

Coversheet

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During spring 2022, folklorist and radio producer Violet Baron completed work on a dual master's degree project in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology and the Media School, both at Indiana University. In the case of such projects (radio productions, podcasts, museum exhibitions, etc.), students undertaking such a degree complete a companion reflection essay reflecting upon the nature, experience, and wider contexts of the underlying project. The bibliographic information for this report is as follows.

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COLLEGE OF ARTS AND
SCIENCES

**DEPARTMENT OF FOLKLORE
AND ETHNOMUSICOLOGY**

Material Culture and Heritage Studies Laboratory

GROWING IN PLACE: A REFLECTION

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**Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree**

Master of Arts

in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology

and the degree

Master of Arts

in The Media School

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Preface

The following paper analyzes a series of narrative audio programs broadcast online as a podcast and on the radio as standalone productions in the summer and fall of 2020 and the winter of 2021. These episodes were a part of my graduate work in folklore studies and journalism. They are accessible online at the following locations:

- <https://www.indianaenvironmentalreporter.org/gip-episodes/>
- <https://indianapublicmedia.org/eartheats/young-farmers-build-community-and-help-each-other-through-the-hard-times.php>
- <https://indianapublicmedia.org/eartheats/essential-workers-and-fig-tree-fans.php>

Introduction

In the following pages, I describe and evaluate an applied project that combined journalistic and folkloristic methodologies to create a podcast series about farmers and food workers in Southern Indiana. The podcast was called *Growing in Place*, a play on the “shelter in place” orders that many states and counties were operating under at the beginning of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. I reported, produced, and hosted the five-part series with support and editorial guidance from the Indiana University Media School, especially the help and mentorship of Professor of Practice Elaine Monaghan. The finished product, and the process I used to arrive at it, applied strategies from public folklore and solutions journalism. These are sub-fields of folklore and journalism, respectively, that employ elements of their fields’ methodologies to reach a result that directly supports and better the communities that they engage with.

Public folklore is a praxis model that applies elements of academic folklore and ethnography to public programs for government or nonprofit organizations, resulting in projects like festivals, museum exhibits, and broadcast productions that package traditional arts for audiences of insiders, outsiders, or a mix of the two (Baron and Spitzer, 2008). Solutions journalism is an orientation that media networks and individual journalists employ to tell stories of conflict or struggle by focusing on solutions and techniques that the people involved in those stories have come up with to approach the problem in question. (Solutions Journalism Network, 2022). While this is the first project to my knowledge that overtly attempts to combine methodologies from public folklore and solutions journalism, it is part of a long tradition of journalistic programs and productions that center community voices and traditional lifeways in

an attempt to tell small-town stories to wider audiences. It offers a model for future such projects, and a test case to improve upon for greater community engagement and collaboration.

The first episode of the series features Michael Hicks, a farmer in his early 40s who grew up in a farming family but went in his own direction to start an organic farm in French Lick, Indiana. He details his circuitous path into farming, and the hardships and risks inherent in starting and maintaining a farm. He meditates on his choices, the future and legacy of his project once he is too old to perform the necessary physical labor, and the ways that he pivoted to provide for an increased demand in local food following the pandemic's outbreak.

The second episode is with Taylor Ferguson, a woman who volunteer-leads the "beef club" for 4-H of Monroe County. 4-H of Monroe County is the local branch of a program that teaches farm skills to children in rural communities. She describes the program, which teaches children from farming families about raising cattle, and talks about what it was like to shift suddenly to virtual meetings once the pandemic started. She also mentions the disappointment her community felt when the 2020 Indiana State Fair went virtual, as this is the culmination of the beef club's programming. Some children made it work, she tells the audience, by filming themselves showing their cattle in their yard. This story was probably the most classically folklore-adjacent, as Ferguson describes the ways children train and adorn their cattle for showing at the fair: it is a close look at a community practice, and the way the community kept it alive amid a major break from the norm.

The third episode features Juan Ruffin, a butcher at a Kroger supermarket in Indianapolis. This one was a slight break from the rest for a few reasons: Ruffin is a Black man living in a city, whereas the first two interviewees are white, rural residents. He also works in food service, rather than the farming side of the food system. I felt it was significant to include his perspective

for these reasons, since the story of food in Indiana very much depends on the services that Ruffin and his colleagues provide, and the story of the pandemic summer of 2020 very much centered on the experiences of so-called essential workers like Ruffin. These employees of food stores, drugstores, gas stations, and similar stations of commerce for everyday life were not exempt from work during the initial pandemic shutdowns. Often the lowest-paid workers in American society, these people had to continue risking their lives to provide their cities and towns with food. Ruffin tells the audience what it was like to work in these scary conditions and considers the impact that the massive Black Lives Matter protests happening in his city had on his perspective.

The fourth episode is an interview with Keith Nance, who works as a school superintendent for a rural school system. He tells listeners about a program the school system created to delivered free meals to the families who qualified for them, after the children could no longer receive them at school because of the shutdown. Many school workers pitched in to support this effort, including bus drivers who knew the routes and led the drop-off efforts. Nance was the least “on-the-ground” interview in the series; he knew this story well, but he told it from the perspective of an administrator, a bit further removed from the direct action of the experience. I attempted to interview one of the women who personally organized the efforts and packed the food, but she was not comfortable with speaking for the podcast.

The final episode is with Liz Brownlee, who cofounded the Hoosier Young Farmers Coalition. This is an organization that advocates for social support for people starting farms in the state. Brownlee describes the challenges that young farmers face, in a government system that subsidizes commodity farmers but does not offer easy access to healthcare, childcare, or subsidies for organic farms. She also tells listeners about the pressures and competition that arose

when the pandemic shutdown hit, including long waitlists for butchers and the immediate need to pivot from in-person markets to online commerce systems. Brownlee offered an on-the-ground perspective, but I felt she differed somewhat from the others in her level of education and her critical sense of the major systematic and institutional elements at play for farmers and food workers. She was in two roles at once: as a farmer, she worked in the middle of the social systems she spoke about, and as an advocate and local leader of a nation-wide organization, she was also somewhat able to influence these systems through her connections and access to tools for advocacy.

Part I: The Process

Contextualizing the Project

By early May of 2020, Bloomington, Indiana was on lockdown, and deeply enmeshed in the strange, repetitive daily break from normalcy of the early Coronavirus pandemic. As my first year of graduate school at Indiana University (IU) wound to a close, I discussed with my journalism professor and mentor, Elaine Monaghan, the possibility of a series that would expand on my earlier research into nearby farming communities. In the fall semester for Monaghan's intensive graduate journalism workshop, I had written an article about a cooperative market and farm-share in Paoli, Indiana that supported a growing organic farming movement in the area and provided a central place for rural neighbors to buy healthy food and find community (Baron, 2019).¹

Now, the global pandemic was halting or delaying food systems and supply chains. Both national and local media were watching supermarket supply and demand wobble and farm hands faced new challenges reaching their seasonal work (Wozniacka, 2020; Turner, 2020; Associated Press, 2020). In a state where agriculture dominates, Monaghan and I agreed it was an important time to tell the stories about the people running farms and working to distribute their food to consumers.

For me, a podcast was an obvious medium for these narratives: there was already precedent for telling food and farm stories through audio, and the form allowed for a certain conversational intimacy that breaks through the rigidity of a journalistic interview.² This was important because I wanted the stories to move beyond a standard journalism piece. I wanted to use elements of ethnography that I was learning in my folklore classes: taking the time with each

source to learn about their lives and allowing them to lead the narrative and tell the story the way that they wanted it to be told.

Monaghan suggested that we reach out to IU's [Center for Rural Engagement](#) for funding, and to the [Indiana Environmental Reporter](#), which could serve as a platform and host for the podcast. Each of these organizations agreed to partner with us for the project, with Monaghan serving as a mentor, editor, and sounding board and myself as the reporter, producer, and host. I decided to call the show *Growing in Place*, as a play on the “shelter in place” orders that went into effect throughout the state of Indiana and nation-wide in the weeks after the pandemic’s domestic outbreak in mid-March of 2020. Later, I pitched the series to *Earth Eats*, a weekly radio show on WFIU, Bloomington’s NPR affiliate station. The show aired two of the episodes on its show after a round of edits.

Who Commissioned and Hosted the Series and Why

The IU Center for Rural Engagement (CRE) is a four-year-old organization on the IU Bloomington campus that aims to channel university resources toward support for the mostly rural communities that surround its main campus in Bloomington. The CRE served as a sponsor for my project, and members of their team and IU faculty affiliates including Jacob Simpson and Jodee Ellett also served as initial sources for background research and connections to potential sources for the stories. The CRE was interested in our project because it provided publicity both for the organization’s initiatives and for their constituents in rural communities. The grant we received from the CRE was called a Direct Collaboration Grant, intended to support initiatives by IU affiliates to work within the CRE’s constituent communities.

One of the reasons the CRE was interested in being a partner in this work was because both Monaghan and I had prior experience collaborating with the organization and highlighting its projects. Monaghan had previously developed a grant with the CRE to promote some of their work, and I had written a profile of the organization for her class the previous semester, as well as a second article that publicized a program they supported to build a local farming cooperative. I had interviewed CRE staffers for both prior projects, so we already had a rapport, and they were familiar with my work. The CRE, meanwhile, had connections to some of the interviewees whom I ultimately selected for the project: the fourth and fifth episodes' interviewees came out of conversations I had with IU faculty affiliates of the CRE, who were connected to these community members because of CRE programs related to rural nutrition and food systems support work.

The *Indiana Environmental Reporter (IER)* is an editorially independent online media organization based at IU that tells stories related to the environment in a way that seeks to be nonpartisan (*Indiana Environmental Reporter*, 2022). It is supported in part by funding from an IU “Grand Challenges” initiative called “Prepared for Environmental Change,” which seeks “to deliver actionable environmental solutions to communities throughout the state.”³ Its editor Anne Kibbler agreed to host the podcast on IER’s website, and she and IER multimedia reporter and producers Beth Edwards and Enrique Saenz offered editorial and production feedback for early drafts. *IER* also offered branding for the project, and I met several times with Sophia Chryssovergis, a graphic designer-consultant to *IER*. Chryssovergis developed imagery and logos for the project, as well as banners and thumbnail images for the individual episodes and social media.

Earth Eats is a weekly, hour-long local radio show that features local and national food and farming stories. It is part of the small roster of local shows on Bloomington's NPR affiliate station WFIU, supported by local underwriters and produced entirely by its host, Kayte Young, with some help from a rotating band of interns. Formats on the show can vary, from interview to narrative storytelling to more experimental pieces. *Growing in Place* fit well into this category, featuring as it did voices of Indiana residents discussing their livelihoods as food producers and distributors. *Earth Eats* is also a member of Harvest Public Media, a collective of radio programs devoted to telling stories of agriculture and food in the American Midwest and Great Plains. The show often features stories from the collective alongside its own local reporting.⁴

Background Research

My first step in this project was research. As someone who had spent only nine months in the Midwest after moving here from New York City, I needed to learn as much as I could about the lifeways here and about the issues and systemic challenges that farmers and food workers face, as well as any solutions that communities, organizations, or individuals had come up with to mitigate those challenges. I immersed myself in recent news articles on rural Indiana, agriculture, and labor issues here, and began to reach out to sources for what is known as background interviews; conversations with experts that may not be recorded but that inform the production work. The CRE's Community Resilience Liaison Jacob Simpson was a great help in this initial stage, both offering perspective on the main projects CRE seeks to support including its food systems program and sharing some contacts who work in partnership with CRE and could speak more in-depth on the issues.

Simpson initially connected me with Jodee Ellett, a faculty affiliate of CRE and expert on farming systems in the state who is an expert in food systems science and Joni Muchler, a school nutritionist and CRE community partner. At the time, Muchler had recently initiated a program for her school system that helped forgive the school lunch debts for children who could not afford to pay.⁵ Ellett and Muchler both spoke with me on background, briefing me on their programs. Each of them also connected me with someone who was doing that type of work on the ground and who could speak to it from a personal perspective. Both contacts became major interviews for the project and led me to my interviewees for episodes of the podcast. Also in this research stage, I reached out to Jon Kay, Professor of Practice in the IU Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology, who has a deep and thorough knowledge of Indiana lifeways and the issues and initiatives that are alive in the state. His knowledge arises from his work as Indiana's state folklorist, a role he fills as Director of Traditional Arts Indiana, the statewide folk and traditional arts program based at IU. Kay suggested I look into the local county extension office, a service in rural areas of the country with several divisions that aim to support farmers and other agricultural workers. Indiana's county extension offices are run and staffed by Purdue University, the land grant university for the state of Indiana. I called the extension office for Monroe County, where I was living and working at the time and where Indiana University's flagship Bloomington campus is located. This yielded a couple of informative background interviews on mental health among farm workers and programs for children on the local farms. One interview led me to my second episode's interviewee, the woman who volunteer-led the beef club for 4-H of Monroe County.

I also researched several issues in the area that ultimately did not go into the podcast because of limitations in space and my own bandwidth. This research did inform the rest of the

series, however; I learned about the occupational hazards and labor disputes among the largely Latinx meat processing workers in the major plants in Huntingburg, Indiana, which were brewing before the pandemic, but which were greatly exacerbated by it. I also learned about the serious limitations on broadband installation and internet service in many rural areas around the state, and the municipal and state-wide programs aiming to expand it.

Interviews

After I identified what I felt was a promising on-the-ground contact for each episode, I began the interview phase by reaching out via email or telephone. I explained that I was an IU graduate student developing this project with support from the CRE, and that I hoped to speak with them about their experience on whatever topic we would, hopefully, discuss. I asked to set up a time to talk before any official interview took place; what is known in journalism as a pre-interview. Here I would explain more about my project and learn a bit more about the interviewee. If after the call the person had interest in participating in the podcast, I explained in my message, we could move forward and schedule a recorded interview. This process allows the person to learn more and decide if the project is something that interests them before they commit to being on the show, and it often allows someone who might be hesitant to test the waters and ultimately decide to participate. This methodology parallels in some ways the ethical expectations associated with ethnographic field work in folklore studies and cultural anthropology. These norms stipulate that participation in research, including research interviews, be voluntary and that consent for recording is documented.

For those willing to go beyond the pre-interview, the interviewee and I would speak for about forty minutes while I recorded them using my podcasting equipment. This equipment

consisted of a podcasting microphone connected via an XLR cable to my portable audio recorder, which was in turn connected to the cell phone on which I made the call. I wore headphones so that I could more precisely hear and better regulate the sound quality of our conversation. While phone connections can sometimes have unreliable or patchy sound quality, this setup ensured that I was able to capture the greatest range of sound available and resulted in a reasonably good raw recording file that I could later improve during the editing phase.

During the conversation itself, I would ask questions I had prepared, combining my research and the information that I had learned in our pre-interview. Some of these would be questions about the person's background and experience working in food and farming before and during the pandemic, while others would be about the person's reaction to the changes that we were all then experiencing, as well as their perspective on the then current situation. I would also listen closely to their answers, their tone of voice, and to the implications behind their statements. In other words, I would try to *hear* what they were saying, what they might want to say but not quite have the words for, and what they were choosing to leave out of the conversation. If I felt that there was something implicitly present between the lines of their commentary that was an important message or something that might benefit or interest the audience, I gently prompted them to say more.

Sometimes this yielded significant results. When I interviewed Juan Ruffin, a butcher at a Kroger grocery store, I remembered that he had mentioned in his pre-interview that he grew up in the Black community in Indianapolis and that this was a significant part of his biography. I knew that Indianapolis had been a flashpoint in the Black Lives Matter protests that swept the nation that summer, so I asked in the interview if he could see or hear the protests on his way to work, and what that felt like to him. His answer was deeply moving and added another layer of

meaning and significance to the story. This became the core of [Episode 3](#) (7:52), where Ruffin explains that, as a child with a developmental disorder, he used to be someone that people fought for. He goes on to say this is part of why he became a union steward for his food workers' union, and why he teaches his children to fight for others who need help.

Edits: A Change of Plans

My initial plan for the project was to record and then post these conversations, with minimal editing or intervention. In my original conception, I would sit, virtually, with my interviewees and we would talk about their experiences from that spring and early summer with the audio recorder rolling. Then, I would edit those conversations down to their essential points and upload those recordings as podcast episodes.

But when I uploaded my first interview recording and looked at the transcript, I realized that I would need to adjust my strategy. My interviewee, a young farmer living just outside of Bloomington, told his fascinating life story in a meandering way. Each of my questions elicited a thoughtful response from him that began in the middle of his experience. He started his farm after returning home from military service in Europe where he had been inspired by organic farming practices. Instead of going to business school, he bought a plot of land not far from where he grew up in southern Indiana. All these points hinted at larger themes, and we unpacked them together throughout the course of the conversation.

To someone listening for the first time, however, this narrative was confusing. Without a linear, chronological structure, it was hard to keep up with the storyline, and easy to lose the thread. Were we talking about his travels, his military time, his change in careers? How business school informed his entrepreneurship? My mentor Monaghan agreed. The answer I came up with

required more editing work, both in terms of considering the narrative the piece was presenting, and in terms of “cutting” the raw “tape” and fashioning it into something new.⁶

Instead of simply uploading the real-time conversation with minor edits, I decided that I would present the main themes from our conversation and add some narrative voiceovers to tie them together. Because I still wanted the episodes’ content to come from the people themselves, I used their audio from our recorded conversation. My own voice only appeared in the introduction and in the brief narrative paraphrases to bring in context between the clips of the interviewee. Music was woven in among the pieces of recorded speech, at the beginning and end of the episodes and transitionally to tie the different pieces together.

This format put the project more in line with a thoroughly produced and sound-designed radio story or podcast. It followed a trend toward higher production standards in audio storytelling that started with radio programs like *This American Life* and *Radiolab* over the past two decades, and now includes thousands of radio shows and podcasts that use elements of narrative nonfiction to tell true stories with an attention to detail that goes beyond simple narration and quotes on tape.

Production Process and Workflow

For each interview, then, I would take the transcript of the raw audio, and draw up a list of the main themes that were germane to the podcast series.⁷ For each theme, I would include the clip or clips from the interview that most clearly and movingly illustrated the theme and noted where I would need to add in more narrative context to make those clips understandable to a general audience without experience in the topics. I would then script my narrative elements and write up a second draft that stitched together my narrative clips with their interview clips,

making sure the two fit together in a seamless way. This method was essentially similar to the way one might write a print article, with “quotes” from the interviewee. However, this was structured so that the interviewee’s points made up the majority of the episode, and the narrative pieces only served to move from one to the next.

After I had a working draft with the clips and narrative script, I would record my narrative pieces in an improvised home sound booth: two chairs with a blanket draped over them to block outside sound and prevent echo. All of this happened before I did any work in the Adobe Audition audio editing software. That came next: I would first cut the raw interview file into clips to reflect the quotes I wanted to include and place them in the audio editing software in the order I had decided was most logical and narratively interesting. I would then add in my narrative clips and adjust everything to make sure the pieces fit together in a clean, crisp way.

Next, I would add in the music: a beginning and ending sequence that were the same for each episode, known as the intro and outro, as well as a narrative introduction and closer and musical transitions to bridge the two or three major thematic parts, or acts, of the episode. Because the ultimate iteration for this project was a produced work, it was a gestalt: a whole composed of many parts, each of which came together to create the final result. One element of this gestalt was the sound design, which mainly consisted of three elements: the edited human voices of the interviewees and my own narration, the “nat sound” or sound effects from the natural world that I brought in to add depth and a sense of place to the pieces, and theme music that was appropriate for the piece. The nat sound I chose to add came from a recording I made in my own backyard at nighttime. That “empty” sound was loud with insects, wind in the trees and the distant sound of cars on the roads near my home.

Once I had brought all the sound elements together, I played the piece through once, listening and noting any narrative or sound edits to make. I revised the piece according to the notes and repeated this process until I felt satisfied. Then, I moved into the collaborative stage. In this stage, I shared the piece first with Professor Monaghan and she gave me thoughtful editorial feedback about how the pieces of the story fit together and whether it all made sense as a whole.

Before joining the faculty at IU, Monaghan had a career as a reporter, writer, and analyst, including work as a foreign correspondent for Reuters and then as bureau chief for the outlet in Eastern Europe. These bona fides gave her a strong sense of storyline, and the ability to tell whether a story was offering information in a clear and sensible way. She also knew when a draft had holes in it and required a return to the source for a follow-up in order to share necessary background on the interviewee's life or their feelings about a topic. Sometimes at this stage,

Monaghan would indeed recommend I go back to the interviewee and ask a few follow-up questions. I would do so, with the same recording setup, and then weave file into the production.

Once I had Monaghan's stamp of approval, I then shared the piece with IER's editorial team. Anne Kibbler, IER's editor, made further editorial comments, and Beth Edwards and Enrique Saenz, the outlet's reporter-producers, made comments on the sound design. Once I revised the piece according to these suggestions, I uploaded it to its designated cloud drive folder that I created to share with the editorial team, with a couple of blurbs attached for short and long web posts accompanying the online episode. I alerted IER's web developer, Ross Hughes, so that it could be posted to the website. Once the piece was live online, I shared a link to the story with the interviewee. I also posted it on my social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, and

Instagram, tagging the organizations that were hosting, funding, and supporting my project, as well as those that were involved in the episode itself, such as the labor union in Episode 3 and the farm in Episode 5. Finally, I shared a link to the finished piece with the CRE's communications team via email. At this point, I considered the episodes to be finished. After I completed this process for the fifth and final episode, the project was complete according to my agreement with the CRE. I still hoped to amplify the series in some way, though, and I looked for chances to raise its profile.

A few months after I had posted the last episode in the series, I got such an opportunity when I met the local audio producer Kayte Young in an audio producer meetup group. Young is the producer of *Earth Eats*, a magazine show on the local NPR-affiliate radio station WFIU. I asked her if she accepted story submissions for the show and explained my project to her. She told me she was unable to pay for a feature but encouraged me to send me some episodes so that she could see if it was a fit for the show. Shortly after I sent them, Kayte responded indicating her interest. She asked for some edits to simplify the storyline of a couple of the episodes and asked me to edit the intro and outro to allow the story to fit in as a segment of the longer weekly show. With these edits included, Kayte featured two of my stories on *Earth Eats*: selections from Episode Five on February 27th and 28th, 2021, and from Episode Three over on March 20th and 21st, 2021.

Two other elements that brought the podcast together and gave it the feel of a professionally produced show in similar standing with shows produced by major media brands, were selecting theme music and logos. Initially, I had wanted to use a tune played by local old-time musicians for the theme, to tie the show into some of the traditional arts for which this corner of the country is known.⁸ Another suggestion for a theme song came from the editorial

team at *IER*, who suggested that we reach out to the publicist for John Mellencamp, a renowned singer-songwriter from Seymour, Indiana who often cites his Indiana roots, to see if they would give us permission to use his music for the local story project. Ultimately, to save time and avoid potential legal and financial pitfalls of using music by a recognized musician, I opted to use a song from Universal Production Music, a streaming and download service with pre-licensed music for media use that IU students and faculty have free membership access. The song I chose had a strong fiddle component that I felt was evocative of the old-time music that is popular here. I was not the only producer with this feeling; a video producer also chose the song as a backdrop to a short segment for the local traveling PBS show *Journey Indiana* (Tim, 2020).

The logos that we used for the thumbnail images of the podcast episodes and the banner image for the show on *IER*'s website came out of conversations with Sophia Chryssovergis, the graphic design consultant for *IER*. Over several Zoom meetings, Chryssovergis and I decided on certain images and stylistic elements – farmers in overalls, images of vegetables and livestock, and a simple-sketch style with earth tones and lots of white space – that had the feel (I hoped) of a show that focused on unembellished stories about agricultural life and work.

Adaptations: Growth in Real Time

This project was an attempt to use my training and skills in reporting and field recording to tell a story about an important moment in history: farmers' adaptations to pandemic changes. It was also a first for me personally in many ways, as my first production. Prior to the project my reporting had always been in a print format, except for some live radio interviewing. I had never taken audio files and crafted them into their own original story, and in some ways, this was a trial by fire.

At the start of the project, I had consulted with Monaghan about how we would handle my lack of experience with audio production. This project required me to navigate a learning curve that spanned the entire breadth of the digital editing process, while actually producing a project that was meant for a real audience to hear. We also wanted this to sound professional enough to put forward as a product of the CRE and *IER*. We agreed there were two options for presenting the work given this challenge: I could produce and post each episode one by one and accept the fact that each one would likely represent my relative strengths and abilities as an audio producer at that moment in time. The second option was to produce and edit the episodes one by one but wait to post until they were nearly all complete. By holding them back for edits and then releasing them together in a coordinated way, I could give myself more time to learn the crafts of audio editing, mixing, and mastering. By the time I had worked through five episodes, I could even return to the earliest episodes and apply the more advanced-level skills I had acquired. This would allow for more of an even level of production quality among the episodes, but it would delay their release.

We chose the first option, partly in acknowledgement of the limited amount of time in the summer and the desire to have something to show for the work before too much time had passed since I received the grant. But I also made this choice because I suspected that it would do me little good to have an unspecified amount of time to perfect each piece. In other words, done is better than perfect.

And so the five episodes in this series do clearly show my evolving abilities in recording and editing. The first piece has a lot of background noise, partly due to my ignorance about recording in separate audio channels to isolate my interviewee's voice from the loud park scene around us. I also knew less at that point about removing unwanted sound in the edit phase, so I

did so in ways that compromised the overall sound quality of the story. The second piece was recorded in separate channels, but I was new to using a boom mic, so in the finished episode one can hear handling noise from my need to adjust the heavy pole in my arms. The third and fourth pieces were recorded in a quiet space, but I was not yet using the proper equipment to record a phone call directly into my audio mixer without also capturing the static and interference from speakerphone. In each of these first four pieces, I was still learning the intricacies of cutting tape in the digital workspace, so the small silences and beats of the conversation do not align in a perfectly natural way. By the last episode, I had learned from the issues above, I acquired the right equipment and I had much more practice editing since, by then, I was also producing the Media School's weekly podcast *Through the Gates*. At that point, I knew how to enhance the slightly tinny sound of a voice on the phone, and how to incorporate music in a way that feels natural. The piece flows easily and sounds much better. But I could not have reached that point without going through the process of releasing imperfect episodes.

Part II

Reflections: Successes and Points for Improvement

Reception

Because podcasts are a digital medium, one way to analyze their reception and impact is to consult the data. Soundcloud, the hosting platform from which listeners could stream *Growing in Place*, publishes listenership data for each episode as well as the geographic locations from which listeners tuned in. As of August 2020, people in fifty cities and seven countries across the globe had listened to the show's five episodes 256 times. The top episode for listenership was the first, with 157 plays, followed by the third episode, with forty-seven plays. Top listeners were mainly local, coming from Bloomington (80 plays), Indianapolis (19 plays), Brooklyn, New York (19 plays), and Louisville, Kentucky (9 plays). Brooklyn, New York is my hometown, so many of these listens likely came from family, friends, and friends of friends. Other Indiana listeners include the Fairfield Township area, Fishers, Noblesville, Fort Wayne, Jasper, Carmel, West Lafayette, Salem, and others. This suggests that the series got attention from local community members who were familiar with the lives and lifeways of the episode subjects. As of January 2022, the first track had 210 plays, and the fifth and final track was the second most with 161 plays. I no longer have access to the extended insights dashboard, including geographical data, now that my premium Soundcloud membership has expired. From the data we have, however, we can deduce that the series did find listenership both with Hoosier farming communities and in both urban and rural regions of the world.

Earth Eats, the radio show on Bloomington's NPR affiliate station that aired two episodes of *Growing in Place*, gets an average of about 1,600 listeners per quarter hour. My

episodes were about 20 minutes long and ran twice each. That is a little over 4,267 listeners in total for the broadcast episodes. The station broadcasts across South Central Indiana as well as in Kokomo, further north in the state. *Earth Eats* also runs its episodes on its podcast, which has about 1,500 subscribers and an average of 250 listeners per day, according to its host, Kayte Young. Other demographic data was not immediately available.

Two of my goals were accomplished. First, to create something that spoke to and about a specific community that does not get much national media attention or interest: Indiana farmers and food workers. The listeners in small, rural towns around Southern Indiana demonstrate that it did reach these communities. And second, to create something that also reached people who had little in common with these farming communities. The listenership in Brooklyn, Israel, Ireland, and the Czech Republic show that this also happened. However, beyond the knowledge that people in these places clicked “play,” we know little about what impact it had on them. Did they listen to the episodes through, or did they stop in the middle? Did they enjoy them, or hate them? Did they learn something from the stories within, or did they feel that the podcast showed a limited or incorrect view of these communities that the listeners may have known intimately? Soundcloud does have some features of a social media platform: users can “like” or comment on the episodes they hear. But my episodes each have only 1-2 “likes,” and only the last one has any comments: two positive comments thanking the project for telling the story and laughing at a joke in the episode. Similarly, there were few comments on the Facebook, Instagram or Twitter posts linking to the episodes as they came out. Despite the data, there is little to show what the show *meant* to its listeners. Despite a collective focus on the plethora of negative comments seen as typical of life on the internet, such minimal responses are actually quite common for media projects of this type.

For a more thorough understanding of the show's impact, I would need to reach back out to the communities who shared their stories with me. One way to do this could be to have a listening event in the community, where community members could ask questions and share their commentary. This would offer a chance for what the folklorist and longtime syndicated radio show host Nick Spitzer calls "cultural conversation," where a community or group of collaborators on an ethnographic project is able to respond to the finished work (Spitzer 2008). Here, they would give their take on the experience of watching or listening to their stories in a produced format after their broadcast. In addition to offering a deeper and more thorough response to the project, it would also give the community that the episodes represent more buy-in to the project as a whole, rather than just at the research and interview stages.

In addition to listening events, I would have liked to spend a longer time with each of the people I interviewed for the podcast. That is one of the strengths of a "real" ethnographic project: to form a real relationship with a community partner, and to really know them as a result of that experience. This allows the researcher to establish trust, to learn more about each person than that person would tell a stranger, understandably, and to know enough about that person's mannerisms, history, and beliefs to be able to ask the right follow-up questions. All of that takes time: months, if not years. It is in large part what separates most journalistic work from ethnography.^{9,10} After each episode aired, I sent the interviewee a link to the *IER* page where it lived. Most of them did not respond to the episode itself or share their thoughts about it. The fifth episode's interviewee, a young farmer and leader in the Hoosier Young Farmers group, did respond positively to the episode.

In her article "Practice Makes Perfect: Lessons in Active Ethnomusicology," the folklorist and music educator Bess Lomax Hawes argues that when evaluating a public program

in the folk and traditional arts field, one should consider its success not only in terms of the audience's reception, but also in terms of the performers' perceptions of how well a programmatic event went (Hawes 1992: 342). Her case study was of an African American a Capella quartet concert she attended, and whose organizers were colleagues of hers. Despite a huge effort on the part of the organizers to bring renowned singers out of retirement and into the same concert hall for one night of performance, very few people came out to recognize this feat. However, Hawes argues that this was still a success for one major constituency: the gospel singers themselves. She writes that "...everybody-artists, audiences, everyone who has been touched in any way by the particular event. Everyone evaluates, out loud or in silence. And on the basis of those evaluations, the next event will rise or decline, will grow or shrink" (*ibid.*). If we apply this analysis to the broadcast context and consider the interviewees themselves to be the performers in this case, one other way to evaluate *Growing in Place* would be to speak with the interviewees after they have had the chance to hear themselves on the radio or through their podcast apps. A major reason why I did not follow up in this way was that I did not initially conceive of the project primarily as an ethnographic or public folklore endeavor, but instead as a journalistic one that was informed by some public folklore and ethnographic methodologies. It is unusual in a typical journalistic project to follow up with sources in this way, unless it is for a meta-analytical follow-up story.

Institutional Context

The Center for Rural Engagement has embarked on a number of projects in southern Indiana, including programs to bring the fine arts into schools through partnerships with the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music and the Eskenazi School of Art, Architecture, and Design (Center for Rural Engagement, 2022).¹¹ It also has a number of programs in partnership with schools and departments across the university to improve public health and nutrition in rural communities, including those that address substance use disorders, teen pregnancy and maternal health, and support for elderly Hoosiers who wish to age in place (*ibid.*). Other programs address education opportunities, affordable housing, resilience for predicted changes in climate, and an initiative the CRE calls Sustaining Hoosier Communities, which works in a variety of sectors to improve the quality of life in rural towns (*ibid.*). Communities can apply for grants from the CRE to address these issues (*ibid.*).

Apart from the CRE, Indiana University has a long history of tension with the community around it in Bloomington and the state at large. Much of this involves issues of affordability, as the university's student population help to drive up housing prices while IU pays little in tax back into the community due to its status as a tax-exempt non-profit (Zaltsberg, 2019).

Analysis: Disciplinary Context

Folkloristics

Choosing to use media production and broadcast to widen the audience and scope of an ethnographic or community-based folklore project is nothing new. Beginning in the 1930s and 1940s, New Deal-era programs like the Works Progress Administration and Federal Writers Project collected stories of everyday Americans to create an oral history of the country.¹² Many of these recordings later appeared on the radio to showcase American life and history. A key figure in bringing folk music and culture onto the national airwaves in the United States was Alan Lomax, who along with his father John, collected and recorded thousands of songs, stories, dances and photographs of communities in the United States and abroad.

Blues, Cajun, Appalachian and Ozark, cowboy songs and ballads and the songs of the Irish folk revival all found their way onto the radio scene as a result of this collecting. Lomax produced projects like *Wellsprings of Music* and *Back Where I Come From* on CBS, where listeners learned about blues great Lead Belly and ballad singer Aunt Molly Jackson and heard voices like Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie and Burl Ives, who led the American folk song revival.¹³ Programs like *Bound for Glory* during World War II on the Armed Forces Radio Service offered fiddle songs, ballads, and stories meant to boost morale among soldiers.¹⁴ When Lomax left the United States during the Red Scare in the 1950s, his projects moved overseas, where a number of programs on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) included folk music from Italy and Scotland that Lomax collected during his own fieldwork. On returning to the United States, Lomax and the historian and musician Raoul Abdul developed a program series called *The Black Encyclopedia of the Air*. These were short educational spots played on Black radio stations like

WLIB in Harlem, New York in the late 1960s, where the radio DJ and personality Jack Walker narrated about the music and civic contributions made by Black Americans.¹⁵

Lomax's television and film contributions include documentaries with the dance scholar Forrestine Paulay like *Dance and Human History* (1974), *Step Style* (1977) and *Palm Play* (1977). These projects analyzed body movement patterns in world dance traditions and considered dance styles around the world and their relation to subsistence practices. Lomax also produced the PBS series *American Patchwork*, about the Southern origins, key artists and rich stylistic variety of folk and blues music.

Lomax's work even extended into digital media, with an early-internet project to collect and map the songs of the world for educators, researchers, and laypeople to access. The Global Jukebox, as it is called, exists today as a website and digital database of world music (The Global Jukebox, 2022). Lomax's nonprofit and archive, the Association for Cultural Equity, is developing the project into an educational tool and interactive site where users around the world would be able to contribute elements of their own folk culture and information about their traditional practice.

The folk singer Woody Guthrie also brought folk music onto the airwaves in the 1930s and 1940s. He did this through many appearances on public radio stations such as the Los Angeles station KCRW and New York City's WNYC, including on the blues singer Lead Belly's show *Folksongs* (Artsy, 2016; Lanset, 2011).

Other folklorists have also created audio and video projects aimed at presenting folk and vernacular culture to a wider audience, as well as to bring the products of their field research back to the source communities in a consumable form. Notable examples include Nick Spitzer's long-running syndicated radio show, *American Routes*, which charts the many varied musical

traditions found in the United States through narrative episodes that combine interviews and song. This engaging style of reportage on folk topics can also be found in documentaries like *From Mambo to Hip Hop*, co-produced by public folklorists Steve Zeitlin and Elena Martinez and directed by the renowned filmmaker Henry Chalfant. There are also an abundance of videos and feature-length films available on the free-to-the-public website *Folkstreams*, which assembles videos on topics in folklore.

As the podcast world continues to explode with content in every genre, examples of relevant projects in this space now also abound. Podcasts under the folklore banner fall into several categories, including academic and applied work by specialists in the field, as well as work by hobbyists with folklore themes.

One category is those by academic folklorists and largely devoted to narrative and storytelling, such as *Folklore Thursday*, *Encounters* and *Crimelore*, by alumni of Indiana University's folklore program Jesse Fivecoate, Kristina Downs and Eleanor Hasken-Wagner, and *Blúiríní Béaloidis / Folklore Fragments*, the official podcast of The National Folklore Collection at University College Dublin.

Another category is purely academic, such as the *New Books in Folklore* series, which is part of the 'New Books' family of podcasts which explore new releases from several academic fields, and *New Directions in Folklore*, a podcast by the online academic journal of the same name.

A third category is those by specialists such as public folklorists or documentarians whose work may be folklore adjacent. These podcasts may be either conversational or documentary-style and include shows such as The Smithsonian Institution's *Folklife Today*; and *The Kitchen Sisters Presents*, a narrative, documentary-style show focusing on lesser-known

history topics and that often touches on traditional music and vernacular culture. *Second Servings*, one of several podcast series produced by Indiana University's public folklore program *Traditional Arts Indiana*, discussed stories about traditional food preparation in the state. Lamont Jack Pearley's podcast *The African American Folklorist*, which highlights African American traditional music and lifeways, and *Yellow and Brown Tales: Asian American Folklife Today*, which discusses current and historical culture for Asian-identifying people in the United States, both offer glimpses at the varied cultural life within this country.

A last category could be considered hobbyist podcasts, produced by people who may not have degrees or professional specialties in folklore and may not consider themselves folklorists, but who care deeply about topics in the field and use their shows to explore them more deeply. These include the popular storytelling podcast *Lore, Myths and Legends*, *Folktale Project*, and *Caribbean Folklore and Mysteries*.

There are certainly many more podcasts in each category – and more categories – than I have mentioned here; I encourage anyone interested to explore for themselves and find some of the excellent examples in the space.

The above list indicates that not only are there many shows available now that bring folklore topics into the podcasting medium, but also that there are many ways for a show to be a “folklore podcast.” It could be a podcast about the “stuff” of folklore, like tales, foodways, and music. It could be a podcast about the discipline of folklore, or folkloristics, with an academic bent and an eye to the direction in which the field is headed. Or it could be the attempt of a folklorist (with or without an academic degree) to present the result of their fieldwork in podcast form. This is often done by putting a folk performance on display for an audience beyond that folk group and adding in narrated context to make that performance and the discourse it includes

legible for the wider audience who does not understand all the ways the folk group refer and signify meaning within their folk medium.¹⁶

As with many projects packaged for the popular media and general audiences, the result of this third type of podcast is often one that sacrifices some of the deeper context in order to increase relatability and palatability for audiences who are more interested in infotainment than academic deep dives. This give and take is something that Nick Spitzer discusses in his article cited above, as he describes his process to shrink a radio story down to just a few minutes in order for it to fit within a short NPR spot (Spitzer 2008: 88).

Media Studies

From the perspective of media studies, this project could fit within the category of solutions journalism. In fact, the Solutions Journalism Network, a project dedicated to reporting stories in a way that highlights what people are doing to solve a problem, rather than simply fixating on the problem itself, included the article on local farming that preceded *Growing in Place* within its “story tracker” (Baron 2019). Founded in 2013 by New York Times columnists David Bornstein and Tina Rosenberg, and reporters Courtney Martin and Keith Hammonds (Jain 2020), the Solutions Journalism Network is now finding editorial support in newsrooms across the country, according to a survey the network collected in 2021 (Venancio and Lee, 2021). In their 2018 article “Placing Constructive Journalism in Context,” the media scholars Liesbeth Hermans and Nico Droc argue for a new way of thinking about the function of journalism. They propose a “constructive journalism” that builds on the “civic journalism” movement of the 1980s to narrow the gap between a society’s institutions and its everyday citizens. Constructive journalism would further this work at a time when social networks allow citizens to contribute

directly to the media world and influence the civic conversation. The constructive journalism model would take ideas from the solutions journalism framework and other similar models to envision a new form of journalism that is more oriented toward the public and less biased toward negative or sensational reporting (Hermans and Droc 2018: 688).

In their 2021 article “Transitioning to Solutions Journalism: One Newsroom’s Shift to Solutions-focused Reporting,” meanwhile, Kyser Lough and Karen McIntyre analyzed a case study of an Alabama newsroom’s transition to solutions-oriented reporting. The authors found that while many survey respondents did not feel that the level of bias in the newspaper had decreased (Lough and McIntyre 2021: 203), the paper’s use of solutions journalism ultimately increased the level of engagement between the public and its audience (*ibid.*). Similar to Hermans and Droc’s work, one can interpret this to mean that a focus on what communities are doing to address the problems they face ultimately serves to signal to an audience that their media sources are concerned with issues of interest and import to them. This methodology can help people feel more engaged with their media outlets.

Growing in Place fits within these frameworks by sharing the conversations and perspectives of rural Hoosiers with a wider Hoosier and national public, and by doing so in a way that highlights potential solutions they found to the problems they faced. Each of my interviewees describes workarounds and other alternative ways of doing the tasks that make up his or her life and livelihood once the pandemic changed the way they operated. In the case of Juan Ruffin, the Kroger butcher in Episode 3 who had to reckon with essential worker status during the shutdown, this meant a change in mindset to persevere through the worst of the pandemic surge. For others, it meant turning to online marketplaces to sell produce, or leading virtual state fairs for 4-H children or participating in an effort to deliver school meals to families

who relied on them, once school was no longer in-person. In highlighting these actions and the agency they demonstrated, the podcast series does what Hermans and Droc describe: it “...approaches people primarily as socially competent citizens and attaches great importance to an action-oriented perspective that empowers people to make self-substantiated decisions in their lives...” (*ibid.*). A further development of this model could follow up with the interviewees after the series’ publication to share their perspectives on the experience of having their views broadcast for a wider public.

One could also consider the podcast format that *Growing in Place* takes and analyze the project within that relatively new and emerging media genre. Once considered a niche format (Molloy, 2019), the medium has extended its reach enormously in the past ten years (*ibid.*) to become a format for journalism, documentary, storytelling, and other media forms that most mainstream media outlets now dedicate staff and resources toward developing (Hunt 2021). These days, podcasts largely parallel digital media’s written formats in scope, voice, and variety (Chladek, 2018) – there is a podcast now on nearly any topic, and audiences can respond to what they hear through online comments and social media conversations (Kapko, 2014). But as an audio-only format, podcasts require not eyes but ears; their consumption happens while audience members move throughout their days, with the intimacy of story in one’s headphones, and a voice that often only they can hear (Wen, 2015).

The podcast’s role as an internet-based media channel both addresses certain problems of traditional media formats and suggests potential new ones. Because they are not reliant on physical printing and distribution, like print media, or limited terrestrial airwaves and government restrictions, like the Federal Communication Commission-controlled radio and television formats, podcasts can be distributed relatively freely through the internet almost

anywhere in the world.¹⁷ However, the role of the internet can also be limiting in terms of access: places like China that limit internet to increase political control also limit access to podcasts that challenge the official narrative. (Li, 2019). Further, the simple fact that podcasts require internet access means that those who do not have regular access to the internet or to a smartphone that can play podcasts, are limited in their access to the form.

Podcasts are often limited and pulled by economic factors and incentives just like other legacy media forms. Those that are affiliated with mainstream corporate media companies or large independent organizations are reliant on advertising revenue from those companies that partner with the media organizations (Hunt, 2021). Those podcasts that are unaffiliated often must seek out sponsorship from corporations or nonprofits. For independent shows, advertisement revenue is usually only available to shows that have a certain minimum listenership (McLoughlin, 2018). All of these elements can factor into the editorial decisions that a podcast makes.

In addition, podcasts in this documentary style are largely built on the legacy of radio, particularly American public radio. Three of the most popular programs for learning the craft are the Transom Story Workshop in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, the Maine College of Art's SALT Documentary Studies Department, and Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies. Each of these programs' instructors cite work in public radio prominently among their experience in the field.¹⁸ Like public radio before it (Drizin, 2020), podcasting as a medium has often been considered to cater largely to white audiences (Friess, 2017). My own podcast fit that profile and ended up featured on the largely white-staffed and white-listenership Indiana Public Media show *Earth Eats*. But with the widening scope of the form have come more voices and audiences from different backgrounds and cultures (Nielsen 2021).

These factors mean that *Growing in Place* came about in an era of change. This is a time of reckoning and retooling how we consume media and how we critique the media on offer both in the United States and globally. The fact that it was able to reach multiple audiences, including local, small-town Hoosiers and international podcast listeners, indicates that the model may be a viable one for future projects that aim to bridge multiple disciplines. That itself is not new – we saw examples of it at the beginning of the radio format with projects by the Lomaxes – but the ease of transmission of the podcast form, and the contemporary pressures to include a wider range of voices and perspectives, indicate that this type of project might expect a wider reach geographically and demographically than previous iterations.

Conclusion

This project was an attempt to create a media model that synthesizes the fields of public folklore and solutions journalism. It did this by utilizing research and interview methodologies informed by ethnographic research methodologies and public folklore techniques, and by focusing on a topic of interest to folklorists – how people in farming traditions and food-related fields respond to an earth-shattering global event – and producing stories about it in a format that will reach and interest traditional and digital media audiences such as radio and podcast listeners. All in all the project “worked” – I was able to produce five high-quality podcast episodes that effectively told five stories in this genre – but it did not get the reach that I or my collaborators may have hoped for. The series had a good deal of listener downloads from a variety of locales, but to my knowledge it did not yield direct responses from the communities involved.

In my mind, a truly reflexive folkloristic endeavor would close the cultural feedback loop by offering the people whose words and ideas the podcast shared the chance to respond to the experience of hearing them in this new format, and it would then share that reaction with a wider audience to foster a cultural dialogue. This ability for listeners to talk “back” to media projects, and for the projects to incorporate that feedback in their next iterations, is a strength of the modern web-based media that lives on internet feeds: it is fundamentally social, and commentary dialogue is built into its nature. I would hope that a next project in this vein would harness that ability to interact and gain strength, and critical feedback, in the process.

Part of what limited my ability to host these events were the restrictions on in-person gatherings during periods of high infection rates in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Other hurdles came from my limited availability beyond my full-time coursework schedule, graduate

assistant work and side jobs. Really, though, I had intended this project as an end in itself, and a learning experience that would serve the dual purpose of sharing the life experiences and stories of people whose perspectives are rarely heard in the media at large. I had not planned listening events or follow-ups from the start, and I considered the project a success because it served its purpose of packaging and presenting these perspectives for wide podcast and broadcast consumption.

To that end, a future podcast informed by this experience could plan to incorporate virtual or in-person listening events and conversations with community partners before, during and after the production phase to learn about what formats and production plans might best serve the stories and their communities. It would hopefully also incorporate the participation and creativity of community members in the production process, rather than being produced by a third party for an outside community of “media consumers.” Time constraints make this follow-up process difficult but not impossible.

My own professional plans may include a form of this model, as I work on projects that touch on both media and folklore topics and fields. I recently began a job working at the local public radio station in Bloomington, Indiana, and I am working with the Center for Rural Engagement to create a more permanent position that produces stories about local communities for broadcast on our public media channels, and ideally in the national media as well. I hope to use the considerations above to create future projects that foster dialogue and use media to share perspectives that the listening public may not otherwise access.

As I continue to work on these projects, I hope to continue to bridge the distance between these two disciplines’ aims and outputs in a productive way. As a journalism and folklore graduate student over the past few years, I found it easy to explain why I wanted to combine the

two, but more difficult to make my colleagues in journalism understand the value of folkloristics. Just as folklore-related podcast productions attempt to make a given folklore practice “legible” for an outsider audience, as mentioned in the Folkloristics section above, the problem of legibility reappeared. Folklorists and anthropologists employ the term to describe the way insiders understand, or “read” the discourse within a piece of folk art, and the ways that folk artists and folk audiences interpret it as part of wider conversations about their lives and the world around them. A folk performance is legible to members of that community, who have seen other iterations and understand the traditions that ground a new version. Those who are not from the community and did not learn the meanings of its various elements cannot recognize what it is saying or adding to the conversation that surrounds the tradition it belongs to. It is not legible to them, or at least not entirely.

In this case, as my Media School advisor Dr. Jim Kelly suggested, perhaps the problem is *perceived legibility*. Today, most journalists who report on communities of a different race or national identity are sensitive to cultural difference and understand that some (or much) cultural context is needed in order to tell accurate and meaningful stories about them. But this sensitivity is not always afforded to communities like those I presented for this project. These communities are American, and white, and speak the same language and understand many of the same references from media and consumer culture as a given NPR listener or mainstream print media reader. They can sometimes slip through the cracks in understanding that way, not offered the same interest in learning and presenting the context of the interviewee.

Having some background in ethnography allowed me to see in this project that the people I spoke with did indeed have their own vibrant cultural worlds in rural and agricultural communities. Part of what I attempted to do here was to offer that context along with their stories

of perseverance through pandemic challenges. I wanted to demonstrate that these communities and their work are not, to the naked eye, as legible as the average podcast listener might first think. But that they are worth just as much attention as any other group and have just as much to teach others. This is similar, in essence, to Alan Lomax's ideas of cultural equity – all communities and all stories are not the same, but all are worth telling.

One thing that made this work challenging was own positionality with respect to my interviewees, and issues of class that are everywhere present when stories about agricultural communities appear in media. From the beginning, I was selecting and culling: choosing contacts for the story whom I felt were promising, meaning they could offer life experience and perspectives of the sort I hoped to include in the project. My interviewees were selecting and culling as well. Listening to the episodes now, I can clearly hear it: several of my interlocutors tread cautiously as they describe their upbringing or the nuts and bolts of farming life. They know that I, as a highly educated outsider coming from Indiana University, may have different cultural references. I speak with a slight New York accent. I ask questions that make it clear I am an outsider, that I am hoping to share their stories with other outsiders, who may view their lifeways with judgement or condescension. So they begin a sentence one way, then change the grammar or syntax. In other words, they code-switch, speaking slowly, audibly considering how they will translate their experience into a more digestible format. This is not a bad thing, necessarily, and it may be inevitable in any journalism or ethnographic work. But it is quite important to note the way that my own identity and background color the conversations with the interviewees, affecting what they are willing to say, how they say it, and what storylines result from an editorial process with me at the helm.

As I reenter the professional world now with a foot already in media, I find that my attempts to bring in cultural context often can often appear to be essentializing; I end up telegraphing the main ideas of a traditional practice or vernacular art in the context of a story, but much of it gets lost in translation. Some of that is due to the pace of each field. In general, media is fast, aimed at packaging content to be consumed by an audience with an ever-shrinking attention span. And folklore is slow, with years of study on a topic often resulting in books filled with concepts that one can acquire only after more years of study. However, I have learned from this project that there is an appetite for hearing stories that are close to the ground, and that portray communities often overlooked or underrepresented in media at large, among public radio and podcast listeners. I learned that the methodology of solutions journalism, which reports on societal problems from the perspective of the people who are attempting to address those issues, can be a window into worlds that are different from our own. And I learned that this technique could dovetail with ethnography, which attempts to look at those worlds up close and present the situations, the problems, and their solutions, as the people themselves see them and in their own words. I learned that public folklore programming, which brings folk art and culture onto a wider stage for diverse audiences, can work in tandem with new media formats like podcasts to offer a way in, just as it has in broadcast radio programming throughout the past century.

I remain optimistic that it is possible, and worthwhile, to continue developing projects that communicate the beauty and utility of a folk practice or idea to an audience unfamiliar with it. This partnership of the two fields can offer audiences the chance to learn about the cultural differences among them that may seem subtle at first, but that make up our country and our world. And this work can broaden experience and understanding of the neighbors who grow and

distribute our food, in this case. It can allow their creativity, their tenacity, and their unique perspectives more airtime and consideration.

Appendix I: Theme Draft

Following is an example of a “theme draft,” the first step in storyboarding an episode. Here I would list the “themes” of the recorded interview. I would asterisk parts I definitely wanted to include.

Ep 5 Theme Draft

Moved onto family's land; turned it back into pasture

Fortunate family had held onto land

*It's been hard but amazing to see land transform back

Profound to watch that process

Process of moving farms btwn generations: convincing parents organic could succeed in IN

Starting HYFC: there wasn't a community of young farmers

(Some chapters are city, but HYFC is statewide, Louisville to Gary)

*Sense of relief on people's faces - not alone

Other states have coalitions; but IN has none. Equity in food systems; policy, etc. *had to start with farmers getting together

*Why it's different for young farmers: avg farmer 60 y/o; young farmers more diverse. You need access to capital

*I have to remind myself don't be mad at other gens. *Bucks going out, health insurance. Student loan debt

*How COVID is creating new problems for farmers supply chain new

(& setting up online things take a lot more time)

(It's working for now; but prob will reassess in winter)

*Butcher dates

*A cow can get too big!

If you can't get butcher dates: can sell to wholesaler, but hard to say what will happen

Also staffing issues with COVID

*We don't know what the next few months will look like! We have to guess and hope that it works, working on a podcast

*Taking the small joys where we can find them.

Website and Instagram

Appendix II: Sketch Draft

Following is a “sketch draft,” the second step in storyboarding an episode, in which I would list the parts of the episode in order, indicating where I would like to place individual clips as well as narration.

Ep 5 Sketch Draft

Liz Brownlee

Intro

- Clip: drop-intro: but we felt we had to start with community

VO: Show ID

- Clip: Liz ID

VO:

A common theme here on the show is that COVID might not be the root cause of every problem, but it can sure fan the flames on systems that were already under pressure.

This is especially true for farmers who are just starting out.

Our guest this episode is one of the founders of the Hoosier Young Farmers Coalition, the Indiana branch of a national group that supports and advocates for beginning farmers.

The USDA defines a beginning farmer as someone in their first 10 years.

These folks who face all the challenges felt by young people in this country -
Student debt, pricey health care, and institutional racism -
When they're trying to start their careers and their lives a field - no pun intended - that's hard even on the good days.

Why it's different for young farmers

- /Clip: *avg farmer 60 y/o; young farmers more diverse. You need access to capital

- /Clip: (*I have to remind myself don't be mad at other gens.) *Backs going out, health insurance. Student loan debt

Starting her farm - transfer between generations

VO: For her part, after working for years on organic farms throughout the country, Liz and her husband Nate moved back to Indiana about seven years ago and got to work turning her family's farm from fields for commercial crops, back into pasture, native grasslands, and wildflowers.

She says they're fortunate that her family held onto the land, since purchasing farmland can be an overwhelming burden for young farmers in itself.

Their families were supportive, and excited for them to start the project.

Which hasn't been easy, but it has been profound.

- /Clip: *It's been hard but amazing to see land transform back
- (Clip: Profound to watch that process)
- /Clip: Process of moving farms btwn generations: convincing parents organic could succeed in IN

HYFC

VO: But between the struggle and reward of making the farm come alive again, Liz felt alone.

- Clip: there wasn't a community of young farmers

VO: It all started when Liz and Genesis McKiernan-Allen were paired on a trip sponsored by Purdue University to visit thriving food scenes in other states.

They decided they needed to create that where they were, and HYFC was born.

- Clip: The chapter has just really bloomed
- Clip: Other states have coalitions; but IN has none. Equity in food systems; policy, etc.

Some chapters are city-based, but HYFC is statewide, from Louisville to Gary.

- Clip: *had to start with farmers getting together
- Clip: Filled up slots
- *Sense of relief on people's faces - not alone

COVID for farmers

VO:

All that got a little upended when COVID made breaking bread together impossible this summer.

But that was overshadowed by the battle to adjust to this new reality and stay afloat. They've been hosting virtual trainings to help farmers navigate online sales.

- /Clip: *How COVID is creating new problems for farmers supply chain new

VO: The other problems are bigger though. There was a run-on butcher shop dates for farmers raising animals for slaughter.

- Clip: *Butcher dates
- Clip: *A cow can get too big!

VO: If you can't get butcher dates, you can sell your animal to a wholesaler, but overall it's hard to say what will happen to a lot of farmers who are scrambling right now.

- (Clip: Also staffing issues with COVID)

What's next?

VO: As with everyone right now, Liz can't predict the future, and she's taking it day by day.

- Clip: *We don't know what the next few months will look like! We have to guess and hope that it works, working on a podcast
- Clip: *taking the small joys where we can find them.

Outro/Plug and Credits

VO: You can follow Liz and Nate's farm at night fall farm dot com, and the Hoosier Young Farmers Coalition at Hoosier YFC dot org and on Instagram, they're AT hoosieryoungfarmers.

Thanks to Joni Muchler and the Resilient Hoosier Communities team at CRE.

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Endnotes

¹ A farm share, or CSA, short for Community Supported Agriculture, is a partnership with a local farm whereby a customer may pay in advance for a “share” of the farm’s produce over a set period. The result is often weekly portions of varied produce from the farm for the agreed upon period.

² For instance, *Earth Eats* and *Second Servings*, two podcasts produced in Bloomington that deal with food and its significance for communities. See Disciplinary Context section for more details.

³ IU’s Grand Challenges are three areas that the university administration and board of trustees identified as focuses for research projects and funding initiatives as part of its strategic planning for the bicentennial in 2020 (Indiana University, 2022). One challenge, Prepared for Environmental Change, is dedicated to helping communities and institutions in the state prepare for coming changes in the climate or other environmental factors (*ibid.*).

⁴ For more information on Harvest Public Media, see their website, cited above.

⁵ Joni Muchler in conversation with the author, June 18, 2020.

⁶ While contemporary audio producers use digital tools to edit, mix and master their projects, many still use terms from a pre-digital era when recordings were on physical audio tape, and an editor had to literally cut and reattach the tape to form a produced work.

⁷ See Appendix for an example of a two-part thematic storyboard for one episode of the podcast.

⁸ Old-time music is a term for the string-heavy music of many regions in the United States, stemming from both African American and Anglo-American traditions (The Smithsonian Institution, 2013). There are several locally recognized old-time music groups in Southern Indiana. Traditional Arts Indiana has played a large role in recognizing this music and supporting its musicians through the Elder Music Project, which records and releases music by the state’s traditional artists (Traditional Arts Indiana, 2022).

⁹ For an introduction to the concept of ethnographic research, see Kimberly Kerner and Jan Mills’ book *Introduction to Ethnographic Research: A Guide for Anthropology*. For a somewhat dated introduction to ethnographic work in folklore specifically, see Kenneth Goldstein’s book *A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore*.

¹⁰ Another important note in the discussion of relationship-building in ethnography and folklore work is the debate over what Henry Glassie and his advocates call the “friendship model” in fieldwork. This is the idea that it is of greater use than harm to a field worker’s project to develop a real friendship and trust with one’s collaborators (Glassie 2016: 437-38). Fellow folklorist Alan Dundes took issue with this model, arguing that a scholar should not allow him or herself to be

“intimidated” by his or her informants, censoring their writing to avoid causing offense (Dundes 2005). When one considers his or her primary relationship with his or her collaborators to be one of friendship, one may even withhold a significant portion of their research in order to protect the source; this situation became very real when Glassie worked with sources who were affiliated with the Irish Republican Army during the height of the Troubles (Glassie 2016).

¹¹ The CRE’s website has an [interactive project map](#) that describes its projects in rural communities around Indiana.

¹² The Library of Congress has a number of these recordings available to listen to on their website, as well as information about the recordings and what is known about the people in them.

¹³ See [culturalequity.org](#), the website of the nonprofit that Lomax founded, for more information on these projects.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.* Listen to the series on [the Association for Cultural Equity’s archive site](#).

¹⁶ For a discussion of cultural performance as discourse, see Sherzer 1987.

¹⁷ One caveat to the widespread availability of podcasts is the growing trend of single-platform podcasts. Spotify is increasingly creating exclusive deals with podcast producers that limit the availability of the shows to its proprietary platform (Bedingfield, 2021). This means that listeners in countries that do not have access to the platform cannot access those podcasts. Another limitation is internet availability. Places with limited broadband availability cannot readily stream them.

¹⁸ See the [Salt Institute’s website](#) for more information.