

When you know one food hub: Post-capitalist enterprise and the ethical praxis of care

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ABSTRACT:

In this paper I use diverse economies theory as a framework for asking better questions FOR food hubs to foster their emergence and fragile becomings. The first step is a query into the nature of the food hub as a diverse economic enterprise: who and what is assembled, and how are they set into economic relationships? The case studies presented in this paper demonstrate how two distinct models of food hubs emerged out of unique historical/environmental contexts. When seen through the lens of diverse economy, we are able to understand that it's the WHY and the HOW of a food hub's activity that are the essential dynamics of the economic assemblage, not the WHAT of the economic exchange (i.e. local food). In conclusion I argue that food hubs are a form of post-capitalist enterprises which contribute to the community agro-food economy through an ethical praxis of care.

Introduction

The rapid proliferation of federal, philanthropic and investor funding of Food Hubs is a testament to the status of their status as an en vogue food system innovation. At least seven different USDA grant programs are known to support food hub development, and surveys of food hubs in the United States have report a 32% annual growth rate in food hub numbers, with over 300 self-identified currently in existence. There's even a Food Hub Business Assessment Toolkit is available "for investors and food hubs alike to utilize in the process of evaluating a food hub business' readiness for investment." (Vanderburgh-Wertz & Ram Moraghan, 2014).

The proliferation of food hubs has also come with a concomitant demand for documenting food hub 'best practices,' which is indicative of the tendency within public policy, community programs, or social enterprise to latch on to the band wagon of a 'replicable model' (Baker & Temenos, 2015; Peck, 2011). This approach to social innovation assumes that community contexts are fungible, and that the particular configuration of practices or policies that constitute a model can be copy and pasted across communities (Prince, 2010). Within agro-food systems, this same tendency manifests as the assumption that food hubs can be classified and standardized, and that they operate within a 'local food movement' whose goals, actors and practices are falsely presumed to be more or less comparable across locations (Cleveland, Carruth, & Mazaroli, 2014; DeLind, 2011; Feagan, 2007; Fonte, 2008).

"I see other communities they want to jump straight to a food hub help and I'm like, do you have a farmer network? All your farmers, do they have capacity? Do they understand how to grow the kinds of vegetables that that the consumers want? Is there any kind of network established, and is there trust in the community?" – Grow Food Carolina Leadership

However, a common saying among food hub researchers and service providers goes, "When you know one food hub, you know one food hub" (Pipkin, 2016). This aphorism acknowledges the contextually specific nature of the origins and operations of food hubs. Limited research in this area has acknowledged the difficulty and pitfalls in creating ready-made templates for food hub development, noting that readymade replicable models "would be constraining and counter-productive as assets and resource gaps are unique to each locale" (Blay-palmer, Landman, & Knezevic, 2013).

As social scientists, this is where we can be of the most assistance – grappling with the messy, overdetermined dimensions of nature/society is our bread and butter (Law, 2004). Instead of applying readymade social constructs to our exploration of food hubs (or any values based enterprises) I suggest that we as social scientists need to engage in exploratory thinking with food hubs (Gibson-Graham, 1996). They are, perhaps, an example of Law's hopeful monsters; "places where the necessary incompatibilities, inconsistencies and overlaps come gently and creatively together." (Law, 1991, p. 17). If we seek to realize new economic futures, if we have a "speculative commitment to contribute to livable worlds" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011, p. 100), then our contribution as social scientists can be the care and protection of the new ideas and language that are essential in the realization of those new worlds.

The project of this paper is to explore how we can use diverse economies theory to ask better questions *for* food hubs as a means to foster their fragile becomings (Gibson-Graham, 2011; Gibson-Graham, 2006). Following Ann Hill's invitation to pursue a new mode of critical inquiry in food scholarship (2014) this paper engages in exploratory thinking practice on matters of concern for farms, food, and agrarian-nature/society. The first step in this project is an elaboration of the nature of the food hub as a post-capitalist enterprise: who and what is assembled, how are they set into economic relationships, and what are the ultimate goals or outcomes of those economic entanglements? My inquiry foregrounds the unique and contextually specific factors that shape the emergence of any post-capitalist enterprise, and food hubs in particular, rather than take the form, function and desires of the food hub as given.

Through a presentation of two case studies, I show that a food hub are diverse economic assemblages that emerge from a unique context, and which engage in economic relationships oriented towards caring for a specific concern closely interrelated with the community agro-food economy. When seen through the lens of diverse economy, we are able to understand that it's the particular *why* and the *how* of a food hub's activity that are the essential dynamics of the post-capitalist enterprise, not the abstract *what* of the economic exchange of local food. While there may be many shared or similar practices across food hubs, the defining feature it is how those practices are interwoven and adapted to care the specific community based concern that animated the food hub's organization.

A food hub is not a lawnmower

A fair question to ask of food hubs is what distinguishes the post-capitalist enterprise of a food hub from the conventional (e.g. capitalist) business model of wholesale produce distributor or grocer. To date, responses to this question have been underwhelming. Beyond the involvement of farm sourced food, and identification of some sort of community oriented mission or values, attempts at definition span a spectrum of those which primarily consider the business model:

"A financially viable businesses that demonstrate a significant commitment to place through aggregation and marketing of regional food." Fischer et al. (2105)

"A regional food hub is a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand." (Diamond & Barham, 2012)

To those which emphasize the intermediate role of food hub operations in a region's food system:

A food hub serves as a coordinating intermediary between regional producers and suppliers and customers, including institutions, food service firms, retail outlets, and end consumers. [...] Services provided by a food hub may include and are not limited to aggregation, warehousing, shared processing, coordinated distribution, wholesale and retail sales, and food waste management. (Horst et al., 2011, p. 224)

And while some scholars are actively grappling with the complex nature of food hubs (Campbell & MacRae, 2013; Mount et al., 2013, the associated food hub definitions are so expansive as to provide

little assistance in grappling with the market based, economic complexities of the food hub's diverse economy.

"We define food hubs as networks and intersections of grassroots, community-based organizations and individuals that work together to build increasingly socially just, economically robust and ecologically sound food systems that connect farmers with consumers as directly as possible."(Blay-palmer et al., 2013, p. 524)

Before attempting to provide a framework for what a food hub is, I will make an argument for what they are not via a short metaphorical foray into McDonalds and Lawnmowers.

A food hub is not a McDonalds franchise: a plug and play business model, every aspect of which comes pre-determined from the corporate headquarters. The menu, what and from whom ingredients are procured, the labor hierarchies and standard operating procedures have all been maximized according to a context-neutral model designed to maximize profit generation. Just because you happen to be an enterprise that offers hamburgers, doesn't mean you're an aspiring McDonald's franchise.

Neither is a food hub a lawn mower – a machine with a more or less standard set of capacities that function the same in any context, and which you might choose to upgrade a few aspects of with additional capital infusions. The purchase of a lawn mower results of the question "What machine can I buy to mow the lawn?" What would happen, what wonderful proliferation of solutions would emerge if instead the question was "How can we as neighbors work collaboratively to manage the land surrounding our houses in a way that maximizes our shared enjoyment while also supporting animal and insect habitat?"

I offer that a food hub is not a standard business model attuned to the capitalist market place that can be replicated endlessly without concern for context. Nor is it an engineered economic machine that can be purchased and upgraded with sufficient capital to solve straight forward problems. In the remaining sections of this paper I will seek to elaborate the following framework for understanding and thinking with food hubs: food hubs are a form of post-capitalist enterprises which contribute to the community agro-food economy through an ethical praxis of care.

The diverse economic enterprise and community agro-food economies

The notion of a replicable model for a social enterprise is indicative of 'strong theory' of capitalist economies: "powerful discourses that organize events into understandable and seemingly predictable trajectories" (Gibson-Graham, 2014). Strong theory approaches to analysis of economics in the modern capitalist era result in what Gibson Graham refer to as capitalocentrism - "the positioning of all economic identities as fundamentally the same as (or modeled upon) capitalism, or as being deficient or substandard imitations." (1996:6). In contrast, diverse economies as a theoretical orientation emphasizes a 'weak theory' approach to the exploration of economic worlds. This approach favors thick ethnographic description that acknowledges the multi-layered, contingent forms of meaning or functionality bound up in economic exchange or practices (Gibson-Graham, 2014).

The goal of diverse economic theory is to trouble naturalized or predictable models of the economy. Counter to the dominant mode of capitalocentric thought, Gibson Graham present a vision for new experiments in community economy that struggle against the disempowering tendencies of the

instruments and agents of global capital (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Trauger & Passidomo, 2012). The framework of community economy is expansive, containing a diverse array economic practices, livelihoods and subjectivities (Hill, 2014).

In community economy, reciprocal and interdependent relationships are forged between new economic subjects through deliberate and ongoing negotiation of the process and outcomes of economic activity (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Snyder and St. Martin stress that community economy is comprised of “economic concepts and practices that foreground community and environmental wellbeing” (2015, p. 46). By extension, we can understand community agro-food economy as consisting of a wide array of economic activities that foster the wellbeing of an agro-food system as a whole. In contrast to a fixed spatial boundary within which that activity happens (i.e. mileage based definitions of ‘local’ food), ‘community’ in this sense is an emergent property of the practices of care and exchange in an economic assemblage.

I further suggest we can understand community agro-food economy as consisting of a wide array of economic activities that foster the wellbeing of an agro-food system as a whole, and that food hub as post-capitalist enterprises operating within and contributing to that community economy. And so we must further distinguish the role of the post-capitalist enterprise.

Diverse economies theory identifies the role of an enterprise as the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus value. However, diverse economies argues that the goals and dynamics of those processes are not pre-determined by the logic of capitalism. Instead, the enterprise – its rational and economic functions, is a key sites of negotiation and political struggle (Gibson-Graham, 2001). Opening to diverse economic theory of the enterprise invites us to asks anew where, and by whom, and through what means is surplus value created and appropriated; ask what the nature or form of that value is; and how that surplus might distributed through a variety of possible channels(Gibson-Graham, 1996, 2014, 2008).

However, an unanswered and critical question for elaboration of a theory of post-capitalist enterprise is this: What holds together and animates the economic praxis post-capitalist enterprise when the rapacious drive for capital accumulation is removed? Notions of ‘promotion of wellbeing’ lack analytic specificity or rigor. I thereby suggest there is need for further elaboration of the characteristics of the animating rational of post-capitalist enterprise.

Gibson Graham state that the firm (e.g. enterprise) is a site of ethical practice (Gibson-Graham, 2001; 2006). Ethical practice is a productive concept – it adds to the already assumed set of proper business practices a multiplicity of types and forms of labor, transactions, and actants that are engaged for more than purely financial ends. In their case study of the Mondragon cooperative, Gibson Graham identify the essential characteristic of that enterprise as the “ongoing debate and reevaluation of their economic choices in the lights of a specified set of ethical principles.” 2006 P. 104). I offer that it is not the profession of abstract ethical principles that define a post-capitalist enterprise, but rather the grounding of economic praxis in an ethic of care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011, 2012).

Building off Latour’s matters of concern (2004) and drawing from feminist theories of care (Engster, 2005; Tronto, 1993), Puig de la Bellacasa argues that unlike the passive worry of concern, care is a material doing; an ethically and politically charged practice (2012). Care does not simply respect an ethical principle, but is rather an active engagement with its full realization in the processes of

“everyday doings” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012, p. 100). Introducing care into the economic activities of the post-capitalist enterprise expands the boundaries of ethical economic praxis to include both productive and reproductive activities which inform and support each other. While productive labor generally creates value, reproductive labor is directed towards unvalued activities that are essential for the continued viability of an individual or collective (Engster, 2005; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011)

By integrating a context specific understanding of care into the negotiations of an enterprise’s ethical praxis, this framework responds to Goodman and Dupuis’s call for more reflexive politics with alternative food networks (2005). Engster’s argues that in order to be effective, care must be attentive, responsive, and respectful towards the particular “circumstances and tastes” of those engaged (2005). In particular, the notion of responsiveness calls for ongoing dialogue among those who would engage in care in order to discern the precise nature of their needs, and to monitor the effectiveness of the caring activities (Engster, 2005). This approach echoes Goodman and Dupis argument that we must consider how race, class and gender inform “people’s notions of “right living,” and especially “right eating,”(DuPuis & Goodman, 2005, p. 362)

In acknowledging care for someone or something we are obligated to ask: How will care occur, and for whom or what? Who will do the work of caring? As researchers, what are we encouraging care for? (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011). Focusing on concrete acts of care rather than adherence to abstract ethical principles or allows us to consider how we might develop a new mode of accounting that considers and assess the realization of more-than economic goals by food hubs and other AFN enterprises.

In summary, I propose that food hubs are a form of post-capitalist enterprise, in that it is operating intentionally in and contributing to the realization of new community agro-food economies. What distinguishes a post-capitalist enterprise is the *intentional proliferation* of economic diversity that fosters the development of community economy, as opposed to unintentional or suppressed diversity obscured by hegemonic capitalist discourse. I further submit that this proliferation is facilitated by the tensions and negotiations regarding the ethical praxis of the enterprise, and that those negotiations are shaped by an ethic of care.

Case studies

“I would just love to see what somebody made work... We need to know how to make this sustainable, how to connect to the community. Nobody has ever been able to help us with that.” – Hollygrove Market and Farm Leader

In the following section I present case studies of two food hubs in the South Eastern United States: GrowFood Carolina and Hollygrove Market and Farm. Each of these hubs represents a different combination of the common market outlets, organizational structure, and social/ecological values among food hubs in the United States. Data is drawn from in depth interviews with food hub staff, leadership, and key stakeholders. Textual analysis was conducted on primary sources for each hub as available. This included bylaws, business plans, grant applications, websites, promotional materials, and

press releases. The findings from the textual analysis were used to provide historical support and/or clarification for findings from the interviews.

A food hub is both discrete and diffuse – an assemblage operating within a wider network of an agro-food community economy. As Jarosz says, AFNs are not specific to any particular geographic scale, but “constituted out of multiple, contradictory processes and relations which they internalize in place and through time.” (2008, p. 234). The boundaries of the relative influences, inputs, and impact of a food hub are diffuse, but discrete practices, policies, and actants can be identified and traced through their actions and outcomes. By tracing and showing the ways in which food hubs or other diverse economic enterprises are assembled, the purposes is not dismantle or undermine their reality, but “enrich and affirm their reality by adding further articulations” (Puig de la Bellacasa p 89). And so, towards the goal of documenting diversity and deconstructing dominance (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008), the case study approach allows us to look at what is “assembled and arranged” within community agro-food economies – relationships, practices, and materials (Healey 2015).

As stated earlier, the goal of this preliminary theorizing is to think with food hubs as a post-capitalist enterprise and foster their fragile becomings. In the following case studies, I gather and assemble narratives that speak to the questions of: who and what is assembled, how are they set into economic relationships, and what are the ultimate goals or outcomes of those economic entanglements? In both cases I demonstrate that a matter of concern (or perceived crisis) related to the community agro-food economy is identified by an initial group of organizers who then assemble a diverse array of actants and enroll them into an enterprise. The form and functions of the food hub enterprise is then uniquely adapted to care for the matter of concern, thus shaping the ethical praxis of the enterprise. Finally, because the nature of assemblage is one of constant becoming – adaptation and reconfiguration, the ongoing negotiations and tensions of the food hub are an equally important component of the dynamics of the enterprise.

Grow Food Carolina

“It’s always been about the protecting the coastal plain and in that we have water and air land and people and quality of life” – Coastal Conservation League Leader

Overview

GrowFood Carolina (GFC) is a non-profit food hub organized and operated by the Food and Agriculture program of the Coastal Conservation League (CCL) of Charleston, South Carolina. The CCL is a long standing nonprofit organization dedicated to land conservation and environmental preservation in the ‘Low Country’ of South Carolina, and recognized for its unapologetic commitment to the preservation of open space and resistance to the many mechanisms of expanding urban development. CCL serves as GFCs fiduciary agent and provides a full suite of administrative support, Grow Food Carolina (GFC) has its own advisory board whose principle task is overseeing the design and implementation of a wholesale

produce distribution enterprise that serves the mission of creating viable livelihoods for farmers by selling their product to restaurants and other wholesale customers in the greater Charleston region.

The food hub sources and distributes wholesale lots of produce and a few other regionally produced agricultural products (e.g. rice, canola oil) from 80 different farmers and food producers within a 200 mile radius of Charleston. GrowFood has five full time staff members and is led by a general manager who was recruited for the position specifically because of their extensive expertise in wholesale organic produce distribution as well as a strong background in business and financial analysis. They sell to restaurants, grocers, and dining service providers in Charleston, a city known for its culinary scene and distinctive food culture.

Matter of Concern

“The objective of GrowFood is to tap into the existing assets of small-scale agriculture to help create a stronger rural economy, spurring job creation, and building capacity in rural communities by connecting farm businesses to the thriving local food movement.” –GFC Promotional Document

Grow Food Carolina opened its doors in 2011 after several years of planning and outreach by CCL staff and partner organizations, and its mission and activities are understood as a key element of the strategy and work of the Coastal Conservation League’s broader mission of preserving rural lands and environmental preservation of the Low Country coastal plain. From the CCL Website:

“Between 1992 and 1997, more than 200 acres of rural land were converted every day to urban uses, placing South Carolina in the top ten states in the nation for rural land loss. We quickly realized that small farmers lacked access to the infrastructure available to industrial farms, and were therefore unable to say “no” when a developer offered to buy their land.”

The path to GFC originated in an ethic of land conservation and environmental protection. After years of fighting development, CCL recognized the next step for their organization was to move into the lives and livelihoods of rural communities. As stated by a CCL leader, “We’re not an organization that is scared to dive into an area that’s not conservation per se, but that directly impacts conservation.” Rather than continuously going to battle with developers and politicians, through developing a food hub CCL sought to meet landowners where they were and preserve land from development from the ground up.

The evolution of CCL’s strategy from litigation against development to an inclusion of agricultural market development was spurred by the realization that, as one CCL employee put it, “conservation has to address the working landscape and has to ensure the viability of successful farm business in order to work in many of the rural landscapes.” This shift in ethos merges concern for rural lands with concern for rural people, and rural livelihoods.

“You have a landowner who has been struggling doesn’t have a good market for the farming product- typically the medium scale farm if they are farming at all anymore- and it’s sometimes more appealing to get a minimum wage job and sell property and just accept that as the fate for the town.” – CCL Leadership

CCL and GFC leadership are clear at all times that the overarching goal of GFC's work is to promote land conservation and environmental protection. Aggregation, marketing, and distribution of source identified 'local' produce by GFC is believed to directly and indirectly inspire faith in the viability of land-based livelihoods in the South Carolina Low Country. Even though the number of land owners involved in GFC's enterprise is limited, the indirect impacts of growing interest and belief in a viable local food economy is believed to have compounding effects on public and private attitudes towards land preservation and rural development.

Community of Care

The first steps to launching Grow Food Carolina were a series of listening sessions conducted throughout the region to hear the needs of farmers, and promote the opportunities that a regional aggregator/distributor like Grow Food could provide. These events were organized in partnership with the South Carolina Rural Resource Coalition, an economic development organization comprised of a broad array of state and national agencies and organizations related to affordable housing, agriculture, community development, conservation, forestry, heirs' property, and tourism. As outreach and recruitment continued, Low Country Local First (a Charleston-based nonprofit organization) and Clemson Cooperative Extension both helped with recruitment efforts and lent their credibility and expertise to outreach and recruitment.

"We were bringing together as many different stakeholders as we could - because we're really building a case for why local agriculture is important to South Carolina."
– GFC Leadership

The early focus on collaboration and partnerships in GFC's evolution has continued throughout its growth as it considers its resource needs and identifies its areas of expertise and specialization within the community's agro-food system. Subsequent partnerships have included coordination of food donations and collaboration on trucking with the Charleston area food bank, and allowing a startup business focused on direct to consumer sales of local food to use the warehouse as a delivery location.

As the vision for a Charleston-based local food wholesaler/distributor formed, CCL leadership sought funding to support the bricks and mortar infrastructure and professional staff needed to get the food hub off the ground. As a testament to the influence and prestige of the CCL supporter base, the warehouse that is now GFC's home was purchased and donated to CCL by a longtime supporter. What's more, the building contained additional office spaces that are leased out and provide a significant source of revenue to support GFC's overhead and operations.

The startup was further supported by a two million dollar capital campaign funded by local donors and other philanthropic entities, which reveals the strength of community support for GFC's efforts. Interestingly, while some initiatives of CCL generate animosity within the Low Country (for instance CCL's opposing of major road or commercial development), GFC and CCL leadership report that they have received significant donations from individuals who state that they would never donate to CCL, but that they want to give their financial support to the work of GrowFood Carolina.

Ethical Praxis

“I’m seriously worried that no one is going to farm anymore! If we don’t do something soon, we’re not going to have any more farmers.” –GFC Employee

At its core, the food and agriculture program of the Coastal Conservation League and GrowFood Carolina reflect a belief in the intrinsic worth of farmers and farming to the broader wellbeing of the Low Country. The decision to develop a food-based enterprise focused on working with small and mid-sized producers specifically, rather than with established large-scale produce operations, was informed by two aspects of the value of small farm enterprises relative to CCL’s goals: the intrinsic worth of family farms to rural community vitality, and the importance of agricultural production practices in the overall ecological health of the region.

The public discourse developed by CCL and GFC weaves together concerns for environment and rural economic vitality with an explicit critique of conventional/industrial agro-food systems, or what one GFC document describes as South Carolina’s “unswerving loyalty to industrial-scale, single-crop, export agriculture.” CCL’s capital campaign literature frames the root crisis to be addressed by GFC as economic:

“Industrial-scale agriculture has become the national standard as a result of a complex web of federal and state regulations, policies, subsidies and corporate consolidation that favors large-scale farms and makes it nearly impossible for small farms to survive.”- CCL Document

GFC argues that small and mid-sized farmers are significantly disadvantaged in the current American agro-food system.

“Due in large part to a well-developed infrastructure system that benefits large-scale agriculture, produce distributors, packing sheds and warehouses offer significant advantages to large farmers, particularly in the export arena. This structure is not available for small and mid-sized farms serving local markets.” – GFC Marketing Document

Though GFC is operated using many of the same practices and policies of a standard produce distributor, the food hub’s commitment to working with small and mid-sized farmers in service to the mission is in direct odds with conventional distributor logic. The extra time, administration, and price premiums required by the farmers GFC works with make the majority of them unpalatable to conventional distributors. While certain logics related to product volume, price point, and farming expertise factor into GFC’s choice of producers, by and large the class of farmers GFC works with is chosen because they are the ethically ‘right’ farmers to serve (relative to the mission), rather than the most profitable or logical farmers to source ‘local’ food for the marketplace. GFC staff and leadership recognize the paramount importance of supporting the success and development of their partner farmers for both the success for GFC as an enterprise, and to the overarching mission. This care and support occurs both through formal and informal practices.

“Basically my goal was to talk to [the farmer] once a month and be like, I am committed to moving your entire crop and we will give it at this price. And if that

*price starts to not make sense, we'll talk about it. This is important! Keep going!" –
GFC Staff*

As the enterprise grew, GFC leadership recognized that informal farm consulting functions needed to be institutionalized. At the time this case study was concluding, GFC was hiring a farmer liaison whose job will be to conduct extensive on farm visits, production planning, and general consulting for GFC suppliers. This serves the dual purpose of supporting the continued growth and success of participating farmers and also supporting GFC's sales by ensuring a regular supply and anticipating supply shortages before the delivery is due.

Environmental Stewardship

In the early stages of GFC's development, the general manager, who has extensive background in wholesale Organic produce marketing and distribution, provided ad hoc and informal consulting for the producers on packing and grading of product as well as encouragement for the adoption of sustainable production methods such as Integrated Pest Management or Organic Certification. CCL and GFC leadership assert that small farms are greater contributors to the goal of environmental sustainability than large/consolidated farm enterprises.

*"The only way we're going to see a shift toward organic, that we can be a part of and help facilitate, is through the relationships we have with these farmers. They trust us to get them a premium because their food is local, and they trust us to get them premium because it's organic. And so the building of relationships and of these sales connections really is the platform to do more things in the sustainability arena." –
GFC Leadership*

At first glance, GFC's willingness to market farm products that are not Certified Organic and produced with conventional (synthetic chemical-intensive) production methods might seem at odds with their strong environmentalist ethos. However, upon further examination the choice fits squarely within the foundational goal of preserving rural farmlands, and is part of a long term strategy to engage farmers, stabilize their enterprise by providing a reliable market outlet, and then promote transition to sustainable production practices.

Tensions and negotiations

"I think it is an economical model and we're not yet through figuring out how to make it an economical model. I don't think Grow food will look like Grow food does now in five years. Not because it's not working, but because I just think it needs to evolve." – GFC Leadership

As Grow Food Carolina enters its fifth year of operations, one of the key points of tension and/or negotiation playing out in GFCs evolution is the definition of 'viability' for the food hub from both a mission and an enterprise perspective (e.g. financial self-sufficiency). GFC is a successful food hub by most traditional financial indicators; the enterprise has hit key financial benchmarks set by the advisory board, annual sales experience steady growth, and the enterprise has new customers and market opportunities presenting themselves at every turn. However, the long term feasibility of attending to

both the community based mission of preserving rural lands and serving small and mid-sized farmers on one hand and prioritizing financial benchmarks of a break even analysis is up for debate.

People here hate that we're a non-profit. If we're making any revenue at all, they think that it's an entitlement – tax payer dollars. So telling people that we are going to consistently operate on that model, and consistently look for 'hand outs'... they'll be like then farmer's shouldn't exist if they can't make what they need to make. And I'm like "really? Because we've been paying... YOU have been paying farmers your whole life" -GFC Leadership

As discussed in the previous section, GFC receive significant philanthropic support precisely because of the 'public good' nature of the work – rural land preservation and local food system. In the terms of diverse economies, we can see the community agro-food economy, and its enrollment of farmers, farm lands, and consumers, as a kind of commons. In more classical economic terms, the work of GFC, and in particular its care for farmers and farm lands, is an important contribution to the public good that is the region's agro-food system.

As the food hub evolves and its operations grow, maintaining connection and understanding with the farmers (who are after all the focus – their tenure, their management decisions) is key to continuing the project of building a diverse agro-food economy. This work involves the more-than-financial, non-capitalist nature of the transactions and negotiations.

Hollygrove Market and Farm

"It's a big story. It's more than just a farm market. It's a story of a community pulling itself up by the boot straps and fixing its own problems" - TCC Leader

Overview

Hollygrove Market and Farm (HGMF) is a non-profit retail grocer and distributor located in the Hollygrove neighborhood of New Orleans. Though it is organized as an LLC, it is wholly owned and operated by the Carrolton Hollygrove Community Development Corporation (CHCDC), and in close partnership with Trinity Christian Community (TCC), two non-profit organizations based in and serving the Hollygrove neighborhood. Incorporated in 2008, HGMF has grown from a once a week produce pick up for 25 people hosted at folding tables amidst post-Katrina devastation, to a seven day a week retail market that features urban farming, community gardening, and a full range of food offerings including fresh produce, dairy, meat, and value added food products.

The food hub is located on the site of a refurbished plant nursery at the edge of the Hollygrove Neighborhood¹. On the grounds are a two story building which includes a retail grocery enterprise on

¹ According to interview participants is located across the street from a baseball field that was "white's only" in the pre Jim Crow era south adding additional layers of semiotic and spatial complexity to race and class relations of HGMF

the first floor with HGMF offices on the second floor. The market and farm also includes 12 community garden plots in raised beds, a quarter acre of urban farm, and a utility building used for the storage of farm equipment.

The stated mission of HGMF is to “increase accessibility of fresh produce to Hollygrove, surrounding underserved neighborhoods, and all of New Orleans while promoting sustainability through support of local farmers and the local economy as well as acting as a demonstration site for environmentally sustainable practices.” The market operates a ‘cooperative style’ retail location that offers both a pre-set produce share as well as a la carte grocery service, and are currently expanding operations to sell to restaurant and other wholesale accounts. The market buys from 45 different farmers and food producers in southern Louisiana and Mississippi that represent a broad range of production scales.

‘The Box’, a set selection of fresh produce that emulates a typical CSA share, has been HGMF’S principle offering and focus since its inception. The market’s procurement manager makes weekly orders of wholesale lots of produce from small and mid-sized farmers in the region and curates a desirable assortment and reasonable volume of product. This share is on sale six days a week for the set price of \$25, which is less than the produce would cost if purchased separately at regular retail prices while still providing a financial return to the market.

Matter of Concern

The Hollygrove neighborhood, developed in the late 1940s, is predominantly African American and historically a working class neighborhood that experienced a slow rate of repopulation since Hurricane Katrina, compared with other, more affluent neighborhoods (Kato & McKinney, 2014). On August 27, 2005 the New Orleans Food and Farm Network (NOFFN) partnered TCC and enthusiastic help from community members in the Hollygrove neighborhood to install 17 vegetable gardens and urban orchards across the neighborhood. These gardens were meant to kick-start urban food production and organizing around community food access. The next day, Hurricane Katrina hit the gulf coast and left Hollygrove torn to pieces under 6 feet of water.

“When Nagen was mayor...it came across pretty clear: ‘Plan for recovery of your neighborhood or your neighborhood is going to be gone. We will clear it and make it into a green space.’ So that was part of it. But the other part of it was people just knew, realized what had to be...they had to band together locally or else their neighborhoods were not gonna come back” - CHCDC Leader

In the aftermath of the storm, neighborhoods across New Orleans began to self-organize and plan for recovery through grassroots resident associations, which was a distinct shift to decentralize management and (re)development of the city. In 2007, the Carrollton-Hollygrove Community Development Corporation was formed with the simple but ambitious goal of bringing people back home to the neighborhood by supplying needed resources and technical assistance.

“CHCDC addresses issues related to Hollygrove revitalization: community organizing, eradicating blight, economic development, and marketing Hollygrove as a livable, vibrant New Orleans neighborhood. A major part of this revitalization work is to address issues relating to access to healthy, fresh, affordable food.” – CHCDC Grant Application

The principle efforts of both TCC and CHCDC in the early years following Katrina was on housing restoration and facilitating the return of residents to the neighborhoods. A block captain program was initiated that identified neighborhood residents serving as embedded liaisons for other residents seeking to return to their homes and provided support and resources for navigating the complicated and often treacherous landscape of post-Katrina recovery efforts (Wooten, 2012).

“Frankly politicians don't listen to us anyways, the city doesn't listen to us. It's evidenced by the fact we don't have any [public] grants. [The city] wasn't really paying attention. So we have to certainly fix the problem ourselves.” - TCC Leader

The residents and leadership of Hollygrove were confronted with a difficult question; how to rebuild a neighborhood after a human exacerbated natural disaster strikes. What is the heart of a community? What is it that calls us home? In particular, leadership of the CHCDC saw themselves as confronted with both the challenge and opportunity of rebuilding a community that was systematically marginalized (economically, environmentally, socially) in pre-Katrina New Orleans, and largely starting from scratch. As written in a CHCDC in a funding application, “The neighborhood, once known for poverty, drugs and crime, now had a chance to re-envision itself, creating a newer, healthier milieu.”

“We're beginning ask a lot of questions around the neighborhood; what is it that limits the community? One of the things that came about, one of the big issues was lack of food access; there wasn't enough grocery stores.” - TCC Leader

Through feedback from block captains, and a grassroots community planning initiative, CHCDC then identified food access, and fresh food access in particular, as a priority. As recounted in a grant narrative prepared by the Carrolton-Hollygrove CDC, “In those days, no matter how much money one had in his or her pocket to buy food, no one knew what was open and where to go.” Following hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans area lost 21 of 36 major supermarkets. Though grocery stores would eventually come in to the area as recovery progressed, ‘good’ food access was emblematic of more than just the presence of a food retailer in the community.

Community of Care

“Hollygrove - the community I grew up in, that I love - the incidence of people with a limb chopped off because of diabetes or heart problems or other food-related, diet-related illnesses were astounding. So we thought, why don't we start doing healthy stuff?” - CHCDC Leader

The connection between HGMF leadership’s concern for food access in a socially and economically marginalized neighborhood, and the choice to source exclusively from small and mid-sized farmers from the region is not readily apparent. Following the story for HGMF’s establishment, the reasoning involves a combination of the ethical disposition of individuals involved, the influence of key community partners, and sheer practicality of needing to get produce in the box.

Interview participants described a close knit group of community leaders working on Katrina recovery across the city who shared ideas and banded together to realize a shared vision of the future.

“After the storm... we were a small network of people, we're trying to rebuild the city, so we all knew each other, we hung out and we're all trying to envision what it would be like to rebuild the city differently, but that maintained the same character of New Orleans... We still want to maintain our same distinctiveness. We could do things better in the future than we did in the past.” – CHCDC Leader

As part of that re-imaging process, the leaders who spearheaded the formation of Hollygrove Market and Farm found themselves reading and discussing, among several authors, the writings of the iconic agrarian Wendell Berry, and in particular an Orion article titled The Idea of Local Economy (Berry, 2001). The following passage from this article is worthy of quoting at length, as it is easy to imagine how its sentiment and ideas resonated with sweat-soaked and mud-streaked community organizers searching for answers in the wake of Katrina’s devastation:

“If the government does not propose to protect the lives, livelihoods, and freedoms of its people, then the people must think about protecting themselves... How are they to protect themselves? ...For several good reasons, they are beginning with the idea of a local food economy...They want to use the local economy to give consumers an influence over the kind and quality of their food, and to preserve land and enhance the local landscapes. They want to give everybody in the local community a direct, long-term interest in the prosperity, health, and beauty of their homeland.”(Berry, 2001)

CHCDC leadership looked at several potential models and partners for brining fresh food access into the neighborhood. They approached Crescent City Farmer’s Market with the hope of establishing a traditional farmers market in the neighborhood. According to one leader:

“It just didn’t work, mainly because there weren’t any farmers. The farmers had been destroyed [by the storm] number one, and number two there were no real truck farmers in Southeast Louisiana. The farmers all grew soy beans and rice and...the only farms available were small family farms that you could buy produce from.”

CHCDC then looked to the Louisiana Public Health Institute’s Steps to a Healthier New Orleans (STEPS) program which worked with 13 neighborhood corner stores across the city to ‘stock and promote the purchase of healthy food choices including fresh fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy and/or whole grain products’. However, while initially optimistic about the STEPS’ approach, community leaders were ultimately dismayed with the program’s lack of fresh produce and general lack of impact. Having run out of options for existing partners, when the opportunity to lease the former nursery site arose, the head of the CHCDC board decided to make the leap into running their own “hole in the wall.”

At the same time, a key partner for CHCDC was the New Orleans Food and Farm Network (NOFFN). As the lead partner in the ill-fated garden installations with TCC, NOFFN was engaged in a number of gardening and ‘urban farming’ initiatives across the city. NOFFN offered training in production and marketing, and encouraged neighborhood associations, and specifically CHCDC, to establish farmers markets and other localized market outlets for urban grown food. In the first several years of HGMF’s operations, NOFFN managed the urban farm and community garden plots on the site of HGMF and used it as a site for training and other programing.

While the food enterprise plans were incubating, the CHCDC's primary focus continued to be on housing redevelopment, and helping neighbors transition back to Hollygrove from wherever they'd fled after the storm. The mission as the board saw it was straight forward: "help homeowners get back into their homes and rehab their homes." In conceiving and developing the food market, CHCDC board members believed they could build an enterprise that could not only support its own operations, but generate profits that could fund housing development and other community building efforts of the CDC.

"We really felt that the market would be a money maker and that it would make money for the CDC and we were able to cover all our expenses." – CHCDC Leader

Ethical Praxis

Within the market's operations, a number of programs have been implemented (to greater and lesser degrees of success) with the goal of making the market and farm a viable and valued resource for residents of the Hollygrove community. In support of HGMF's mission of providing particular care for the Hollygrove neighborhood, Hollygrove residents (regardless of their income) receive a 20% discount off all purchases from the market (including the box). Further support of the goal of providing increased access to the fresh locally sourced produce to low income residents of all of New Orleans, the 20% discount is also extended to customers using Supplemental Nutrition Assistant Program (SNAP) benefits to make their purchase.

While the discount programs have been a permanent fixture of the market's operations, HGMF and CHCDC leaders have sought other ways to support and encourage participation by residents. By far the most popular program HGMF offers is their volunteer labor program whereby volunteers can sign up for a four hour shift at the market and take home 'the box' at the end of their shift. However, this program is utilized primarily by young single people living outside of the Hollygrove Neighborhood.

Beyond market sales, community garden plots are provided to neighborhood residents on the market grounds and gardeners can sell their products on a specially designated 'community table' in the market place, or even occasionally to the market for inclusion in the box (most typically bunches of herbs that can be grown in volume on small garden plots). Additionally HGMF has in the past secured modest grant funds to offer community outreach and education programs that included cooking classes focused on the use of fresh and seasonal produce.

Tensions and Negotiations

"Until you have some black faces around there, it's going to always be looked at as that is not for us."- CHCDC Leadership

As is likely obvious from the above discussion, HGMF continues to search for ways to effectively serve the residents of the Hollygrove neighborhood. The market has been very successful in attracting customers from across New Orleans who are drawn to the 'local food' and the community-oriented ethos. Both TCC and CHCDC leadership are quick to acknowledge that the success of the food hub has contributed to a broader change in the reputation and perception of the Hollygrove neighborhood by New Orleans residents.

"Hollygrove had such a bad reputation and finally something good was in Hollygrove that people from all over the city, it was like, I will go to Hollygrove for that. And like,

you Google Hollygrove and the market pops up, instead of a murder. So I always called it the welcome center for Hollygrove. And so, but – the other is that it wasn't indicative of Hollygrove.” – CHCDC Leadership

Staff and leadership all express their dismay and frustrated confusion with the lack of meaningful buy in from Hollygrove community members. Despite efforts at outreach and marketing, HGMF leadership recognize persistently low level of patronage of the market by Hollygrove residents, and have sought answers and guidance from on how to better engage and serve the community.

Through partnership with Tulane University (located in New Orleans), HGMF participated in a semi-experimental research project to identify specific reasons for low neighborhood participation. Researchers found that “dismal participation by the local residents was not a result of conscious avoidance but rather due to lack of awareness.” (Kato & McKinney, 2014, p. 216). The challenge, as HGMF staff and leadership see it, is in how to find the appropriate balance between making choices that are best from a market based perspective, and those that would best serve the needs and desires of community members:

“I find that when neighborhood people do shop here, they're kind of looking for different stuff than I'm normally ordering... they want like 20 bunches of mustard green. I don't necessarily even stock mustard greens all the time. I try to have them in a la carte because I know that that's an appealing thing for the neighborhood people, but if they don't come, then I'm not selling them. You know what I mean? And it's taking up space of something that I could be selling to other people who are more interest in shopping here.” – HGMF Staff

The lack of neighborhood residents in HGMF staff is an additional and key point of tension and negotiation, though the causes are complex. Trinity Christian Community is perennial host of a large contingent of Americorps volunteers, and hosted even larger contingents of volunteers during the initial labor-heavy stages of post-Katrina recovery. As such, CHCDC relied heavy on volunteer labor, and Americorps volunteers in particular, for the initial development of HGMF. Because of their extensive work in the food hub's start up, early staff of the food hub was drawn almost exclusively from former AmeriCorps volunteers who were college educated whites from outside the neighborhood (and outside Louisiana).

“Honestly, we had some employees that basically were running the market ...they weren't from Hollygrove...To be able to look for a position for someone from Hollygrove, like somebody who worked in stock room... You got to have [the board's] input because you don't know these people...I don't think [they were] prejudiced at all. I really don't...But I think it was easier for [them] to work somebody who had work experience as opposed to somebody who didn't. And so it became the norm for the market and the market... And so it was like, this is why people [from Hollygrove] think it is not for them...” – CHCDC Leadership

On the market-facing side of the enterprise, the retail operation faces competition for both suppliers and customers from profit-oriented local food purveyors – some of which pop up even in the ranks of HGMF employees. While the intricacies of this particular story are outside the purview of this paper, in the winter of 2014 HGMF endured a one two punch of poor financial management by a hired consultant, and the sudden departure of two staff members with the express intent of starting a competing local food enterprise using HGMF suppliers and clients. The resulting financial turmoil nearly resulted in the market closing its doors for good. One HGMF staffer, who had been holding on to a month's worth of un-cashed paycheck at the time of our interview (itself a testament to the passion of HGMF staff for the enterprise) recounted her amazement at the generosity and commitment of participating farmers:

"I had to call farmers saying, I know you have a check of ours... but long story short, I don't have money in the bank right now... I was in tears with people. But a lot of people were really understanding. One farmer said 'The important thing is that you guys stay in business, and if that means giving you free produce that's what we'll do.'"

The near-closure, while extremely stressful to staff and leadership, served to re-energize the commitment of some ambivalent board members, and focus the attention of staff and leadership on instituting essential administrative systems and capacities necessary for the continued success of the market. In considering the future, conversations with HGMF and CHCDC leadership often return to the value of HGMF to the overall image and reputation of Hollygrove as a neighborhood, and the continued hope that they could somehow figure out how to "make it all work".

Discussion and conclusion

Both of the food hubs presented above employ a strategy of engagement with the market place as a means to care for a concern or crisis that is in some way entangled with community agro-food economy. Comparing the farmer and farmland focused assemblage of GrowFood Carolina with the community re-development yearnings of Hollygrove Market and Farm demonstrates that there is no replicable model for food hubs. Instead, there are stories, common tools, desires and concerns to investigate. However, another community wrestling with their own unique context and concerns will re-mix these differently.

Though they share many similar practices (e.g. tools) and types of actors, their unique configurations, expressed capacities, and desired outcomes will vary greatly between hubs. Food hubs emerge from their respective community contexts and do not necessarily share the same concerns or seek to realize the same ends. This is because their matters of concern, communities of care, and ethical praxis differ. This is consistent with a notion of care, as Puig de la Bellacasa states: "Care eschews easy categorization: a way of caring over here could kill over there. Caring is more about a transformative ethos than an ethical application. We need to ask 'how to care' in each situation." (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011, p. 100). Care, in its particular manifestations, is not universal. It is not fungible, cannot be easily exchanged across locations. Care can be a function of economic exchange, but not easily exchanged through economic means.

The particular challenges for food hubs are how to realize care within the mundane (yet still extraordinary) labors and processes of the food hub and how to effectively account for that caring in their enterprise and to financial stakeholders. Which is not to say that market based, revenue generating activities don't have to happen as well; the leaders and employees of the food hub case studies presented have their own economic necessities, thus existing in the "awkward position as activists making a living off their cause" (Rogers & Fraszczak, 2014).

In the paper I've sought to demonstrate that Food hubs are a form of post-capitalist enterprise; a kind of economic assemblage comprised of new sociotechnical arrangements through which a variety of human and nonhuman actors are enrolled. These agro-food assemblages are "knots of social and political interest" whose forces are intimately entangled in the ongoing material remaking of the world (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012). These economic assemblages of human, non-human, and socio-technologies, constitute a community of care who, through the ethical praxis of community economy, work to realize a shared vision for the future (Snyder & St. Martin, 2015). As a form of post-capitalist enterprise, food hubs embody the ideals of community economy. Their ethical praxis – realized within and beyond economic exchange - contributes to the construction of the economic world envisioned by the enterprise's community of care (Callon, 1998; J. K. Gibson-Graham, 2008)

In the introduction I suggested that the post-capitalist enterprise might be one of Law's 'hopeful monsters'. We might also understand them as an example of Haraway's cyborgs (1991). The cyborg is a creature of lived-social reality that is a hybrid of both machine and organism; that blurs and ultimately rejects the boundary between nature and society. The cyborg is a product of the modern era of hegemonic capitalism, but also potentially its undoing: "The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins." (Haraway, 1991, p. 151)

Any attempt to understand and foster new economic futures will have to grapple with that same awkwardness – a necessary and productive awkwardness which has no use for ideological or theoretical purity. The notion of post-capitalist enterprise is additive in that it expands the universe of forms of knowledge, forms of practice and labor, and realms of value that are acknowledged as a component of the economic work of the enterprise: reframing some, remixing others, while also building wholly new tools and terms. Partial, failed, and contradictory efforts at building community economy are efforts none the less, and carry their own unique lessons and insights (Healy, 2015).

Centering care in our understanding of the post-capitalist enterprise is a form of performative ontology – a way of thinking with the affective desires of food hub actants and taking their concerns and desires seriously. A care-centered understanding of economic performativity is a first step towards a new accounting (affective accounting) that could foster the emergence of new economic worlds. The radical potential of food hubs as a post-capitalist enterprise is found in the careful negotiation and integration of care (specifically around production and distribution of value) throughout the economic assemblage, and in that assemblage's capacity to realize new worlds of economic activity and economic subjectivity.

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