

Voting Rights: How the Fetishization of Organic Compromises Food Justice

by

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This research is dedicated to U.S. farmers and farm workers—  
may they *all* get a fair shake.

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## ABSTRACT

The organic industry has grown exponentially since the distinction was established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1990. While organic has become a household name and driven food sales for both corporations and small farmers, its popularity inspires consumers to buy organic food without questioning whence it came, or how or by whom it was grown. This establishes a fetish, which is prevalent in contemporary popular discourse and which is played out via a belief that one can improve the food system with one's shopping habits, known as *voting with your fork*. Using critical discourse analysis, I found that contemporary popular discourse reinforces a number of illusions about organic agriculture and about race, class, and gender issues in the food system. Specifically it (a) creates confusion, shame, and/or fear around conventionally grown food; (b) equates organic food with dignity, health, and/or happiness; (c) emphasizes the ease with which one can access or process organic food; (d) makes a social movement out of a personal choice; (e) applauds the consumer's ethical fortitude and/or good taste; and (f) subordinates or ignores the rights or existence of farm workers. My thesis explores the idea of contemporary popular discourse revealing a fetishization of organic food, which compromises food justice, particularly for the food-insecure and farm workers. I approach the problem as a pragmatist, using a food-justice framework explore the unintended consequences of fetishizing *organic* and then suggest meaningful ways of effecting change via policy and activism, rather than commerce.

*Keywords:* organic food, fetishization, neoliberalism, social justice, farmworker rights, food insecurity, industrial organic, food policy

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The rise of organic agriculture in the United States is an unusual success story. Organic purveyors have not only convinced consumers that their products are needed by the mainstream, they are able to charge *more* than average for those products. Organic food has garnered such popularity that it is stocked in grocery and discount stores alongside generic brands, even during a period of general economic recession. What started as a minor counter-culture effort thirty years ago, and then grew into a niche market with a federal labeling system, has transformed into a global movement (Organic Valley, n.d.; Schroeder, 2014). While organic food still constitutes a modicum of the United States' total agriculture income, as a segment it has enjoyed seventeen-percent growth from 1998 to 2006 and ten- to fifteen-percent growth every year since, except during the 2009 recession (Dettman & Dimitri, 2010; Greene, 2013). The USDA Economic Research Service estimates 2014 sales to be approximately \$37 billion (Greene, 2013).

The organic industry is supported by hundreds of nonprofit organizations and dozens of charismatic leaders, many of whom have created bestselling books and films and have enjoyed rising political and economic power. These authors and film directors are members of a continuum of food “experts” with food “solutions” that stretches back centuries. DuPuis (2007) notes that woodland spirits were reported to appear to eighteenth-century U.S. colonists imparting dietary advice, and patriots like Benjamin Rush and Thomas Paine weighed in about proper consumption habits as well as democracy. In the late 1800s anti-industrialists and food purists like John Harvey Kellogg explored the effects on health of various stringent practices, including restrictive diets, frequent enemas, and redundant mastication (Boyle, 1993; Pollan, 2008). The twentieth century, as well as present time, is riddled with cures, diets, and other food-

based schemes as experts, including scientists, continually update their attempts to pigeonhole the secrets to vibrant individual health and use diet to subjugate the “other,” be it a racial, social, or economic dissociation (DuPuis, 2007).

The mechanisms of the obsession with food and health dovetail well with capitalism by creating a market for a continuous stream of the most recent iteration of the perfect product or agricultural process. Unexamined, this activity is laudable for inspiring innovation and fueling the U.S. economy. However, organic’s unqualified marketing success has obscured important facets of an equitable food system. I suspected that a thorough examination might tell a different story—one rife with inequity, fear-mongering, and consumption masked as political action.

Perhaps the most telling repository of a time period’s thought about “what to eat” is its books, articles, and films. My research investigates the discussion of organic food in contemporary popular discourse to better understand what *organic* reveals and conceals, so that the public conversation about *organic* can be more transparent and can more effectively engage food justice. I do this by first considering how contemporary popular discourse portrays *organic*. I then consider how contemporary popular discourse portrays *voting with your fork*. Thirdly, I ask whether the assumptions about *organic* and *voting with your fork* that are present in contemporary popular discourse valorize individual interests over collective interests, and whether unintended consequences follow. Lastly, I suggest ways that a comprehensive understanding of *organic* and *fork-voting* might contribute to the goals of food-justice advocates.

While numerous academic studies explore elements of the broader food system, this type of comprehensive examination has not extended beyond the reach of academia to affect popular discourse. My research provides analysis of the trends and gaps in existing literature in hopes of illuminating of how *organic* and *voting with your fork* work within the U.S. food system, and

encouraging consumers to be greater advocates for parity and equity in the food system. Without this type of study, people will continue to believe that there are no further questions to ask about *organic* and that their consumer habits are an effective form of political activity. As Getz, Brown, & Shreck (2008) write, “It is precisely because of the widespread belief that organic agriculture represents a more socially just form of production that these issues must be critically evaluated at this time.”

In Background and Significance, I explore a short history of organic food and of the concept of *voting with your fork*, and explain how I approach this issue from my own life experience as a *green consumer*. In Methodology and Method, I outline my epistemological and theoretical framework for this research and describe my research method, critical discourse analysis. In Research, Analysis, and Contribution, I explore my research questions as outlined above. I collect representative examples of the treatment of *organic* and *voting with your fork*, respectively, into tables and then provide analysis of that data. I consider the unintended consequences that affect farm workers and the food-insecure and other eaters by the assumptions revealed in the data. Finally, in Conclusion, I summarize the scope and results of this research project, and recommend additional strategies to support food justice.

My intention is not to demonize the organic industry or anyone who buys organic food, but to increase the knowledge and understanding that could support true equity and food justice in the United States.

## Chapter 2: Background and Significance

Karl Marx is well known for his critique of capitalism, including the relationship of capitalists with objects of consumption. In *New Keywords*, Weeks (2005) describes Marx's argument that the "fetishism of the commodity" occurs when an object gains "value [that] appears to be intrinsic" and the "labor power that went into it is obscured, so that instead of seeing the object as the product of a social labor, the worker seems subordinated to the work itself" (132). In contemporary U.S. culture, nearly everything is fetishized. Consumer items—electronics, cleaning supplies, apparel—are packaged and arranged neatly in stores that belie their (usually foreign) origins. Moreover, the average U.S. shopper has been revealed to *not want* to know where their products come from nor under what conditions they were made (Mayerowitz, 2012; Swanson & Bhasin, 2013).

Agriculture provides an interesting exception. Figure 1 is a screen-capture of an advertisement that aired in 2013 during the Superbowl, an annual television event notorious for its expensive and highly produced commercials (Superbowlads.com, n.d.). The commercial, selling a brand of pick-up truck, features a series of romanticized portraits of farmers while legendary radio personality Paul Harvey recites his 1970s speech "So God Made a Farmer." As pictured in Figure 1, the commercial had been viewed nearly 18 million times at the time of this screen-capture; a very successful product.

Figure 1  
 “Official Ram Trucks Super Bowl Commercial ‘Farmer’” Video



(Ram Trucks, 2013)

People in the United States idealize farmers even if they cannot follow the trajectory between tractor and Twinkie. Couched within this cultural reverence is a movement that has gained momentum since the mid-twentieth century. Still revering farmers, this movement emphasizes, as one of its main tenets, how out of touch the average consumer is with food production. In 1990, author and poet Wendell Berry wrote:

I begin with the proposition that eating is an agricultural act. Eating ends the annual drama of the food economy that begins with planting and birth. Most eaters, however, are no longer aware that this is true. They think of food as an agricultural product, perhaps, but they do not think of themselves as participants in agriculture. They think of themselves as “consumers.” If they think beyond that, they recognize that they are passive consumers. They buy what they want—or what they have been persuaded to want—within the limits of what they can get. They pay, mostly without protest, what they are charged. And they mostly ignore certain critical questions about the quality and the cost of what they are sold: How fresh is it? How pure or clean is it, how free of dangerous chemicals? How far was it transported, and what did transportation add to the cost? How much did manufacturing or packaging or advertising add to the cost? When the food product has been manufactured or “processed” or “precooked,” how has that affected its quality or price or nutritional value?

Berry's impassioned essay has, since it was published, found sympathetic ears and joined a rising chorus of like-minded people. Many consumers have become interested in the environmental impact of food, and particularly interested in a type of food that has differentiated itself from conventional agriculture: organic food.

## 2.1. History of Organic

Organic agricultural practices were a fringe concern in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century, but they gained popularity during the latter half in response to concern about the petroleum-based fertilizers and synthetic chemical pesticides and herbicides that became common in agriculture after World War II (UC Santa Cruz, n.d.). During the back-to-the-land era of the late 1960s and early 1970s, organic agriculture grew even more popular. Farmers used the label as a tool to indicate to the public that they provided ecologically sound agriculture and supported an egalitarian social construct (Guthman, 2011, p. 142; Pratt, 2009, p. 157). Organic had become a relatively de-fetishized food.

However, *organic's* move into the mainstream was slowed by a negative association with the perceived austerity and blandness of health food, and with counter-culturites ("hippies") and communes, as well as from the lack of a consistent rubric for what *organically grown* meant. In 1990, in response to public pressure to forge a common definition and also to pressure from organic farmers who wanted their efforts recognized and protected, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) created a regulatory board and certification regimen for organic growers. The USDA was a rather reluctant participant, and the process was drawn-out and contentious (Vos, 2000, p. 247). In spite of the behind-the-scenes drama, *organic's* official status, and the accompanying public perception of government endorsement, encouraged explosive growth in the industry (Greene, 2013).

As the USDA spent the decade of the 1990s sorting out the rules that would enforce the Organic Foods Production Act, hippie cooperative markets (*co-ops*) and health food stores began to gain mainstream popularity (Bogo, 2000; Pratt, 2009; Zimbelman, n.d.). People who valued environmentalism but could not find everything they wanted in a local store or co-op also began mail-ordering products via catalogues like Seventh Generation and Real Goods (Fig. 2) (Smith, 1993). The growing acceptance at the turn of the twenty-first century of healthy and environmentally friendly products set the stage for the proliferation of alternative food institutions such as community-supported agriculture, farmers markets, and “natural” grocery stores (Dimitri & Greene, 2002).

Figure 2  
*Real Goods newsletter*



(RGS Energy, n.d.)

Organic food has become an integral component of *green consumerism*, a sub-genre of environmentalism that gained ground during the early 1990s with the publication of the book *The*



*Green Consumer*. Allen & Kovach (2000) note that people have been framing their purchases as votes since the 1980s, writing “the central tenet of green consumerism is that consumers, by becoming more informed and shopping more responsibly, can transform the way in which goods are produced” (p. 222). As these two phenomena have merged, *voting* for mostly undefined concepts such as *the environment* and *sustainability* by purchasing organic food has become a way of life for many people in the United States and a major focus of U.S. popular discourse (Szasz, 2007, p. 147).

What may have slipped away with the growing popularity of *organic* in contemporary popular discourse is, ironically, its transparency. At the same time, *fork-voting* may have replaced political activism in the collective consciousness. Taken together, *fork-voting* for *organic* may be compromising food justice.

## **2.2. Goals of Food Justice**

My research focuses on justice for eaters of food, particularly people with low incomes and who are food-insecure, and for farm workers. Food-justice advocates aim to reverse the trends listed below and improve the fate of millions of others, around the world.

### **2.2.1. Food-insecure.**

People who are *food-insecure* lack reliable access to a sufficient quantity of food. More than 46 million people were enrolled in the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in January 2015 (Food Research and Action Center, n.d.). Food-insecure people also tend to also be *low-income*, which Dettman (2008) helps to define: “Low incomes included all households with incomes below \$30,000, middle incomes were households between \$30,000 and \$70,000, and upper incomes were households with incomes greater than \$70,000 a year.”

Strickhouser, Wright, & Donley (2014) write, “A moment’s reflection makes clear that people can be food insecure for reasons other than lack of money” (p. 12). Not everyone has ready access to a store or market with a full complement of healthy, fresh food (Dammann & Smith, 2010; Johnston et al, 2012; Rodman et al., 2014, p. 88). Twenty-three and one-half million people in the United States live in a *food desert*, meaning they lack access to fresh food within one mile of their residence in an urban area, or within ten miles of their residence in a rural area (USDA AMA, n.d.). Significant additional reasons for food insecurity will be explored in Research, Analysis, and Contribution.

### **2.2.2. Farm worker.**

United States agriculture has a history of racial inequity (Alkon & McCullen, 2010, p. 945; Gilbert, Sharp, & Felin, 2002; Khan, 2014a), subjugation of women (Allen, 2004, p. 154 – 155; Khan, 2014b; Kurtzleben, 2015; Runyon, 2014), and invisibility of non-white farmers and farm workers (Alkon & McCullen, 2010, p. 946; Malavé, 2015). These huge gaps in the collective consciousness about food are exacerbated by contemporary popular discourse’s portrayal of “farming” as being performed by white men (and their families) on small farms.

Consumer assumptions about organic farmers compromise the rights and wellbeing of farm workers (Alkon, 2012, p. 665; Barclay, 2013). This false perception creates invisibility for actual farm workers, which makes it easier for farmers to perpetuate poor working conditions, low pay, wage theft, substandard housing, few or no breaks, exposure to non-synthetic chemicals, and other inequitable and dangerous conditions (Bourgeois, 2013; Getz et al., 2008; Moskowitz, 2014; The Food Chain Workers Alliance, 2012).

National nonprofit organizations including Farmworker Justice and The Food Chain Workers Alliance, state-based organizations, and unions struggle to bring farm workers’ rights

into the public eye. The home page of the Farmworker Justice website (2014) succinctly describes the main issues for U.S. farm workers:

Farmworkers frequently encounter abusive labor practices at the hands of unscrupulous employers. Workers all too often labor for employers who skirt the minimum wage laws or practice other forms of wage theft, work under unhealthy or dangerous conditions, or are made to live in grossly substandard housing). Employment abuses in agriculture are difficult to address because farm work is not covered by many important labor protections enjoyed by most other workers in this country.

Most farm workers live in substandard on-farm housing, often labor camps (Gray, 2014; McMillan, 2012; Perkowski, 2014a). In addition to the health hazards of overcrowding, lack of fire egress, and broken fixtures, workers suffer isolation due to lack of a vehicle, language barrier, and unfamiliarity with the area in which they are working (Moskowitz, 2014). Their comings and goings from the camp may be monitored or restricted (Jenkins, 2014). Gray (2014) writes, “Self-empowerment through networking, collective action opportunities, or political action was generally closed off for those who could not move freely beyond the orbit of the camps” (p. 57).

Farm workers lack access to public assistance, health care, paid time off, and education for their children (Kenner, 2008; McMillan, 2012; Migrant Clinicians Network, 2014; Oregon Public Broadcasting, 2001; Shreck et al., 2006). On-the-job injury is rampant, undertreated and underreported (Lowe, 2014). Undocumented workers live under constant threat, by their employers or by a chance encounter with law enforcement, of deportation (Kenner, 2008; Lowe, 2012; McMillan, 2012; Moskowitz, 2014). Even the federal guest-worker program, H-2A, is known to produce slave-like situations for some workers (Bobrow-Strain, 2015; Perkowski, 2014b). Female workers are vulnerable to workplace sexual harassment and assault (Greenaway, 2013; Greenhouse, 2014).

### 2.3. Justification and Conceptual Framework

My research investigates the discussion of organic food in contemporary popular discourse to better understand what *organic* reveals and conceals, so that the public conversation about *organic* can be more transparent and can more effectively engage food justice. My first research question is: How does contemporary popular discourse portray *organic*? This question scrutinizes the public imaginary about what *organic* offers, enabling me to identify and examine recurring themes.

My second research question is: How does contemporary popular discourse portray *voting with your fork*? This question similarly scrutinizes the discourse to discover how consumerism is compared with activism, particularly in regard to organic food.

My third research question is: Do the assumptions about *organic* and *voting with your fork* that are present in contemporary popular discourse valorize individual interests over collective interests, and are there unintended consequences? This question allows me to analyze the discoveries made with the first two questions, weighing those assumptions against the realities of agriculture and food insecurity.

My final research question, which also supports my “Contribution,” is: How could a comprehensive understanding of *organic* and *fork-voting* contribute to the goals of food-justice advocates? Once I identify the perceptions in popular discourse and examine the unintended consequences of them, I am able to consider policy-based solutions for food justice.

These questions relate to social justice and social change in the food system by identifying gaps in the rhetoric about *organic* that are crucial to food justice. Because most supporters of organic food are unaware of the gaps in organic agriculture’s ability to address food justice, they are unaware of the incompleteness of their imaginary. Or, worse, they are

aware of gaps and purposely ignore them. Only by identifying and then debunking mythologies can *organic* be de-fetishized and social justice achieved.

To consider *organic* and the mechanism of *voting with your fork*, I use a food-justice framework, which considers food a mechanism of greater social and systematic structures of cultural injustice, particularly for people of color. Even though the framework's history and basis are associated specifically with structural racism, I find the framework useful as a basis for examining social justice for all people in the United States who are food insecure, regardless of their ethnic background or race. U.S. culture may be idealizing agriculture, producing food that is not available to all consumers while demonizing the food that is, and may be failing to acknowledge an entire echelon of workers—particularly, in this research, migrant specialty-crop pickers. Meanwhile, millions of U.S. eaters may be suspending their examination of the food system, believing that *fork-voting* is an effective way to ensure equity and ecological safety within the system. If this fetishization exists, it is damaging to social justice and, therefore, deserves exposition.

Much has been written about the rise of *organic*, first in academic and industry spheres, and later in the books, magazines, blogs, and videos of the public sphere, as organic food has become more mainstream in U.S. culture. Academic writers such as Patricia Allen, Andrew Bobrow-Strain, Christy Getz, Margaret Gray, Julie Guthman, and many others, have paid close attention to social justice issues related to consumption and food systems. They and industry writers have also carefully monitored policy, specifically the process of creating the 1990 Organic Foods Production Act and subsequent periods of public comment and political activity, and to the economics of organic-food sales (Cornucopia Institute, 2014; Greene, 2013; Howard, 2014; Vos, 2010). Writers of books, magazines, news articles, films, and other vehicles of

popular discourse have joined the movement to hold organic as a standard of purity and an answer to industrial agriculture. However, academics have yet to consider the rise of *organic* and the notion of *voting with your fork* specifically through the lens of popular discourse. I find this an important gap, as the majority of people—the purchasers and consumers of food—are engaged by popular discourse rather than by academic or industry discourse.

## Chapter 3: Methodology and Method

My research investigates the discussion of organic food in contemporary popular discourse to better understand what *organic* reveals and conceals, so that the public conversation about *organic* can be more transparent and can more effectively engage food justice. I approached this by asking research questions that engage critical discourse analysis, illuminating examples of *organic* and *voting with your fork* in contemporary popular discourse. Then, I examined the discourse's significance and explored its unintended consequences that affect food justice. Finally, I considered alternative, policy-based strategies.

### 3.1. Methodology

#### 3.1.1. Author's epistemology and background.

I am drawn to pragmatists and, to some degree, philosophical anarchists like Paul Feyerabend, for whom Lazar notes a lack of scientific method is a “cause for celebration rather than concern” (1999, p.12). Like Jesson, Matheson, & Lacey (2011), I doubt my (or anyone's) ability to truly be impartial, particularly about a topic in which one is interested enough to study in a master's program (p. 67). I agree with Feyerabend (in Lazar, 1999, p. 12) that “it is a myth that science is characterized by scepticism [*sic*] and openness,” and with Taylor & Weber about the value and necessity of interpretation in the social sciences (in Creswell, 2014). Like Weber (1999), I do not believe that even the most objective person creating a rubric can completely detach him- or herself from that same swirling mass of internal, unique influences (in Lazar, p. 16).

With all of that doubt and skepticism, one might ask, “Why study anything?” I would respond that, even while human analysis is flawed and fraught with bias, it is all we have.

Feyerabend (1994) writes, "... the history of science will be as complex, chaotic, full of mistakes, and entertaining as the ideas it contains ..." (p. 11). Even flawed understanding, then, is better than none.

I recount some personal history to establish myself as typical of the people I am studying: From 1988 to 1991, I was an undergraduate at the University of Minnesota, in Minneapolis, and I remained there until 1995. At that time, organic food remained in the realm of hippie culture. The tiny co-op near my house reeked of patchouli and sold nearly everything in bulk; the toothpaste I bought there looked and tasted like clay. I once ordered a "veggie burger" from people in tie-dyed t-shirts and Rastafarian-colored, crocheted berets at the New Riverside Café, on the West Bank of the school (where the artists and "poli sci" majors hung out). The "burger" seemed like some kind of sprouted-wheat casserole on a bun. While I felt like I *should* like organic, at that point I still I preferred theory to practice.

Nevertheless, the things I heard about Alar (daminozide, which I learned about via the television show *thirtysomething*) and other chemical additives spoke to me, and once a more mainstream co-op, The Wedge, upgraded their store in 1992, I participated enthusiastically. I shopped there on the twentieth anniversary of Earth Day. I signed up for Working Assets long-distance phone service and for their credit card, which promised to share one percent of its profits with eco-friendly nonprofit organizations. When I did, I was rewarded with a coupon for a free pint of Ben & Jerry's Rainforest Crunch ice cream. I resonated with Ben & Jerry's promise of "Buy this ice cream and save the rainforest!" and found a mission in their encouragement to "vote with my dollars" (Maran, 1995).

I bought a copy of *The Green Consumer* via my subscription to Quality Paperback Book Club. I phoned the head office of Target (based in Minneapolis) to ask that they carry



environmentally friendly cleaning products; a representative informed me (in a tone that scarcely masked his disdain for my odd request) that there was not enough demand to warrant it. So, I started mail-ordering them from Seventh Generation.

A few years later, in a regular grocery store in Portland, Oregon, I saw a jar of organic spaghetti sauce made by Prego. “It’s happening!” I thought—organic food is going to take over, and everything will be all right. Little did I know how complicated things would become.

Like the people who engage with contemporary popular discourse, I am someone who, for the last twenty-five years, has honestly felt she was making a difference by purchasing organic products. I fancied myself part of a Revolution, not complicit in the creation of an exclusive niche market. At no point did I consider who was growing or picking my food. And I had felt this way—ignoring the inflated prices and occasionally enduring less-palatable products—until I entered the Food Systems and Society program at Marylhurst University.

This research affects me directly. In my former home of Portland, in my current rural home in Eastern Oregon, and in my virtual circle via social media, I am surrounded by people who value “sustainable” food. The message is repeated over and over—in articles that are reposted on Facebook, in movies, in magazines, and in live presentations—by popular writers, considered heroes of the food world, including Michael Pollan, Mark Bittman, and Barbara Kingsolver. It’s not the idea of sustainability at issue—it’s the definition. The people who surround me have, generally, come to understand *organic* to be a codeword for *sustainable*, or *real*, or *good*. And, worse, they have stopped questioning what *organic* actually can promise, or whether there are other considerations in the food system. Before conducting this research, I had, too. I am motivated to investigate contemporary popular discourse so that I can more effectively engage food justice and share my knowledge with others.

### 3.1.2. Author's methodology.

I consider my work exploratory action research, as I have been—as described in the preceding paragraphs—a consumer of organic food for decades, and am a member of The Public who regularly engages with others in public venues (e.g. Facebook, Slow Food group, my workplace) about food-systems topics. I also consider this action research because I plan to place my findings within the same popular discourse that I critique. In fact, I have already begun to do this by posting essays from previous Marylhurst classes on my blog and by presenting some of this material during a program I designed, called “Good Food, Bad Food: Agriculture, Ethics, and Personal Choice,” which is presented in communities around Oregon, and sponsored by Oregon Humanities (Athens, 2014).

Because my main focus is the discourse itself, my primary research method for the first two research questions (explored in “Method,” below) is critical discourse analysis informed by grounded theory. As Van Dijk (2008) writes, “Critical discourse analysis [CDA] is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context.” (p. 352). CDA is appropriate for this study, as most popular magazines, books, films, and news outlets cater to the middle-to-upper class—the same demographic as that which tends to fetishize *organic* (Dettman & Dimitri, 2010). As per Creswell (2014), I use a constructivist, inductive process that “does not guide and direct the study but becomes an aid once patterns or categories have been identified.”

For the third research question, I use academic literature to help place *organic* in context and analyze popular discourse. In an effort to balance the messages of contemporary popular discourse with industry reality, I will also reference gray literature in the form of USDA and

industry reports. Not all academics value gray literature (Jesson et al., 2011, p. 126); however, I feel it is necessary to demonstrate the specific elements of agriculture that the fetishization of *organic* causes people to overlook. Industry reports and statistics can help to paint that picture.

The fourth research question also serves as the basis of my “Contribution.”

### **3.1.3. Research limitations.**

In order to keep the scope of this paper manageable I had to leave out certain elements of organic agriculture. For example, I find no reason to defend confined animal feed operations (CAFOs), and could write a separate thesis about the grey area represented by industrial “organic” dairies, egg producers, and meat growers. I, therefore, omitted altogether the raising and processing of livestock. Except for a brief segment in “Question 1: Evidence of a Fetish,” I also left out the efforts that organic farmers, food processors, and marketers themselves make to promote organic food, which can infiltrate and influence contemporary popular discourse (Allen & Kovach, 2000, p. 224; Conner, 2004, p. 140; Danovich, 2014).

Conducting industry research was slightly challenging at times, as federal agencies have only recently begun to track organic enterprises separately from conventional. Also, for obvious reasons, undocumented farm workers are not tracked well (The Food Chain Workers Alliance, 2012, p. 21). I occasionally was unable to find the data I wanted because it simply does not exist.

It is unrealistic to attempt a systematic review of the entirety of popular literature (Jesson et al. 2011, p. 104). Instead, I focused my research and analysis on two particular subjects—the valorization of *organic* and of *voting with your fork*—to document patterns and impact. I restricted my research to the United States, with the exception of a few citations and when considering organic imports.

In conducting this CDA, I define “contemporary” to mean since the passage of the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990. Most of the literature I reference is even newer, published or released since 2000, extending into April 2015. “Contemporary popular discourse” comprises books, online sources such as websites and news aggregates, news programs, videos, films, and non-academic magazines and journals.

## **3.2. Method**

### **3.2.1. Research Question 1.**

My research questions shaped this inquiry. First, I asked, “How does contemporary popular discourse portray *organic*?” I acquired articles and videos via Facebook (articles reposted by friends) and a number of email subscriptions, including *Food Business News*, Tufts University’s food-systems listserv, *Food Politic*, The Cornucopia Institute, The Greenhorns, Friends of Family Farmers, *Grist*, Homegrown.org, and National Sustainable Agriculture. I also regularly visited websites such as National Public Radio, *Slate*, *Huffington Post*, and the USDA’s many sites. I used search keywords such as “organic food safe,” “organic better,” “organic more,” and “organic family.” I also looked for these keywords specifically in U.S. publications with the largest circulation in order to ensure that I was not biasing fringe opinions (List of Magazines by Circulation, n.d.).

I surveyed contemporary popular discourse about *organic*, looking for evidence of assumptions or mythology, and for the absence of important issues such as race, class, or gender equity in, or corporate control of, the food system. I coded and then organized my findings in tables according to the most prominent messages, guided by the principles of grounded theory. I analyzed my findings by comparing how popular discourse characterizes organic agriculture with how academic literature characterizes organic agriculture.

### 3.2.2. Research Question 2.

Then, I asked, “How does contemporary popular discourse portray *voting with your fork?*” I acquired articles and videos via Facebook (articles re-posted by friends) and a number of email subscriptions, including *Food Business News*, Tufts University’s food-systems listserv, *Food Politic*, The Cornucopia Institute, The Greenhorns, Friends of Family Farmers, *Grist*, Homegrown.org, and National Sustainable Agriculture. I also regularly visited websites such as National Public Radio, *Slate*, *Huffington Post*, and the USDA’s many sites. I used search keywords such as “voting with dollar,” “voting with fork,” “shopping for change,” “organic vote,” “green consumer,” and “ethical consumer.” I looked for these keywords specifically in U.S. publications with the largest circulation in order to ensure that I was not biasing fringe opinions (List of Magazines by Circulation, n.d.). I also searched the discourse for messages that link *fork-voting* to *organic*.

I surveyed contemporary popular discourse about *organic*, looking for evidence of assumptions or mythology, and for the absence of important issues such as race, class, or gender equity in, or corporate control of, the food system. I coded and then organized my findings in tables according to the most prominent messages, guided by the principles of grounded theory. I analyzed my findings by comparing how popular discourse characterizes *fork-voting* with how academic literature characterizes *fork-voting*.

### 3.2.3. Research Question 3.

Third, I asked, “Do the assumptions about *organic* and *voting with your fork* that are present in contemporary popular discourse valorize individual interests over collective interests, and are there unintended consequences?” I pursued unintended consequences, particularly in terms of farm workers and food-insecure eaters. I acquired articles and videos via Facebook

posts and a number of email subscriptions, including *Food Business News*, Tufts University's food-systems listserv, Food Politic, The Cornucopia Institute, The Greenhorns, Friends of Family Farmers, *Grist*, Homegrown.org, and National Sustainable Agriculture. I also regularly visited websites such as National Public Radio, *Slate*, *Huffington Post*, and the USDA's many sites. A very small number of sources cited are from outside the United States; I include them because they are relevant and provide a perspective that is not articulated as well elsewhere.

I found the majority of my academic literature on the EBSCO database, using search terms such as "organic fetish," "organic mythology," "food systems," "organic agriculture," "farm workers rights," "neoliberal voting dollars," "voting fork," "shopping for change," "fetish organic vote," "organic low-income," "food system ethics," and "fork vote class system" in a variety of combinations. I found industry literature on the Internet using Google, with search terms such as "organic corporate sales," "organic imports," and "growth organic sector."

I weighed my findings against academic studies that have been performed to consider race, class, and gender with regard to the desirability and availability of organic food. I also looked at industry reports and other sources of information about the realities of the food system that might be in conflict with the public perception of *organic*.

#### **3.2.4. Research Question 4.**

Finally, I asked, "How could a comprehensive understanding of *organic* and *fork-voting* contribute to the goals of food-justice advocates?" This research question, which also served as the basis for the "Contribution" section in Results, Analysis, and Contribution, is answered using both academic literature and popular discourse. I based my recommendations on the stated goals of food-justice advocates, which were primarily gathered from advocacy-organization websites and from academic articles that explore food justice and advocacy groups. I found the majority

of my literature on the Internet using Google and EBSCO, using search terms such as “food justice,” “food activism,” and “food rights” in addition to the terms listed above.

## Chapter 4: Results, Analysis, and Contribution

In order to advance food justice in the United States, I pursued my suspicion that the term *organic* has become misleading, fetishized and, to some degree, counterproductive to food justice since the industry's increased success over the last three decades. I also suspected that the notion of *voting with your fork* has become a mechanism of the fetishization of *organic*. My interest in consumers' assumptions about organic agriculture and the social value of advocacy via consumption is based on a suspicion that these assumptions compromise the goals of food-justice advocates. In this chapter, I explore how *organic* and *voting with your fork* are treated in contemporary popular discourse by examining samples of each concept.

I consult mainly academic sources to examine whether that fetishization creates unintended consequences that affect food justice, and in what ways. Finally, I consider how a defetishized public understanding of *organic* and *voting with your fork* might contribute to the goals of food-justice advocates. These questions are significant because they force the reader to re-examine an idea s/he might have taken as an unequivocal truth—i.e., that buying organic food is the most effective means of improving the food system. With my findings and recommendations, I hope to encourage supporters of organic food and purveyors of popular food-systems discourse to move beyond *fork-voting* to more effectively engage food justice.

I find it important to emphasize that my intention with this study is not to demonize organic-food consumers, who are generally only as informed as the discourse allows. A consumer-interviewee in Rodman, Palmer, Zachary, Hopkins, & Surkan (2014) says, “They just say the organic food's healthier. Why? I don't know. Just going with what they say. ... See all these commercials on TV, ‘Oh, it's organic. It's better for you’” (p. 87). I agree with Gray



(2014), who writes: “Consumers cannot be faulted for this [fetishization]; they are simply mimicking the attitudes of food movement leaders ...” (p. 41). And, even, one cannot fully blame the people who facilitate popular discourse—the journalists, writers, and filmmakers—as they are also “charmed and persuaded by the aesthetics of agrarianism” (*ibid.*). Whom to blame for the problem is a complicated issue, one I sidestep in order to simply illustrate the problem and suggest some strategies for change.

#### 4.1. Question 1: Evidence of a Fetish

As people in the United States have become more conscious of their food choices, the term *organic* has come to mean, simply, *good*. Consumers see *organic* on a food label and assume things beyond what the label promises, including:

- The food was grown with “sustainable” practices (Cummins, 2014; Hamerschlag, 2014; Williams & Hammitt, 2000);
- There were no chemical compounds whatsoever used in growing the food (Cummins, 2014; Rodman et al., 2014, Williams & Hammitt, 2000);
- The food is “safer,” or more “pure” or nutritious (Andersen, 2014; Cairns, Johnston, & McKendrick 2013; Hamerschlag, 2014; Porter, 2007; Rodman et al., 2014; Severson & Martin, 2009; Williams & Hammitt, 2000);
- The food is grown “locally” (Guthman, 2011; Williams & Hammitt, 2000); and
- The only people involved in growing the food are the farmers, who own the land and work it with their families (Allen, 2004, p. 119; Naidoo, 2014; Schiffman, 2012).

The academic community is aware of these misconceptions; the general public is not. As noted in Methodology and Method, I analyzed contemporary popular discourse for its treatment of the notion of *organic*. My evidence suggests that consumers have come to fetishize *organic*.

The following data reveal a number of assumptions about and valorizations of *organic*. Most significantly, contemporary popular discourse:

1. Creates confusion, shame, and/or fear around conventionally grown food;
2. Equates organic food with dignity, health, and/or happiness; and
3. Emphasizes the ease with which one can access or process organic food.

I selected texts to illustrate trends; they do not provide an exhaustive catalogue.

#### 4.1.1. Confusion, shame, and/or fear around conventionally grown food.

Table 1  
*Popular Discourse Creating Confusion, Shame, and/or Fear  
Around Conventionally Grown Food*

Source	Source Type & Significance	Illustrative Quotation(s) from Source
Ronnie Cummins: "10 Reasons Consumers Buy Organic" in <i>Alternet</i>	Online magazine article/"Two-time Webby award-winning news site; averaging 2.7 million unique visitors per month" (Alternet.org, n.d.)	"... organic food and farming, once you look closely at the practices and hazards of so-called 'conventional' food and farming, are literally matters of life or death."
Ibid.		"Non-organic, chemical and GMO-intensive food (so-called "conventional" food) is the number one cause of deteriorating public health among adults and children, including obesity, diabetes, cancer, antibiotic resistant infections, and heart disease."
Michael Pollan: <i>The Omnivore's Dilemma</i>	Book/Named one of the ten best books of 2006 by both <i>The New York Times</i> and <i>Washington Post</i> ; winner of California Book Award, Northern California Book Award, James Beard Award; finalist for National Book Critics Circle Award. A young readers' edition was published in 2009. (Michael Pollan, n.d.)	The author separates "industrial" and "organic" as separate food chains (p. 7) and later recognizes "industrial organic" as an "oxymoron"(p. 8), and uses descriptors such as "unclassifiable," "frankly synthetic," and "deathless" when referring to conventionally grown foods (p. 16).
Wendell Berry: "The Whole Horse" in <i>The New Agrarianism: Land, Culture, and the Community of Life</i>	Essay/Berry's work "has earned numerous fellowships and awards, including the T.S. Eliot Prize, the John Hay Award, the Lyndhurst Prize, and the Aiken-Taylor Award for Modern American Poetry (Freyvogel, Ed., 2001)	"The agrarian mind begins with the love of fields and ramifies in good farming, good cooking, good eating, and gratitude to God. ... The industrial-economic mind begins with ingratitude and ramifies in the destruction of farms and forests" (p. 70).
Michael Pollan: <i>In Defense of Food</i>	Book/ <i>The New York Times</i> bestseller (Michael Pollan, n.d.)	"... today there are thousands of other edible foodlike substances in the supermarket" (p. 1).
Steven Waldman: "In Defense of Food(iesm)" in <i>Food Politic</i>	Online magazine article/"Journal of Food News and Culture" (Food Politic, n.d.)	"It's one thing to read that a local, organic tomato is better for the individual consuming it and for the environment but an entirely other thing to see firsthand why that's the case."

Table 1 (continued)

Source	Source Type & Significance	Illustrative Quotation(s) from Source
Michael Pollan: "Voting with Your Fork" in <i>The New York Times</i>	Newspaper article/Circulation 1,865,315 daily (The New York Times, n.d.a.).	... it's important to recognize what unifies the Whole Foods and Trader Joe's and the farmers' market, and what has brought so many of us 21st century food foragers to Union Square and all places like it: the gathering sense that there is something very wrong with our conventional food system — what I call the industrial food chain, by which I mean typical supermarket and fast food."
John Roulac: "Why Monsanto Will Never Rule the Food World: The Three-Prong Movement That's Stopping the Beast in Its Tracks" in <i>GreenMoney Journal</i>	Online magazine article /"Covering Sustainable Business and Investing Since 1992" (GreenMoney Journal, n.d.).	"Although tens of millions of Americans might not understand all the complexities, they have a gut sense that something is very wrong with our food system, and little faith that Monsanto should be in charge of a baby's nourishment."
Dana Anderson: "Yes, You Can Afford Organic" in <i>Delicious Living</i> magazine	Online magazine article/"Carried by more than 1,300 top natural products stores and is read by more than one million readers each month" (Delicious Living, n.d.).	"Although many organic products are more expensive, consumers are considering the costs of conventional foods not reflected in those foods' comparatively lower price tags: genetically modified ingredients, environmental degradation, and pesticides' potential health effects."
Kurt Hamerschlag: "More Spin Than Science: The Latest Effort to Take Down Organics" in <i>Civil Eats</i>	Online magazine article/"Daily news source for critical thought about the American food system" (Civil Eats, n.d.).	"Why spend massive resources on PR efforts to convince consumers not to care about pesticides, antibiotics, hormones, or GMOs in our food, rather than giving consumers what they want: Safe, healthy food grown in ways that don't harm people or the planet?"
Deirdre Imus: "Can organic farming save us from overexposure to pesticides?" in FOX News	Website article /52 <sup>nd</sup> most popular web resource in the United States, and 220 <sup>th</sup> globally (Alexa, n.d.).	"Organic produce is unlike its conventionally-grown counterpart. Careful steps are taken to ensure every carrot, strawberry, beet, potato or head of lettuce is cultivated using organic, time-tested practices, like spreading house-made fertilizer on crops or irrigating from open creeks. Such methods differ from those of so-called factory farms, where pesticides and other chemicals are rampantly used and impact the quality of the finished product."
Ibid.		"The EPA acknowledges that pesticide exposure causes problems, 'that may occur over a long period of time,' which basically means that any health problem experienced now or in the future by you or your kids could be caused by pesticides, or not. You'll never know for sure, and neither will I."

Table 1 (continued)

Source	Source Type & Significance	Illustrative Quotation(s) from Source
Food, Inc.	Film/Nominated for awards including Academy Award and winner of Cinema Eye Honors, Gotham Awards, National Board of Review, Emmy, Southeastern Film Critics Association, Washington DC Area Film Critics Association (IMDB, n.d.).	Quoting Michael Pollan: “Although it looks like a tomato, it’s kind of a notional tomato. It’s the idea of a tomato.”
Ibid.		Quoting Joel Salatin: “Is cheapness everything that there is? I mean, who wants to buy the cheapest car?”
Deirdre Imus: “New study finds organic foods are healthier than conventionally grown foods” in FOX News	Website article/52 <sup>nd</sup> most popular web resource in the United States, and 220 <sup>th</sup> globally (Alexa, n.d.).	“People like me who choose to eat organic produce and other foods grown and raised without poisons, carcinogens, heavy metals, other harmful toxic chemicals, and genetically engineered food are constantly forced to defend ourselves.”
The Future of Food	Film/“It was chosen by the Oscar screening committee of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences as one of the best documentaries of 2004. [It] ... has been translated into Spanish, French, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian and Japanese. An Educational Edition ... with a year-long, university level curriculum by Professor Joshua Muldavin was released in Fall 2007” (The Future of Food, n.d.).	Quoting Paul Muller: “We’re growing [organic] food that you have no doubt what quality and character it has; food that’s healthy, that my kids can eat ...”
Michael Pollan: Why Cook?” in <i>The Sun</i>	Magazine article/Circulation: 70,000. “Writing from <i>The Sun</i> has won the Pushcart Prize, been published in <i>Best American Short Stories</i> and <i>Best American Essays</i> , and been broadcast on National Public Radio” (The Sun, n.d.).	“... for the forager of raw food would have likely fed himself on the go and alone, like all the other animals. (Or, come to think of it, like the industrial eaters we’ve more recently become, grazing at gas stations ...).”
John Lanchester: “Shut Up and Eat” in <i>The New Yorker</i>	Magazine article/Circulation: 1,047,260. Newsstand sales: 33,530 (Pompeo, 2012).	“People feel judged by their food choices, and they are right to feel that, because they are.”

In a “Funny Friday” satire piece posted on the Eat Local Grown website and reposted in 2015 on FoodMatters.tv, satirical reasons to “avoid farmers markets” included: “I prefer bland, tasteless foods;” “I love eating chemicals and pesticides;” “I adore excessive packaging;” and “I want to suffer from fun things like cancer, heart disease, or diabetes” (Comer, 2013). This kind of “humorous” content serves to feed misconceptions about both organic and conventionally grown food.

The effort to valorize organic while creating a sense of distrust around conventionally grown food is bifurcating the food system, without a complete understanding of whether that is appropriate or helpful (Raynolds, 2004, p. 734; Vos, 2000, p. 253). Alkon notes that “in this binary, food is either natural *or* industrial, but never co-produced” (2012, p. 672). This division of our food into “good” and “bad” types creates fear and shame for people who are not able to buy into the organic system, and encourages those who buy “good” food to not question the food system further. This is explored in detail in “Question 3: Consequences of the Fetish.”

Many farmers selling organic products are not in a hurry to clear up the misconceptions. An Idaho nursery posted a video to YouTube in 2014 (Fig. 3), which emphasized that everything the nursery sells is grown organically.

Figure 3  
“Freaks of the Garden Sale” Video



(Peaceful Belly Farm, 2014)

Because of its silly dancing and re-lyricized hip hop music, the video went *viral* (meaning it was watched by a large number of people in a short time); its sudden popularity was unexpected. The nursery’s owner later acknowledged that the video was not created out of some deep-seated devotion to organic growing, but was simply a marketing device:

“We’re organic, so we can’t use GMOs,” she said. “The people that are purchasing from me, that’s what they’re looking for. [The video] was all about sales” (Ellis, 2014).

A farmer in Guthman’s book *Agrarian Dreams* says, “I’m not out to save the world ... We are about feeding people organic food for a profit ... Hell, my politics are way to the right of center” (2004a, p. 58). Promoting *organic* purely as a marketing tool sets the stage for fetishization amongst consumers.

#### **4.1.2. Equation with dignity, health, and/or happiness.**

The popularity of *organic* has inspired everything from a “socially responsible lifestyle restaurant” chain to a Hollywood celebrity launching an organic product line because she is “obsessed that women find alternatives to eat which are low in fat” (Berry, 2014; Dowd, 2008). Both of these examples demonstrate that the vision of what *organic* represents is, currently, more important to consumers than the reality of what organically grown food can offer.

Even products such as “journalistic” books can play into the fetishization. Author Michael Pollan, who has sold millions of copies of his books and has enjoyed the public-speaking circuit for a decade, takes full advantage of this market opportunity (Penguin Group, 2010). Near the beginning of the bestseller *In Defense of Food*, Pollan notes, “Here I am advising you to reject the advice of science and industry ... I speak mainly on the authority of tradition and common sense” (p. 13). Further in, he posits a science-based argument for preferring organic food: “Recently a *handful* of well-controlled comparisons of crops grown organically and conventionally have found appreciably high levels of antioxidants, flavonoids, vitamins, and other nutrients in several of the organic crops” (p. 170; emphasis mine).” Pollan appears to be selective about which science to reject and which to accept, possibly based on what he thinks his readers would prefer to read.

Bolstered by their beliefs, supporters of organic food sometimes take on a quasi-missionary stance, stressing the superiority of their lifestyle. This is demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2  
*Popular Discourse Equating Organic with Dignity, Health, and/or Happiness*

Source	Source Type & Significance	Illustrative Quotation(s) from Source
Dana Anderson: “Yes, You Can Afford Organic” in <i>Delicious Living</i>	Magazine article/“Carried by more than 1,300 top natural products stores and is read by more than one million readers each month” (Delicious Living, n.d.).	“Healthier, cleaner food translates to healthier lifestyles.” [Article’s image is a young, white woman with no children.]
Barbara Kingsolver: <i>Animal, Vegetable, Miracle</i>	Book/James Beard Award for Writing and Literature, Book Sense Book of the Year Award for Adult Nonfiction (Kingsolver, Barbara, 1995–).	“When people see the size of our garden or the stocks in our pantry and shake their heads, saying ‘What a lot of work,’ I know what they’re really saying ... ‘What a dope.’ They can think so. But they’re wrong. (p. 308).
Wendell Berry: “The Whole Horse” in <i>The New Agrarianism: Land, Culture, and the Community of Life</i>	Essay/Berry’s work “has earned numerous fellowships and awards, including the T.S. Eliot Prize, the John Hay Award, the Lyndhurst Prize, and the Aiken-Taylor Award for Modern American Poetry (Freyvogel, Ed., 2001).	“The market for so-called organic food, for example, is really a market for good, fresh, trustworthy food, ... and such food cannot be produced by a global corporation” (p. 76).
Sheri Doyle: “Slow Food in the Fast Lane” in <i>Food</i> magazine	Magazine article/Defunct.	“Ultimately, eating should be pleasurable. McIntosh sums it up in a wonderfully simple but profound statement: ‘Eating slow should be a joyful act.’ Making simple efforts toward our slow food tastes can bring us one step closer to a slower, more joyful life.”
Laura D’Alessandro: “Slow Food in the Fast Lane: A Prologue”	Video trailer for upcoming “mini-documentary” on Vimeo/“Has over 18 million members, gets over 100 million visitors per month, and there are approximately 250,000 websites using video sharing platform” (Chianis, 2013).	“My name is Laura D’Alessandro, and I’m a foodie. I don’t really like that word, but it’s a genetic predisposition.” [Goes on to glorify family’s generational cooking habits.]
Michael Pollan: “Voting with Your Fork” in <i>The New York Times</i>	Newspaper article/Circulation 1,865,315 daily (The New York Times, n.d.a.).	“This desire for something better — something safer, something more sustainable, something more humane and something tastier — is what’s bringing people to the Whole Foods and the farmer’s market, as well as to C.S.A.’s [ <i>sic</i> ] ... and directly to farmers over the Internet.”
Ronnie Cummins: “10 Reasons Consumers Buy Organic” in <i>Alternet</i>	Online magazine article/“Two-time Webby award-winning news site; averaging 2.7 million unique visitors per month” (Alternet.org, n.d.).	“By contrast, organic foods and products, especially raw fruits and vegetables, whole grains, healthy oils, and grass-fed meat and animal products, are safer, healthier and more sustainable than the chemical-intensive, genetically engineered, highly processed (laced with sugar, salt and unhealthy fats) junk foods that make up the bulk of the U.S. diet.”

Table 2 (continued)

Source	Source Type & Significance	Illustrative Quotation(s) from Source
Lauren Markham: “The New Farmers” in <i>Orion</i>	Magazine article/Winner of Utne Independent Press Award for General Excellence and finalist for a National Magazine Award (Orion Magazine n.d.). Total circulation 25,000 (Orion [magazine], 2014).	“...just enough of her organic, <i>love-sown</i> seeds have sprouted from the ground ...” [emphasis mine].
Michael Pollan: <i>In Defense of Food</i>	Book/ <i>The New York Times</i> bestseller (Michael Pollan, n.d.).	“Another important benefit of paying more for better-quality food is that you’re apt to eat less of it” (p. 184).
Deborah White: “Farmers Markets, CSAs: A Blow for American Freedom of Choice” in <i>Fake Food Watch</i>	Blog/Author is “Journalist, blogger, real food activist, coffee drinker. About.com/New York Times Co. writer, editor for 8 years” (White, D., n.d.).	“One more reason I urge everyone to shop farmers markets and CSAs: freedom. Freedom from the unhealthy industrial fake foods that dominate supermarkets. Freedom from supporting major industrial corporations rather than local entrepreneurs. Freedom from the federal government’s funding agenda (via the farm bill) [ <i>sic</i> ] of genetically-modified foods teeming with chemicals, additives, fillers, and artificial flavors and colors ... fake foods manufactured by political donors.”
Rosy Smit: “Photographer Offers Fresh Take on the Female Farmer” in <i>Food Tank</i>	Website article/51,000 Twitter followers. <i>The Guardian</i> named Food Tank one of the top 10 best Twitter accounts on sustainable food. 100,000 Facebook fans on (with ongoing direct engagement from 300,000+ people weekly). 10,500 Instagram and 5,000 Pinterest followers. Web traffic of roughly 4,000 daily unique visitors and 120,000 monthly unique visitors (Food Tank, n.d.).	“Mulkern’s photographs evoke a sense of beauty and realism, depicting the hard work and simple satisfaction of women in the farm-to-table movement.”

The average organic consumer believes that organic food is better than conventionally grown food. “Better” is defined in popular discourse as cleaner, healthier, safer, more sustainable, and/or more transparent (Lockie & Halpin, 2005; Pollan, 2006a; Roe, 2006; Severson & Martin, 2009; Vos, 2000, p. 245). The valorization of organic food can extend to the valorization of the shopper as well. One might even consider oneself a better parent for buying organic (Cairns et al., 2013). Lusk notes that “what we eat, where we shop, and how we cook have become symbols for who we are as individuals” (2013, p. 95). Williams & Hammitt characterize the purchase of organic food as a “lifestyle choice,” coupled with habits such as recycling and using environmentally friendly cleaning products (2000). Guthman adds that “ethicality becomes a fetish itself” (2004a).



“Better” is also defined as produced by a *family farm*, which is considered more honorable than a corporate farm (Alkon, 2012, p. 672; Alkon & McCullen, 2010, p. 939; Vos, 2000, p. 252). Small farmers are valorized as “noble” hard workers (Alkon & McCullough, 2011; Mitchell, 2015; Pilgeram, 2011), even performing a “public service” rather than running a business (National Young Farmers Coalition, n.d.).

#### 4.1.3. Ease of purchasing and preparing organic food.

Contemporary popular discourse asserts that *better* food, as defined above, is available from special places including farmers markets, community-supported agriculture (CSAs), community gardens, cooperatives, and natural-foods stores. Such places are considered superior to mainstream grocery stores and other larger outlets (Alkon, 2012, p. 671). The cost and time to visit these specialized venues and buy organic food are characterized as value choices made by shoppers. D’Costa (2014) points out that food pictures are shared on social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which hosts more than 143 million images tagged with “#food”—because “we want to know what others are eating and we want to share what we’re eating because these things establish a social status quo.”

As people line up on either side of the line being drawn between organic and conventional, and between “good” and “bad” food, those on the organic side make a point of stressing how *effortless* it really is to live an organic lifestyle (D’Costa, 2014). Table 3 illustrates this tendency.

Table 3  
*Popular Discourse Emphasizing the Ease with Which  
One Can Purchase and/or Prepare Organic Food*

Source	Source Type & Significance	Illustrative Quotation(s) from Source
Barbara Kingsolver: <i>Animal, Vegetable, Miracle</i>	Book/James Beard Award for Writing and Literature, Book Sense Book of the Year Award for Adult Nonfiction (Kingsolver, Barbara, 1955–).	“Cooking good food is mostly having the palate and the skill. ... The main barrier standing between ourselves and a local-food culture is not price, but attitude” (p. 31).

Table 3 (continued)

Source	Source Type & Significance	Illustrative Quotation(s) from Source
Ibid.		A bushel [of potatoes at a farmers' market] costs about the same as dinner for four in a good restaurant ..." (p. 305).
Michael Pollan: <i>In Defense of Food</i>	Book/ <i>The New York Times</i> bestseller (Michael Pollan n.d.).	"... before the resurgence of farmers' markets, the rise of the organic movement, and the renaissance of local agriculture now under way across the country, stepping outside the conventional food system simply was not a realistic option for some people. Now it is" (p. 14).
Ibid.		"We spend a smaller percentage of our income on food than any other industrialized society; surely if we decided that the quality of our food mattered, we could afford to spend a few more dollars on it a week—and eat a little less of it" (p. 187)."
Sheri Doyle: "Slow Food in the Fast Lane" in <i>Food</i> magazine	Magazine article/Defunct.	"Shop for local, organic foods that are quick to prepare. ... Take pleasure from your foods in their purest forms: raw or lightly steamed and lightly seasoned."
Ibid.		"Create a flexible grocery list that leaves room for the seasonal surprises that you might discover at the farmers' market, health store, or local food co-operative."
Ibid.		"Think even further ahead and consider canning and freezing foods. ... A little effort in the summer sets up months of slow food enjoyment."
Ibid.		"On those busiest of days, Loat suggests that we take advantage of shops and services that prepare healthy local foods. ... Is there a cheesemaker down the road? Perhaps there is a meal preparation service in town that uses local foods. What artisanal food shops exist in your city or town?"
Ibid.		"No time to shop? Have your local whole foods delivered to your doorstep. Delivery services are available ... and can be found through a simple Internet search."
Laura D'Alessandro: "Slow Food in the Fast Lane: A Prologue"	Video trailer for upcoming "mini-documentary" on Vimeo/"Has over 18 million members, gets over 100 million visitors per month, and there are approximately 250,000 websites using video sharing platform" (Chianis, 2013).	"I'm a full-time reporter and a grad student. But I still make time to cook for myself, even if it's just a salad."
Laura D'Alessandro: "Slow Food in the Fast Lane"	Film on Vimeo/"Has over 18 million members, gets over 100 million visitors per month, and there are approximately 250,000 websites using video sharing platform" (Chianis, 2013).	Quoting Bernadine Prince: "It doesn't take much work to prepare fresh food. A lot of people think, 'Oh, you're cooking meals every day, but, you know, the food is so delicious it doesn't need much preparation.'" (Visuals: Bernadine is casually perusing booths at a farmers' market.)

Table 3 (continued)

Source	Source Type & Significance	Illustrative Quotation(s) from Source
Ibid.		Quoting Uncle Ed: “I go to work very early and I get home very late, very often. So, I still manage to cook simple meals for myself. I don’t care what kind of day I’ve had, or how tired I am ... It’s really easy to prepare healthy meals in a short time.”
Dana Anderson: “Yes, You Can Afford Organic” in <i>Delicious Living</i>	Magazine article/“Carried by more than 1,300 top natural products stores and is read by more than one million readers each month” ( <i>Delicious Living</i> , n.d.).	“Whether you’re shopping for fresh produce, milk, or frozen meals, USDA Organic products are easier to find than ever before.”
Ibid.		“Local food co-ops often have bulk bins or bulk-food packages. This can save a lot of money because you’re reducing packaging costs and buying in large quantities.”
Ibid.		“You can quickly make a flavorful, fresh, delicious, and wallet-friendly meal if you budget your time.”
Rebekah Depp: “10 Foods You Should Spend More Money On” in <i>AARP The Magazine</i>	Magazine article/#1 ranked in United States, with circulation of 22,274,096 ( <i>List of Magazines by Circulation</i> , n.d.).	“Sure, you want to keep your grocery bills under control. But sometimes it pays to spend a little bit more on what you eat. Here are 10 foods that could be worth every extra penny.”
Michael Pollan: <i>The Omnivore’s Dilemma</i>	Book/Named one of the ten best books of 2006 by both <i>The New York Times</i> and <i>Washington Post</i> ; winner of California Book Award, Northern California Book Award, James Beard Award; finalist for National Book Critics Circle Award. A young readers’ edition was published in 2009. (Michael Pollan, n.d.).	“So is the unwillingness to pay more for food really a matter of affordability or priority?” (p. 243).

Possibly because the publishers of these media have researched their readers’ demographics, little attention is paid to the financial and time constraints the working poor have to visit specialty markets, nor to the time and equipment involved in preparing food from scratch.

Contemporary popular discourse fetishizes *organic* by sidelining important factors involved in its production. As noted in Background and Significance, I define *fetish* (à la Karl Marx) as an object that is disassociated by the buyer from its intrinsic human/social value (Allen & Kovach, 2000, p. 226; Dant, 1996). Consumers may feel that they are defetishizing food when they *know their farmer* by shopping, for example, at a farmers market (Alkon & McCullen, 2010, p. 939, p. 946; Berry, 1990). In fact, because numerous realities of organic farming are

absent in contemporary popular discourse, the discourse and its attendant consumers have actually re-fetishized it (Pottinger, 2013). I write *re-fetishized* because organic originally started as defetishized agriculture (Allen & Kovach, 2000, p. 226 – 227). The industrialization of organic food production has diminished *organic*'s original environmentalism-focused intent and its practice of “challenging the hegemony of the agro-industrial paradigm, and proposing and exploring alternative society-nature relations” (Vos, 2000). The corporate success of *organic* has corrupted the basic tenets of back-to-the-land-era organic farming, as per Kuepper (2010):

- Environmentally sound farming without the use of synthetics;
- An alternative food-distribution system with few middlemen; and
- Whole, fresh food with minimal processing.

This corruption will be explored further in “Question 3: Consequences of the Fetish.”

#### **4.2. Question 2: Mechanism of the Fetish**

Consumers' assumptions about organic food lead them to fetishize and valorize it. This valorization is enacted via the mechanism of *voting with your fork*. *Fork-voting* is a variation of *voting with your dollars*, which evolved from the *green consumerism* movement of the 1990s. The idea was to endorse, by purchasing them, particular products to represent one's personal values (Allen & Kovach, 2000, p. 222; Cairns et al., 2013; Gunderson, 2014, p. 111; Johnston, Szabo, & Rodney, 2011). By way of example: In the cereal aisle of a grocery store, buying the mass-produced Kellogg's Corn Flakes can be interpreted to mean one values large corporations and unhealthy and/or chemical ingredients, while choosing the Cascade Farms Oats & Honey Granola connotes that one values small business and healthy, natural, and sustainably grown ingredients. An entire store can claim this ethicality, such as the one in Joseph, Oregon, at which I discovered this business card-sized advertisement for its fair-trade items (Figure 4):

Figure 4  
Front and Back of Promotional Card in Retail Shop



Like the “inspirational” card above, contemporary popular discourse demonstrates a positive treatment of the notion of *fork-voting*—of couching advocacy in the form of shopping. I examined contemporary popular discourse and collected evidence of valorization of *fork-voting*. Most significantly, contemporary popular discourse:

1. Makes a social movement out of a personal choice;
2. Applauds the consumer’s ethical fortitude and/or good taste; and
3. Subordinates or ignores the rights or existence of farm workers.

I selected texts to illustrate trends; they do not provide an exhaustive catalogue.

#### 4.2.1. Social movement from personal choice.

Table 4 provides examples of popular discourse inflating the meaning of an individual’s buying power into collective action.

Table 4  
*Popular Discourse Making a Social Movement out of a Personal Choice*

Source	Source Type & Significance	Illustrative Quotation(s) from Source
Michael Pollan: “Voting with Your Fork” in <i>The New York Times</i>	Newspaper article/Circulation 1,865,315 daily (The New York Times, n.d.a.).	“The market for alternative foods of all kinds—organic, local, pasture-based, humanely raised—represents the stirrings of a movement, or rather a novel hybrid: a market-as-movement.”
Ibid.		“You can simply stop participating in a system that abuses animals or poisons the water or squanders jet fuel flying asparagus around the world. You can vote with your fork, in other words, and you can do it three times a day.”

Table 4 (continued)

Source	Source Type & Significance	Illustrative Quotation(s) from Source
Barbara Kingsolver: <i>Animal, Vegetable, Miracle</i>	Book/James Beard Award for Writing and Literature, Book Sense Book of the Year Award for Adult Nonfiction (Kingsolver, Barbara, 1995–).	“Something positive is also happening under the surface of our nation’s food preference paradigm. It could be called a movement” (p. 20).
Ibid.		“I made up my mind to buy something from everyone here, just to encourage them to come back next week. My farm advocacy work for the day” (p. 36).
Ibid.		“Our [family’s] goal had not really been to economize, only to exercise some control over which economy we would support” (p. 307).
Ibid.		“By pushing the market with our [family’s] buying habits, we continually shape our buying choices, and the nature of farming” (Steven L. Hopp, p. 349).
Michael Pollan: <i>In Defense of Food</i>	Book/ <i>The New York Times</i> bestseller (Michael Pollan, n.d.).	“To reclaim this much control over one’s food, to take it back from industry and science, is no small thing; indeed, in our time cooking from scratch and growing any of your own food qualify as subversive acts” (p. 200).
Ibid.		“And the more eaters who vote with their forks for a different kind of food, the more commonplace and accessible such food will become” (p. 14).
Ibid.		“Not everyone can afford to eat high-quality food in America, and that is shameful; however, those of us who can, <i>should</i> ” (p. 184) [emphasis mine].
Ibid.		“Today’s green movement is considered by some Millennials and Gen Xers to be an equivalent to the Civil Rights struggle ...”
Michael Pollan: <i>The Omnivore’s Dilemma</i>	Book/Named one of the ten best books of 2006 by both <i>The New York Times</i> and <i>Washington Post</i> ; winner of California Book Award, Northern California Book Award, James Beard Award; finalist for National Book Critics Circle Award. A young readers’ edition was published in 2009. (Michael Pollan, n.d.).	“At its heart is a new conception of what it means to be a consumer ... Many of the Polyface customers I met ... had come to see their decision to buy a chicken from a local farmer rather than from Wal-Mart as a kind of civic act, even a form of protest” (p. 254).
Ibid.		Quoting Joel Salatin: “We ask for too much salvation by legislation. All we need to do is empower individuals with the right philosophy and the right information to opt out en masse” (p. 260).
John Roulac: “Why Monsanto Will Never Rule the Food World: The Three-Prong Movement That’s Stopping the Beast in Its Tracks” in <i>GreenMoney</i>	Online magazine article/ “Covering Sustainable Business and Investing Since 1992” (GreenMoney Journal, n.d.).	“Americans vote at every meal for their preferred version of a food system.”

Table 4 (continued)

Source	Source Type & Significance	Illustrative Quotation(s) from Source
John Lanchester: "Shut Up and Eat" in <i>The New Yorker</i>	Magazine article/Circulation: 1,047,260. Newsstand sales: 33,530 (Pompeo, 2012).	Quoting Alice Waters: "Every single choice we make about food matters, at every level. The right choice saves the world."
Jennifer Kroll: "Vote with Your Dollar" in <i>Adbusters</i>	Magazine article/Circulation: 60,000 (Adbusters, n.d.).	"What you buy matters. Every time you bypass a local boutique to shop at a big-box store, it makes a small but significant mark on the economy. It's a vote with your dollar, so why support a system that amounts to a kind of economic feudalism?"
Ibid.		"You can shift the balance of economic power with every purchase you make ... It's a straightforward, earnest approach to changing the world, the can-do hallmark of doing business in the altermodern [ <i>sic</i> ] era."
Andy Hammermeister: "The Benefits of Organic" in <i>Readers Digest Canada</i>	Magazine article/#2-ranked in Canada, with circulation of 597,229 (List of Magazines by Circulation, n.d.).	"So every time we buy organic we are, in effect, voting with our dollars."
Brian Clark Howard: "6 Surprising Facts About Organic Foods" in <i>Good Housekeeping</i>	Magazine article/#7-ranked in United States, with circulation of 4,348,641 (List of Magazines by Circulation, n.d.).	"We relish the fact that more choices are becoming available, and we vote with our food dollars for tastier, greener fare."
Food, Inc.	Documentary/Nominated for awards including Academy Award and winner of Cinema Eye Honors, Gotham Awards, National Board of Review, Emmy, Southeastern Film Critics Association, Washington DC Area Film Critics Association (IMDB, n.d.).	Quoting Gary Hirshberg: "When we run an item past the supermarket scanner, we're voting ..."
Ibid.		Final message before credits roll: "You can vote to change this system. Three times a day." Music in background: Bruce Springsteen singing "This Land Is Your Land."
The Future of Food	Film/"It was chosen by the Oscar screening committee of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences as one of the best documentaries of 2004. [It] ... has been translated into Spanish, French, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian and Japanese. An Educational Edition ... with a year-long, university level curriculum by Professor Joshua Muldavin was released in Fall 2007" (The Future of Food, n.d.).	Narrator: "Because the system is fluid, it can change quickly based on the opinions of the public. ... The choices we make at the supermarket determine the future of food."

As demonstrated by these data, when consumers combine their assumptions about *organic* with their notions about *fork-voting*, they believe that they are "making a difference" by shopping at farmers markets or grocery stores such as Whole Foods or New Seasons (Gunderson, 2014, p. 115; Guthman, 2011, p. 143, 148; Szasz, 2007). I defined *making a difference* as having an

impact in any of the aforementioned areas of social change, including food justice—what could be considered *collective interests*. Guthman (2007b) notes that many consumers interpret this message in popular discourse to release them from further responsibility for or questioning of the food system.

#### 4.2.2. Ethical fortitude and/aesthetic superiority.

Shopping for food is a component of shopping in general. CNBC reports that,

While many say consumers are just paying lip service to good intentions, 55 percent of consumers surveyed across the globe say they will pay extra for products and services from companies committed to positive social and environmental impact, according to a Nielsen survey from June. That number is up from 45 percent in 2011 (Korber, 2014).

Such consumers are referred to in the article as “socially responsible shoppers.” Guthman (2007b) observes that some writers who address food politics appear to feel “morally superior” to people who make different choices about their food. This is evident in the popular discourse, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

#### *Popular Discourse Applauding the Consumer’s Ethical Fortitude and/or Aesthetic Superiority*

Source	Source Type & Significance	Illustrative Quotation(s) from Source
Steve Holt: “Here's Why Your Smartphone Is the Key to a Better Food World” in TakePart	Magazine article/Digital news & lifestyle magazine and social action platform for the conscious consumer—is a division of Participant Media, the company behind Pivot Television Network and important films such as <i>An Inconvenient Truth</i> ; <i>Waiting For Superman</i> ; <i>Food, Inc.</i> ; <i>Good Night &amp; Good Luck</i> ; <i>Charlie Wilson’s War</i> ; <i>Contagion</i> ; <i>The Help</i> ; and many others.	“The site is just one of hundreds of examples of cutting-edge technology being used to encourage greener, cleaner eating. ... Producers are using technology to better market their offerings to the <i>right</i> people.” [emphasis mine]
Ibid.		“More broadly, mobile and tech solutions shorten the distance between us and our food, allowing us to shop our values, cook more at home, eat healthier, and, like GrowMingle, find local food restaurants and producers in our area.”
Steven Waldman: “In Defense of Food(iesm)” in <i>Food Politic</i>	Online magazine article/“Journal of Food News and Culture” (Food Politic n.d.).	“... slobbering over ‘food porn’ is just slobbering if you do it while the microwave is warming your pre-cooked dinner.”



Table 5 (continued)

Source	Source Type & Significance	Illustrative Quotation(s) from Source
Sheri Doyle: “Slow Food in the Fast Lane” in <i>Food</i> magazine	Magazine article/Defunct.	“Connecting our beliefs with our habits can be a challenge in our busy lives. But hectic days do not have to spoil our slow food appetites.”
Barbara Kingsolver: <i>Animal, Vegetable, Miracle</i>	Book/James Beard Award for Writing and Literature, Book Sense Book of the Year Award for Adult Nonfiction (Kingsolver, Barbara, 1995–).	“Food is the rare moral arena in which the ethical choice is generally the one more likely to make you groan with pleasure” (p. 22).
Laura D’Alessandro: “Slow Food in the Fast Lane”	Mini-documentary on Vimeo/“Has over 18 million members, gets over 100 million visitors per month, and there are approximately 250,000 websites using video sharing platform” (Chianis, 2013).	“Taste and health are major factors in the way my family cooks, and why we do it. ... We can spend a little time in the kitchen and a long time at the table.” [Visuals: The kitchen prep involved de-stemming and steaming green beans, stuffing a whole chicken, boiling and skinning beets, and washing and steaming spinach in a large and well-appointed kitchen. Dinner, served with crystal glasses of red wine, was in a wainscoting-lined dining room featuring an oil portrait of the family matriarch.]
Lauren Markham: “The New Farmers” in <i>Orion</i>	Magazine article/Winner of Utne Independent Press Award for General Excellence and finalist for a National Magazine Award (Orion Magazine n.d.). Total circulation 25,000 (Orion [magazine], 2014).	Quoting Deena Miller: “But when I get down, I think about a conversation with my mom that really helped me,” she reflects. “She asked, ‘If everyone was [farming organically], would the world be a better place?’ And the answer is, of course, yes. Yes, it would. And that’s why I do it.”
Ibid.		“But as I drive out of Sweet Roots Farm, bidding Miller and her guardian llama goodbye, past the farm’s trickling brook and into the emerald foothills of my state, I feel both the import and the appeal of farm life. I see how interacting with small-scale agriculture—as a consumer, visitor, or farmer—is healthy for us all.”
Takepart “About Us”	Website/TakePart — a digital news & lifestyle magazine and social action platform for the conscious consumer — is a division of Participant Media, the company behind Pivot Television Network and films such as <i>An Inconvenient Truth</i> ; <i>Waiting For Superman</i> ; <i>Food, Inc.</i> ; <i>Good Night &amp; Good Luck</i> ; <i>Charlie Wilson’s War</i> ; <i>Contagion</i> ; <i>The Help</i> ; and others (n.d.).	“We recognize, too, that in today’s world you also vote and speak with your wallet, so you’ll find lifestyle articles to help you make safe, responsible, ethical choices on grocery store shelves, in the dressing room, at the drug store, and beyond—without compromising taste or quality.”
Michael Pollan: <i>In Defense of Food</i>	Book/ <i>The New York Times</i> bestseller.	“Even connoisseurship can have a politics” (p. 195).
Ibid.		“Depending on how we spend them, our food dollars can either go to support a food industry devoted to quantity and convenience and ‘value’ or they can nourish a food chain organized around <i>values</i> —values like quality and health” (p. 161).

Table 5 (continued)

Source	Source Type & Significance	Illustrative Quotation(s) from Source
John Lanchester: "Shut Up and Eat" in <i>The New Yorker</i>	Magazine article/Circulation: 1,047,260; Newsstand sales: 33,530 (Pompeo, 2012).	"People feel pressure to shop and eat responsibly, healthfully, sustainably."
Babson College: "One week to Babson Food Day!"	Website/"Attracting thought leaders from policy, education, health, cuisine, start-up, and corporate food sectors, not to mention over 1,000 students, faculty, and staff" (Babson College 2014)	"Eating is an inherently entrepreneurial act. Eater entrepreneurs are the ones tilting our food system toward greater justice and sustainability, recognizing that through their food decisions, they have agency in the food system. If you eat food, you are an eater entrepreneur."
Lydia DePillis: "Big Agriculture Wants to Reach Millennials, But It Started a Food Fight in the Process" in <i>The Washington Post</i>	Newspaper article/Total circulation: 401,360 (Statista, n.d.).	"'You do not have a <i>target audience</i> with millennials!' he exhorted the room full of protein purveyors. 'You have a <i>consumer as a partner!</i> '" [emphasis mine]
Donna Berry: "LYFE Kitchen exemplifies mindful dining" in <i>Food Business News</i>	Magazine article/ Circulation: 14,010 Print; 32,000 Online (Food Business News, 2013).	"LYFE, an acronym for 'Love Your Food Everyday,' captures the brand's philosophy that food choices are important each day. It also extends to one of the brand's core principles of offering food, products and programs that are good for the planet and one another."
Sheri Doyle: "Slow Food in the Fast Lane" in <i>Food</i> magazine	Magazine article/Defunct.	"McIntosh says that her customers 'appreciate being able to learn about the local farms that supply their food ... as they are placing their orders. It helps them feel connected to their food sources.'"
John Collins: "Where Farmers Markets and CSAs Fall Short" in <i>In These Times</i>	Magazine article/14,700 Twitter followers (In These Times n.d.). Circulation 22,000 (Miner, 2011).	Quoting Mary Berry: "We have to be good citizens. And a way to be a good urban citizen is to be an informed shopper and eater."
Mindy Pennybacker "Local or Organic? I'll Take Both" in <i>National Geographic</i>	Magazine article/#9 ranked in United States, with circulation of 4,029,881 (List of Magazines by Circulation, n.d.).	"As shoppers, we're lucky. ... we can fill our baskets with foods from a variety of labels, farms, and retailers that reflect the colorful patchwork of farm fields. All we have to do is stay informed and follow our values as well as our own good taste."

Gray (2014) wonders whether the goal for *fork-voters* is to "feel more justified in their own food choices, or is it to foster deeper change in the structure of agricultural markets and food production?" (p. 130). In other words, is buying high-priced food an illustration of activism or class privilege? Is it satisfying *collective interests*, or *individual interests*? To answer these questions, I consider Jubas (2011), who writes that "like gender and race, class is a persistent social construct which is fluid across time and place and, increasingly, is downplayed in contemporary social rhetoric." Szasz (2007) finds buying organic an "inverted quarantine

response;” that is, a protective gesture of oneself and one’s family that avoids collective effort to effect change (p. 2 – 3, p. 150). Guthman (2011) adds, “... by exalting a set of food choices, the alternative-food movement tends to give rise to a missionary impulse ... Seeing their food choices as signs of heightened ethicality, they see social change as seeing people become like them” (p. 141). The evidence of privilege, a byproduct of class inequity, is strong in the data. This privilege, which can seem invisible in its ubiquity, obscures some of the most invisible people of all in agriculture, farm workers.

#### 4.2.3. Ignorance of rights or existence of farm workers.

Naturally, one can only *ignore* something that one knows about. People who have never heard of the existence of farm workers, let alone their working conditions, cannot be blamed for this ignorance. The semantic difference between *ignoring* and *ignorance* is at play here—I am interested in purveyors of contemporary popular discourse who deliberately choose not to engage with the subject of farm workers’ rights. The examples listed in Table 6 were sourced from people who, I find it safe to say, have been exposed to the existence of farm workers.

Table 6

#### *Popular Discourse Subordinating or Ignoring the Rights or Existence of Farm Workers*

Source	Source Type & Significance	Illustrative Quotation(s) from Source
King Corn	Film/Presented at SXSW, Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, Chicago International Documentary Film Festival, Hot Docs International Film Festival; winner in 2008 of Peabody Award (The New York Times, n.d.b, Peabody Awards, n.d.).	From the DVD packaging: “To eat outside the Corn Kingdom, start reading food labels, try cooking grass-fed beef, and go shopping at a farmer’s market. You won’t find any high fructose corn syrup there, just fresh food, <i>straight from the people who grew it.</i> ” [emphasis mine]
Michael Pollan: <i>In Defense of Food</i>	Book/ <i>The New York Times</i> bestseller.	“Farmers can lose sight of the fact that they’re growing food for actual eaters rather than middlemen, and consumers can easily forget that growing good food takes care and hard work” (p. 160).
Barbara Kingsolver: <i>Animal, Vegetable, Miracle</i>	Book/James Beard Award for Writing and Literature, Book Sense Book of the Year Award for Adult Nonfiction (Kingsolver, Barbara, 1995–).	“Organic practices build rather than deplete the soil, using manure and cover crops. They eliminate pesticides and herbicides, instead using biological pest controls and some old-fashioned weeding with a hoe” (Steven L. Hopp, p. 117).

Table 6 (continued)

Source	Source Type & Significance	Illustrative Quotation(s) from Source
Michael Pollan: <i>The Omnivore's Dilemma</i>	Book/Named one of the ten best books of 2006 by both <i>The New York Times</i> and <i>Washington Post</i> ; winner of California Book Award, Northern California Book Award, James Beard Award; finalist for National Book Critics Circle Award. A young readers' edition was published in 2009. (Michael Pollan, n.d.).	"Joel said the farmer's market was his least profitable outlet, which is why he had stopped doing them himself a few years ago" (p. 247).
USDA Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food: Our Mission	Website.	"Beginning farmers are finding an entry point into agriculture through local markets. Experienced farmers are diversifying their sales to capture added value through local branding. Small businesses are developing new packing, processing, distribution and retail opportunities. And consumers are learning more about where their food comes from and gaining access to fresh, local foods."
Julia Reed: Food for Thought: The Farmer as Superstar" in <i>Newsweek</i>	Magazine/Circulation was 3.3 million at its peak (Kaufman, 2014).	"Now, of course, in the wake of the ever-burgeoning 'farm to table' movement, gorgeous, green-topped, and very pointy carrots abound at local farmers' markets as well as on restaurant menus across the country. Not only do we know the names of the carrots (Purple Haze, Rainbow, White Satin), we know the names of the farmers who grow them."
The Future of Food	Film/"It was chosen by the Oscar screening committee of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences as one of the best documentaries of 2004. [It] ... has been translated into Spanish, French, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian and Japanese. An Educational Edition ... with a year-long, university level curriculum by Professor Joshua Muldavin was released in Fall 2007" (The Future of Food, n.d.).	Narrator: "People are returning to buying fresh, local produce grown by local farmers."

In addition to the examples in Table 6 one could add the sources in each of the preceding tables, as well as the majority of media coverage about agriculture. An indicative sample, entitled "10 Ways You Can Grow a Better Food System," lists choosing restaurants that source locally, canning and baking bread at home, composting, and joining a CSA (Nierenberg & Carter, 2015). A 2014 survey conducted by *Consumer Reports* asked which labels are most important. The most popular was "Locally Grown," with 66-percent support, "Natural," with 59 percent, then "Pesticide Free" and "Organic," down the line. "Certified Humane" and "Fair

Trade” came in last, with 36 and 31 percent, respectively (Consumer Reports, 2014). It is unclear whether to attribute this to lack of awareness or disinterest in justice for workers.

As Alkon writes, “Farmworkers are largely physically and discursively absent from advocacy for local organic food” (2012, p. 672). Consumers are interested in knowing the farmer but are unaware of, or not interested in knowing, the farm *workers* (i.e., the people who, in most cases, actually pick the fetishized produce). Feeding consumer assumptions, contemporary popular discourse offers a fairly narrow picture of farming—the “farmer” tends to be a white male. A Google search of “organic farmer” images yielded the selection of photographs shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5  
*Google Images Search*



(Google Images, n.d.)

The few photos, of approximately 350, of a person of color (e.g., lower-right corner of Fig. 5) turned out to be farmers in other countries. A search for “farm worker” yielded nearly exclusively Hispanic workers; when I added “organic,” half the workers became white. In all

three searches I saw only a handful of obviously African American, Native American, or Asian American people.

In the introduction, I referenced a commercial that glorifies “The Farmer” (Fig. 1). Shortly after that commercial aired, a number of “rebuttals” (what could be called “spoofs,” were it not a serious matter) appeared, entitled “So God Made a Farm Worker.” One of the videos uses the same Paul Harvey narration but replaces the photos of white people with Hispanic people; another lectures about the industry and the need for intervention; another re-writes the Harvey narrative to more accurately depict farm-worker experience: “So, one day, God looked down on the United States and said, ‘I need someone who will work in the fields to provide cheap food for these people,’ so God made a farm worker” (12FramesPerSecond, 2013). However, when *The Huffington Post* reported on this phenomenon—even when the attached video interview included detail about the lives of farm workers—the text report missed the point by incorrectly stating the video-maker’s complaint as “failing to feature many minorities” (Wilkes-Edrington, 2013).

Unlike “So God Made a Farm Worker,” the current imaginary in U.S. culture is of the farmer and his or her immediate family being the only people who work on a farm, when that is rarely the case (Alkon, 2012, p. 674). The notion of an industrial-scale organic greens farm, tended by dozens of migrant workers and large machinery, does not exist. The main reason for its absence is because the media that covers agriculture—all agriculture, surely, but especially organic agriculture—avoids discussing the use of farm workers. The silence is deafening.

#### **4.3. Question 3: Consequences of the Fetish**

Contemporary popular discourse demonstrates that consumers believe that *voting with your fork for organic* is a viable strategy for social change, when it actually aligns with neoliberal philosophy (Alkon, 2012, p. 676; Gunderson, 2014, p. 110). Neoliberalism, the

concept of limiting governmental activity in favor of economic activity, is characterized by Peck and Tickell (2002) as a “religion” that has operated in two different ways in the “North Atlantic zone” since the early 1980s: “roll-back neoliberalism,” which was a Reagan-era period of dismantling government regulation, and “roll-out neoliberalism,” which “has spawned a free-market in social regression.” Roll-back neoliberalism battled “Keynesian-welfarist and social-collectivist institutions” by restricting a number of assistance programs for low-income people that had been developed during the Franklin D. Roosevelt and Lyndon B. Johnson administrations (*ibid.*). Modern neoliberals espouse “roll-out” neoliberalism, which supports social change, if at all, via “The Market,” i.e. commerce, rather than via policy (Harvey, 2005; Thorsen, 2010).

In fact, people like “The Market.” Many U.S. shoppers have become so enamored with the idea of ethical, guilt-free food that they not only cling to the descriptor *organic* but also bestow upon it qualities and values that the organic growing process actually cannot provide (Evoy, 2012; Halweil & Scowcroft, 2002). Bobrow-Strain (2007) writes, “a logic of niche marketing has steamrolled the language of ethical dissent.” Included in the realm of marketing is contemporary popular discourse, which demonstrates that consumers consider their purchases (i.e. *voting with your fork*) a valid substitution for political advocacy within the food system (Gunderson, 2014; Pollan, 2006a, p. 254; Szasz, 2007). This fetishization of *organic* and its mechanism *voting with your fork*, as explored in the preceding sections, creates unintended consequences in U.S. society by encouraging people to valorize individual interests over collective interests.

*Individual interests* include a general focus on how delicious and healthful organic food can be, as well as how grounded, ethical, and authentic one’s life can be when one buys organic

food. An extension of this, perhaps because mainstream U.S. culture continues to be dictated by European Americans, is a valorization of “gourmet” and European-influenced cuisine and practices (Alkon & McCullen, 2010, p. 949 – 950; Avakian & Haber, 2005, p. 13 – 14; Guthman, 2004a, p. 516; Guthman, 2011, p. 145; Pollan, 2008, p. 185; Pratt, 2009, p. 168 – 169).

*Collective interests* include the rights of farm workers and of the food-insecure, and the pursuit of sustainable agriculture for human and global well-being (Lang & Barling, 2012).

*Sustainable*, a notoriously problematic word in food-systems parlance, is defined for this research by Hassanein (2003) as “repeatable in perpetuity will few or no ill residual environmental, human rights, or economic effects.” Fetishizing and valorizing *organic* creates false assumptions about each of these collective interests that, ultimately, prove harmful to them.

In the following pages I examine the unintended consequences of fetishizing *organic* and valorizing *fork-voting*:

1. Fetishized *organic* supports the illusion that organic food solves food-system problems;
2. Fetishized *organic* harms non-organic eaters; and
3. Fetishized *organic* harms farm workers.

Strochlic & Hamerschlag (2005) write:

For an agricultural system to be truly sustainable, it must be environmentally sound, economically viable and socially equitable. Nonetheless, the social aspects of sustainable agriculture have been eclipsed by greater attention to environmental and economic concerns, with few efforts to make sustainable agriculture more socially just (p. iii).

Critical discourse analysis reveals a dearth of discussion of the rights of the food-insecure and of farm workers’ rights—or even of the existence of the workers themselves—inequities which can be attributed to class, race, and gender discrimination (Alkon, 2012, p. 673). There is



considerable overlap between class, racial, and gender groups (Alkon & McCullen, 2010, p. 954; Avakian & Haber, 2005, p. 7, p. 10; Coleman-Jensen, Gregory, & Singh, 2014, p. 13). As Jubas (2011) writes, "... although categories such as gender, race, and class might be individually named and discussed, as social constructions they are always interrelated in lived experience." Therefore, when I explore the unintended consequences that affect non-organic eaters and workers, I consider class, race, and gender not singly but as an intersection of shifting issues and social relations that compose key aspects of equity.

Below, I illuminate some of the illusions held by fetishizers of *organic* about organic agriculture. I then explore the resulting harm in terms of race, class and gender equity to non-organic eaters, particularly the food-insecure, and to farm workers.

#### **4.3.1. Fetishized *organic* supports the illusion that organic food solves food-system problems.**

Ironically, a demographic of generally well-educated people, who pride themselves on their ability to identify and cook a plethora of ingredients from a variety of international cultures, actually knows little about the food system. This lack of knowledge enables them to harbor misconceptions about food, how it comes into being, and how it should be valued. My analysis of contemporary popular discourse in "Question 1: Evidence of a Fetish" shows evidence of fetishizers of *organic* inadvertently supporting a bifurcation of the food system into "good" and "bad" factions. Figure 6 demonstrates this stratification.

Figure 6  
Food Labeling Political Cartoon



(Springer, 2014)

Creating a hard line and specific definitions between *organic* and *conventional* (also known as *corporate*, or *industrial*) agriculture makes it easy for fetishizers to identify their approved goods and *vote with their forks*. They believe *organic* to be, as the opposite of *industrial*, the “correct” choice (Conner, 2004, p. 139; Guthman, 2004a, p. 517; Scholten, 2006).

Alkon (2012) writes:

Supporters construct local organic food as simultaneously natural and social but do not make the leap to seeing nature in processed foods or factory farms. This division allows supporters of local organic food to construct their own foodways as separate (and separable) from the corporate food regime, orienting them toward the creation of alternatives over a fuller and more critical engagement with industrial agriculture (p. 665).

Unfortunately for fetishizers of *organic*, such a distinct line between organic and conventional does not actually exist. As Allen & Kovach (2000) note, “the standards and practices of organic agriculture contain a number of contradictions and inconsistencies, some of which result from the dynamics of the capitalist marketplace” (p. 224). A number of illusions are explored below: (a) that the “USDA Organic” label is a panacea; (b) that organic agriculture is anti-corporate and pro-small and -family farm; (c) that organic food guarantees health; and (d) that organic food is locally grown. These illusions, supported in contemporary popular discourse, sustain the neoliberal practice of *voting with your fork*; however, as demonstrated below, the premise is false.

*4.3.1.1 Illusion 1: The “USDA Organic” label is a panacea.* Organic fetishizers look for the USDA label, finding it a rigorous program that encompasses more than how the food is grown. In reality, the “USDA Organic” label is extremely limited in what it ensures; its third-party certifiers are inconsistent at best; corporations own the majority of organic brands and product lines; processed food is less healthy, whether it is organic or conventional; *organic* does not in any way guarantee “local;” and the small farms that are fetishized along with the food they grow are economically unsustainable. These claims are detailed below.

While most consumers rely on the USDA organic label to determine *goodness* (Vos, 2000, p. 245), the USDA (2003) itself never intended the organic label to suggest superiority of organic food over conventional food (p. 9). The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) is a group of industry and government representatives who determine which substances and practices are allowable under organic certification (USDA, 2013). These rules set organic agriculture apart from conventional agriculture. The creation of these rules was contentious, causing the standards to not be signed into law until 2001 and not take effect until 2002—and, thirteen years later, the

rules continue to be contentious (Cornucopia Institute, 2014). The original organic farmers, and their successors who venerate their goals and practices, are at odds with a growing industrial-corporate sector, which is motivated to keep the certification bar low in order to maximize profit (Allen & Kovach, 2000, p. 224).

The USDA's rules of organic certification are upheld by nearly one hundred third-party certifiers (USDA, 2014). The NOSB standards represent the minimum required of an organic farm; some certifiers can and do require additional standards, and some organic farmers uphold higher standards as a matter of principle (Fineman, 2012). Some third-party certifiers, particularly the for-profit Quality Assurance International, have been accused of lax stringency regarding NOSB rules (Main, 2011; Rogers, 2010, p. 62 – 64; Severson & Martin, 2009).

Guthman (2004a) notes that “it is the niche positioning of organic food that finally convinced the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 1997 that a federal rule for organic production would not disparage the rest of the food supply” (p. 512). Additionally, the rules have been increasingly modified to favor industrial enterprises. Motivated by profit potential, corporate efforts have successfully altered USDA organic standards to the point that a broad range of herbicides and pesticides, including some synthetic chemicals, are allowed by the USDA—and used by farmers—on organic farms (Allen & Kovach, 2000, p. 221, 224; Guthman, 2001, 2004a; Jaffee & Howard, 2010, p. 389; Lockie & Halpin, 2005, p. 286).

*4.3.1.2 Illusion 2: All organic food is anti-corporate and pro-small and -family farm.* The reality is that 97 percent of farms in the United States—even large ones that might look corporate from afar—are, legally, family-run (Getz et al., 2008; Hoppe, 2014). Guthman (2004a) notes that “many family-owned farms form closely held corporations to obtain certain tax and liability

privileges, and some of the largest grower-shippers in California are family-owned operations” (p. 305).

What most people mean when they say “family farm” is what the USDA calls a *residence farm*, meaning the farmer lives on the property. Fifty-seven percent of farms in the United States are considered residence farms, while 9 percent are “commercial” and 34 percent are “intermediate” (USDA ERS, 2014). Residence farmers generally have additional occupations because their operations are too small to support the household (*ibid.*). It can even make sense to hire someone cheaply to do farm work while the farmer works his or her better-paying day job.

Fetishizers of *organic* do not realize the degree to which commercial operations control the organic food system (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011, p. 12). The NOSB’s minimal standards have created an economic opportunity for industrial agriculture, which now makes more than eighty percent of total organic sales using the same giant fields, equipment, and migrant workers as conventional agriculture (Laux & Huntrods, 2013). The largest organic operations in the United States are simply converted conventional farms, or portions of farms (Guthman, 2001). The increased popularity of organic has caused a similar wave of growth and consolidation as that which occurred in conventional farming in the mid- to late-twentieth century (Allen & Kovach, 2000, p. 224; Guthman, 2001; McMillan 2014).

Consumers imagine organic processors to be independent businesses—and, once, many of them were. But the majority of well-known organic brands, including Odwalla, Cascadian Farm, and Horizon, have been purchased by some of the largest food corporations in the world: in this case, Coca-Cola, General Mills, and Dean Foods, respectively (Howard, 2014; Raynolds, 2004, p. 733 – 734).

*4.3.1.3 Illusion 3: Eating organic food guarantees health.* Consumers believe that all organic food products are inherently “healthy,” even as the term lacks a specific definition (Rodman et al., 2014, p. 83 – 84; Szasz, 2007, p. 149). Studies comparing the nutrition of conventionally grown produce with organically grown produce are inconclusive or find minor differences, mainly in antioxidant content (Charles, 2014a; Smith-Spangler, Brandeau, Hunter, Bavinger, Pearson, Eschbach, Sundaram, Liu, Schirmer, Stave, Olkin, & Bravata, 2012; Tobin, Moane, & Larkin, 2013). The nutritional edge that organic may offer is eliminated once processed. Cookies and boxed macaroni-and-cheese, for example, are still minimally nutritious even if created with organic ingredients (e.g., Annie’s Homegrown, n.d., Newman’s Own, n.d.). Szasz (2007) reports that the organic processed-food category is quickly overtaking organic produce, and “sales of organic snacks rose by 30 percent from 2002 to 2003” (p. 147). Even Pollan (2008) writes, “the supermarket today is brimming with processed organic food products that are little better, at least from the standpoint of health, than their conventional counterparts.” As Bobrow-Strain (2007) describes of the United States’ obsession in the early 1900s with pure, “clean,” mass-produced but nutritionless white bread, “Mountains of fiercely critical dietary advice seem to have had little impact on people’s ... choices.”

*4.3.1.4 Illusion 4: Organic food is locally grown.* In addition to assumptions about healthfulness, consumers often conflate *organic* with *local* and ignore the large amount of organic food that is shipped cross-country or imported from other countries (Raynolds, 2004, p. 732). I use the phrase “large amount” because the USDA has only recently begun to track organic imports and offers few useful numbers (Jaenicke, Dimitri, & Oberholtzer, 2011; Raynolds, 2004, p. 726). Imports are problematic because buying them does not benefit organic growers in the United States; foreign workers’ rights are not guaranteed, even if “mandated” by

U.S. importers; and the integrity of imported organic food may not match that of the United States (LeVaux, 2009; Marosi, 2014). The USDA does not inspect organic farms in their country of origin, and imports receive inconsistent scrutiny upon arrival to the United States. Proven cases of certification fraud bring a minor fine of \$11,000 per infraction (USDA National Organic Program, 2014); in a billion-dollar industry, this fine creates little deterrence. The price premiums at farmers markets have also attracted vendors who sell non-farm or even foreign produce at their stands (Charles, 2014b; Duane, 2009).

In the course of this research, I found that while the increased demand for organic has indeed benefited some organic farmers in the United States, the majority of organic farmers do not earn a sustainable income (Beach, 2010, p. 12; Curry, 2015; Nordquist & Moynihan, 2011; Pilgeram, 2011). It appears that the demand has not altered the food system as a whole, but instead created a niche market that conforms to the same capitalist, big-get-bigger model as conventionally grown food (Jaffee & Howard, 2010, p. 388). Using a capitalist model, the current profit yielded by organic price premiums can only decrease as the supply of organic increases (Allen & Kovach, 2000, p. 225; Guthman, 2004a). Farmers market managers across the country are already voicing concern about oversaturation, when direct sales of that type have captured only a sliver of the total food sector (Greder, 2012; Ho, 2010; Scott, 2014).

Meanwhile, in response to the perceived opportunity, thousands of too-small-to-compete farms have appeared (Greene, Slattery, & McBride, 2014); mid-sized farms have become ultra-niche or consolidated into mega-farms (MacDonald, Korb, & Hoppe, 2013); and corporations have created or purchased-into organic divisions to capture some of the revenue offered so willingly by the “ethical” consumer (Howard, 2014). The economy-of-scale advantages of industrial agriculture do bear consideration, but the corporate world as a whole would require a

substantial overhaul before it could be considered *sustainable* (Gunderson, 2014, p. 114).

Neoliberal strategies of improving the food system via “The Market” seem to be reaching their limit; policy may be a more effective mechanism of change.

#### **4.3.2. Fetishized *organic* harms non-organic eaters.**

The bifurcation of the food system might be a simple mechanism of classism (i.e., snobbery) were it without victims. However, there are victims. When people valorize *organic* and demonize *conventional*, they are not only incorrect, as shown in the previous section, but they harm non-organic eaters by creating fear and shame around eating conventionally grown food. When people conflate *buying good* with *doing good* via their *fork-voting*, they disenfranchise low-income and food-insecure eaters in relation to their ability to change the food system.

*4.3.2.1 Fetishized organic shames the food-insecure.* Academics have noted the rise of “ethical food discourse” (Cairns et al., 2013; Gunderson, 2014; Johnston, Rodney, & Szabo, 2012; Morgan, 2010). These discourses offer examples of the perceived superiority of *organic*, creating shame and fear for food-insecure and/or obese people with limited or no access to organic food, or who do not buy produce at all because they think that if it is not organic, it is dangerous or unhealthy (Guthman, 2011; Rodman et al., 2014). Rather than provide objective reportage, the media plays into consumer fetishization of *organic*. Guthman (2011) writes:

Many advocates of alternative food—and here I am referring to food writers ...—seem to agree that educating consumers to the provenance and qualities of the food, along with some good muckraking about the conventional food supply, will turn people into believers, willing to pay more for their food (p. 148).

Pushing the merits of organic food can also inadvertently valorize a particular cultural value, demonizing culturally appropriate food. Beagan, Ristovski-Slijepcevic, & Chapman (2010) found in their study of different ethnic groups in that “African Canadian participants on



the East coast and Punjabi Canadian participants on the West coast ignored reflexive discourses of ethical consumption in favour of a focus on ethnocultural food traditions” (p. 753). In Rodman et al. (2014), an African American shopper who was interviewed recognized that organic food is nutritious but also associated it with a lack of spices, which are assumedly part of her cultural heritage: “Like I say, a lot of your organic food, your lean food, your less salty; you know, seasoned food, hot and spicy foods is not healthy. Your—just your natural bland foods is good; is healthy. Natural bland foods is [*sic*] healthy to me” (p. 86). Avakian & Haber (2005) consider this sort of re-education and assimilation “culinary colonialism.”

The conceptualization of *good* food has led to the valorization of one type of food over another, glossing over important realities of the “good” food and creating a stigma for the other (“bad”) food, which is often the only food available to people with limited income. While examples of shame or fear around eating non-organic food are studied in academic literature, they are absent from popular discourse. This is most likely due to the media tending to ignore certain populations’ experience based on class, race, and/or gender, and because of a media bias toward organic as explored above.

In contrast, I found many examples in popular discourse of why low-income people *ought to* value organic food. Arguments asserting the ease with which one can obtain organic food lack a certain understanding of the reality of the food insecure and the working poor. Attempts to ameliorate the cost of food at a farmers market by accepting SNAP, or even matching the SNAP funds, merely create the illusion of enhancing food justice while lacking a grasp of the whole picture of the low-income grocery shopper (Athens, Dillon, Galarneau, Mende, & Wolkowicz, 2013; Johnston et al., 2012).

Those who rely on a food bank, soup kitchen, or other social-service agency to supplement or supply their food are limited to what is available there (Dammann & Smith, 2010; Miewald & McCann, 2014). Low-income people (especially single parents) often lack access to childcare; a functioning, fully equipped kitchen; and transportation (Guthman, 2011, p. 66 – 90; Johnston et al., 2011, p. 308; Malavé, 2015; Miewald & McCann, 2014; Roberto, 2008; Strickhouser et al., 2014; U.S. Dept. of Labor, n.d.). People who use public transportation or walk purchase only what they can carry, making suggestions such as buying a bushel of tomatoes and canning them oneself, or taking advantage of in-store specials to stock up unreasonable and, possibly, even cruel.

Not everyone has time, ability, and/or inclination to buy and prepare healthy food or—even less realistically—to grow it oneself. Those who spend the majority of their waking hours transporting to or from one or more jobs lack the time to visit a farmers market, where only a portion of the items needed on a shopping trip are available (e.g., no personal-care items or cleaning products), or to prepare meals from scratch (Guthman, 2011, p. 145; Peacher, 2014). Popular writer Michael Pollan suggests that people try “foraging for edible greens and wild mushrooms in the park” (2008, p. 197). Even if a city park were not flooded with fertilizer and pesticides to maintain its green lawn (or paved from fencerow to fencerow), the presence of wildcraft-able foods is doubtful, and if a mother lacks the time to visit a farmers market she certainly will not have an hour to crawl around on her hands and knees searching for miner’s lettuce.

The demonization of conventionally grown food in popular discourse creates further unintended consequences for the food insecure. While general attention to conventional-versus-industrial agriculture practices is valid, an across-the-board dismissal of the entire industry

creates a situation in which people who cannot afford organic food have no alternative but to eat conventional food because of its price and availability *and also* to feel guilt or worry about doing so, due to the relentless insistence that eating conventionally grown food is wrong, even when those worries may be unfounded (Szasz, 2007; Wilcox, 2012). Rodman et al. 2014 note, “If organic is prioritized over nutrition when determining whether a food is healthy, the nutritional quality of consumers’ diets may be compromised” (p. 89). Non-organic rice and beans do not Twinkies make.

In his book *In Defense of Food*, Pollan polarizes *value* and *values* (p. 161). That is, one can either care about saving money *or* one’s health, but not both. This is unfair and insulting. The assertion that cooking from scratch with fresh, organic ingredients need merely be a personal priority, as demonstrated in Table 3, is classist (Alkon & McCullen, 2010, p. 950). Guthman (2011) writes, “Asking people to pay more for food gets it really wrong when it asks people who have paid with their lives, land, and labor to pay even more” (p. 151).

4.3.2.2 Fork-voting *disenfranchises the food-insecure*. Disenfranchisement occurs around the notion of *voting with your fork*. Among the many false assumptions about race, class, and gender equity in regard to eaters of food, particularly the food-insecure, is the assumption that everyone has the same *fork-voting* power (Alkon, 2012, p. 667). In a neoliberal system in which dollars are *votes*, those who lack money lack a ballot and, thereby, decision-making power about what (if any) food they have to eat.

The effects of this disenfranchisement are not lost on the “voteless.” Rodman et al. (2014) note that conflicting messages in popular discourse about *organic* and *nutrition* caused confusion within the low-income, African American neighborhood they studied, and write that the “perceived unaffordability of healthy [read: organic] food may further increase a sense of

hopelessness in consumers in regard to following dietary advice” (p. 91). As a formerly food-insecure woman wrote about the spectacle of normally food-secure people pretending to live off SNAP funds for one week (called the “SNAP Challenge”) in the name of compassion: “I’m scared these SNAP Challenges will make it even easier for well-meaning financially stable people to keep conversations about poverty and food ‘insecurity’ on comfortable intellectual levels, while the real people who do the best they can surviving without enough money for food remain mute” (Denkmire, 2013). Shannon (2013) considers current efforts by outsiders to address food deserts a “distinctive form of neoliberal governance” (p. 249); that is, quasi-colonial. Food-insecure people should lead the conversation about their needs, and not be subjected to “values” they cannot afford.

As demonstrated in the critical discourse analysis of the preceding sections, *organic* fetishizers believe that their purchases are evidence of being compassionate citizens with good taste. What fetishizers ignore is the privilege inherent in exercising the “right” to buy one’s way to a better world. In his book *In Defense of Food*, Pollan (2008) waxes about tending his backyard garden:

None of this work is terribly difficult; much of it is endlessly gratifying, and never more so than in the hour before dinner, when I take a knife and a basket out to the garden to harvest whatever has declared itself ripest and tastiest (p. 198).

Pollan’s general tone in his books is *you should do this, too*. When suggesting readers regularly visit a farmer’s market or grow food in their own garden, Pollan and writers like him ignore many factors that dictate the schedules of hundreds of thousands of working-poor and food-insecure people, urban and rural, across the United States. Raising a garden is not possible for someone who lives in an apartment or other landless domicile, nor on uncultivable land, nor for the elderly or disabled, nor for someone who lacks the resources to buy equipment and seeds

at the beginning of the season, nor for someone who works two jobs, including during the hallowed “hour before dinner.”

### **4.3.3. Fetishized *organic* harms farm workers.**

The organic industry has partially defetishized its food by highlighting the environmental impact of its agricultural processes (Allen & Kovach, 2000, p. 226; Gunderson, 2014, p. 110). However, the industry ignores other factors that are equally important and harmful, as noted in Background and Significance. Shreck, Getz, & Feenstra (2006) point out that “the organic farming system, touted for the higher prices its products capture, is generally perceived as sustainable even as many costs go unpaid” (p. 446). Eight years later, not much has changed, as Gray (2014) notes that “... growers rely on well-polished mythologies to justify the low wages and poor benefits that they dole out to employees” (p. 120).

*4.3.3.1 Farm workers on organic farms experience similar conditions as on conventional farms.* Minkoff-Zern & Getz (2011) state “it is generally assumed that organic growers treat workers more fairly and that worker rights are an inherent part of sustainable farming. But ... labor standards on organic farms are largely in line with those on conventional farms” (p. 18). Shreck et al. (2006) found that organic farmers were not in support of additional “social certification standards to the current organic certification requirements” of their products (p. 443). Charles (2015) explores farmers’ fear that President Obama’s proposed legal amnesty for some undocumented farm workers would enable them to pursue better employment opportunities—off the farm. Gray (2014) adds an anecdote of a young farmer struggling with his need to hire undocumented workers because other workers were too expensive, writing, “In general, those who want to go green and produce boutique high-end produce and products were

preoccupied with maintaining the public *perception* that they did not exploit workers” (p. 121, emphasis mine).

Farms grossing less than \$500,000 per year, including most organic farms, have fewer legal requirements for their workers’ conditions than farms that engage in interstate commerce (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2010). Industrial organic operations are bound by regulations to provide necessities such as toilets, hand-washing facilities, and potable water (*ibid.*). Shreck et al. (2006) found farmers of larger organic operations more likely to provide fringe benefits than those of smaller farms. Gray (2014) notes that small farms—“the most idealized by those in the food movement”—are released from certain requirements by the federal government on the basis of “financial burden,” adding:

It is important for those interested in ethical eating to understand that it is not only the violation of labor laws, but also, and perhaps more importantly, the institutional marginalization of agricultural workers ... that reproduces their inequality in the workplace ... Following the letter of the law can still result in extreme exploitation (p. 49).

#### *4.3.3.2 Farm workers of color are not welcome in the public sphere of agriculture.*

Organic farmers compound this issue by not only shielding their immigrant workers from public view but also publicizing their young, physically attractive white workers—preferring them to run their farmers market booths and be photographed for their websites (Gray, 2014, p. 77). This phenomenon is called “white-coding” (Alkon & McCullen, 2010). The authors describe various types of cultural “whiteness”: that associated with country clubs, the Republican party, and “god, guns, and country,” and end with the whiteness that they feel affects the food movement: “The farmers markets we studied reflect an affluent, liberal habitus of whiteness. ... affluence and liberal political orientation shape whiteness, but whiteness is not reducible to class or politics” (p. 940 – 941). This *white-coding* is especially egregious in light of a study that indicates that

Hispanic and African American customers are interested in buying organic food (Dettman, 2008; Porter, 2007). White-coding may be keeping them from accessing the fresh food at farmers markets.

White farm workers, generally college students or recent graduates, may work on a small farm as an intern, volunteer, or WOOFER (“World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms,” an international matchmaking service for farmers and volunteers) to gain experience with the intention of starting their own small farm; to satisfy a “newfound interest in understanding where their food comes from” (Gray, 2014, p. 89 – 90); or to have an outdoorsy, fun job in their early twenties (not unlike the Peace Corps, Americorps or the local swimming pool) before they get serious about their career and move to a city (Pilgeram, 2011). Migrant farm workers and other disenfranchised people lack the resources to make an equivalent transition out of farm work.

Gray (2014) writes:

It is part and parcel of American ideology that the exploitation of first-generation immigrants for the sake of future generations is justified. However, the persistent and mostly cyclical migration of Mexicans to the United States over the course of the twentieth century has resulted in a durable poverty (p. 93).

Regardless of race, many farmers themselves work long hours for little pay, and lack health care and other fringe benefits (Curry, 2015; Moyer, 2015; Smith, 2014). This can create resentment toward activists and others who accuse them of abuse (Marema, 2014). Moskowitz (2014) writes that “the Goliaths in [agriculture] are usually Davids—small farm owners who are often struggling to keep their business afloat in a country with the lowest food prices in the developed world.” “Ethical” consumers, if they are aware of non-family farm workers at all, often do not believe that small farmers would perpetrate such injustices (*ibid.*).

*4.3.3.3 Migrant farm workers without documentation experience the worst abuse.* Nearly all of agriculture is guilty of hiding from the public eye its lowest social echelon (and also its

backbone), migrant workers who lack legal documentation to work in the United States. North Carolina State University's report "Today's Farmer" has no mention of farm workers at all. The report states that "twenty two million American workers produce, process, sell and trade the nation's food and fiber. But only 4.6 million of those people live on the farms—slightly less than 2 percent of the total U.S. Population" (n.d.). Who are these remaining 17.4 million people? Most are U.S. citizens, surely, but the report lacks some important detail. North Carolina State University is either extremely lax with their use of the phrase "American worker," or they are simply not recognizing the immigrants who work on farms. According to the North Carolina Farmworker Institute (2012), the state ranks sixth in the United States in its number of migrant farm workers.

Iowa State University's Extension office publishes a list of farm worker wages. The Midwest has fewer migrant workers due to the dominance of commodity crops (corn and soybeans) grown there, which require more machinery than human labor. However, the migrant workers who are there are paid less than their white counterparts. After listing copious examples of the generosity of Iowa's farmers toward its workers, including gifting t-shirts, meals, and tickets to local events in addition to providing health care and insurance, a small paragraph at the end of the report addresses the compensation for migrant workers:

The 16 percent of employees who were born outside the United States earned significantly less than U.S.-born employees, averaging \$33,514 of total compensation per year and \$12.78 per hour. ... Most of them were carrying out duties with [lower paying] dairy or swine enterprises (Edwards, 2012).

It is important to note that Iowa's report of their average wage is much higher than most wages reported across the country. Ulrich (n.d.) reports that the national average wage *fell* during the last decade of the twentieth century, from \$6.89 to \$6.18. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014b) lists the 2012 national median wage to be \$9.09 per hour, or \$18,910 per year. The Food



Chain Workers Alliance (2012) found undocumented workers to earn an average of \$7.60 per hour, while “other workers” median wage was \$10 per hour (p. 34). Iowa’s report of average wages may indicate the impact that government subsidy has on commodity crops, as the state’s commodity crops make up 97 percent of its non-animal-based agriculture (Stuff About States, 2013).

Organic and conventional farmers collude to keep farm pay low (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014a; Greenaway, 2013; McMillan, 2012). The disparity between what Iowa’s “American” workers and its migrant workers earn is blamed in the report on the average migrant worker having one-third less farm experience than the average “American” (read: white) worker, and lacking a high school diploma. There is a precedent for this sort of discrimination—with African American farm workers of the twentieth century. As Gray (2014) notes in *Labor and the Locavore*, “African Americans, particularly the poorest, were acutely disenfranchised, both politically and economically, for so long that they were effectively treated like noncitizens” (p. 121). That 23 percent of all food workers actually *are* noncitizens does not bode well for hopes of improving their situation (The Food Chain Workers Alliance, 2012, p. 21).

#### **4.4. Contribution: De-fetishized Imaginary Within Popular Discourse**

It is important to consider the food system comprehensively in order to debunk the false choice between organic and conventional, or between farmer and worker; to support environmentalism, human rights for farm workers and people who are food-insecure, and local economies and small businesses; and to create a basis for improvement in farm workers’ conditions and food-insecure people’s access to fresh food (Hassanein, 2003). As Pilgeram (2011) writes, “The ability of sustainable agriculture to provide a true alternative to conventional

agriculture is tied to its ability to address the social injustices and privileges of conventional agriculture” (p. 379).

Organic was, originally, a de-fetishized industry. The intention of the first organic farmers was to reconnect with eaters of food, open the channels of commerce for direct sales, and restore the environment from decades of abuse by chemical herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers. IFOAM, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, maintains this comprehensive definition; the USDA does not (Shreck et al., 2006). As the organic industry grew and became attractive to corporate food processors, the veil that had been pushed aside in the 1970s slowly began to fall back into place. Obscured were industrial-scale operations, approved biological herbicides and pesticides, imports, and—most importantly—farm worker conditions. Today’s organic food has been re-fetishized.

Gunderson (2013) writes, “Markets, including alternative markets, do not exist independently of the social formation they are part of (in this case, capitalism), nor are they exempt from the basic processes of capitalism and market pressures” (p. 113). Guthman (2011) adds, “... it’s unclear that the problem can be rectified by the action of conscientious consumers” (p. 151). Alternative or niche markets cannot eliminate inequity and misconceptions; they are positive but, currently, only feed the fetish. However, it is possible for the people who staff and patronize such markets to step up and play a greater role in food justice.

Assuming the U.S. system of capitalism remains in place for the foreseeable future, social justice is going to have to work to some degree with consumerism. Mechanisms of defetishization that can function within the existing marketplace include customers inquiring with their shopkeepers and farmers market vendors about their workers’ treatment. Farmers and vendors could volunteer the information by including their workers in farm photos, websites, and

other public materials (Alkon & McCullen, 2010, p. 951). People could use social media to communicate organizations' messages and events, and talk with friends and family about food justice.

Processors and growers could consider a new label for retail sales, or revamp the labeling system entirely. Some people refer to the idea of a comprehensive label as “beyond organic” or “organic plus” (Guthman, 2007a; Guthman, 2011, p. 149; Howard & Allen, 2006; Schleenbecker & Hamm, 2013). McKay (2010) writes that “Vendors that want to stand out now need another card to play” (p. 14). If each facet of defetishization receives its own label—and at this point there are an estimated two hundred “eco-labels” in existence—consumers may encounter *label fatigue* (Organic Monitor, 2013). In some ways, this proliferation of labels is reminiscent of the diverse interpretations of *organic* that led to the USDA Organic label. The FDA is considering creating a QR-code system that could incorporate significantly more information about a food item onto its packaging or display, accommodating a full range of eco-labels. In order to be equitable, this system would require a means for those without a “smartphone” to participate.

Lee and Yun (2015) write that “to effectively respond to the continued growth of the organic food market, companies need to identify the attributes which give organic food an advantage over conventional food and to understand how consumers form their intentions to purchase organic food” (p. 260). As Jurwicz notes in an interview about slave labor-free cotton, “The key is for businesses to show commitment and to highlight the steps they are taking to fulfill their goals. For instance, a company needs to show how it is holding its suppliers accountable” (Hearts on Fire, n.d.). Jurwicz reports that “165 global brands, including IKEA, Walmart, lululemon athletica, Ann Taylor, and GAP” have responded to the campaign led by her organization, Responsible Sourcing Network (*ibid.*). *Forbes* magazine writes that “it is only a

matter of time before socially conscious eaters in the United States begin demanding information about farmworker conditions” (Gould, 2012). Making ethical choices at the grocery store can be a tool to supplement political advocacy, but only when all of the elements of agriculture are considered, particularly labor, and food is completely defetishized.

While the organic industry will remain marginal for some time, it continues to grow. The USDA reports that “organic products have shifted from being a lifestyle choice for a small share of consumers to being consumed at least occasionally by a majority of Americans” (USDA Organic Agriculture, 2014). The potential to educate those consumers about *organic* and *fork-voting* opens up the possibility for true reform in agriculture (Allen & Kovach, 2000, p. 230; Gunderson, 2014, p. 116). As DuPuis (2007) writes, “We need to stop trying to solve our social problems through our stomachs and think about the ways in which this type of politics simply justifies current inequalities.” Berry (2001) writes, when extolling the virtue of supporting small farms, “I do not mean to belittle the importance of protest, litigation, large-scale organization—all of which I believe in and support” (p. 77). A *re*-defetishized understanding could contribute to the equity goals of food-justice advocates, which include the quality, accessibility, transparency, and affordability of food for all people (Alkon, 2012, p. 665; Hinrichs & Allen, 2008, p. 333).

My contribution, via this thesis, is to inspire popular writers to broaden their perspectives and contribute to debunking the fetishization of *organic* (DuPuis & Gillon, 2009, p. 44), which will in turn inspire consumers to move beyond consumer activity to effect meaningful policy change in the food system.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

I began this project wondering if the term *organic* had come to mean more than the USDA label guarantees. Many claims in the articles I read and the films I watched seemed unrealistic, like things were missing from the equation. My research investigated the discussion of organic food in contemporary popular discourse to better understand what *organic* reveals and conceals, so that the public conversation about *organic* can be more transparent and can more effectively engage food justice.

In the introduction, I set *organic* in a historical time and place. In Background and Significance, I expanded the history of organic food and the concept of *voting with your fork*, and defined food justice for the food-insecure and for farm workers. In Methodology and Method, I outlined my background and my epistemological and theoretical frameworks for this research and noted my research method, critical discourse analysis.

In Research, Analysis, and Contribution, I first investigated how contemporary popular discourse portrays *organic*. I then investigated how contemporary popular discourse portrays *voting with your fork*. Thirdly, I asked whether the assumptions about *organic* and *voting with your fork* that are present in contemporary popular discourse valorize individual interests over collective interests, and what unintended consequences might follow. Lastly, I suggested ways that a comprehensive understanding of *organic* and *fork-voting* might contribute to the goals of food-justice advocates.

By analyzing what contemporary popular discourse does and does not say about how food is grown, harvested, processed, and distributed to hungry people, and how it empowers

people to feel they can “make a difference” via their purchases, I identified the following themes, the first three being affiliated with *organic*, and the final three with *voting with your fork*:

- Creating confusion, shame and/or fear around conventionally grown food;
- Equating organic food with dignity, health, and/or happiness;
- Emphasizing the ease with which one can access or process organic food;
- Making a social movement out of a personal choice;
- Applauding the consumer’s ethical fortitude and/or good taste; and
- Subordinating or ignoring the rights or existence of farm workers.

By de-fetishizing the former and clarifying the implications of the latter, I hope to encourage those who contribute to popular discourse (e.g. magazines, websites, and films) to change the imaginary (Gunderson, 2014, p. 114 – 115), inspiring their reader-consumers to broaden their consideration when buying food, and moving beyond consumer activity to effect meaningful policy change in the food system. I hope, more directly, to give the general public a more comprehensive understanding of how the food system works under capitalism, encouraging them to be greater political advocates for parity and equity in the food system.

### **5.1. Changing Discourse**

In the past two or three years, I have noticed a fledgling anti-fetish trend developing in contemporary popular discourse. A few articles have been published that take the form of *myth-busting* lists focusing on the environmental or nutritional aspects of organic; these articles still snub farm workers and end with a statement that generally lauds organic (Blumberg, n.d.; Laufer, 2014). The *Los Angeles Times* published in December 2014 a detailed, five-part exposé about worker conditions in Mexico. This report is thorough and damning, but does not address the fact that similar conditions exist in the United States, and on some organic farms.

Even more encouraging are a few articles providing in-depth, reasoned critiques of *organic*'s rarified state (Almendral, 2012; Johnson, 2014; McMillan, 2012; Shulson, 2014). Many of them originate from National Public Radio (NPR) and its state affiliates, written by young reporters who are, often, bicultural people of color (WNYC reporter Aurora Almendral's personal tagline is "Feet in Two Worlds" [2012]). Aubrey & Barclay (2015) write, for NPR's food department, *The Salt*:

But there's another way to nudge change in the food system: Support a campaign that's confronting the problems more directly. ... There are [*sic*] now a wide range of campaigns aimed at pushing these global companies to respond more directly to consumers' concerns about everything from antibiotics to greenhouse gas emissions to labor abuses.

And then again, some critiques are written by middle-aged white men. Published under the banner "A Foodie Repents," Lanchester (2014) writes in *The New Yorker*:

If these tiny acts of consumer choice are the most meaningful actions in our lives, perhaps we aren't thinking and acting on a sufficiently big scale. Imagine that you die and go to Heaven and stand in front of a jury made up of Thomas Jefferson, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Your task would be to compose yourself, look them in the eye, and say, "I was all about fresh, local, and seasonal."

And, *The New York Times* columnist Mark Bittman (2014) encourages self-described "foodies" to pay attention to worker rights, even mentioning political scientist Margaret Gray, and writes, "working to make food fair and affordable is an opportunity for this country to live up to its founding principles." Whether these contributions to the popular discourse end up attracting readers' attention, being respected (rather than being dismissed as "organic-bashing"), and making a difference remains to be seen.

## 5.2. Changing Policy

Policy happens at a number of scales: locally, regionally, statewide, and nationally. Important work is to be done at each. Individual *fork-voters* can be encouraged to direct the

funds that are currently filtered through for-profit farmers and food processors, with the intention of improving the food system, straight to worker-advocacy nonprofit and activist organizations. They could also support the workers and workers' organizations by volunteering their time—participating in phone-banking or door-to-door advocacy visits, and lobbying at the state legislatures for better working conditions and higher pay.

Locally and/or regionally, depending on the area, people could form food councils and pressure the leadership to include all their constituents (including those with low incomes) and make the meetings accessible by providing transportation vouchers, childcare, and other support (Chen, 2014). When it comes to self-determination of a community, those in power need to ensure that people have the tools to succeed and then get out of the way. Loehr (2014) admonishes:

Equity ... requires action. To create a place where everyone not only has what [community members] need, but also the power to decide what that may be. We can call the system broken, but if it continues to be the well-served community working to 'fix' the system for the good of the under-served community, we cannot expect change.

A good example of a community standing up for its rights is the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, tomato pickers in Florida who have successfully lobbied corporations such as WalMart and Yum Brands to pay an extra penny per pound, which goes to the workers (Greenhouse, 2014). The Civil Rights Movement was instrumental in empowering African Americans to move out of farming and into more rewarding vocations (Gray, 2014, p. 121); a workers' rights movement could do the same, and also improve the conditions under which farm work happens so that it, too, is a rewarding vocation.

While farmers are the ones providing substandard conditions and low pay, the proverbial buck does not stop with them. Forty-nine percent of the value of a farm product is realized by the manufacturer of the processed food item (National Farm Worker Ministry, n.d.). The farmer



receives 1.7 percent, and the farm worker 0.3 percent (*ibid.*). Pilgeram (2011) notes that “farmers are already often stretched very thin; it is difficult to imagine them making any less for their food” (p. 387). A farmer interviewed in Shreck et al. (2006) claimed: “Get rid of imports [and] allow prices to reflect actual costs, and I believe most family farms would absolutely support benefits [for farm workers] such as you mention.” Strohlic & Hamerschlag (2005) add, “Many sustainable growers have expressed a deep genuine interest in improving farm labor conditions, yet most do not know how to do so, or feel they cannot afford to” (p. iii).

The corporate manufacturing sector, with its political power to influence lawmakers to tilt the market in their favor, must cede some of its profits to the farmers and farm workers that keep them in business. And consumers of food, the lifeblood of the manufacturing sector, could pressure them directly and via state and federal legislatures to do that.

In order to do the right thing for their workers, farmers need policies that support their efforts. In the documentary *Food, Inc.*, Pollan says, “To eat well in this country costs more than to eat badly. It will take more money, and some people simply don’t have it, and that’s one of the reasons we need changes at the policy level” (Kenner, 2008). While Pollan’s definitions of “well” and “badly” remain to be debated, he demonstrates an understanding—at least in this instance—that real change requires more than *fork-voting*.

To support farmers, consumers could contact their representatives in Congress about farm- and food-related policy issues (Allen & Kovach, 2000, p. 229). They could agitate Congress to stop catering to industrial agriculture and corporate food processors, and approve a Farm Bill that significantly supports organic-agriculture research, conservation efforts, and the cultivation of specialty crops—those fruits and vegetables recommended by the USDA and

Department of Human Services to provide half of an individual's daily consumption (2010)—in the ways that the federal government currently does commodity crops.

Additionally, people could encourage policies that improve the working conditions of farm workers without putting farmers out of business; enfranchise migrant farm workers so they do not risk their lives to come to the United States to work, while lacking access to social services and living in fear of deportation while they are here; create a pathway for citizen farm workers to start their own farms or transition into other careers; bring healthy, culturally appropriate food choices to people with low food security; and support anti-trust laws and alternatives to mercenary capitalism, such as B Corps and nonprofit corporations. More study into how these policies might be written and implemented is needed.

The appeal of *fork-voting* to effect change in the food system is understandable: If one can afford organic food, “voting” is easy and it yields great personal benefit in the form of delicious meals and a clear conscience. But, complicated problems rarely respond to simple solutions. The more people take an active interest in parity in the food system and agitate in ways that are more likely to make a difference—policies that give *everyone* a “vote,” not just the people who have dollars—the more likely food justice is to become a reality.

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