Food Security,
Food Sovereignty and
Food Democracy:
Elevating Our Power to Be Architects of Change

Omari Washington
Sustainable Environmental Systems
Pratt Institute
December 16, 2016
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I. Introduction

Access to food is a universal right for all people that was established by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, signed by 160 nations as of 2012. This right is nevertheless undermined by the realities of the global food system - a system that is unsustainable, unjust and providing inadequate nutrition to the world.

Globalized agricultural production has provided privileged citizens in some countries with unprecedented access to a bounty of food options that transcend national borders or seasonal fluctuations. Yet, despite this wide-reaching food interdependence, the impact of globalization has been uneven, suggesting an unsustainable future. While democratic nations, such as the United States, may feel disconnected from issues of global inequity regarding food systems, there is significant and accelerating evidence of imbalance regarding access to food in America.

Consequently, the United States is facing a pivotal moment where great change will occur in food systems. There are many reasons why change is required: On a macro level, there are urgent questions about the impacts of climate change on agricultural production and the global trend towards urbanization on food distribution. On a more micro level, our nation faces an aging workforce of agricultural producers and a rapid loss of agricultural land, as well as mounting
concerns about ‘food deserts’ in low-income communities. More, persistent hunger is an indicator of the limitations of our current system.

Change is not optional! Attempts to correct course across the country already involve forward-thinking members representing three general groups: consumers, producers and nonprofits. Though each of these actors strives to increase access to healthy, locally grown food, there is much to be done. The State of New York is well positioned to take advantage of its unique attributes and resources to be a national and global leader for food democracy. The critical questions become: Will New York create policies that result in more equitable and democratic food access for all? How well will New York support programs that increase food sovereignty? What innovations might New York create to address issues of food waste, the need to grow food in urban areas, or to create more nutritious value-added products? Given the continuum of food security to food democracy to food sovereignty, how can New York lead and create equitable outcomes for all? Clearly, addressing inequalities is essential to the development of a sustainable food system.

To address these questions, this paper has three objectives

➢ To define what the issues are all about:

This paper will define food sovereignty and food democracy

➢ To review who is impacted by these issues:

This paper will discuss the policies and programs that impact consumers, producers and nonprofit groups as they relate to issues of food sovereignty and
food democracy. It is evident that the history of farming in the United States and evolving public policy, specifically the Farm Bills, have contributed to our current failing system.

➢ To identify how these issues can be resolved:

This paper will specify solutions and recommendations to issues of food sovereignty and food democracy, using illustrations from my work in two New York based projects. Public will to address the United States’ role in the globalization of food may be limited, but there are many strategies in New York that attempt to sustain farming communities and promote the consumption of more nutritious, less processed, local food.
II. What are we talking about? Definitions

Given the various inputs to the food system, understanding the three organizing concepts of food security, food democracy and food sovereignty is crucial to building a system that provides access to everyone. There is considerable overlap with regards to aims of each concept, yet the methods and actual outcomes of each are important to both short-term and long-term success.

Food Security

Concern about food security has likely existed throughout the existence of human life. Both Biblical referencesii and historical evidence point to times of famine; granaries (efforts to store food) have been in use over 10,000 yearsiii; and both ancient China and Egyptiv are noted to have experienced times of famine.

While ancient cultures may have been more susceptible to food shortage, food security is also a very modern challenge that is currently addressed in many ways in both research and policy.v Many international organizations have defined the term, and over time, the term has become increasingly complex (see Table A).

The concept of food insecurity, however, is much more straightforward. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines it as a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. Communities in which food insecurity predominates are often characterized as “food deserts.”
While the USDA notes that there are many ways to define which areas are considered “food deserts,” and many ways to measure food store access for individuals and neighborhoods, a food desert is generally defined as a place where there is both limited access to fresh and healthy food and where a large percentage of residents live more than a mile from a traditional supermarket. A quick study of the three communities served by Hudson Valley Seed might challenge the adequacy of that definition.

The term, food insecurity, is used throughout the paper to describe the condition of lacking access to food, particularly unprocessed fresh food, including fruits, vegetables, and minimally processed dairy products. Food insecurity is now understood to be a significant social concern that has evolved from the notion of simply providing sufficient food to eat to encompass concerns about health, food preferences, and human rights. In addition, climate change, population growth and soaring food prices are global threats of food security that have the potential to cause increased insecurity in the near future. A recent surge in avocado prices has made me reconsider ordering a favorite sandwich at a local restaurant.

**Food Sovereignty and Food Democracy**

While access to healthy food can potentially be solved within a food security paradigm, it has failed to account for externalities, such as fair pay for farm workers and environmental degradation that results from a global industrial system.
Writing in Food First’s Backgrounder, fall 2003, Peter Rosset argues that

"Food sovereignty goes beyond the concept of food security... [Food security] means that... [Everyone] must have the certainty of having enough to eat each day [,] ... but says nothing about where that food comes from or how it is produced."

As a young social movement, "food sovereignty" is based on the idea that the people who produce, distribute, and consume food should control the mechanisms and policies of food production and distribution. The idea of food sovereignty is in contrast to the practice that corporations and market institutions should dominate the global food system. "It is about redirecting the values, resources, and joys of food, to focus on the health and livelihoods of each country’s farmers and citizens themselves, rather than the needs and profits of a global, financially-driven and speculative marketplace that serves investors and large multi-national companies." Thus, food sovereignty has become an international movement that ties the distribution of food to the distribution of power among people and nations. Food sovereignty, therefore, requires democracy. The process of achieving it is slow and involves education about what exists and listening to the desires of the most people possible. The calls for food democracy recognize that the question of food is fundamentally social. Who should provide food and how?

In many ways the food sovereignty movement is a response to disillusion with the concept of “food security.” Food security is considered to be the dominant global discourse on food provisioning and policy based on systems of global efficiency and
productivity. Corporate farming, specialized production, land concentration and trade liberalization are all part of the concept of ‘food security”. More, this ‘food security” concept as it has been practiced is considered to be a contributor to widespread dispossession of small producers and global ecological degradation. Calls for food sovereignty have emerged with concern about the increasing concentration of power in the global industrial food regime. For example, ten companies account for nearly 75% of the global seed market. 

Food democracy can be seen as a bridge to food sovereignty. It advocates for a break from the status quo of global corporate food systems and challenges the concept of food security, but can still allow that New York State is an important component of bringing about change.

The aims of “food democracy” are many including:

1. **Shortening food supply chains.** Otherwise, people have: “food from nowhere”, as Josè Bovè puts it. A goal is to buy directly from local producers or opting for Fair Trade products may bring us closer to this goal.

2. **Healthy food.** Put public health before profit.

3. **Protect local lifestyles and livelihoods.** Food cooperatives, local models of community control of resources, such as the Greening of Detroit, and support for Black farmers provide models of participatory democracy.
4. Reconnect local human, cultural and land ecologies. Farmers markets and civic food networks, for example, encourage the practice of “food citizenship” and help develop a democratic food system.

5. Tackle structural problems with the food system. These include food deserts in poor neighborhoods and rules that grant corporations property rights over seeds. An example of inequity: There are 4 x number of grocery stores in predominately white neighborhoods compared to predominately black areas. \(^{11}\)

**Challenges beyond Definitions**

Moving towards food democracy and ultimately food sovereignty tests the ability of communities to be architects of change. It is not easy to disrupt established conducts pertaining to our government. While there are many supporters of these ideas, detractors point to food security as a preferred method of providing healthy food for all.

It is argued that the idea of “food security has without doubt increased crop yields and had some success in combatting world hunger.” Moreover, many small farmers and peasants are not in their situations by an idealistic choice but out of hardship and necessity. Small-scale farming is not necessarily a freely chosen life-style and farmers in least developed and highly developed countries do not face the same challenges.
What we know for sure is that world hunger – hunger in New York – continues due to challenges of access and issues of unequal power. With respect to food, both the purchasing and political power of many poor communities is limited.

How do we eliminate disparities (defined as different outcomes or community conditions based on race, class, zip code, etc.) that result from institutional or program structures (defined as public policy or public programs)?

How can we become architects of change in our state and local situations? How do we hear the voices of various communities as we address these questions?

The next section of this paper examines the roles of three potential architects of change—producers, consumers and nonprofit organizations.
CASE-IN-POINT ABOUT FOOD SECURITY:
A TALE OF THREE CITIES (...OR TWO CITIES AND A HAMLET)

As the program Coordinator for Hudson Valley Seed, my team and I work in the nexus of youth empowerment and food democracy in New York State. Working in three school districts, we educate children in school gardens and through curriculum-integrated lessons focused on healthy eating, food literacy, outdoor learning, and academic success. We intend to raise leaders in the local food movement who are equipped with the knowledge and critical thinking to tackle community challenges of food access, food democracy and food sovereignty.

Through our work we witness on a daily basis the inequities of the food system. Our students deal with issues of hunger, obesity and living in communities that lack grocery stores. This is a reality that no child should have to face – especially those who live in our prosperous state and nation.

Through our work in three communities, we witness the inequities in communities’ ability to have “physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food.”1

Take a look at our three communities and observe different outcomes despite being in the same locality.:

- **Garrison**: a wealthy small hamlet with no grocery store
- **Beacon**: a small city experiencing shifting demographics and gentrification. There is one small grocery store with a poor selection of produce.
- **Newburgh**: an urban cluster of poor inner-city residents alongside wealthier suburban/rural communities. Here one finds significant food options in the town – but no grocery store in the center.

To be clear, eating a banana from Chile in December is not a terrible thing to do, but New York State producers grow enough apples to supply our state’s needs.
III> Who are we talking about?

Producers, Consumers, Nonprofit Groups

An interesting statistic has often been told about world demographics if the world were 100 people: if the entire world were only 100 people: 1 would be dying of starvation, 11 would be undernourished, and 22 would be overweight. This is striking data, which illustrates “who” is impacted by the worldwide issues of food security, food sovereignty and food democracy.

Since the Great Depression, most Americans perhaps give little thought to issues of food security. As a prosperous nation, most Americans fall well above “physiological needs” (like food) on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (see Table B). Nevertheless, food insecurity is a very real phenomena in the United states, affecting about 14 percent of households. Although New York has the persona of being a place that people come to for ‘self-actualization” in Maslow’s hierarchy, one in every seven New Yorkers struggles with hunger.

There are three critical voices in New York’s quest for food security, food sovereignty and food democracy: producers, consumer and nonprofit groups. As we think about each group, let’s consider our two introductory questions: what are the policy and program contexts in which each of these groups relate to equitable and democratic food access for all?
Producers

Food security, food sovereignty, and food democracy, it might be argued, have been ideals that have been hard-wired into the psyche of the American people. For example, Thomas Jefferson encouraged a “national agrarian identity.” He saw this as a democracy comprised of yeomen farmers who would propel the nation’s stability and prosperity. In 1801, about 95% of the nation’s population were involved in agriculture. During the early to mid-1930s, one in four Americans still lived on a farm. Although the Great Depression affected all sectors of society, many scholars contend that the farming economy was the hardest-hit because of the convergence of bank closures, home foreclosures, drought, dust storms, and floods. Others contend that this “farm crisis,” was “triggered not by too little food, but by too much” due to overzealous planting during the 1920s, combined with innovative advances in both mechanization and soil inputs. This situation accelerates the producers’ reliance on support from public policy in a quest to sustain food security, which has had unintended consequences for food sovereignty and food democracy.

Reflecting on this historical context significance, Professor William S. Eubanks writes:

“[I]n the more than two centuries since U.S. independence, our nation’s deep agrarian roots have had a profound influence on our increasingly complex federal farming and food policies that have attempted to adapt over time to meet the prevailing needs of farmers, consumers, and ultimately the national economy.”xvi
Recognizing the importance of farmers in food security, during the Great Depression the federal government enacted a farm bill entitled the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, which “emerged as one of the most ambitious social, cultural, and economic programs ever attempted by the U.S. government.” (Citation). In essence, the Farm Bill was designed to save small farming in America, and it signaled a return to the Jeffersonian ideal of an agrarian democracy.

While it was thought that these subsidies and price controls would be temporary, pending war in the 1940s made the provisions permanent. Recognition that the years of malnutrition created by the Great Depression created a pool of potential soldiers who were plagued with health problems tied the idea of “farm security” to “national security”.

Although the Farm Bill was initially received with popular acclaim, there were unintended consequences: Farm income increases were prompted by artificial market supports. The introduction of commodity subsidies became sensitive to political influence, resulting in the gradual narrowing of commodity subsidies to a select handful of crops. Subsequent policy efforts, such as the 1948 Agricultural Act, brought fundamental changes in growing technology, agricultural mechanization and increased efficiency in processing. All of these developments influenced the demise of small farming in the United States.
A new Farm Bill was passed every five to seven years ultimately leading to the so-called “Green Revolution.” This revolution led to both a tripling in grain yields (namely of the wheat, rice, and corn that prove to be the most heavily subsidized crops today) and, as many argue, divesting impact for rural life. For example, Richard Manning argues that the green revolution disrupted long-standing patterns of rural life worldwide, moving a lot of no-longer-needed farm workers into the world’s most severe poverty, leading to new pesticides, herbicides, and agricultural mechanization and resulting in overproduction and depressing crop prices. Unlike the earlier farm crisis, however, the government did not swoop in to protect the small farmer. Instead, larger farms that had the ability to stay afloat despite decreased crop prices began to purchase small and foreclosed farms at below-market rates and to create the agribusiness lobby. “Food sovereignty” and “food democracy” were ultimately sacrificed in this political dynamic. As a result of these policies favoring large farms, it became more difficult to make or sustain a living as a small or family farmer. Table D presents some of the challenges.

Challenges for Black farmers are even direr. During the 50 years following the emancipation of slaves, and against all odds, African Americans in the South acquired an estimated 15 million acres of land. Today, African American owner-operators of farms own only about two million acres of land. The broad consensus is that the loss of much of this land has been involuntary. These farmers have
generally expressed a specific interest in preserving their farms yet face greater challenges.

The public response to the plight of these Black farmers is weak. For example, in the Miscellaneous Title of the 2014 Farm Bill, only $50 million is allocated for socially disadvantaged farmers. This limited funding reduces capabilities to increase outreach, support of farm operations, and augment socially disadvantaged farmers’ capacity to get their crops to market.

Three Hopeful Signs for Food Sovereignty and Democracy

There are a number of relatively small initiatives that can support small or family producers. Here are three examples:

First: The Specialty Crops and Horticulture Title, the Crop Insurance Title, and the final Miscellaneous Title. Under Specialty Crops and Horticulture, quadruples funding for the Farmers Market and Local Food Program. This program gives grants to rural and urban communities to increase access to farm-fresh food and help rural farmers get that food to these urban markets, particularly in the area of specialty crops, which includes non-subsidy crops like many fruits and vegetables. In this Title, there are increased funds for farmers who want to grow specialty crops.

Finally, in response to significant market demand for more organics at affordable prices, the Specialty Crop and Horticulture Title includes many sections on organics with provisions for increase regulation and certification as well as supporting
farmer’s efforts to develop organic operations. More, the Crop Insurance Title helps mitigate risk for farmers by including all commodities as well as underserved crops like fruits and vegetables without making any cuts to insurance funding programs. Three key areas under this Title include a new supplemental coverage option for farmers, expanded crop insurance for fruits and vegetables, and two new stand-alone revenue protection programs for cotton and peanut growers.

Second: Under New York State’s Article 25-AAA of the Agriculture and Markets Law, the Commissioner is authorized to administer three grant programs focused on farmland protection. The Farmland Protection Planning Grant program, or FPPG, assists county and municipal governments in developing agricultural and farmland protection plans which recommend policies and projects aimed at maintaining the economic viability of the State’s agricultural industry and its supporting land base. The Farmland Implementation Grant Program, or FPIG, assists local governments, land trust organizations, and soil and water conservation districts in implementing farmland protection plans, including those created through FPPG. The Land Trust Grant program is directed at land trusts to encourage activities that will assist counties and municipalities with their agricultural and farmland protection efforts.

Third: A deepening of the Farmland Protection Program is the Hudson Valley Farmland Protection Program (2016). This program is the first-ever regionally targeted farmland protection grants program provides funding for strategic
preservation of agricultural lands in the state. It has awarded $20 million in grants through the Hudson Valley Agricultural Enhancement Program to help farms and nonprofits in the region protect valuable, at-risk farmland from future development and maintain the land’s use for agricultural purposes. This unprecedented commitment is the state’s first-ever regionally targeted farmland conservation grant program. If this commitment continues, it has the potential to protect more than 5,600 acres of active farmland on 28 farms in seven counties through permanent conservation easements.

**Security, Sovereignty and Democracy**

The agricultural policy history in the United States is a prime example of why advocates believe that “food security” is necessarily but not sufficient policy. The United States and New York have certainly achieved food security for most people. However, this security has come at a cost for both food democracy and food sovereignty for small and family producers.

**Consumers**

Given agricultural policies and programs over the past few decades, and the decline in the proportion of citizens who are farmers, consumers are highly dependent upon external factors for access to food and to the types of food available.

Indeed, if food security is defined as being within one mile of a grocery store, then there are 1.5 million New Yorkers who are food insecure. There is still small but
growing sensitivities to the origin of food and its quality that are reflected in both public policy and local programs.

**The Impact of Farm Policies on Consumers**

Agricultural policies that have supported larger commercial farms, emphasized a few crops, and focused on heavy use of pesticides affect consumers as well as small and family farmers.

- Food security is still elusive for a large number of Americans, and racial disparities in food security are clearly evident. More than one in five Latinos and African Americans are food insecure as compared to just one in ten (10%) White, non-Hispanics and one in eight (13%) Americans overall.[iii]

- Because the farm bill heavily privileges one crop that can be used in many products, consumers have more processed food that have often been grown with heavy use of pesticides and additives. [xvi]

- This has decreased the nutritional value of food that people are consuming.[xvii]

- Increase in childhood obesity, such as in the Hudson Valley example previously discussed, is often linked to this situation

- For this reason consumers are offered increasing quantities of low cost high calories food choices and unhealthy food is less expensive.[xviii]
As farmlands became suburbs, states actively disinvested in cities resulting in a decline in basic services, food deserts

**The Consumers Ability to Make Choices**

Many consumers want to increase their capacity to meet their needs for food security, or to select foods from noncommercial sources are several. This ability to make choices is challenging for both the food insecure and highly food aware consumers.

For the food insecure:

- **Poverty can limit choices.** In 2015, 59 percent of food-insecure households participated in at least one of the three major federal food assistance programs – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP-formerly Food Stamp Program), The National School Lunch Program (NSLP), and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) -- in the prior month.

- **Dependence on service providers can limit choices.** Food banks and food rescue organizations provide access by redirecting food to areas of need/food insecure communities.

- **Options for micro-gardening, community gardens, and urban farms** and increase choice among poor families and communities. Urban farms
(victory gardens during World War II with 20 million Americans\textsuperscript{xxxiii}) have already proven value.

In addition to community gardens, for the “aware” consumer who wants to reduce their risks

- **Farmers markets give some consumers choices.** There is a movement of “locavores” - people who are committed to eating primarily locally produced meat and produce. For most of human history, most people were “locavores”\textsuperscript{xxxiv} - In 2008, Congress defined “local” or “regional” food as being within a 400-mile radius, or within one day to be transported from the farm to the market.\textsuperscript{xxxv} Now “locavores,” especially in urban areas, are a small movement that some might consider radical.

- **Ability to pay a premium** at supermarkets such as Whole Foods increases choice.

**Consumers, Food Security, Food Sovereignty and Food Democracy**

A high level of diligence, and significant financial resources, are necessary for many people to exercise food choices in their communities. The many fragmented and small initiatives really do not yet create food democracy for most people. Food security is also not guaranteed for a small but significant part of the population in the United States, yielding significant racial disparities.\textsuperscript{xxxvi}

**Nonprofit Groups**
The status of both the producers and consumers has led to increased efforts by state agencies as well as advocacy and service groups working to address a variety of concerns. On a national level, various nonprofits have worked for decades to combat the negative effects of the Farm Bill and other food related policies. Over the last decade in New York, advocacy and service groups working to strengthen the regional food system have become savvier at capitalizing on the progressive nature of the current political climate. Through reports and recommendations, the groups have provided focused directives about how state agencies can create better outcomes for producers and consumers. The following are examples efforts in a large city and a more rural community.

**New York City (NYC)**

In 2010, NYC Council Speaker, Christine Quinn, drafted FoodWorks: A Vision to Improve NYC’s Food System, an historic report that serves as a comprehensive food plan for the city. The report identified goals, strategies and specific proposals in five key areas of the system: agricultural production, processing, distribution, consumption and post-consumption. While there were no actual policies attached to this report, it served as a springboard to pass legislation that targeted tangible components of the plan. The 2013 update on FoodWorks highlighted the successes that stemmed from these recommendations. Local laws 48 and 49 of 2011 added an urban agriculture assessment to the vacant city-owned property online database and eased zoning restrictions on rooftop greenhouses, respectively.
Major improvements were also made to programmatic aspects of the NYC’s operations. For example, the NYC Department of Education made local purchasing a priority by spending $25 million at regional farms in 2012, while also doubling the number of salad bars at schools. Another milestone in addressing equity in the system was the increased acceptance of Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards at Greenmarkets, which grew to 51 (out of 54) Greenmarkets and 11 youth markets in 2012, up from 6 in 2006. xxxix

The Hudson Valley

Scenic Hudson’s Hudson Valley Foodshed Plan monetized the unmet need of NYC for regional food and identified the Hudson Valley’s capacity to meet that need. In addition, the report stated the cost of $720 million required to conserve the 650,000 acres of at-risk farmland. This clear enunciation of problem and solution led to the allocation of $20 million in funding through NYS’ Farmland Protection Program.xli

Similarly, the Local Economies Project (LEP) published a report titled, The Hudson Valley Food Hub Initiative, in 2013xlii and provided crucial guidance to NYS’ Dept. of Agriculture and Markets around creating food hubs in the state. As a grant making entity, LEP was also able to lead the way by funding FarmBridge (formerly Farm-to-Table Co-Packers), a food hub in Kingston, NY. xlii
The Vital Role of Nonprofit Organizations

Community-based groups and nonprofit organizations that help identify the needs of people, and the system as a whole, directly influence efforts like the one undertaken by NYC. The recent targeted work of nonprofits in both New York City and the Hudson Valley has shaped new developments in a statewide approach.

IV. How can we elevate our power to be architects of change?

As producers, consumers and nonprofit organizations attempt to deal with the issues of food security, food sovereignty, and food democracy. I am encouraged by the many important activities being undertaken by actors in each of these sectors. Further progress I believe will occur as these actors behave as architects of change, rather than passive recipients of change that is externally imposed on them by others. Strengthening our collective capacity to be architects of change depends on three requirements:

1. A systems approach
2. Effective collaboration based on adaptive leadership
3. Strategic investments

In this concluding section of my thesis, I will examine each of these requirements.

First requirement: A systems approach

To truly make change in food systems, consumers, producers and nonprofit organizations will need to develop stronger systems thinking and systems approaches. Systems thinking is the process of understanding how various actors influence one another within a complete entity, or larger system. Food democracy
will require more intensive thought about how various elements of food sovereignty work together to survive or perish. Rather than focusing on the individuals within an organization it prefers to look at a larger number of interactions within the organization and in between organizations as a whole.

I am influenced by the work of Peter Senge who defines systems work as “webs of interdependence” that is in a constant state of continuous adaptation and improvement. Change efforts create resistance, Senge writes, because they run directly into interpersonal and cultural issues embedded in the prevailing system that resist change. To overcome this resistance and move toward food democracy it will be essential to develop reflection and inquiry skills so that the real issues can be opened for discussion. Therefore, Senge states that there are four challenges in initiating changes.

- There must be a compelling case for change.
- There must be time to change.
- There must be help during the change process.
- As the perceived barriers to change are removed, it is important that some new problem, not before considered important or perhaps not even recognized, doesn't become a critical barrier. [7]

To become true architects of change, a structural and systemic approach will be needed. Structural approaches recognize that there are complex interactions within and across institutions. Structural approaches mean all the systemic factors (e.g.,
political, social, economic and so forth) that support disparities and inequities must be addressed including

- Operational arrangements within institutions and between institutions.
- Ways that institutions are aligned at the community or societal level
- The way institutions distribute benefits and burdens, convey information and assign meaning

Further, a systems approach will require all of the voices to seek to understand and to address the root causes of the challenges. While this emphasis on root causes seems simple and logical, it is often difficult in the press of deep social challenges.

CASE-IN-POINT ABOUT the DIFFICULTY OF ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES

An oft-told tale about the difficulty of systems thinking: One day a group of villagers was working in the fields by a river. Suddenly someone noticed a baby floating downstream. A woman rushed out and rescued the baby, brought it to shore and cared for it. During the next several days, more babies were found floating downstream, and the villagers rescued them as well. Before long, however, the village became exhausted with all this rescue work. Some villagers suggested they go upstream to discover how all these babies were getting into the river in the first
Second requirement: Effective Collaboration including adaptive leadership

If we truly want to create a systems approach to food security, food serenity and food democracy, consumers, produces and nonprofit organizations must take responsibility for the shared problem solving that will be required. Consensual responses require effective collaboration. The question of how to do this work together makes relevant the work of Ron Heifetz and his colleagues on adaptive leadership.

Heifetz makes the distinction between technical challenges and adaptive challenges. Technical problems involve the application of existing knowledge and expertise to problems. The availability of accepted answers to a problem make it possible to focus on finding and applying known solutions.

In contrast we must recognize that the issues of food democracy are not technical challenges, although incremental policy or program approaches may treat them as technical problems. An important way to distinguish a technical from an adaptive challenge is to determine whether there is a preexisting solutions; adaptive challenges required created solutions. Therefore, those of us attempting to solve the challenges must engage in adaptive leadership – that is the work of actually developing acceptable solutions and making the required adaptations. Adaptive work often requires developing new values, habits and behaviors – effective collaboration!
Adaptive leadership is not for the faint of heart. It entails resolving conflicting values, making difficult choices, and “loss”. Therefore, in the area of food democracy, I suggest that adaptive leadership based be based on several ideas:

- Solutions must, with planning and intention families in communities and neighborhoods.

- Solutions depend upon collective responsibility in holding institutions and systems accountable. Affected populations must be engaged.

- Given the deep-seated disparities that exist, successful solutions will assure that communities of color have an authentic impact on decision-making.

- Solutions supporting food democracy also focus on overcoming barriers to: Awareness, Affordability, Accessibility, Availability, Accommodation and Acceptability.

- Continuously evaluate and adapt

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**CASE-IN-POINT- THE New York RESTORATION PROJECT FIGHTS FOR COMMUNITY GARDENS and GREEN COMMUNITIES**

Soon after I graduated from college, I worked for the New York (City) restoration project, an organization founded and led by Bette Midler. Among other roles, I was involved in collaborative leadership with the city and many nonprofit organizations to plant a million trees in New York City from 2007 - 2015 (this goal was achieved.)

NYRP also was involved in strategic, multi-organizational efforts to strengthen and preserve the right of local residents to use vacant lots as community gardens. These gardens are an essential component of food security and food democracy in low-resource communities.
Third requirement: Strategic Investments

Strategic investments will be required to create a greater sense of food democracy.

Here are some guiding principles for future policy and investments:

1. **Reckon with our history related to food.**
2. Focus on **structural and institutional issues** rather than only programmatic activities.
3. **Acknowledge: race-neutral rules are rarely race-neutral; make equity a priority.**
4. **Move Away from universal policies toward targeted universal policies**
5. **It matters who writes the rules, so ensure collaboration among many voices.**
6. Address food democracy **inequality explicitly but not necessarily exclusively with a focus on root causes.**
7. Focus on **impacts** rather than intentions. Ask who is impacted by the circumstances we face and ensure that the voices of those impacted can be heard. Pay attention to unintended consequences.
V. Conclusion: In Search of Equity

Without question both the United States and New York have a bountiful harvest in the midst of serious concerns about food security, food sovereignty and food democracy. Will – and how well – will we address these questions of equity?

Change is not optional!

To move forward I recommend that New Yorkers:

• Address food democracy and food security issues explicitly but not necessarily exclusively with a focus on root causes. Make equity an ongoing priority

• Focus on impacts rather than intentions. Ask who is impacted by the circumstances we face and ensure that the voices of those impacted can be heard. Pay attention to unintended consequences.

• Focus on systems - structural and institutional equality - rather than only personal activities. Identify the resources available to address structural issues

This paper suggests that there are many hopeful signs for positive change in the midst of these serious challenges. I conclude that our foundational need is a question of leadership and collaboration. It is, at core, leadership efforts that have been fragmented among small farmers, consumers and nonprofit groups. Indeed,
we must move from a series of important activities toward a more strategic vision that can be communicated to a broader, mainstream public. There is significant and accelerating evidence of that the voices of consumers, producers and nonprofit groups is growing in this direction. Together, we will be architects of both policy and program change.
## TABLE A:

### DEFINITIONS OF FOOD SECURITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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| 1974  | World Food Summit             | Availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices.  
 |       |                               | [25]                                                                                                                                       |
| 1983  | FAO                           | Ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food that they need.  
 |       |                               | [26]                                                                                                                                       |
| 1986  | World Bank report “Poverty and Hunger” [27] | Access of all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.                                                                 |
| 1996  | World Food Summit             | Food security, at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels [is achieved] when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.  
 |       |                               | [30]                                                                                                                                       |
| 2001: | The State of Food Insecurity | Food security [is] a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life[31]. |
| 2008 | International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), an intergovernmental panel under the sponsorship of the United Nations and the World Bank, | Food sovereignty is defined as the right of peoples and sovereign states to democratically determine their own agricultural and food policies."[31] |
Table B

Maslow's hierarchy of needs

- **Physiological**
  - breathing, food, water, sex, sleep, homeostasis, excretion

- **Safety**
  - security of body, of employment, of resources, of morality, of the family, of health, of property

- **Love/Belonging**
  - friendship, family, sexual intimacy

- **Esteem**
  - self-esteem, confidence, achievement, respect of others, respect by others

- **Self-actualization**
  - morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, acceptance of facts
Table C

Food Insecurity in the United States in 2015, from Feeding America

- 42.2 million Americans lived in food insecure households, including 29.1 million adults and 13.1 million children.

- 13% of households (15.8 million households) were food insecure.

- 5% of households (6.3 million households) experienced very low food security.

- Households with children reported food insecurity at a significantly higher rate than those without children, 17 percent compared to 11 percent.

- Households that had higher rates of food insecurity than the national average included households with children (17%), especially households with children headed by single women (30%) or single men (22%), Black non-Hispanic households (22%) and Hispanic households (19%).
Table D: Status of Small and Family Farmers xlvi

Across the United States:

- There is a decline in farmers overall, from 6 million in 1910 to 2 million today.
- The age of farmers in the past twenty years has risen dramatically xlvii
- Only 10% of these older farmers have heirs who are willing or able to take over the family business.
- One-fourth of farms will change hands in the next 20 years.
- There are nearly 30% fewer young farm operators (under 45) now than in 2002.

In New York:

- As of 2010, 92% of New York’s 10,314 senior farmers do not have a young, under age 45, operator working with them. This subset of seniors farming without young farm operators owns a collective $4.3 billion in farmland and buildings and owns or operates 1.7 million acres of land in farms.
- Twenty-one percent of principal farm operators in New York have farmed for 10 years or less. These beginning farmers produced 9% of the market value of agricultural products sold in 2012.
- Nearly 30% of New York’s principal farm operators are 65 or older. Their footprint is significant: Senior farmers in New York steward 30% (2.1 million acres) of the land in farms and own more than $5.3 billion in land and farm buildings. In 2012, they generated $1.3 billion, 24% of the total market value of agricultural products sold.
- “Changing rural demographics will result in an estimated 70% of US farmland changing hands in the next 20 years.”
There are Biblical references to food insecurity and famine throughout both the New and Old testaments. A few examples are as follows: Luke 21:11 There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. Psalm 107:34 A fruitful land into a salty waste...Genesis 41:53-57 The seven years of plenty that occurred in the land of Egypt came to an end, and the seven years of famine began to come...Matthew 24:7, and there will be famines and ... in various places. Genesis 12:10. The famine was severe in the land. Jeremiah 52:6 On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. Luke 14:12-14 “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” 2 Kings 6:25-29 And there was a great famine in Samaria, as they besieged it, until a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and the fourth part of a kab of dove’s dung for five shekels of silver. Acts 11:28 ... there would be a great famine over all the world Haggai 1:10 Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. Ezekiel 5:17 I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will rob you of your children. Pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword upon you. Ezekiel 5:16 When I send against you the deadly arrows of famine, arrows for destruction, which I will send to destroy you, and when I bring more and more famine upon you and break your supply of bread. Ezekiel 4:17 I will do this that they may lack bread and water, and look at one another in dismay, and rot away because of their punishment. Lamentations 4:4-10 The tongue of the nursing infant sticks to the roof of its mouth for thirst; the children beg for food, but no one gives to them. Those who once feasted on delicacies perish in the streets; those who were brought up in purple embrace ash heaps. Now their face is blacker than soot; they are not recognized in the streets; their skin has shriveled on their bones; it has become as dry as wood.... Lamentations 1:11 All her people groan as they search for bread; they trade their treasures for food to revive their strength. Jeremiah 5:17 They shall eat up your harvest and your food; they shall eat up your sons and your daughters; they shall eat up your flocks and your herds; they shall eat up your vines and your fig trees; 2 Kings 8:1 “Arise, and depart with your household, and sojourn wherever you can, for the LORD has called for a famine, and it will come upon the land for seven years.” 2 Kings 25:3 On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. Haggai 1:11 ... for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors.”
iii This http://winjah.blogspot.com/2014/02/in-your-granary-eating-your-grains. The question of how to store food from one harvest to the next has plagued humanity since the Neolithic (c. 10,000 BCE- the oldest granary ever found dates to 9000BCE in the Jordan Valley), and we’ve only had preservative techniques like canning and freezing in the Modern period (i.e. post-Medieval). Of human society, so how did ancient societies go about keeping their food safe?


v http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4671e/y4671e06.htm

vi http://tuspubs.tuskegee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1031&context=pawj

vii (USDA, 2014a).

(vii) (http://tuspubs.tuskegee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1031&context=pawj)

viii http://www.iatp.org/files/2015_01_06_Agrodemocracy_JC_JC_f_0.pdf

ix Examples of international conversations: the Forum for Food Sovereignty in Sélingué, Mali, 27 February 2007; In September 2008, Ecuador became the first country to enshrine food sovereignty in its constitution. Since then at least five additional countries have integrated food sovereignty into their national constitutions or laws. These countries are Venezuela, Mali, Bolivia, Nepal and Senegal; and most recently Egypt (2014 Constitution) [5]. In 2011 more than 400 people from 34 European countries met from the 16th to 21 August in Krems, Austria to plan the development of a European movement for food sovereignty. Since 2011 Europe-wide gatherings and actions have continued, including the Good Food March, where citizens, youth and farmers came together to call for a greener and fairer agricultural policy in Europe, as well as democratic reform of Europe’s Common Agricultural Policy.

x http://www.etcgroup.org/content/just-3-companies-control-more-half-53-global-commercial-market-seed


xii http://www.100people.org/statistics_100stats.php?section=statistics
iii See Maslow, A. H. (1943). "A theory of human motivation". Psychological Review. 50 (4): 370–396. doi:10.1037/h0054346. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory in psychology that describes the stages of growth in humans. Maslow used the terms "physiological", "safety", "belongingness" and "love", "esteem", "self-actualization", and "self-transcendence" to describe the pattern that human motivations generally move through. Physiological needs, perhaps the most important, are the physical requirements for human survival and therefore should be met first.


xvi (Eubanks, 2013, p. 1).


xviii Eubanks, 2013).

http://tuspubs.tuskegee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1031&context=pawj

xix #e.).
“It is hereby found and declared that agricultural lands are irreplaceable state assets. In an effort to maintain the economic viability, and environmental and landscape preservation values associated with agriculture, the state must explore ways to sustain the state’s valuable farm economy and the land base associated with it. It is therefore declared the policy of the state to promote local initiatives for agricultural and farmland protection.”

- Statement of Legislative Findings and Intent, Article 25-AAA, Agriculture and Markets Law

Counties are eligible for grants up to $50,000 or 50% of the cost (whichever is less) and municipalities are eligible for grants up to $25,000 or 75% of the cost (whichever is less) for developing a local farmland protection plan. The local share of funding must be provided in at least 20% cash (no more than 80% in kind services). Any two municipalities may join together in application for a planning grant; similarly, any two counties may join together in application. Any municipality that has not previously prepared an agricultural and farmland protection plan is eligible for funding. Any county that has established an agricultural and farmland protection board and has not had an agricultural and farmland protection plan approved by the Commissioner in the last ten years is eligible for funding.

“Agriculture remains a key driver of our economy, and I am proud that we are continuing to support and protect New York farmers throughout the Hudson Valley,” said Governor Cuomo. “This program provides vital resources to ensure these farmlands can remain in agricultural use today and in the years ahead. I am pleased we are awarding funding to these important projects, and I look forward to seeing them thrive for seasons to come.”

Awards include:

- Columbia County: $4.16 million (5 projects)
• Saratoga County: $3.14 million (7 projects)
• Dutchess County: $3.01 million (4 projects)
• Orange County: $2.83 million (4 projects)
• Rensselaer County: $2.55 million (4 projects)
• Westchester County: $1.84 million (1 project)
• Washington County: $860,000 (3 projects)

The program is administered by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. The Department received a tremendous response to this program, with 42 proposals requesting a little more than $27 million. Projects that were not awarded through the Hudson Valley Agricultural Enhancement Program may apply for funding through the statewide Farmland Protection Implementation Program, which was announced on March 14, 2016.


xxv https://freshconnect.ny.gov/content/about-freshconnect


xxviii http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/12/05/a-high-price-for-healthy-food/?_r=0


xxxi http://www.urbanfarming.org/

xxxiii http://livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/crops_02.html

xxxiv http://environment.about.com/od/health/f/What-is-a-Locavore.htm

xxv

xxvi One in five (22%) African American households is food insecure as compared with one in 10 (10%) Caucasian households and one in eight (13%) households overall. [ii] More than one in four African American children (27%) live in food-insecure households as compared to one in seven (14%) Caucasian children. [iii] Latinos are more than twice as likely to be food insecure as White, non-Hispanics.
More than one in five (21%) Latinos are food insecure as compared to just one in 10 (10%) White, non-Hispanics and one in eight (13%) Americans overall.[iii] Nearly one in four Latino children (24%) lives in a food-insecure household as compared to one in seven (14%) White, non-Hispanic children.[iv]

http://www.justfood.org/sites/default/files/NYC_Food_Governance_Timeline.pdf


1999, *The Dance of Change*


http://www.cascadeharvest.org/files/u1/Farmland_Changing_Hands_0.pdf

Consistent with a thirty-year trend, farmer’s average age continued to increase (Fig. 2). For principal operators, average age increased 2 percent between 2007 and 2012. Although second and third operators are younger, their average ages increased 4 and 3 percent respectively (Table 5). Among principal operators, 6 percent are under 35 years old, 61 percent are 35 to 64 years, and 33 percent are 65 and older. The older age groups all increased in number.
https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/Highlights/

Farm Demographics/#average age}