or 62.5 acres for a city of 10,000. These
figures demonstrate that small shifts away from industrial agriculture crops, which are
dominated by corn and soybeans produced primarily as food additives and livestock feed,
could easily sustain regional populations.

Urban growth, health concerns, corporate control of food production, increasing
awareness of food safety and security issues, and the rising cost of food have contributed
to heightened concern and motivation to make changes in the food system. The economic
challenges faced by family farms are no secret, and the loss of these lands is felt not only
in their food production value but for their community supporting and sustaining
elements as well. Concerns about contaminants in spinach, beef, sprouts, eggs, melons,
and peanuts have increased public awareness and concern about food safety and security
and have motivated people to learn more about what is in their food and from where it
came. Along with a desire for a different way of getting food, being able to purchase and
eat fresh food has become increasingly difficult for many individuals and families.
Access and cost are added to the challenge of worrying about what is in or on the food

\[109\] Swenson, Selected Measures, 37.
\[110\] Ibid., 2.
\[111\] Ibid., 24.
that people are able to purchase. Will it threaten their personal health and that of their families? The Lappés bemoan this reality, wondering if there is anything scarier than not knowing if what you feed your family is hurting them? And what’s scarier than not knowing whether you can feed your family at all?”

Food security concerns sparked conversations in South Bend which ignited action on various fronts. Food deserts exist in several South Bend neighborhoods. Two ways they are being addressed in one neighborhood is by creating a seasonal, open-air market in a nearly abandoned shopping district, combined with the development of a large community garden which is open to the community for planting, watering, weeding, harvesting, and sharing produce. Local action and planning, along with increased awareness, can begin to bring food where it is needed. In South Bend, the combined effect of the market and the garden provide the community with ways to connect around fresh healthy food grown by and for local people. Many small steps in the form of large community efforts are taking place in South Bend, Indiana. The following will highlight three different approaches to feeding this urban area: a new approach to community gardening; developing farm markets in food deserts; and, a virtual way of creating personal connections with local food producers.

Gardens – Who Plants the Seeds?

Community gardens provide local food production in areas with substandard grocery stores. As part of community food systems, they improve the quality of a community’s diet and foster the social pleasures associated with food production.


112 Lappé and Lappé, Hope’s Edge, 14.
113 Flammang, The Taste for Civilization, 235.
Over the last century, several community gardening efforts have been made in South Bend. The Oliver Farm Equipment Company started a community garden for employees in 1917, providing 50 acres of land just south of the factory. Approximately 300 employee “soldiers of the soil” participated and even competed for a company sponsored prize of $50 for the plot which yielded the most during the season. In 1932, 25 acres of vacant school property was donated for gardens and the Oliver Farm Equipment Company lent 250 acres of land for gardening in addition to providing space in warehouses for storing seeds, plants, and root crops. In 1934, 40 men were employed as garden supervisors, and “bulk gardens” produced approximately 80,000 quarts - an estimated $11,695 worth of vegetables - which were distributed in the community. Individual plots produced an estimated $13,000 worth of food for families. Multiple sectors of the community were involved in producing food. For example, in 1934, inmates tended 50,000 tomato plant seedlings which were planted on 7 acres of bulk garden land. Local efforts contributed to statewide results. The home gardens and relief garden plantings in South Bend totaled an estimated 275 acres, of which 100 acres were located on the Oliver estate. Across the state, it was estimated that in 1933 relief gardens saved the taxpayers $3,000,000 in food costs, that garden crops were grown on “18,000 acres of idle land,” and that “home gardens were cultivated by 75,000

114 Joan Romine, Copshaholm: The Oliver Story (South Bend, IN: Northern Indiana Historical Society, Inc., 1978), 95.
115 Spitzer, Gail, “The History of Community Gardens in South Bend” (Research paper presented during roundtable discussion on gardens and sustainable communities, IU South Bend, March 25, 2010).
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
These early efforts at community gardening illustrate that it is possible, by coordinating efforts across communities to produce sufficient quantities of food to support area residents. In the 1970s, decades after the relief garden programs, the city of South Bend approved the use of vacant lots around the city for garden use. Today, the City of South Bend continues to offer city land for use as a garden by interested individuals, groups, or organizations.

In South Bend, it has been women who have taken a lead role in starting gardens as well as recruiting volunteers and promoting the concept to community and government organizations. Historically, women’s organizations have played a vital role in urban garden promotion. At the turn of the century, gardening was promoted as not only a Christian duty but also as good civic housekeeping. The role of women in food production, not simply food preparation, as well as organizing for green space and food production land should not be surprising. For example, during World War II, when more than two million men left agricultural jobs, the result was the Women’s Land Army (WLA). Through the WLA and other agencies, nearly 3 million women maintained large scale food production through the war. Today, it is estimated that women grow 59-80 percent of the world’s food, and make up one-half to one-third of agricultural labor.

Women growing food is not a new concept, nor is organizing to create a cleaner,
healthier environment. As Karen Warren observes in *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*:

Women often play a primary role in community action because it is about things they know best. ...(they) are responding not to “nature” in the abstract but to their homes and the health of their children….Women are more likely to take on these issues than men precisely because the home has been defined as a woman’s domain.124

It may have been inevitable that women in South Bend create and sustain the garden and local food movement. Their motivations go beyond civic duty, encompassing a wide array of concerns, skills, and motivational factors. What develops next depends on the ability of these women to work with area residents to strengthen and grow the communities which are directly and indirectly involved.

Unity Gardens

Unity Gardens Mission: To improve community health: Physically - by increasing accessibility of fruits and vegetables as well as providing education on nutrition and food preparation. Socially - by providing education, increased social capital, and opportunities for the disadvantaged. Economically - by developing a sustainable local food system, recapturing food waste, creating new jobs, and increasing per-capita productivity.


Growing the first community garden South Bend had seen in decades began with a conversation, or rather, a series of conversations. At an April, 2007 Earth Day event at a local park, I was there helping with an activity and information table with the Holistic Moms group, and had just begun asking about community gardens. Where were they located in town? How could I find out about getting involved with one? My questions were met with blank stares and replies of “Community what?” and, “I haven’t heard of

124 Ibid., 11.
any, but it sounds like a good idea!” That afternoon in the park a man approached the table and began talking about a growing interest - one that he hoped would resonate with our group. His name was Kelly Hoggard, and he began talking about community gardens and the benefits they could provide. Having started and been a part of several community gardens in other cities, and currently seeking one locally, I struck up a conversation. He had a lot of passion for the idea, and had already been talking with various organizations around town. His contact list was small, but significant. He was hoping to rally enough interest to get this project growing in multiple places around town. That conversation was closely followed by a group discussion among participants at a workshop on food offered by St. Joseph County Indiana’s Community Forum for Economic Development (CFED), a local grassroots organization that promotes economic development which simultaneously improves living standards and opportunities. I was there, and so was Hoggard. As a group, there was interest in and support for community gardens, but no plan of action emerged that day. From there, Hoggard and I exchanged a few emails sharing our interests, ideas, and contacts. I suggested we bring together whoever was able to meet to discuss how to make our community garden dream a reality.

My background in community development and volunteer project coordinating had prepared me lead the planning and initial brainstorming meetings. I was excited by the interest and energy of the people who came to the meetings, and the progress being made in identifying city resources and potential land. That summer I was also participating every other week in a working CSA (community supported agriculture) farm just across the state line in Michigan. One morning, as we were weeding and harvesting the greens, a conversation I was in with my carpool partner Gail, and Diane,
another South Bend resident, provided the path to a new garden. We shared how much we enjoyed working at the CSA, although the half-hour drive each way somewhat tainted the reward and purpose of local organic food. Wouldn’t it be nice, we mused, if we could do all this close to home? I shared the conversations and meetings I had been having and the efforts to find land for a community garden. “I know just the place,” chirped Gail.

“Right behind the city conservatory and greenhouses is a big open area, partially fenced in, with nothing going on. I walk by there all the time and I often think how perfect it would be to have a garden there.” I gasped in comprehension. That spot was just over a block from my house, although it had never occurred to me as a potential community garden. After she mentioned it, I could not stop thinking of it. I recruited her garden planning skills, and began conversations and meetings with the Botanical Society of South Bend. This organization, which was active in the upkeep and maintenance of the conservatory, was seeking positive promotion of the facility and had a number of gardeners on its board. One showed me the large patch of red raspberries along the border of the property, and vowed to help make a garden a reality. With the help of a few Botanical Society members, plans were drawn up and meetings were set with the Parks department. Although warned by special projects manager Matt Moyers that presenting ideas for such a drastic change in park land use could take several appearances in front of the Parks Board, the first meeting yielded a green light for growing the garden. Armed with a design, a sample garden contract that gardeners would sign which committed them to regular garden upkeep and maintenance, and a brief but comprehensive presentation of what we envisioned for the land, Gail and I left that meeting thrilled to have a place close to home where we could grow food and gardeners in our neighborhood.
Over the winter, I was approached by members of a church in a struggling neighborhood who wanted to start a garden. They had heard that one was getting started and they wanted some advice. We met in one of the parishioners homes over a chili dinner and talked about what would need to happen, what could go wrong, and what they really wanted to grow. Their hope was to provide a space for parishioners to grow food and to connect with the neighborhood, and by creating opportunities for conversation, friendship, and sharing the bounty of the garden. We discussed how to design the garden, options for maintenance, having a garden “leader,” and the benefits of starting small.

After dessert, they were ready to grow. A couple of months later, at the next CFED event, another key conversation about gardening took place. Sara Stewart, a registered nurse working on her MSN (Masters of Science in Nursing), had a piece of land downtown, and was intrigued by the possibility of having a garden there that the homeless and hungry could eat from and help maintain. She wondered, would this work? Could she just start a garden and hope it grew and fed people? Along with a few other people, I encouraged her to go for it — what harm could there be in trying? This led to a third garden growing in South Bend. All three planted in the spring of 2008, and as they spoke with visitors and press, the dream grew. By 2011, over forty community gardens, assembled in a local affiliation headed up by Stewart known as Unity Gardens, were growing all over town.

The energetic and passionate Sara Stewart has had the time, energy, networking skills, and financial ability to dedicate much of her time to get gardens growing in areas that need and want a place to grow food. Each of the Unity Gardens in South Bend has a unique design and way of bringing diverse people together to grow and share the harvest.
In 2010, Stewart secured a grant from Memorial Hospital to support her financially as she helped start new gardens across town. One of these gardens was planted across the street from the main hospital downtown, with hospital staff walking across the street to work in the garden and sharing their produce with needy co-workers as well as with nearby residents. Lettuce from the gardens was even served in the hospital café, with signs highlighting their growing efforts. This is one example of how Unity Gardens incorporates education and awareness about the benefits of fresh, local, seasonal food, nutrition, environmental issues and impacts, and community development as integral pieces to how all the gardens operate. As Unity Gardens board member Jill LaFountain writes on the organization’s website:

...Unity Gardens [is] about more than the food produced by the Unity Gardens. It is about something much bigger, it is about community, pride, planting seeds of hope, and harvesting good things from each individual. We find value in ourselves, our neighborhood and our community...this is something that is a vital need in our community. One seed has all the potential in the world to grow and feed a community.

The gardens grow in church yards, on park land, on unused city lots, on school grounds, and in neighborhoods. As with any community garden endeavor, connections, land availability, and funding sources determine the nature and scope of each project. The result is a wide variety of garden sizes and designs, each of which is overseen by a garden leader who helps guide new gardeners with growing, weeding, and watering, coordinates...
volunteer days and harvests, and keeps connected to other Unity Garden leaders as well as to Stewart.

In addition to individual garden volunteers, Stewart and the other garden leaders have brought together a wide array of volunteers from the community to help in the gardens. This has proven particularly useful for the “open” gardens, which are primarily worked on by the garden leader and any neighborhood or community volunteers who can help. All the produce is available on a “pick for free” basis, with gardens remaining open and available to anyone from the community in need of food. While loosely organized volunteer or harvest days are set for almost all the gardens, the open ones do not restrict harvesting but often provide some on-site assistance with identifying ripe produce and offering tips on preparation. Garden organizations are as different as the neighborhoods, schools, or organizations where they are located. A majority of South Bend’s Unity Gardens are neighborhood gardens, with food grown by and for neighbors.¹²⁶ Others are primarily ones made to be wide open to the public — a “pick for free” garden — or are gardens with individual family plots. Each garden shares the harvest in different ways, depending on the garden location and organization. The primary methods are to use it directly in garden neighborhoods to feed those who can use fresh produce, and to have an open garden with the produce available for the picking. Others donate a share to social service agencies or give directly to hungry families. One notable example is the garden at the juvenile detention facility, where fresh produce and value added items, such as salsa, are donated by the youth to a social service agency.¹²⁷ This provides a great way for the

¹²⁶ Sara Stewart, e-mail message to author, June 30, 2011.
¹²⁷ Ibid.
youth to work together and to develop their own personal and community networks through their garden efforts. Regardless of the design, all bring together diverse people around a common cause.

Networking with volunteers and gardeners, or simply those interested in learning more about gardening, is a vibrant Unity Gardens activity. It takes place in gardens and via email, Facebook, Twitter, e-newsletters, in person, and on the phone. Media coverage on garden ground breakings and group seed starting events have also been popular ways to get media attention and to recruit future volunteers and gardeners. With its twofold mission to bring together people and to provide food, both serve to improve the health of the community and the impact is evidenced in the health of both individuals and neighborhoods. Unity Gardens play a vital role in developing a sustainable urban food system by naturally working towards a balance between the needs of people, by providing fresh food; of the planet, by doing soil testing and implementing organic growing methods at the gardens; and profit, by keeping costs low for both Unity Gardens as a whole and for each garden by garnering free seeds, plants, and soil. Partnerships have been forged between Unity Gardens and the city of South Bend, which provides land and free compost from its composting facility; the County Health Department, which provides the soil testing; individuals, who till the gardens and donate materials; and with area businesses such as banks, local hardware stores, and greenhouses which provide funding and in-kind support. Schools are also a part of the city network of gardens, incorporating garden curriculum and neighborhood involvement to varying degrees. Garden workshops have become a standard event for Unity Gardens. They are held not only to educate, but to provide a way to bring people together and engage them...
in the gardens. Beginning in 2009, workshops were held at the Greenhouse Community Garden on topics such as “Starting from Seed,” “Container Gardening,” “Starting a Community Garden,” and an heirloom tomato tasting. Since then, education efforts have expanded to offer workshops each season and are presented by area Master Gardeners, garden leaders, chefs, and nutritionists. Attendees have not only gained information, but often continue to apply what they learn by volunteering with Unity Garden efforts such as seed starting and transplanting.

All of these activities are vital to include in developing a sustainable urban food system. Reaching out to communities large and small through direct engagement and education, along with integrating garden groups into other local food movements, are central to developing a new food system. Sustaining the gardens requires action from multiple areas, including government, civic groups, neighborhoods, schools, and individuals. Gathering around a school or neighborhood garden to plant seeds, pull weeds, or to harvest peas and beans is a great place to start.

Urban Garden Market

Local and regional food systems can especially increase employment, income, and output in rural areas, help address “food desert” challenges in cities’ lower-income neighborhoods, foster civic engagement, and enhance urban-rural connections.  

--- Jeffrey K. O’Hara, “Market Forces: Creating Jobs Through Public Investment in Local and Regional Food Systems.”

The South Bend Farmers Market was started over 100 years ago on the Colfax Street bridge, only a short distance from its current location. It has been in the same location, just over a mile east of downtown, since 1924, and in the same building since

129 http://southbendfarmersmarket.com/about, accessed November 18, 2011
As the only farmers market in town, it has provided a point of sale for local food, food businesses, crafts, and has served as a community gathering place. Because of its location, it has served the central and eastern parts of town very well, but the West side does not have easy access to it, especially for those without personal transportation. It can easily take twenty minutes or more to drive to the market from the west side, or over an hour on the bus. On Saturdays, parking can be dangerously crowded. Once inside, the aisles are full of people and produce and the bulk of both, combined with the noise of conversation and commerce, make it nearly impossible to converse with the farmer about what a food is, how it was grown, and what to do with it. Although it is also open during the day on Tuesday and Thursdays, and Fridays during peak growing season, those who live and work on the West side may find it challenging, if not impossible, to make the trip during the week. Today, the population of South Bend is just over 100,000, compared to the early 1920s, when the population of the county was about the same. Then, the farmers market was likely large enough to accommodate most city residents; but the one market in town has been bursting at the seams, and yet has not been able to reach and serve the whole community.

Physical limitations to a farmers market, economic demands, the lack of knowledge or ability to grow food, and the idea that everybody needs to eat and deserves access to whole, fresh, seasonal foods from the area all motivated the founders of what became the Urban Garden Market. While many neighborhoods have easy access to either grocery stores and or the South Bend Farmers Market, areas of the West side of South

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130 Ibid.
Bend have limited access to groceries as the stores once embedded in Westside neighborhoods followed new developments growing on the city-county border. For those with limited access to convenient, reliable transportation, a one way 20 to 60-plus minute journey, depending on the day, to drive or take the bus from the Westside to the South Bend Farmers Market, making the trip challenging and time intensive even for able-bodied, childless people.

As conversations started about community gardens providing fresh produce in South Bend neighborhoods, ideas abounded about how to sell it in neighborhoods, too. A farm market or stand in every neighborhood! A food truck delivering produce to underserved areas! A farmers market in the food desert sections of the west side of town! These comments and ideas were shared over the period of a year among a small group of women, including me, who were active in food issues and community organizing. We had all been wondering how more fresh food could be provided in high unemployment areas which have high crime rates and low access to fresh food. These neighborhoods have little in the way of social services, and little available in terms of shopping, green space, anything beyond the basic city services, and low access to and availability of decent paying jobs. The lack of fresh food sources, the lack of economic opportunity, the need for more community development and community gathering spaces, and the need for revitalization in a near-abandoned shopping district known as LaSalle Square ultimately brought a diverse little group together to discuss how to create a something positive in a negatively viewed part of town.
Early in the summer of 2008, I met with Linda, Donna, and Marilyn at a local coffee shop to discuss these issues. Each of us came with a different perspective, and each of us brought different skills to the table. Linda, a retired high school biology teacher, helped start the Community Forum on Economic Development (CFED) and is active in planning the annual conference and maintaining the email contact list for members of CFED. Every week she contacts the list with key events, meetings, and educational opportunities regarding local development issues and opportunities. When we met, she was busy with what would be the first of two efforts to keep the LaSalle Square branch library open. She is very interested in creating and supporting opportunities for neighborhoods to have places to gather and to grow both socially and economically. Through her involvement with the library struggle and with local tax issues, she knew the people in key positions in the local government. An activist since the 1960s, Linda holds a firm belief in creating change through collective, educated action of all kinds. Married to a University of Notre Dame economics professor, she has a strong working knowledge of local economic issues and connections to university people and resources.

In contrast to Linda, Donna lives on the West side and holds a quiet passion for improving her neighborhood’s quality of life. At the time, she was working as a part-time grant writer, and was looking for ways to improve the resources in her part of town. She grows a small but profuse flower garden and relishes in finding good food and good conversation. When not at work or planning how to change the world, she can be found at the bedside of a sick friend, church member, or a relative. She is always ready with a compassionate ear and comforting, thoughtful, and uplifting words. As for Marilyn, she carries a firm resolve to question how things are and to push for them to be better. She
lives on the Westside and was working for a neighborhood center to organize social and educational events. Her job kept her abreast of the rehabilitation projects and in tune with the local unions. Despite all her hard work, Marilyn easily pulls forth a throaty laugh at the ridiculous and the mildly unjust happenings around town. When the offenses appear unfair, however, she digs in, asks questions, and pushes for positive change that involves and engages the community.

As for me, I love farmers markets. The sensory experience of seeing all the fresh, brightly colored food, the social nature of gathering fresh food while talking with farmers, family, friends, and neighbors, and the opportunity they provide for local farmers and gardeners to share their work and bounty with others makes me happy and brings me peace. Going to markets feeds my body and soul, and is something I believe everyone should be able to enjoy as either a shopper or a grower. As a gardener and a project planner, I was excited by the possibility we had gathered to discuss.

We each came with our own particular pet project and issue, but all of us soon focused on a common solution: a farmers market. It could begin to address many of the deficiencies of the area by providing food, fellowship, and opportunity. What we were not sure about was how to start. We divided up the research and list of potential allies to contact and set out to develop the city’s West side by providing what we saw as lacking: healthy and available produce, a community gathering space, opportunities for an area once rich in backyard gardeners to gain some needed revenue, and a reason to be proud of the neighborhood.
It was clear that Westsiders’ access to food was an issue that needed addressing. A fresh food source was clearly needed on the west side of town, especially in the area in and around LaSalle Square — a near-deserted strip mall which had once hosted a grocery and convenience stores. All that was left was a church, a thrift store, a library struggling to remain open, and a variety of fast food restaurants bordering the large, empty parking lot. Underserved by social services and economic opportunity, yet retaining a tentative balance between government supported housing and sturdy middle class homes, the area includes people with and without jobs, and people with and without yards for growing food. Despite the West side’s long history of large backyard gardens, traditionally grown to support families and extended family networks, an ageing population and scattered family networks has reduced homegrown food activities. The area had become “food insecure,” and was a shining example of a food desert.

Although we did not know it at the time, we were on target with our hunches about the state of food and health in the LaSalle Square area. Research done by Matthew Panhans, an economics student at the University of Notre Dame, backs up their hunch. He researched the local impact of food access in the city for his senior honors thesis, “Food Deserts in South Bend, IN: Local Efforts to Promote Healthy Food, Democracy, and Economic Development.” He found that in South Bend, food availability is a problem, and that in some of the highest poverty areas the only place to buy milk is at a gas station – at a much higher price than at a grocery store. “Most alarmingly,” he adds, “in some of the high poverty census tracts, there are no food stores that sell fresh fruits and vegetables, and there are no food stores in the high poverty areas that sell fresh fruits
and vegetables that are organic." The Urban Garden Market would truly meet an unmet need that had long been ignored.

The dilemma that faced us was how to bring fresh, local food to the area while increasing economic opportunity and supporting the local food culture. We saw potential in using a farm market to bring fresh food to an underserved area and provide economic development opportunities to the neighborhood, area farmers, and backyard gardeners. Beyond these benefits, a farmers market can support the development of personal and community connections, but can also help preserve regional foodways that are sources of pride and distinction. O’Hara has described the challenges to starting a farmers market in a low-income neighborhood as including outreach, awareness, and accessibility as well as overcoming the assumption by residents that the food prices will be unaffordable.

None of the goals are small, easy, or quick-fix tasks. Blissfully ignorant of these challenges, we decided that despite beginning our talks at the beginning of the growing season, we would try and put together a test market in LaSalle Square that same season. A September farmers market was the goal, with the idea to try out the idea for a month to see if anyone would come. Would folks come out and shop for fresh local food in an area that was not considered safe for neighbors to gather in public, in a place not known as a source for good, healthy things to eat and do? What if the weather was cold? Rainy? Snowy? The risks were high, but not doing anything seemed riskier.

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133 Flammang, The Taste for Civilization, 263.
As the West side market experiment began, our organizing group gave little thought to developing financial support. Once temporary permits and a piece of land were secured from the city, and food was promised from a small handful of local farmers and from volunteers who could pick up produce at an Amish produce auction about 20 miles away, what was to become the Urban Garden Market began. To publicize, neighbors were alerted in church bulletins and by flyers distributed door to door in the surrounding neighborhoods; each woman’s network from work and volunteer projects were contacted; and some initial press was secured. People came. Even one dark Saturday morning flooded with pouring rain, and only three vehicles with propped open truck beds and hatches displaying slightly soggy produce and their farmer-drivers hunching under a small adjacent office building awning, a few dozen people, young and old, grabbed umbrellas and a few dollars to pick up some late season corn, tomatoes, and lettuce.

Beyond braving the weather, more challenges to developing the market lay ahead. Thankfully, none of us bothered to research how hard it would be to set up a market in a low income area of town. We simply pushed ahead to secure space, support, and produce.

After the trial month ended, we gathered to decide on what to do next. We agreed that it had been a success and it needed to continue in a slightly larger location, with more farmers, and with more direct support by the city and the neighborhood associations. This new market, we decided, would resemble the South Bend Farmers Market on the east side in that it would bring together farmers and eaters, but differ in many other ways. For example, the South Bend Farmers Market operates year-round in an enclosed space. While this provides shelter from the weather, it also limits the number of vendors and limits the amount of space available to walk through the market. Busy market days made
it impossible to talk to the vendors about the food — how it was raised, how to prepare it, and who grew it — and made stopping to talk in the market like pausing in rush hour traffic. The narrow aisles are filled with people eager to see produce and be seen buying produce, with friends and families heading to the restaurant or bakery or meat counters, and with people there simply to see the local food traffic. Traffic jams and stroller crashes were sure to take place for those wanting to talk to vendors or other shoppers, and wheelchair and stroller users were challenged, to say the least. These were situations that we wanted to avoid at the Urban Garden Market. In an open air environment the design would have to be seasonal only. Farmers could drive up in trucks and station wagons and unload produce onto a table at an affordable daily rate of $5-10 dollars per day. We hoped these measures would encourage backyard gardeners to participate. Between rows of farmer vehicles, a wide walkway was set up with an informational table in the middle and an entertainment/education tent at one end. This design, we hoped, would encourage walking, talking, learning, and connecting.

It was easy for us to see the potential in creating the market as a community gathering hub, as well as a place to get and to learn about fresh food. Our vision for the market quickly expanded to include education and awareness about the benefits of fresh, local, seasonal food and community development. Its mission, as described on the website, is that the Urban Garden Market provides South Bend’s West side community with a place to buy fresh produce direct from producers in a friendly, open-air environment; and backyard gardeners and small farmers with a direct market for their goods. As the market proceeded into its first, second, and third seasons, several factors became apparent. Individuals coming to the market learned about the timing and
availability of local food options, and were able to put a face – and often a handshake and a conversation – to the food. For example, one late June morning a young man walked in from a nearby neighborhood and inquired about getting some watermelon. This led to a conversation with a woman who farms in New Carlisle, Indiana, about when it might be available and what was in season that day. The increasing numbers of people returning week after week suggest they had realized “that buying food at farmers markets is more affordable than buying food at supermarkets for many products during peak growing season.” Another reason may mirror why people frequent a Hasting, Nebraska market. “They get to know each other and the vendors,” reported the market organizer. “The Saturday morning market becomes a community-building event.” By the end of the second full season, the vendors were caught up in the friendly atmosphere of the market. Lynn-Joyce Dolson was quoted in an October, 2010 newspaper article as saying, "We're just like a family." In the same article, Eugene Baughman, owner of Pa's Vegetable Patch, said he comes to the Urban Garden Market “to give residents on the west side a chance to buy organic vegetables.” Business had been good, he was quoted as saying. "People want to get away from manufactured foods, and by that I mean food grown in California and Florida, because they can get fresh and ripe vegetables here." The vision of good food and fellowship in a food desert had become a reality.

The Urban Garden Market, which started with brief conversations among virtual strangers crossing paths at community forums and events, has grown into a standard

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135 Ibid., 22.
137 Howard Dukes, “Garden market a west-side hit: Season extended because business was strong,” South Bend Tribune, October 10, 2010.
138 Ibid.
Saturday morning event for the LaSalle Square area. It has grown well beyond that soggy Saturday in the rain, which hosted only a couple dozen people purchasing produce, to a market hosting an average of 130-150 individuals shopping and socializing each week. It has not only developed as a place for the community to gather, it has helped to expand opportunities for growing a local and regional food system. Hopefully, the longer reaching effects of the market are also being experienced. Jeffrey O’Hara reports on how farmers markets can increase social interaction among individuals, noting that “Local and regional food systems can help promote the consumption of more healthful food.” Over time, the regular shoppers at the Urban Garden Market may benefit not only from socializing, but from having a regular supply of fresh whole food available close to home.

While having healthy food is a primary benefit for individuals frequenting a farmers market, there are broader impact markets. On average, studies have shown that 75 percent of shoppers at farmers markets arrived in groups, 63 percent had a social interaction with another shopper, and 42 percent have a social interaction with a market employee. These numbers are even more compelling when compared to the 84% of supermarket customers who shop alone, the 9% of supermarkets customers who have a social interaction with another customer, and the 14% who have a social interaction with an employee. The impacts on the individuals, the neighborhood, and on the community are potentially immense once farmers market regulars start interacting more with the people around them, with the source of their food, and with the people who produce the

140 Ibid., 26.
141 Ibid.
food. Opportunities exist to track a variety of health indexes among market regulars versus area residents who do not or cannot frequent the market.

The Urban Garden Market is a crucial piece in developing and maintaining a sustainable urban food system. It provides fresh food grown locally which is directly purchased from the growers. In turn, it has provided new economic opportunities for the farmers and gardeners who sell at the market created new business opportunities for those farms, and new opportunities for expanding farming networks. In these ways, the Urban Garden Market supports the local economy, and decreases the number of food miles and amount of greenhouse gases. It is one force which is beginning to reshape the design of the city of South Bend and its economic system. By continuing to conduct outreach and education, to network with growers and related services such as Purdue Extension, and engaging and empowering residents to take part, the Urban Garden Market can be a powerful force for positive change in the health, economy, and environment of South Bend. Of the changes the UGM has and will continue to bring, not the least of these is improving local long-term food security and health.

Purple Porch Co-op

I want fully to bear the brunt of what my own eating of the living world entails. I want to escape the trap that I, like most Americans, have fallen into the last four decades: obtaining nine-tenths of our food from nonlocal sources, with shippers, processors, packagers, retailers, and advertisers gaining three times more income from each dollar of food purchased than do farmers, fishermen, and ranchers. I want to reduce the distance that my food travels before it reaches my mouth and my mind, so that I can reduce the ignorance my friend Jim Harrison describes with such devastating simplicity: “The majority of our population that eats beef, pork, and chicken has never known an actual
cow, pig or hen.”

Confidence can only be guaranteed when there is complete transparency in the food system. It is not enough for some consumers to know where their food originates and how it got to the supermarket. Rather, these people demand to know – and to see – who is growing their food, where it is growing, and how it is being grown. Many want to talk to the farmers face to face, and even visit their fields and ask direct questions about pesticides and fertilizers. Meeting the people that grow the food you consume builds confidence and trust, and seems to be inherent with locally produced food.

It started with a conversation around a dining room table. Four friends, myself, my partner, and two of our neighbors, were chatting over some drinks about our food. We had been buying food in bulk from a natural food supplier for several months, and had recently realized that it was not as “green” as we thought. The organic beans came from China, one neighbor had noticed, which did not make sense. After all, beans can be grown all over the Midwest. The problem was none of us knew where to buy them, and none of us wanted to drive to yet another place to pick up local food. We were already driving to get milk, eggs, meat, and cheese from a local farmer, and to an organic farm to pick up our CSA shares of local fruits and vegetables. There must be a way, we agreed, to get local, organic food from growers we could know and trust without driving all over the region. Getting local organic food was turning into a part-time job, a job none of us could afford to keep. The South Bend Farmers Market offered little organic produce, and we had all found it difficult to impossible to talk with the growers about how the food was raised due to a lack of transparency on the growers’ end and a physical inability to get close enough to talk during weekend market hours. Besides, for us, purchasing local food is about more than buying it from a local market, it is about making connections with the food by learning about the seasons, the farms, and the farmers. As Deborah Madison explains,

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142 Nabhan, *Coming Home to Eat*, 34.
When we eat, we do so much more than put food in our mouths. We’ve lived for so long without a story—without any idea of where our food comes from, how it’s raised, and who the people are that grow and produce it—that we have become out of touch with our food.\footnote{Costa, \textit{Farmer Jane: Women Changing the Way We Eat} (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 2010), 95.}

We wanted to be in touch with our food, but we realized that creating a community story with local food as a leading player was going to take a larger cast of characters.

Surely, we concluded, other people wanted to talk about food and gather together to get it. After all, we knew many families with whom we were sharing pick up chores on our various excursions around Michiana. We refined our idea, deciding what we hoped to create was a place to bring local food we could connect with and trust to one place for pick up from the farmer. We put out a press release and an email blast to our friends and acquaintances. We wanted to see who would turn out to possibly create a place that brings local food to local people in the spirit of cooperation, honesty, and in the name of good health and community. At that initial gathering, over 100 people filled a large meeting room at the downtown library, eager to talk about a new way to eat.

This was the beginning of the Purple Porch Co-op. It began as a matter of health and convenience, and as an adventure between friends to see how we could work with others to secure local food. The cooperative work we initially did to pick up local food yielded the name. The foods we each picked up were left in a jointly purchased refrigerator stored in the garage of a house with a purple porch. It provided a concrete
image and a fun identity for our new endeavor. It had been years since South Bend had hosted a food co-op, and since the goal of this venture was not to make money, but to provide a more community-oriented approach to food, starting the effort as a cooperative seemed a natural fit. A cooperative is a unique form of business that is as user-owned, user-benefited, and user-controlled. As described on the Indiana Cooperative Development Center website, cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. By developing a collective marketing and operational structure, the Purple Porch Co-op aims to connect individuals and build community as another way to grow local food resources. It engages a variety of people in developing and supporting a sustainable local food system, which, as Wendell Berry has explained, is crucial to growing a new food system because it “won’t happen if a lot of people – consumers and producers, city people and country people, conservationists and land users – don’t get together deliberately to make it happen.”

As the saying goes, the people make the place, and this has certainly been true of the Purple Porch Co-op. It evolved based on what individuals could offer in terms of talents and time as well as resources. Farmers, artists, web designers, gardeners, community organizers, and teachers helped craft a new local food hub that is unique to

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Purple Porch Co-op
A member-owned cooperative enterprise in North Central Indiana committed to growing a local, sustainable economy that will reduce our carbon footprint through the purchasing of locally produced foods. We aim to connect people in Michiana who want to buy local, organic and/or fair trade food with local growers who produce that food. ~www.purpleporchcoop.com/about
others in the region. This process is strikingly different from the way most businesses begin, but perhaps it is a model for how future sustainable businesses will get started. Leigh Holland highlights this approach in “Diversity and Connections in Community Gardens: a contribution to local sustainability,” explaining that “…the philosophy of sustainable development is that it will most effectively operate at the ‘grassroots’ level, i.e. in the community; a bottom-up approach often at odds with the traditional economic development model.”

This unique gathering space, currently housed in a refurbished warehouse that primarily serves as a creative arts and performance space, brings together rural growers with urban eaters to build the fertile soil from which community can grow and thrive. It operates as a hybrid system, which combines online ordering where members can read information about the farmers and how the food is grown, and direct pick up of their order from the farmer, by utilizing software from first the Western Michigan Co-op and now from Eugene, Oregon’s Local Food MarketPlace. Co-op structure and operation advice and assistance came from the Indiana Cooperative Development Center and its member co-ops. As one element of a sustainable urban food system, it is uniquely situated to promote a sense of community by utilizing technology to connect people to a source for fresh and local food.

It is the desire for local and organic food from a trusted source that inspired the Purple Porch Co-op, and this same desire is motivating people across the country. It is not only the desire to connect with good food from good farmers, but it has also come

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146 Holland, “Diversity and Connections,” 289.
from what O’Hara describes as “a backlash against the deficiencies of our consolidated
food production, processing, and distribution system.”\textsuperscript{147} A sustainable urban food
system can and perhaps must arise from balancing the triple bottom line. It meets the
financial needs of growers by allowing them to earn greater profits by selling
through local food systems. The producers at Purple
Porch Co-op receive 92.3\% of each food dollar spent
there, according to annual figures shared in the
Purple Porch Co-op’s June, 24, 2011 newsletter The
Porch Post, compared to the national average of
11.6\% of each dollar that producers get from selling
on the wholesale market\textsuperscript{149} (See Table 7).

Dick Gallagher, chairman of the Iowa Corn
Promotion Board, explains this disparity, saying, “Only a small percentage of our food
dollar actually pays for the production of the raw commodity itself.”\textsuperscript{150} O’Hara
highlights that local and regional food systems support “employment, incomes, and
output in rural communities...because a greater percentage of the sales revenue is
retained locally.”\textsuperscript{151} During the first 2 ½ years of operation, the co-op has generated over

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\textbf{Table 7: How food dollars are spent:} \textsuperscript{148} \\
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33.7\% food services (eating, drinking, related establishments) \\
18.6\% food processing \\
13.6\% retail trade \\
11.6\% farms \\
6.8\% energy \\
4.45\% finance & insurance \\
4\% packaging \\
3.8\% other \\
3.5\% transportation \\
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\textsuperscript{147} O’Hara, “Market Forces,” 2.
\textsuperscript{148} Canning, A Revised and Expanded Food Dollar Series: A Better Understanding of Our Food Costs, ERR-
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{150} “USDA Releases Revised Food Dollar Farmers share less than Originally Thought- Just 11.6 \textcent,” Iowa
\textsuperscript{151} O’Hara, “Market Forces,” 3.
$330,000 in sales,\textsuperscript{152} generating a significant income for local farmers. The co-op has grown to over 225 members, processes an average of 300 orders per month, and generates approximately $3,300 in monthly sales of 850 local products.\textsuperscript{153} In addition to improving economic situations for local farmers, local food systems also promote eating healthier food and contribute to an improved quality of life.\textsuperscript{154} By providing a way for the local food system to develop, the reliance on foods shipped in from other regions or countries is lessened, thereby improving air, water, and soil quality through reduced impact.

A shift is happening in small, but important, ways. It is coming from a shift in priorities regarding what people eat, where it comes from, and how it is grown. A shift is also occurring in the notion of where to buy food. Grocery stores and supercenters are losing their appeal, especially for those who have access to a fresh food market. Markets, such as the Purple Porch Co-op, need to be continually providing food and promoting their existence and availability to the community and continually educating and inspiring people who are exploring local foods. During its first three years, the Purple Porch Co-op has incorporated education and awareness-raising events about the benefits of fresh food, local food, seasonal food, nutrition, environmental issues and impacts, and community development as integral pieces to its operation. At the core of each event is community. Community dinners, or potlucks, bring together co-op members and friends to share dishes made from local, seasonal ingredients. Each dish is voted on by placing loose


\textsuperscript{153} Greg Koehler, e-mail message to author, September 29, 2011.

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 15.
change or small bills in paper bags near each dish. The winner gets bragging rights and all the vote money is donated towards the co-op’s food donation program. The money from the dinners, as well as whatever is rounded up at the point of sale, purchases food from the co-op’s growers which is then given to a local food pantry, soup kitchen, or social service agency. Other events, such as a film series featuring movies such as *Fresh*, *Dirt!*, and *Food, Inc.* have taken place in area churches. Not only did these movies raise awareness of food issues, but they helped to create community connections between the new co-op and area residents. Local farmers spoke after each film and provided snacks of goat cheese, raw milk cheese, fruits and veggies, and apple cider to fuel the discussions which took place after each movie. Childcare was provided at each event, which allowed the adults participating in the discussions to connect and be inspired towards action in their own lives and in the life of the larger community. By hosting events beyond food pick-up times, the Purple Porch Co-op is providing a sustainable alternative by not only supporting regional economic growth, but by promoting environmental responsibility and fostering community connections.
Conclusion

When we realize how fundamental food and farming are to human life, we can begin to see that the way we eat is not just the problem, but also the solution. By changing just this one aspect of our lives—how we feed ourselves—we can restore our personal and planetary health, the integrity of the natural world, and our right relation to it.  

~ Claire Hope Cummings, lawyer, indigenous land rights advocate, and author of *Uncertain Peril: Genetic Engineering and the Future of Seeds*

Community grows from an awareness of the interconnectedness of various aspects of daily life. Common concerns, shared interests, and mutual understanding can connect individuals and move them towards solutions and revitalized interest in opportunities for improvement. As Carlos Petrini writes, “In the near future, politics and economics will grow aware of the vital relationship between food, agriculture, climate change, and health care, of the landscape and of the beauty of the ecosystems—all interconnected problems.”

In developing a sustainable urban food system, these interconnected problems may be addressed by supporting community education, opportunities to address local needs through local actions, and by encouraging progressive policy that supports local and regional economic and community development.

It takes a community to create community. Beginning with a conversation, an idea or dream shared between two or more people can grow into a new network of folks who otherwise may never have met, let alone worked or played together. The trick is, it has to start somewhere. When contemplating what a sustainable urban food system might look like, the visions and possibilities are endless. It could encompass many things, but it must

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155 Costa, Farmer Jane, 62.

begin in some sort of nurturing community. Large or small, from a church to a neighborhood to a book club, community grows community.

Everything from where we live to what we eat is based around community, although this may not be immediately clear. We choose our homes based on appearance, convenience, and a level of comfort with the neighbors who share our living space. The same can be said for what we eat. We choose what we eat based on what it looks like, the convenience of the store or product, and a level of comfort with the people we interact with around the food. For most, food purchasing takes place in a grocery store where only 14% of shoppers ever talk to store employees, and only 9% speak to a fellow shopper.157 This quiet, isolating, and anonymous shopping experience has become the norm in the United States over the past 50-60 years as grocery stores have replaced small local stores and markets. This experience does not support or nurture community, it is centered on a service or transaction. Items are artfully displayed in each section and described by the name of the food or food product. We purchase what we are able to prepare — in other words, what is convenient for us to eat. Developing a sustainable urban food system necessarily involves addressing these issues by providing food that is appealing, convenient, and that comes from familiar, non-threatening people. It must also address the needs and abilities of each urban community.

After all, everybody needs to eat every day. What we eat, where it is grown, and who grows it has major impacts on the environment, the economy, and on how people live. In order to create a sustainable food system, we need to change all three areas.

Making these changes can stem from selfish pleasures: wanting fresh, delicious food to eat; wanting to learn gardening or farming; or wanting opportunities to connect with others in gardens, at farms, and in markets. We are, after all, social creatures who need to eat. After experiencing these ways of knowing and relating to food, more and more people are getting hooked on fresh and local.

These shifts may represent a beginning, or perhaps a return to the past. In the United States, the number of farms and farmers has dwindled, and most people live in urban areas without access to land for farming or gardening. Fifty years ago, half the population of the Western world worked in agriculture in some capacity; today the number has dropped to between 2 and 7 percent. To develop a sustainable urban food system, opportunities for growing, selling, and buying local foods must be developed and expanded. At the same time, the public needs to learn how to grow food, prepare fresh food, and how to shop for locally grown foods. Luckily, these changes can take place anywhere and be started, implemented, and run by community residents with little to no special training. Food system collaborations and partnerships can sprout out of the fertile networks of neighborhoods, churches, and from interactions at community events.

Each of the approaches to developing a sustainable urban food system outlined here grew out of a community, and began with a conversation that described a shared idea and a common dream. Conversations about food — its sources, embodied energy, source, and nutrition, were beginning to happen nationally at the same time most of these

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projects began. Locally, there was no magic ingredient to create them or support them aside from community and conversation and a hunger for an alternative.

To grow a sustainable food system in an urban area, the needs of the people and the local economy and environment need addressing and supporting by the people of that area. A local approach to a national problem is possible and is taking place in South Bend, where multiple approaches to connecting local food to local people are being implemented. Each endeavor has emerged from the simple, yet complex, strong, and powerful connections of community. Whether the bonds are forged between neighbors or at a community event, people need to connect and feel connected in order for sustainable change to come from their thoughts and words. Being connected as a community connects people to that place, and hence to the land. Steven Semken and Elizabeth Brandt describe the effects of “sprawl, economic globalization, and cultural homogenization [as] the estrangement or outright removal of people from places that help to define their identities and sustain their lifeways.”

Becoming reacquainted and resituated to a place can help to define a community and to sustain a local and regional culture. Living in context with a community and its dreams, needs, and abilities can offer up hope and possibility.

When examining the current mainstream food system, it is easy to feel disconnected, powerless, and unable to control the market, the options, and how those

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choices affect both our individual health and the health of the regional ecosystem. Laura DeLind argues this point from a food safety perspective, writing that the point is not to eliminate the danger, but to manage it. It is not to take our food (and ourselves) out of context – to sanitize, standardize, and codify – but to keep it (and us) in context, in situ and constantly adjusting. Not one language, not one creation myth, not one outcome, but many....The closest we can come to food safety is to know who we are, where we are, and what we are eating.  

Feeling safe about food choices, connecting to where food comes from, and centering food at the heart of community building efforts are the approaches that have been implemented in South Bend and are leading it towards a sustainable urban food system.

Bringing food into the city of South Bend through the development of community gardens, and connecting those gardens and the food grown in them to social networks such as neighborhoods, churches, and social service agencies is one approach that is thriving. In areas without access to land or ability to grow food or purchase fresh food, starting a farmers market in a food desert can begin to address the needs of the local people and economy, and to support the regional environment through the support of local farms. By expanding beyond traditional market models, technology can bring together people by connecting them virtually and literally to food and farmers. Each approach utilizes the tools of sustainability to bring a new harmony to a daily activity: eating. None of these came into being because an “expert” set them up, and none of them exist because there are extraordinary opportunities or resources in the South Bend area. It

160 DeLind, "Safe at any Scale?" 306
is not a city infused with a farming culture even though it is surrounded by rich farmland, cornfields, and a large Amish community. It is a place where community connections can be made throughout the community in civic groups, churches, schools, public events, and in gathering spots such as cafés and pubs. It is a place where a good idea, once shared, can find a supportive following.
Next Steps

The food movement coalesces around the recognition that today’s food and farming economy is “unsustainable”—that it can’t go on in its current form much longer without courting a breakdown of some kind, whether environmental, economic, or both.\(^\text{161}\)

~ Michael Pollan, “The Food Movement, Rising.”

South Bend is not a town with a sustainable urban food system, but it is on its way. There are many communities across the country and across the world with projects that could enhance or add to what is already taking place. The following highlights some of the opportunities available to South Bend as it continues to grow a sustainable urban food system.

- Expanding the Purple Porch Co-op into more of a “food hub.” This concept is starting to catch on in other communities, and can be a useful point of exchange between farmers and customers. A food hub functions as both a drop off and pick up point, as coordinator of the supply chain, and as a place for food storage, processing, and packaging, allowing for an expansion of local and regional food markets by streamlining the delivery and procurement process.\(^\text{162}\)

- Another expansion opportunity that relies on the support of local government and on education of residents is small backyard livestock production. More hands-on learning and the availability of processing meat via neighborhood or mobile processing facilities would provide enhanced connections for people with the source of their meat and for greater economic opportunity to develop local businesses to provide needed services.

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\(^{162}\) O’Hara, “Market Forces,” 12.
Community gardens also provide opportunity to connect to the source of food and to support an emerging local economic system as well as a new way of living in cities. By integrating gardens into neighborhood and shopping district plans, cities become more livable by providing for a connection to the natural world and providing for a way to produce food to sustain the body and soul of residents. Anne Bellows encourages this approach, stating that “Urban environments have the capacity to integrate our need to live in a balance of built and open spaces.” These green zones, she argues, are “as important for a robust city as building housing, service infrastructure, and industrial and commercial spaces. Community and educational land dedicated to food production encourages participation in the vigor of a positive urban environment.”

Can the world be saved by backyard and community gardening? The possibility certainly exists. To grow a sustainable urban food system, city gardening must interact with the farms and food systems of the region in order to support all the people within it. Not only will an interactive and interconnected local food system provide good food, it will build social capital – trust, civic engagement, the development of community leaders, and the sharing of goods, services, and information.

Implementation of garden to market classes that provide training, encouragement, and support for local farmers and backyard gardeners as they grow their capacity to include sales at local markets, preferably through active support by the local county extension office.

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164 Ibid., 8.
Developing a sustainable urban food system yields a multitude of interconnected and interrelated benefits with impacts beyond one region. Backyard gardeners selling alongside farmers at an urban market can provide food in needy neighborhoods and income for city and county residents, thereby supporting local and regional economic development. Having food grown close to where people live reduces the production of greenhouse gases because bringing in the food from backyard gardens, community gardens, or nearby farms keeps the transportation distance short. While reducing environmental impact, local foods connect individuals with the source of their food and to one another.

Meeting a farmer at my local market or co-op allows me to know who they are, why they grow food, how they grow food, and allows me to ask them why, how, when, and what. Having healthy, fresh food available close to home allows for an easier way to live a healthy life, both physically and socially. We are able to touch the soil, talk with fellow gardeners about food or friends or ideas, tell farmers what we want and like and learn from them about what is available and from where it came. We support one another while supporting our local economies while minimizing the damage we do to our natural environment. Sustainable urban food systems can be developed by growing community connections between growers, cooks, and eaters. They grow from conversation, ideas, innovation, and the willingness to plant, to meet, and to try something new.


Dukes, Howard. “Garden market a west-side hit: Season extended because business was strong.” South Bend Tribune, October 10, 2010.


89
REFERENCES

I list here writings that have been of use in the writing of this thesis. This is by no means a complete record of all the works and sources I have consulted. It is included here to indicate the substance and range of reading which has formed my ideas and to serve as a source of information for those who may wish to further investigate local food issues.


