

**Building Food Sovereignty in the United States:  
An analysis of Food Movement Approaches to Challenging Power Inequities in the Food  
System**

by  
**Natalie Lanning**  
Food Systems and Society  
Marylhurst University

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Thesis Advisor: Sean Gillon, Ph.D.

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Table 1: Food Movement Goals & Strategies

## Abbreviations and Acronyms

AFMs	Alternative Food Movements
CFR	Corporate Food Regime
CFS	Community Food Security
U.S.	United States
U.S.D.A	United States Department of Agriculture
USFSA	United States Food Sovereignty Alliance

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## **Abstract**

The dominant food system is characterized by widespread social, environmental, economic, and political inequities perpetuated by dominant actors who retain the majority of power and control in the agrifood system. A patchwork of food movements attempts to alter the course of this unsustainable and inequitable system but may remain largely unsuccessful without engaging with broader calls to challenge the underlying structures that uphold them. As the radical approach of food sovereignty becomes increasingly common in the United States, it provides a framework for food movements to align their diverse approaches. This thesis examines how scholars and activists in the U.S. are engaging with food sovereignty in order to identify opportunities for progressive food movements to further engage through the movement's key goals and strategies for restoring democratic control of the food system.

*Keywords:* food sovereignty, United States, food movements, food policy, food justice, community food security, local food, food security



## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

The industrialized, corporately controlled food system has been increasingly scrutinized in literature and popular media over the course of several decades. Concerns over the environmental, economic, and social sustainability of the current system have abounded from farm to plate and have rightly taken center stage, turning attention on the destructive role that the dominant agrifood system plays in everything from climate change and other environmental issues to public health and food security. What has emerged is a battle between increasingly consolidated corporations continuing to exacerbate the social and environmental effects of industrialization on one side, and a diverse set of actors across a range of food movements working to create a food system rooted in environmental and social justice on the other.

The currently dominant agrifood system is characterized by widespread environmental destruction and social injustices. While the industrialization of the food system, characterized by monocropping, standardization, and intensification has allowed for increases in certain crop yields, it has come at the cost of the social and environmental health of both people and planet, and the ability of the food system to sustain itself and feed our future. Industrialization has been perpetuated by government policy that privileges corporations in a rapidly concentrated food chain in which only a few corporations hold the majority of control and power along the entirety of the chain, from the inputs to production, processing, packaging, distribution, and retail. Decisions affecting food and agriculture, such as who grows the food, what is grown, where it is grown, and under what conditions it is grown are no longer decisions made primarily by farmers and consumers. What remains is largely a food system where food is no longer a human necessity, but rather a business opportunity for the corporations that control the system.

Decades of research and documentation on the social and environmental consequences of the industrialized food system has led concerned citizens including scholars, consumers, and advocates to create a vast array of alternatives to mitigate the harmful impacts of the dominant food system. In rethinking how, where, under what circumstances, by whom and for whom food is produced, these movements have attempted to combat the complex array of issues caused by the industrialization of the food system by creating alternatives that focus primarily on environmental sustainability. These movements advocate for a more sustainable system of agriculture supported by engaged consumers through alternative distribution systems such as community supported agriculture (CSAs), farmers' markets, and food cooperatives (Allen, 2004). By reconnecting producers with consumers, these food movements hope to replace the locus of control of the food system back in the hands of farmers and consumers.

While these initiatives to support farmers through connecting people with locally grown food and educating people to eat better are important building blocks for transforming the food system, concerns have been raised that these efforts fail to address the root causes of the widespread environmental impacts and social injustices in the dominant food system such as issues of food access and farmworker rights. In cases where these food movements address these social injustices through their rhetoric, scholars argue that their actions do not address the root causes of them (Guthman, 2011). These scholars have become skeptical of the ability of food movements to alter the inequitable power structures that uphold the dominant system, and argue that in some cases they may even act to reinforce them (Allen, 2008) by relying on community change and consumer choice as solutions.

Rather, the diverse strategies taken by food movements must come together to work towards directly dismantling the dominant agrifood food system, so that they can engage in

confronting both the environmental and social inequities through building food democracy, restructuring power imbalances, and placing decision-making power back in the hands of the public. Without doing so, these food movements may be limited to “chipping away at the periphery of the dominant political-economic structure” (Allen, 2003), incapable of countering the trajectory of industrialization and its harmful environmental and social effects.

Some food movements do directly discuss tackling the larger political-economic structures that uphold the dominant food system through their rhetoric. The U.S food justice and the global food sovereignty movements are examples of movement frameworks that bring a radical vision to restructuring the food system. Although it is an evolving and increasingly debated conceptual framework (Edelman, 2014), food sovereignty in particular may enable food movements to focus on the policies necessary to challenge the dominant system and restore democracy to the food system. Started as a global food movement in the global south in the 1990s, food sovereignty has taken off as an approach in recent years in the U.S. However, much remains to be known about how U.S. food movements are working towards the goals and strategies of the food sovereignty movement as it spreads.

The goal of this thesis is to understand the extent to which U.S. food movements challenge control in the food system through their differing approaches, and how they might be strengthened in their abilities to do so through a deeper engagement with the food sovereignty framework. I address this research problem through three research questions. The first question asks how scholars characterize the strategies utilized by the mainstream food movements in the U.S. to confront issues of power and control in the agrifood system. My second question asks how scholars suggest engagement with the radical visions and strategies of the food sovereignty movement can strengthen their ability to do so. Finally, with my third research question, I seek to

understand how activists are engaging with food sovereignty through the United States Food Sovereignty Alliance (USFSA) as the movement unfolds in the U.S. context.

In Chapter Two, I review the growth of the corporate food system through a food regime analysis and explain how this system has increased social inequities in the food system. I then introduce the diversity in food movement approaches through a progressive/radical framework and introduce an approach to analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of food movement strategies. With these frameworks in mind, I provide background on the radical visions and principles of the food sovereignty movement. In Chapter Three, I explain the methodology and methods used to address my research questions, detailing how I defined, collected, and analyzed data to answer my research questions. In Chapter Four, I present my research findings and explain my analysis. Finally, in Chapter Five, I conclude this thesis by suggesting opportunities for further collaboration among U.S. food movements and the food sovereignty framework.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Background and Significance**

Food movements are fragmented and differ in the extent to which they confront the growing control and power by food and agriculture corporations. Thus, as explained in this chapter, they are limited in their potential to exert the change needed to challenge the social and environmental inequities of the dominant food system. This thesis studies the extent to which U.S. food movements are challenging power and control in the food system, and how they might more effectively do so by engaging with the radical visions of the global food sovereignty framework. Doing so might allow them to build alliances with broader social, political, and environmental movements, creating a larger movement capable of challenging the dominant food system.

To begin, this chapter opens with an overview of the creation of the dominant agrifood system through the lens of food regime analysis. I then expand on the social inequalities exacerbated by this current food system and provide an overview of the various approaches of food movements that seek to counteract these negative impacts. Finally, I provide background on the global food sovereignty movement, its principles and policy priorities, and the movements spread into the United States.

#### **2.1 Growth of the corporate food regime**

Understanding the mechanisms behind the formation and growth of the dominant agrifood system is key to understanding how to challenge it and repair the social and environmental inequities that are exacerbated by it. One way scholars have done so is through food regime analysis. The next subsections describe the growth of the industrialization and corporatization of the food system through the lens of food regime analysis.

### *2.1.1 Food Regime Analysis*

A food regime, as defined by McMichael & Friedmann (1989), is the structure of production and consumption of food on a world scale. According to McMichael & Friedmann, the first food regime occurred from 1870 to 1914, during the period of British hegemony in the world economy. During this first food regime, European imports of cheap commodities helped enable British and other European countries industrialize (McMichael & Friedmann, 2009). The second occurred between 1945 and 1973, during a period of United States hegemony in the postwar world economy (McMichael & Friedmann, 2009). U.S. government policy encouraged the emergence of this regime through the practice of buying crops from farmers when their market prices were below target levels. This created huge surpluses held by the government for which new export markets were created in the form of food aid to the global south (Allen & Wilson, 2008).

This period was also marked by increased investment in agricultural technology, known as the Green Revolution, to increase production yields with the use of pesticides, herbicides, and genetically-modified seeds. The Green Revolution spurred on the industrialization of the food system, serving to lower the cost of inputs for food processors and allowing for a boost in efficiency in producing huge quantities of cheap food, giving a financial advantage to large agrifood businesses by allowing them to maintain profitability while producing cheap industrial meat, dairy, and processed foods (Busch, 2005). Although the technologies developed in the Green Revolution produced higher yields of a select few commodity crops, such as wheat and corn, it did so at the expense of environmental and social impacts. The main environmental threats in global agricultural production such as the overuse of water resources, the loss of soil through erosion and salinization, the loss of agricultural biodiversity through the simplification

of production, intensive animal production, and over-fishing, come from this industrialization which piles on enormous pressure to produce as much and as cheaply as possible.

Many scholars now agree that we are in a third food regime, often referred to as the corporate food regime (CFR), led by global corporations that are profiting from the reorganization of agrifood chains for financial advantage (McMichael & Friedmann, 2009). It is characterized by a set of relationships privileging industrialized, corporate agriculture in the interest of capital accumulation and is facilitated by neoliberal strategies designed to accelerate food circulation globally and restructure the food system across corporate lines (McMichael, 2009).

The regime relies extensively on the direct and indirect appropriation and exploitation of land, labor, and capital, both at home and abroad (Holt-Gimenez & Wang, 2011). While corporations enjoy record profits as a result, many farmers cannot make a living, are increasingly vulnerable to price fluctuations, and struggle for access to markets (Ayazi & Elsheikh, 2015). This profit is built on the backs of an overworked and underpaid workforce who increasingly do not have access to nutritious and affordable food (Ayazi & Elsheikh, 2015). In the next section, I explore the mechanisms that are responsible for the growth of this current regime.

### *2.1.2 Mechanisms behind the Corporate Food Regime*

The CFR is supported by neoliberal ideology, a political-economic philosophy that reorients the state towards the facilitation of market mechanisms (Holt-Gimenez & Wang, 2011). Neoliberalism institutionalizes corporate control in the world food system (McMichael, 2009) through practices such as deregulation, trade liberalization, and the privatization of state enterprises and public services (Alkon, 2011). Governments and industry within the CFR have

engaged with this neoliberal ideology, focusing on achieving food security through efficiency in production and increasing the output of a limited variety of crops.

This neoliberal ideology has allowed for levels of concentration in the food system to grow exponentially. Corporations have become highly concentrated through consolidation leading to relatively few competitors. This consolidation in the food system can be visualized as an “hourglass” figure where thousands of farmers at the top feed millions of consumers at the bottom, through a corporately controlled food chain involving suppliers, processors, packagers, transporters, and retailers in the middle (Morgan, 2000). Consolidation is based on the growing vertical integration of the system—where one firm along the supply chain has merged with or acquired another “from which it buys inputs or to which it sells output” (Hendrickson et al., 2014, p. 1). Critically, in many cases, the same corporations have become both buyers and sellers, making it difficult to regulate them through anti-trust laws. This largely unregulated consolidation has created a situation where powerful food corporations in the middle of the food supply chain have been able to exercise tight control over which foods are produced at what cost and for which markets, which has given rise to huge agrifood monopolies that yield power and control over the food system.

According to Hendrickson, James, and Heffernan (2014), over the past twenty years, this consolidation of the food system into a few corporate players is unprecedented, with just four firms alone controlling forty-percent or more of the market (Heffernan, 2000) at almost every stage from seed to plate. As of 2007, four corporations owned 85% of the soybean processing industry, 82% of the beef packing industry, 63% of the pork packing industry, and manufacture about 50% of the milk, while five corporations control 50% of grocery retail. Scholars warn that in any market, when four firms control forty-percent or more of the market, they are able to exert



influence on the market unlike that of a competitive system (Heffernan, 2000). These high levels of concentration have resulted in a situation in which smaller businesses cannot afford to participate because they cannot compete and where smaller farmers are replaced with corporate agriculture as agribusinesses consolidate and dominate the production of food. Moss and Taylor (2014) note that consolidation in the middle of the food supply chain has created “tight oligopolies of highly integrated firms” (p. 348). When the number of companies controlling the chain from farmers to consumers is so few, they have tremendous power “both over the people who grow the food and the people who eat it” (Patel, 2008, p. 12).

Consolidation allows for the value to accrue to a limited number of actors, reinforcing their economic and political power, thus their ability to influence the governance of food systems. With concentration of power comes corporate control, or the “control of political and economic systems by corporations in order to influence trade regulations, tax rates, and wealth distribution, among other measures, and to produce favorable environments for future corporate growth” (Ayazi & Elsheikh, 2015), in which agrifood corporations are able to influence governments and organizations that make and enforce rules for trade, labor, property, and technology (Holt-Gimenez & Wang, 2011). Corporations have been able to gain and maintain power by wielding influence in politics, through special interest lobbies and campaign financing, as well as through academia and research, by funding university research, departments, and faculty positions. The resultant impact of this influence and power is the undermining of democracy and the democratic process both within the US and abroad.

This creates a vicious cycle in which food and agriculture policies create significant benefits for those who lobby and organize politically, and negative consequences for those who do not have a voice in the system. Therefore, the system underpinning industrial agriculture and

its resulting social and environmental impacts is “locked-in” place through concentration of power (IPES-Food, 2016). Without addressing the power imbalances that lock them in, social and environmental inequities will continue to grow.

In sum, by analyzing the United States’ food system through a lens of power and control, we see that the corporate food regime is dominating our food system and influencing the systems that set food and agriculture policies and are responsible for perpetuating the harmful environmental and social impacts of corporate agriculture. This rising power of corporations has led to increased inequality within the food system, from heightened disparities in compensation and wages, to the uneven development of agriculture. The health impact on individuals and the environment is part and parcel to the structural paradigm that corporate control has produced. Food chain workers are especially vulnerable to corporate power and face heightened food insecurity as a result of low wages, oftentimes without benefits, and poor labor conditions that impact their health and livelihoods.

While the CFR gives the consumer the illusion of choice, it actually provides individuals and communities with very few choices of who produces what, under what conditions, and for whom. Globally, fewer than five hundred companies control seventy-percent of food choice (Ayazi & Elsheikh, 2015). Farmers and consumers alike have little choice in how their food is produced, distributed, and accessed because the locus of control and decision-making remains in the hands of large agribusinesses. Transforming the agrifood system into one where farmers and consumers have a greater voice in how the food system operates remains both the challenge and the opportunity for food movements, explored in the next section.

## 2.2 Shifting power imbalances in the food system

Patel (2007) asserts that reclaiming control of the food system requires both individual and collective effort, a commitment to equality and democratic deliberation where everyone has a voice, and “the empowerment of society’s poorest members to be able to afford to eat differently” (p.310). Slocum (2006), argues that shifting power imbalance requires analyzing oppression in the food system, and asking such questions as “who will take control?,” “who is building power?,” and “do the solutions we are developing speak to the issues that low-income communities and communities of color have identified as crucial?” (p.340).

The ability to confront the high level of control that corporate interests exert on food and agriculture requires that all members of an agrifood system have equal and effective opportunities for participation in shaping that system. This requires a bottom-up and inclusive approach to food policy that includes a diversity of views and interests (Lang, 1999) in which participative inequalities are a central concern (Loo, 2014). The idea of food democracy, that people should be able to participate in shaping the food system rather than remaining passive spectators on the sidelines, is about citizens having the power to determine agrifood policies and practices locally, regionally, nationally, and globally. Advocates for food democracy assert that the best hope for finding solutions to the issues that plague the food system is through the inclusion and participation of citizens. This means a strong food democracy acknowledges and includes the interests of consumers, farmers, and food and farm workers equitably.

Conceived of in this way, building food democracy is an essential element for countering corporate control and transforming the agrifood system towards sustainability and equitability. However, as this chapter has covered, the food system is so concentrated that individuals are relatively powerless; relying on change to occur through individual actions and market

mechanisms is not sufficient. It is necessary to open the process in food movements of setting food policies at all levels globally, nationally, and locally so that farmers, farmworkers, and consumers alike may have opportunities to engage, influence, and control their food system. If food movements are not successful at challenging power and control inequities, corporate interests will continue to dominate and perpetuate inequality in the food system. In the next section, I introduce the food movements that seek to alter this dominant food system.

### **2.3 The spectrum of food movement strategies in the U.S.**

In response to the social, economic, and environmental issues in the food system, a range of alternative food movements (AFMs) have developed over the past few decades attempting to both directly and indirectly challenge the CFR by “challenging the ways we think and talk about food” (Gottlieb, 2001, p. 271). The food movement consists of a patchwork of different, contrasting, and often competing efforts (Brent, 2015). These movements represent a great deal of interrelated and overlapping approaches that address various problems with the dominant food system. Scholars assert that food system change will come from powerful and sustained social pressure from the food movement, but that this is dependent on food movements overcoming their divides (Holt-Gimenez & Wang, 2011) Opportunities for movement participation are crucial because a high level of mobilization needs to occur if the alternative agrofood movement is going to build transformational change. The only way to change the powers perpetuating industrialization of the food system and achieve the radical visions is with many people working together from multiple strategies. As one author put it, there is a need to “shift the arguments about discourse to the arena of action where the sum of different actions, policy initiatives, and

movement building activities—whether environmentally or socially defined—can become greater than any one of its individual parts” (Gottlieb, 2001, pp. 271–272).

Scholars such as McMichael (2000) have analyzed food movements, explaining their rise through the lens of food regime theory and observing that they represent a response to corporate dominance. While this literature serves to explain that food movements generally share a common analysis of the problems of the CFR, it does not analyze how their approaches to change differ and to what extent each approach serves in challenging power and control of the food system within the CFR. Therefore, there is a need to examine their approaches to change and the extent to which they each serve in transforming the food system, which I turn to in the next section.

### *2.3.1 Analyzing food movement approaches*

One framework useful for understanding activism in the food system is the Builder, Weaver, Warrior framework proposed by Stevenson, Ruhf, Lezberg & Clancy (2007). According to these authors, there are three different approaches to food movement activism that are strategically aimed at creating social change. In this framework, although each category approaches change differently than the other, each approach is essential to the success of the others, and all three strategies are crucial to movement building. This framework allows for an analysis of the strengths of the different social change strategies within AFMs.

Movements that approach social change through builder work seek to create alternative approaches that largely rely on entrepreneurial change rather than political. Conversely, warrior work focuses primarily on changing both political and economic structures through political action. Warrior work engages in tactics such as public protests, boycotts, court cases, lobbying and legislative work. The third strategy, weaver work, focuses on creating linkages and

connections through developing networks and coalitions among groups engaged in builder and warrior work and is thus oriented toward social movement building. Furthermore, Stevenson, Ruhf, Lezberg & Clancy (2007) outline that these approaches can be executed using one or more of three different goal orientations:

- 1) Inclusion (getting marginalized players into the agrifood system)
- 2) Reformation (changing the rules of the agrifood system)
- 3) Transformation (changing the agrifood system)

Food movements vary in the extent to which they are oriented towards each of these goals and the strategies utilized to accomplish them. Certainly though, food movements prioritize certain goals and over others and the strategies utilized to accomplish them. Analyzing food movements for the degree to which each approach engages with the various strategies and goal orientations can highlight their respective strengths and limitations.

Holt-Giménez and Shattuck (2011) have utilized another such framework to understand the differing goals and strategies of AFMs and have provided an analytical contribution to differentiate between food movement trends. They categorize food movements as either “progressive” or “radical”, in which radical movements are viewed as having the ability to challenge the CFR and progressive movements are characterized as having limited ability. They assert that while alternative food movements share common ultimate goal of food system transformation, they differ in their strategies. In Table 1 below, I connect these several frameworks together by summarizing the differences between progressive and radical movements in terms of their primary goals and strategies for accomplishing social change.

Table 1: Food Movement Orientations and Strategies

	<b>Food Movement</b>	<b>Primary Goal Orientation</b>	<b>Primary Strategies</b>
<b>Progressive</b>	Sustainable/organic food, community food security (CFS), local food initiatives, some food justice projects	Reformation/Inclusion	Builder/Weaver
<b>Radical</b>	Some food justice projects, food sovereignty	Inclusion/Transformation	Weaver/Warrior

The progressive branch of approaches in the U.S. includes and encompasses a diversity of food movements. These include approaches such as sustainable/organic food, community food security (CFS), and local food initiatives. Progressive movements primarily aim to reform the food system through engaging in builder activities. Many activists working within these spaces prioritize builder activities to reduce the environmental and social impacts of the corporate food regime. Doing so allows them to work on concrete projects and activities that provide a sense of accomplishment and community (Romer & Farthing, 2016).

On the other end of the spectrum are radical approaches orientated towards transformation and aimed at restructuring power and control and tackling the root causes of social injustices in the food system. They consider the impacts of corporate control on local food system by working to directly challenge the structure of the political-economic system in which they are embedded in order to challenge the injustices of the CFR (Holt-Gimenez & Shattuck, 2011). Radical approaches directly challenge neoliberalism through their discourse and prioritize warrior work by proposing and advocating for policies to dismantle the political-economic system that perpetuates power and control inequities.

A tension exists within these approaches regarding the potential of AFMs to create meaningful change in which progressive actors seek to work on what is presently possible given existing opportunities and barriers while others view this pragmatism as inadequate for achieving the structural transformation of the food and agriculture system that many movement actors and academic analysts see as necessary. Food justice is situated between this tension, bridging the actions between progressive and radical movements.

With its position situated between reforming the food system through building alternative spaces and including marginalized populations, and transforming the system through engaging in warrior strategies, food justice is viewed as a pivotal movement within AFM activities in working towards radicalizing efforts towards transformational goals (Holt-Gimenez & Wang, 2011). The food justice framework draws on insights from the sustainable agriculture and food security frames of the community food security movement as well as incorporating environmental justice perspectives (Alkon and Norgaard, 2009). It calls for access to healthy food by marginalized groups and relies primarily on weaver activities of connection and collaboration to accomplish this goal.

Although it is often critiqued along with other progressive movements, scholars are recognizing how the food justice movement is becoming radicalized, citing its radical potential when the movement is led by people of color, is anti-capitalist, and is dominated by women and youth (Romer & Farthing, 2016). These more radical forms assert economic democracy for underserved communities of color, including the transfer of ownership, property, and leadership to those most negatively affected by the industrial food system (Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck, 2011). These actions facilitate a shift toward more democratic food systems that directly challenge control, exploitation, and oppression in social relations.



An allied movement for food justice and food sovereignty that maintains the political nature of the global food sovereignty framework would not only emphasize the production of local alternatives, but also a dismantling of the policies that uphold the corporate food regime (Schiavoni, 2016). The activists working from a more radical framing of food justice are more likely to have a closer connection with national and international food movements like food sovereignty. In this way, scholars recognize the pivotal role that the food justice movement can play in transforming the food system and how the movement is already positioned to link to the global food sovereignty movement (Holt-Gimenez and Wang, 2011).

Gottlieb and Joshi (2011) also identify food justice as a key political trend within the U.S. food movement and claim it is facing a “pivotal moment” to organize existing food groups into a larger social movement. The strategic alliance between food justice and food sovereignty could go a long way toward achieving this. Schiavoni (2016) suggests both movements should build upon one another with food justice creating short-term action and rights in domestic contexts, while food sovereignty movements support longer-term national, regional and international networks and political action to undermine neoliberalism that underpins the CFR at both local and global scales). I agree with this assertion and suggest that the radical branch of the food justice movement represents a shift in U.S. food movement approaches, overlapping with the strategies of progressive movements and the strategies of global food sovereignty. These more radical forms of food justice set the stage for the transition to food sovereignty. In this view, food justice is a necessary pre-cursor towards food sovereignty in the U.S. In the next section, I explore the food sovereignty framework.

## **2.4 The global food sovereignty framework and its spread in the U.S.**

Food sovereignty falls squarely within the radical category. Although it overlaps with the goals and strategies of food movements in the U.S., it stands apart from the approaches taken by progressive and more radical forms of food justice in several ways. Food sovereignty is a concept that grew out of a growing dissatisfaction among groups and individuals with the current food regime. Although the conceptual framework for food sovereignty is continually evolving, at its core, it is a set of goals and strategies comprised of protecting community, livelihoods, and social and environmental sustainability in the production, consumption and distribution of food through engaging in policy advocacy.

The framework calls for people to have the right to determine “their own food producing systems and policies that provide every one of us with good quality, adequate, affordable, healthy, and culturally appropriate food” (Via Campesina, 2007) and is primarily concerned with placing control of food systems into the hands of those most often disregarded and oppressed by corporate-driven food systems and asserts individual and community autonomy over food systems (Jarosz, 2014). In addition to rights, food sovereignty movements emphasize equity and the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities across populations by prioritizing the most marginalized, vulnerable, or disadvantaged populations, focusing on the structural forms of marginalization.

While the food sovereignty movement originated in the global south in the 1990s by the global peasant movement, La Via Campesina, it has rapidly taken hold worldwide since then. However, the concept of food sovereignty has only recently become a popular social movement outside of the global south. In the U.S., food sovereignty has occupied a central place in the discourses created by food and social justice scholars, advocates, and organizations. Scholars

have been increasingly engaging with the framework in literature examining what the concept means for U.S. advocacy groups and organizations, while actors in the U.S. have been incorporating the radical visions of the framework into their approaches.

As the food sovereignty movement spreads from its roots in the global south and begins to take hold in the north, the framework faces new challenges and opportunities. Despite the popularity of the movement among scholars and activists alike, and its successes internationally, much remains to be understood about how food movements in the U.S. are engaging with the food sovereignty movement, in particular how the concept is helping food movements to radicalize and address their respective limitations in addressing power and control inequities in the food system. In this thesis, I postulate that if movements adopt food sovereignty without maintaining its core focus on warrior work, the movement will lose its transformational potential. Therefore, there is a need to examine the spread of the movement in the U.S., how its radical goals and strategies are being adopted by progressive food movements and whether or not its goals and strategies are maintained in the U.S. context.

## **2.5 Research Questions**

With this thesis, I seek to examine the growing body of academic literature surrounding food movements in the U.S. to understand how movements approach challenging power and control inequities and how a deeper engagement with the goals and strategies of the food sovereignty framework might enable activists in the U.S. to more effectively challenge corporate control. Specifically, my research questions are:

- 1) How do food movements in the United States, as examined in academic literature, differ in their goals and strategies for challenging power and control inequities in the

food system?

- 2) How might a deeper engagement with the goals and strategies of the food sovereignty framework enable food movements to more effectively counter these inequities?
- 3) How is the United States Food Sovereignty Alliance organizing food movements to engage with food sovereignty's key goals and strategies?

By asking how food movements differ in their goals and strategies for challenging power and control inequities in my first research question, I seek to identify how scholars characterize the goals, strategies, and limitations of progressive food movements. With the second question, I hope to gain an understanding of how scholars view the opportunities for the radical visions of food sovereignty to contribute to transforming power and control inequities in the United States. Lastly, my third research question aims to understand how the United States Food Sovereignty Alliance (USFSA) is organizing progressive food movements in the U.S. towards the radical visions and strategies of the global food sovereignty movement. The USFSA is a key space of convergence among progressive and food justice organizations working towards the construction of food sovereignty in the U.S., and therefore provides a space for alliance building between organizations associated with it. Analyzing the organizations connected through the USFSA will help highlight what is currently being done by activists aligning with the movement for food sovereignty in the U.S and where there are differences between the scholar-activist community in terms of how each is engaging with food sovereignty in the U.S.

These research questions will contribute to a growing body of research by helping to identify how scholars characterize the way in which food movements might more effectively tackle the power and control inequities in the corporate food regime and the way in which food movements within the U.S. might more effectively accomplish these goals. The next section will

detail the methods and methodologies used in this thesis to address this research problem and answer my research questions.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology and Methods**

This thesis research seeks to understand how food movements challenge the growth of the corporate food regime and how they may more effectively engage with the radical visions of the food sovereignty framework in order to fully achieve their sustainability and social justice goals. Specifically, I seek to analyze how the U.S. food justice movement is engaging with the food sovereignty frame to dismantle the CFR. In this chapter, I discuss my positionality and the methodology and methods that guide my approach to this research.

#### **3.1 Positionality**

Through my experiences observing the work that is being done in the spaces of food movements, I have found the desire to question the direction that food movements are headed. I believe there is a need to continually question what these movements are accomplishing and where there are opportunities to push further in order to fully realize the goals of sustainability and social justice in the food system. Furthermore, I chose to question how food movements are engaging with policy to dismantle the CFR because I fear, as explained in Chapter Two, if food movements are not actively involved in doing so, these trends will continue and impair the ability of the movements to affect change in the food system, regardless of their intentions.

In questioning how progressive food movements are engaging with the radical visions and strategies advocated by the food sovereignty movement, I am asserting the validity and importance of this framework. While some scholars are critical of certain aspects of this framework and continue to debate the contradictions within it (Edelman, et al., 2014), I maintain that the intersection of the vision of this framework with progressive food movements in the U.S. is currently the best radical approach offered in the scholar-activist community to confront the

enormity of the problems associated with the CFR. Furthermore, I believe that if we are to make progress towards achieving radical visions of change, we can't ignore tough political battles because the political issues of the CFR undermine the ability of food movements to achieve lasting change in the food system. Aligning with the goals and strategies of this movement is the most effective way I see that food movements can become less fragmented and more of an organized force of direct challenge to the corporate food regime.

### **3.2 Methodology**

I chose to utilize the qualitative research method of literature review as the primary methodology for exploring my first and second research questions because it is useful for examining communication systematically. A literature review is an important methodology in qualitative research for interpreting what is already known in academic literature and where contradictions and gaps in existing knowledge exist (Jesson et al., 2011).

In the case of my third research question, I chose to utilize a document analysis to analyze the websites and associated documents of food movement organizations to understand how they are engaging with food sovereignty. Documents provide the data or evidence of the ways in which individuals, groups, social settings, institutions and organizations represent and account for themselves (Coffey, 2014). By examining what scholars and food movement actors say, I hope to identify not only how food movements are beginning to engage with food sovereignty, but to identify what opportunities exist for food movements to further engage to accomplish their goals more effectively.

### 3.3 Methods

In what follows, I detail the methods used to answer each of my three research questions.

#### 3.3.1 *Research Questions 1 and 2*

The methods for my first and second research questions were similar. For my first research question, *How do food movements in the United States, as examined in academic literature, differ in their goals and strategies for challenging power and control inequities in the food system?*, I organized my research around the categories of progressive and radical movements described in Chapter 2. When searching for food movement literature in Google Scholar and EBSCOhost, I used the terms “Progressive” and “Radical” in tandem with the search terms “United States” and “Food Movements”. Based on this search, I chose to utilize 20 journal articles that I determined useful and relevant to my research question by reading through each abstract to see how the article engages with and analyzes the movements. I then organized the data into a spreadsheet categorized by each movement and their respective resources from the literature.

For my second research question, *How might a deeper engagement with the goals and strategies of the food sovereignty framework enable food movements to more effectively counter these inequities?*, I selected articles based on the search terms “Food Sovereignty” and “United States”. For each mention of food sovereignty, I extracted the relevant information and input it into the spreadsheet, and then organized it into categories based on the content of the text.

#### 3.3.2 *Research Question 3*

To research this third question, *How is the United States Food Sovereignty Alliance organizing food movements to engage with food sovereignty’s key goals and strategies?*, I reviewed the mission statements, webpages, and documents of the websites of the USFSA



member organizations. During my review, I searched for explicit use of the words “food sovereignty”, as well as any relevant mentions of any of the key goals and strategies that I’ve listed out in Chapter 2: Background & Significance. After collecting the information from the websites, I organized it into categories based on the text and analyzed this information by determining the extent to which the organizations were engaging with food sovereignty’s key goals and strategies. In the next chapter, I review the results and provide an analysis for each of my research questions.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Results, Analysis, and Contribution**

In this chapter I will discuss and analyze my findings for my research questions. I first present the results and analysis from my literature review on my first question regarding how food movements differ in their approaches to change. I then present the results and analysis for my second research question about how a deeper engagement with food sovereignty framework would help accomplish their goals more effectively. Finally, I examine the extent to which actors in U.S, food movements are engaging with food sovereignty through the United States Food Sovereignty Alliance. In the last section, I suggest how these results may contribute to enhancing the ability of food movements in the U.S. to counter the effects of the corporate food regime.

In section 4.1, I provide findings for my first research question regarding the extent to which food movements challenge power and control in the food system. In section 4.2, I examine how a deeper engagement with the strategies of the global food sovereignty movement might enable food movements to more effectively do so. I organized the findings based on five themes I found in my literature review for which scholars argue are the ways in which food movements could address their weaknesses in challenging power and control in the food system by engaging with the food sovereignty framework. In section 4.3, I provide my findings for my third research question on the extent to which food movements are engaging with the key focus areas of food sovereignty, organizing my research and findings by the same themes found through the first research question. Finally, in section 4.4, I suggest how these research questions contribute to movement building.

#### **4.1 Progressive food movements: goals, strategies and limitations**

Again, my first research question asks: *How do food movements in the United States, as examined in academic literature, differ in their goals and strategies for challenging power and control inequities in the food system?* In order to answer this question, I reviewed literature surrounding progressive and radical food movements to identify how scholars characterize their main strategies and their limitations.

As I introduced in Chapter 2: Background and Significance, food movements vary significantly in their approaches to change. One useful framework for understanding the role in which different food movements play in achieving change is the Builder, Weaver, Warrior work proposed by Stevenson, Ruhf, Lezberg & Clancy (2007). According to these authors, actors within food movements engage with different strategies and goal orientations, each serving a particular role in achieving social change. Here, I expand on how each category of movements (i.e., progressive and radical) differ in their strategies utilized to address power and control inequities in the food system.

##### *4.1.1 Goals and strategies*

Progressive food movements are oriented towards reformatational goals, or rewriting the rules of the food system. Actors within progressive food movements primarily rely on builder work as their main strategy for effecting change in the food system, in which the activities focus largely on consumer and lifestyle choices that seek to change the political system indirectly through consumers' decisions (DeLind, 2003). These strategies challenge corporate control through the development of an environmentally and economically sustainable system of agriculture and food production that relies on local resources to serve local markets and consumers. Builder strategies generally work to mobilize local communities to solve local

problems. Activists build market-based local alternatives to the dominant food system such as farmers' markets, CSAs, urban farms, and cooperatively-owned grocery stores.

Builder strategies help actors confront the corporate food regime by connecting producers and consumers. A benefit of these efforts is in the creation of spaces necessary for people to engage and have a voice in shaping the food system, aiding in the development of food democracy. Anderson (2008) suggests that democratic control of the food system is more likely in a smaller geographic scale because of face-to-face interaction and awareness of how the food system affects people in the region. Therefore, the actions by actors working within progressive food movement trends are important for laying the foundation for food sovereignty work in regards to relocalizing and decentralizing decision-making in the food systems.

The food justice movement brings attention to the ways in which progressive food movements perpetuate existing power relations and contribute to inequitable access to food by acknowledging the ways in which racial and economic inequalities are embedded within the production, distribution, and consumption of food. It is oriented towards inclusion by seeking to address injustices that disproportionately impact people based on race and class (Gottlieb and Joshi, 2010; Alkon and Mares, 2012). The food justice movement builds on progressive strategies by emphasizing transformation of the lives of socially marginalized people through explicitly challenging the systemic conditions that produce marginalization (Alkon and Mares, 2011; Cadieux & Slocum, 2015).

There is an array of strategies within the food justice movement that range from builder, where the priority is providing communities food access through working around the larger food system (Alkon and Mares, 2012), to warrior work that engage strategies to dismantle structural barriers to food access. In this way, food justice often engages weaver work, in what scholars

Johnston and Baker (2003) term “multi-scaled food politics” by linking activities that “scale-out” and “scale-up”, where scaling out refers to extending the reach and impact of local food in other geographical communities (through builder work) and scaling up involves engaging policies at local, state, or national levels to address the underlying structural causes of inequality and food insecurity (through warrior work).

Levkoe (2006) argues that food justice movements create opportunities for a transition to a food democracy since it provides opportunities for people to turn from a passive consumer into a knowledgeable and actively participating citizen. Radical food justice movements expand democratic participation in agrifood systems to include the needs and struggles of marginalized communities who may not live and work directly in the agrifood system, but who are impacted by its control and operation nonetheless (Chappell and Schneider, 2016). These more radical forms of food justice pave the way to towards food sovereignty.

#### *4.1.2 Limitations*

While these approaches are important for countering the social and environmental impacts of corporate control, they are limited in their abilities to challenge power and control inequities in some key ways. There exists a rich body of academic literature for which scholars suggest are the key limitations of progressive approaches. It has been observed that while many movement efforts arose in opposition to neoliberalism and the emergence of the CFR, and while some may oppose neoliberalism through their rhetoric, these efforts by progressive food movements unintentionally serve to uphold neoliberal ideology through their actions (Guthman, 2008). Builder actions taken by progressive approaches often reproduce neoliberalism by turning to market mechanisms and individual actions to impact change rather than demanding it of the state (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011; Schiavoni 2009; Patel 2007), which may inadvertently be

contributing to the shift away from food rights and entitlements and strengthening neoliberal ideas of individual responsibilities (Allen, 2004).

Slocum (2006) noted the tendency for these efforts to emphasize access to food and education about food choices rather than confronting deeper issues of rights and power. Progressive movements are largely dominated by white and middle- to upper-class consumers promoting ‘voting with your fork’ and other forms of “conscious consumerism” that seek change by relying on individual choice through the marketplace (Brent, et al., 2015). While important and meaningful, these interventions are often limited in their potential to create change adequate enough for achieving the complete transformation of the dominant agrifood system (Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck, 2011) because they do not work to place the control of food systems into the hands of those most often disregarded and oppressed by corporate-driven food systems. Despite good intentions, researchers have found that progressive movements reproduce existing power relations by privileging middle class and elite interests over those of structurally marginalized groups. This makes movements that rely on builder strategies such as CFS a limited framework for achieving food system transformation (Fairbairn, 2011).

One of the other main critiques of progressive approaches revolves around their focus with the local. Critics have pointed out that geographic proximity does not in itself overcome social injustices, and may actually operate to increase them (Allen, 2009). They are limited by the focus on local, ultimately “constraining rather than enabling local emancipation” (DeLind, 2010, p. 275). In other words, creating alternatives at the local level is important in order to build the spaces for change to occur, yet these spaces are limited in their ability to impact structural change because they do not engage with politics to alter the underlying power structures. Finally, without direct action towards transformational food politics, progressive approaches are

susceptible to being co-opted into the corporate food regime, losing their abilities to create lasting change.

While scholars recognize the strengths of food justice in addressing institutional racism in both the food system and local food movement, they observe that these approaches do not challenge the dynamics of capitalism that are the root causes of the injustices that they seek to address. Instead of addressing structural inequalities, efforts to include traditionally marginalized populations tend to focus on food itself with programs directed toward donations, growing and selling produce in food deserts, and educating residents about their food choices (Guthman 2008). While food justice perspectives directly confront the issues of inequality, scholars assert that their strategies are still predominantly neoliberal in their efforts to transform the system through changes in individualized consumption practices rather than broader and more collective efforts. Further, scholars argue that food justice activists reproduce neoliberalism by relying on the market to take on some of the roles abandoned by the state (Allen, 2008).

Though food justice activism is a step in the right direction, Alkon and Mares (2012) explain that this sort of citizen and community empowerment will not force a systemic change nationwide. As these authors assert, “Because the government is not seen as an ally, food justice organizations tend to choose social change strategies that work through the creation of alternative markets rather than political transformation or even reform” (Alkon and Mares, 2012, p. 358). Instead, food justice activists importantly address the immediate needs of communities through creating alternatives to work around the root causes of the issues by primarily relying on builder strategies of progressive movements to do so. These more progressive forms focus on food distribution inequalities, overlooking inequalities in participation (Loo, 2014) which is a major impediment for the movement if it is to build towards transforming the food system.

## 4.2 Engagement with food sovereignty

As a reminder, this second research question asks, *How might a deeper engagement with the goals and strategies of the food sovereignty framework enable food movements to more effectively counter these inequities?* Food sovereignty seeks to directly challenge power and control in the food system through engaging in warrior work. Below, I explain how the food sovereignty framework can be distinguished from those of progressive and food justice movements. Based on my findings from my literature review, I organized the results, described below, into four categories: (1) challenging neoliberalism directly through policy engagement, (2) empowering individuals through participative democracy, (3) focusing on the rights of people to access food and control natural resources for food production, and (4) aligning food movements with broader social and environmental movements.

### 4.2.1 Challenging neoliberalism directly through policy engagement

As I have explained in Chapter 2 of this thesis, a broad understanding of and response to neoliberalism is characteristic of the food sovereignty discourse. Directly challenging the CFR would give voice to the people who are most marginalized within the existing food system (Fairbairn, 2012). Food sovereignty activists openly confront neoliberal capitalism, providing a pathway through which the corporate food regime can be transformed (Holt-Giménez, 2011). Challenging neoliberalism can help progressive food movements in the U.S. to create a stronger alliance with food sovereignty activists worldwide, allowing food activists to move beyond questions of food access to a more comprehensive focus on entitlements to land, decision-making, and control over natural resources by those actually working the land (Alkon & Mares, 2012). A strong countermovement could generate considerable political will for the transformative reform of our food systems (Holt-Gimenez & Altieri, 2012).



Policy campaigns restricting the power of agribusiness corporations most directly confront the power of neoliberal capital. Alkon & Mares (2012) claim food sovereignty is the only framework that directly opposes the corporate food regime through large-scale campaigns to limit corporate control, such as those addressing trade and corporate mergers. Scholars argue that none of the U.S. food movements engage with global food politics to the degree that food sovereignty activists have (Alkon & Mares, 2011). While the food sovereignty movement focuses on local and regional autonomy, it recognizes that the development of localized systems depends on the enforcement of trade rules and supportive agricultural policy at the national level. Critically important, then, the approach is “essentially and explicitly political” (Windfuhr & Jonsén, 2005). Engaging with policy would allow activists to challenge the injustices in the CFR while moving toward the radical potential of food sovereignty (Alkon and Mares, 2000). This is an important distinction.

Attention to food policy is one way that food movements can scale-up and move beyond the local (Alkon & Mares, 2011). As I have explained, there is a particularly large need for progressive approaches to engage with the politics of the global to build and strengthen local food systems. While it is true that scholars characterize the focus on local as a weakness of progressive food movements, scholars also assert that the focus on local is a strength that can be built on by the food sovereignty movement. In this way, the local alternatives envisioned by progressive food movements are important in helping to pave the way to transforming the system. Scholars suggest that the limitation of localism can be overcome by articulating it to the global vision of food sovereignty and that engaging with this framework may help to ground their efforts (Bellows & Ham, 2002).

However, Kloppenburg and Hassanein (2006) warn that while food sovereignty links local efforts with global visions, it should not and could not replace the work being done by CFS advocates. The key, they assert, is in recognizing that the food sovereignty framework complements their existing work by bringing a global connection to their local focus. Importantly then, to provide this connection, local politics need to “work in conjunction with, not instead of, national and international politics” (Allen, 2004, p. 175). A food sovereignty approach allows food activists to engage with the intersection of local, national, and global policy, enhancing the ability of food movements to limit the power of the corporate food regime. In other words, food sovereignty helps transcend the local to demand consideration of the impacts of industrialization and centralization, creating an important connection between local food systems in the U.S. to local food systems around the world (Fairbairn, 2012). This connection strengthens dialogue between the activists who are dealing with immediate incremental issues like food access and activists who are dealing with broader structural issues.

#### *4.2.2 Empowering individuals through participative democracy*

The notion of empowerment is an integral pathway to food sovereignty. Patel (2012) highlights this importance by contending that it is possible “to be food secure in prison where one might continually access safe and nutritious food, yet remain fundamentally disempowered over the process and politics of the food’s production, consumption, and distribution” (p. 1). An important mechanism through which all actors in the food system may gain power and control over decision-making processes regarding their food system is through democratic participation in socio-political governance processes and civic engagement, which are at the core of food sovereignty principles. Participation and engagement can empower individuals and communities to contribute to and make decisions about their food system (Windfuhr and Jonsén, 2005). This

differs from the approaches of progressive movements, including food justice, as these movements prioritize inclusion by engaging marginalized populations as consumers, but not as food citizens participating in democratic decision-making processes regarding food and farming choices.

#### *4.2.3 Focusing on the rights of people to access food and control natural resources for food production*

One important tool that food sovereignty uses is the notion of rights (Patel 2009). Like the food justice movement, food sovereignty asserts the rights of those seen as marginalized by the current food system and the corrections of these injustices (Patel, 2009). Unlike food justice, however, food sovereignty advocates for a redistribution of wealth and power through transformational political campaigns (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2011). These campaigns promote not only the right to food itself, but the right to the social, political, and natural resources that allow them to determine and define their own systems of food production and consumption.

#### *4.2.4 Aligning food movements with broader social and environmental movements*

Food movement consists of a patchwork of different, contrasting, and often competing efforts (Brent, 2015). Scholars assert that food system change will come from powerful and sustained social pressure from the food movement, but that this is dependent on food movements overcoming their divides (Holt-Gimenez & Wang, 2011). The food sovereignty movement presents a promising framework for which the various strands of the U.S. food movement could align with broader social and environmental movements.

These findings reveal that scholars are optimistic about the role that food sovereignty can play in the U.S. context in regards to strengthening and building food movements. However, many questions remain: How are the potentials and opportunities of food sovereignty being

realized within activism in the U.S.? Are progressive food movements in the U.S. engaging with the goals and strategies of food sovereignty, and if so, is there evidence that doing so is helping them radicalize to present a greater challenge to corporate control? The next section will begin to explore these questions in addressing my third research question.

### **4.3 Food sovereignty in the U.S. context**

While my first and second research questions focused on how scholars in academic literature characterize progressive and radical trends in U.S. food movements, my third research question turns focus to how activists on the ground are beginning to radicalize through engagement with food sovereignty. As explained in Chapter 3, to answer my third research question, I reviewed the content websites of U.S. food movements connected with food sovereignty movement to examine the extent to which they are engaging with the themes identified and examined in the second research question.

The United States Food Sovereignty Alliance (USFSA) is a space made up of 36 groups, where actors within progressive food movements are converging to engage with food sovereignty in the U.S. context. The founding of the USFSA was an attempt both to unify actors in U.S. based food movements into a more cohesive and powerful movement and to situate this within the broader global struggle for food sovereignty (Brent, 2015). The USFSA represents an alliance that includes food justice, anti-hunger, labor, environmental, faith-based, and food-producer groups that work toward sustainable local agricultural systems. In this way, the USFSA helps connect local and national struggles to the international movement for food sovereignty (Brent, 2015). It is an alliance of progressive and food justice movements working towards food sovereignty in the United States and therefor provides a space to investigate how actors within food movements in the United States are engaging with the food sovereignty framework.

As stated on their website, the USFSA seeks to build the movement for food sovereignty through the following actions:

1. Build and coalesce a domestic food sovereignty movement that identifies itself as part of the broader global movement for food sovereignty and is recognized as such by international counterparts.
2. Build strategic partnerships with existing food justice and food worker initiatives in the US around the theme of ending poverty through rebuilding local food economies. Ensure that the Alliance is informed by these initiatives, honors them, and actively supports them.
3. Build strategic partnerships with international allies. Facilitate the active participation of US-based groups in global food sovereignty campaigns and initiatives (e.g., representation in the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty and involvement in global days of action called by La Via Campesina and other international allies).
4. Lead a broad-based educational campaign on food sovereignty in the US, helping communities to understand how their local struggles are connected to broader struggles and imbalances of power.
5. Raise awareness of how US foreign aid, trade, climate, and development policies are undermining food sovereignty of communities across the globe and build political capacity to challenge these policies and offer alternatives.
6. Identify common struggles that intersect global and domestic arenas – e.g., land grabbing, water rights, and corporate control of the food system. Build mechanisms for communities to effectively support each other's struggles, both within the US and across borders and continents.
7. Through grassroots organizing and alliance-building, work to build political power to bring about structural change in the US and internationally. Use the Call to Action to End the Food Crisis as a tool for organizing.
8. Build strategic alliances with related movements – e.g., climate justice, economic justice, community control of land, water, and others.
9. Work collectively to raise and share resources that support the leadership and full participation of grassroots members of the Alliance.
10. Actively support the leadership of the next generation.

Below, I present my findings on how food movements involved in the USFSA are engaging with the food sovereignty movement's goals and strategies. Interestingly, only five of the thirty-

six organizations examined mentioned food sovereignty explicitly. For example, *WhyHunger* states it as one of their key goals in relation to movement building. *SoulFire Farms* does so in their mission statement, aiming to train “the next generation of activist-farmers and strengthening the movements for food sovereignty and community self-determination”. While all but one of the organizations examined mentioned transformational advocacy strategies, none of the organizations engaged all four of the themes. However, all 36 engaged at least one of the them, explained below.

#### *4.3.1 Challenging neoliberalism directly through policy engagement*

Four organizations acknowledged corporate control as an issue with the food system. These organizations framed the issues affecting the food system as global in scope and cited specific advocacy efforts that included policies aimed at dismantling corporate power and control. *Food and Water Watch* states it explicitly in their goal as: “We stand up to corporations that put profits before people, and advocate for a democracy that improves people’s lives and protects our environment”. The *National Family Farm Coalition* states the goal of reducing corporate control in their mission, “NFFC empowers family farmers to reduce corporate control of agriculture”. *Pesticide Action Network* and *Food First* also acknowledge corporate control as a key problem in the food system, and engage in policy advocacy to dismantle control.

Five organizations engage with advocacy towards restructuring trade policies: *Community Alliance for Global Justice*, *Family Farm Defenders*, *Food First*, and *Institute for Agriculture & Trade Policy*. These organizations directly advocate for democratic debate over restructuring international trade policies, specifically the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) towards the principles and goals of food sovereignty.

### 4.3.2 Empowering individuals through participative democracy

As I examined in research question two, scholars assert food justice serves a pivotal role in building towards food sovereignty as it bridges progressive and radical movements. Maintaining and building on radical forms of food justice framing's focus on dismantling racism and empowering individuals through participative democracy is integral to the success of food sovereignty on the U.S. While all organizations were oriented towards progressive forms of food justice prioritizing inclusion by either stating the goals in their mission or including programs and policies with goals to give a voice to marginalized populations, only six organizations acknowledged structural racism and only two had specific policies or programs in place to engage marginalized populations in advocacy. For example, *Community to Community* has several projects dedicated to this end. One such project aims to dismantle racism through training farmers and activists:

“The Undoing Racism in the Food System Immersion (URFI) is a theory and action training for farming and food justice leaders to uproot systemic racism in our organizations and society. We will delve deep into the history and structural realities of food injustice and develop an understanding of the movement strategies of frontlines communities struggling for food sovereignty” (*Community to Community*, 2017).

Another program of *Community to Community* works to engage Latinos:

“In the Formación Cívica project, we work with newly registered Latino and Immigrant voters to provide non-partisan civic education and training on effective ways to participate in our democratic system”. (*Community to Community*, 2017).

This suggests that the organizations engaging with food sovereignty in the U.S. embrace a more radical form of food justice that places dismantling racism and empowering individuals through democratic participation at the forefront of their activities.

### *4.3.3 Focusing on the rights of people to access food and control natural resources for food production*

Campaigns that not only seek to promote a right to food itself, but the right to the social, political, and natural resources that allow them to determine and define their own systems of food production and consumption, is one way in which the food sovereignty approach is different from progressive movements and radical forms of food justice. Two organizations explicitly mentioned their focus on rights to food, with one focusing on the right to control and access natural resources for food production. *WhyHunger* identifies the right to food as a basic human right, connecting this right to the issue of hunger. The *SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP)* seeks to reaffirm this right and further acknowledges the right to control land and other resources with their mission to “redefine power relationships by bringing together the collective action, talents, and resources of the people within our communities”. They work “primarily in low-income communities of color to gain community control of our land and resources”. When natural resources were mentioned, organizations showed a tendency to prioritize advocacy towards anti-GMO legislation, with three organizations prioritizing land access.

### *4.3.4 Aligning with broader social and environmental movements*

As found in research question two, scholars assert that the food sovereignty movement presents a promising framework for which the various strands of the U.S. food movement could align with broader social and environmental movements. In reviewing the 36 member organizations of USFSA, I found that four organizations explicitly noted the importance of alliance building with other food movements as well as broader movements. *WhyHunger* mentions this in their mission statement “to build networks of grassroots organizations and knit together social movements that share a vision of healthy, sustainable communities leading to greater mobilization and stronger advocacy to realize an end to poverty and hunger”



(*WhyHunger, 2017*). Seven organizations connected their work to larger social and environmental campaigns, such as the Fight for Fifteen, Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ, and Climate Justice. This finding shows that, under the umbrella of food sovereignty in the U.S., broader social and environmental movements are beginning to converge into a collective campaign based on their shared goals.

#### *4.3.5 Analysis*

These organizations, connected through the USFSA, demonstrate that food justice organizations, as well as other progressive organizations, are taking steps towards engaging with the radical framing of food sovereignty. However, there are areas where they must go further. One is in maintaining food justice's framing of structural racism. As food sovereignty builds in the U.S. through alignment with food justice, it is critical that the movement does not drop its core work to dismantle racism. Secondly, these organizations must continue their efforts to build alliances capable of reaching more people to further engage in advocacy in order to truly build momentum towards dismantling power and control in the food system. As many scholars and activists assert, policy is a vital piece of changing the food system. Confronting the dominant food system through advocacy campaigns must remain a priority for activists in order to truly bring about social justice.

#### **4.4 Contribution**

Taken all together, this review of academic literature demonstrates that progressive food movements are limited to varying degrees in their ability to challenge power and control in the food system, but that there is a great deal of potential the movements to be strengthened through engaging with food sovereignty in the U.S. context. This leaves many opportunities for

progressive food movements to radicalize and scale-up through alignment with the goals and radical strategies of the food sovereignty movement. Doing so will ultimately strengthen and build the ability of U.S. food movements to achieve social justice and environmental sustainability in the food system.

Engagement with the food sovereignty framework has the potential to radicalize U.S. movements through a stronger emphasis on building collective campaigns that would allow movements to go beyond their reliance on market solutions and allow them to pursue solutions that do not depend on an individual's ability to access and buy food. These efforts can bring all of these food movements closer to challenging the corporate food regime.

While my analysis of food sovereignty efforts in the U.S show that progressive and radical food justice organizations are making steps towards aligning with the visions of food sovereignty through engaging with some of the key themes of food sovereignty, it also shows that these movements are limited in their scope and have opportunities to go further.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to understand how food movements differ in their approaches to challenging power and control inequities and to understand how a deeper engagement with the goals and strategies of the food sovereignty framework might enable activists in the U.S. to more effectively challenge power and control inequities. In order to approach this research problem, I created three research questions: 1) How do food movements in the United States, as examined in academic literature, differ in their goals and strategies for challenging power and control inequities in the food system? 2) How might a deeper engagement with the goals and strategies of the food sovereignty framework enable food movements to more effectively counter these inequities? 3) How is the United States Food Sovereignty Alliance organizing food movements to engage with food sovereignty's key goals and strategies?

I found that scholars characterize the approaches of progressive food movements, including that of food justice, as having limited impact on challenging the corporate food regime. Scholars assert that what is needed is a broad based movement that seeks to fundamentally rework the politics of food and agriculture through working to reduce the political influence of the corporate food regime. While there is no single strategy to resist the socially and environmentally destructive nature of the corporate food regime, this thesis asserts that food movements, as well as broader social and environmental movements, must put greater efforts into directly confronting the corporate food regime to more effectively accomplish their common goals. It is important that organizations focus their work on offensive strategies such as unveiling and countering structural power of dominant actors through policy advocacy.

As a political movement, food sovereignty is a call to action to redistribute resources and power within society and increase the democratic control needed to pave the future towards

sustainability and equitability. As food sovereignty becomes increasingly popular within U.S. food movements, it is important that its radical vision of directly challenging the corporate food regime through building advocacy efforts remain in tact amid the work on local alternatives. The food sovereignty frame serves as an important and much needed complement to existing U.S. food movements, giving them the connection to national and global efforts to dismantle the corporate food regime that they are lacking. To this end, in many ways, food sovereignty offers a frame for alliance building through which actors both between diverse food movements and among social and environmental movements can more effectively unite.

While this potential is increasingly recognized among the scholar community, there is still unrealized opportunity for organizations and activists within progressive food movements to engage with food sovereignty in a joint effort to alter the course of the corporate food regime and restore democracy to the system for consumers, farmers, and farmworkers alike. Only when these movements become a consolidated force will they be successful in achieving their shared vision of a sustainable and equitable food future.

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