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Shifting plates in the agrifood landscape: the tectonics of alternative agrifood initiatives in California

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Abstract

Alternative food initiatives are appearing in many places. Observers suggest that they share a political agenda: to oppose the structures that coordinate and globalize the current food system and to create alternative systems of food production that are environmentally sustainable, economically viable, and socially just. This paper examines the potential of these initiatives through the lens of the concepts of 'alternative and oppositional' social movements and 'militant particularism and global ambition' developed by Raymond Williams and David Harvey. The three sections of this paper review (1) the current discussion of common themes and strategies in agrifood initiatives within the academic literature; (2) the history of these initiatives in California; and (3) results of our interviews with 37 current leaders of California organizations. We suggest that further understanding these initiatives, and success in the goals of the initiatives themselves, requires us to look past their similarities to examine their differences. These differences are related to the social forms and relations that have been established in the places from which these initiatives arise. 'Social justice,' in particular, may be difficult to construct at a 'local' scale.
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1. Introduction

People are working to construct new initiatives and civic organizations that challenge the existing food system and seek to build alternatives, in many places. These new agrifood initiatives (AFIs) engage the imaginations, hopes, and energies of people located in very different sites within the agrifood system. They affirm a shared political agenda: to create food systems that are environmentally sustainable, economically viable, and socially just. Most frame their engagement as opposing the global by reconstructing the local. Some act to reconnect farmers and consumers through farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture, and the reinvigoration of small family farms; their goals are to develop community-based food systems grounded in regional agriculture and local decision-making. Others focus on organizing and empowering marginalized communities through projects such as urban gardens and food-based micro-enterprise or job training programs. Some engage in education about the food system and ecological agriculture for school children, growers, or the general public. These alternative agrifood activities are increasingly celebrated in both popular culture and academic venues as agents of social change. Implicitly, such initiatives present both critique—opposition to the existing food system—and an alternative vision of socio-ecological relations embedded in food.

Our central question concerns the 'tectonics' of these initiatives. To what degree do they seek to create a new structural configuration—a shifting of plates in the agrifood landscape—and to what degree are their efforts limited to incremental erosion at the edges of the political-economic structures that currently constitute those plates? That is, are they significantly *oppositional* or primarily *alternative*? We believe that this distinction may be useful in assessing the current potential of such initiatives to change the agrifood system. We raise these questions to consider what might be done to support and strengthen these efforts to reach their stated goals of environmental sustainability, economic viability, and social justice.

Our method in this paper recognizes the necessary difference between points of view that arises from the distinct engagements of academics and advocates

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concerned with social change. '(F)or the most part human beings live their lives independent of the intellectual schemes dreamed up in academe … the knowledge whereby one lives is not necessarily identical with the knowledge whereby one explains life' (M. Jackson, quoted in Gray, 2000, p. 47). The three sections of the paper draw on the current discussion of the potential of AFIs in the academic literature, on our own knowledge of the history of these initiatives in California, and on the knowledge and insight of the current leaders of these California initiatives. We believe that reflecting these points of view against each other allows a more nuanced and multi-dimensional consideration of the issues with which we are concerned and can contribute to more effective action. '*Theoretical practice* must be constructed as a continuous dialectic between the militant particularism of lived lives and a struggle to achieve sufficient critical distance and detachment to formulate global ambitions (Harvey, 1996, p. 44).'

We take the terms oppositional and alternative from Raymond Williams (1977). Williams found in such initiatives an on-going and potentially transformative process of cultural struggle—in the spaces of everyday life—against the hegemony which those who support a dominant form of social organization (such as the contemporary agrifood system) must seek to maintain. AFIs seek to construct and portray alternatives to the construction and reproduction of hegemonies of food (and agriculture) in the conventional food system.

> We have then to add to the concept of hegemony the concepts of counter-hegemony and alternative hegemony, which are real and persistent elements of practice (Williams, 1977, p. 113).

These initiatives may in fact be seeds of social change, but they must be understood as works in progress.

> Authentic breaks … have often in fact occurred. And we are better able to see this … if we develop modes of analysis which instead of reducing works to finished products, and activities to fixed positions, are capable of discerning, in good faith, the finite but significant openness of many initiatives and contributions (Williams, 1977, p. 114).

And they are also works in place, in situations and circumstances strongly influenced by the geographies of urban and rural, of landscape and region, which in turn have been formed and framed by the structures and hegemonies of the dominant agrifood system. As such, their global ambitions are in potential conflict with their militant particularism.

Using his own reading of Williams' work, David Harvey develops an analysis of this tension between 'militant particularism' and 'global ambition' (1996). We find this distinction, and this tension, useful. Militant particularism results from the situatedness of the critical impulse of social resistance in everyday life. People seek to change the structures of their everyday lives—but they must do so from within the circumstances in which they find themselves. This carries the particularities of those circumstances forward, potentially as unresolved (and even unexamined) problems. 'Ideals forged out of the affirmative experience of solidarities in one place get generalized and universalized as a working model of a society that will benefit all humanity (Harvey, 1996, p. 32).' 'The move from tangible solidarities understood as patterns of social life organized in affective and knowable communities to a more abstract set of conceptions that would have universal purchase involves a move from one level of abstraction—attached to place—to another level of abstraction capable of reaching out across space (Harvey, 1996, p. 33).' '(W)e cannot do without both kinds of abstraction any more than we can do without the conflicting modes of representation that necessarily attach to them (Harvey, 1996, p. 37).'

Most work to date on alternative AFIs has attended to the global ambitions these initiatives appear to share but not to the militant particularisms that may underlie these ambitions. In this paper we briefly interrogate the portrayal of these initiatives in the academic literature, suggesting that there is now a need for more explicit consideration of their differences as they relate to these circumstances of places from which these initiatives emerge. Terms such as 'environmental sustainability', 'economic viability', and even 'social justice', as they arise out of place, are likely to manifest and transport local encryptions that give them different real meanings as goals for changed social relations.

> Transformations of space, place, and environment are neither neutral nor innocent with respect to practices of domination and control. Indeed, they are fundamental framing decisions—replete with multiple possibilities—that govern the conditions (often oppressive) over how lives can be lived. Such issues cannot be left unaddressed in struggles for liberation (Harvey, 1996, p. 44).

We then undertake this situated engagement ourselves, reviewing the history (which begins nearly 30 years ago) of AFIs in California. Finally, we report on the initial results of our interviews with leaders of 37 California AFI organizations, analyzing their definitions of food-system problems and solutions and the political circumstances and alliances that have supported their past and present efforts.

2. Studying alternative agrifood initiatives in places

The complex and multi-disciplinary literature on AFIs strongly engages the geographical concepts of

'global' and 'local' and emphasizes this antinomy. Academic observers suggest that these initiatives reflect the widespread experience of globalization of agricultural commodities, of integration and globalization of major food intermediaries, and of changing national and international agendas of regulation of agriculture and food. Problems in the current agrifood system are presented as interrelated, linking multiple sites from consumption to production. The alternative to globalized agriculture many advocate is 'localization.' Localizing food seems to manifest both oppositional and alternative desires, providing an opportunity for directly personal relationships between producers and consumers and allowing people to express their sense of responsibility to the natural world and themselves within it, as Williams suggested (see, for example, Clancy, 1997; Grey, 2000; Hinrichs, 2000; Kolodinsky and Pelch, 1997). These relationships construct value and meaning in food, not only the physical product itself (Marsden et al., 2000; Murdoch and Miele, 1999).

But any attempt to reconstruct the 'local'—a central theme in many of these initiatives—must also be influenced by characteristics of the 'locality' in question, as Harvey suggests. These characteristics are themselves a product of the working out of the modern food and agriculture system, which has constructed a heterogeneous landscape of uneven development of city and countryside, regional specialization in the production of particular commodities, and varied local and regional geographies of agriculture and food. The local is not everywhere the same.

> (T)hese militant particularisms—even when they can be brought together into a national movement—… are in some senses profoundly conservative because they rest on the perpetuation of patterns of social relations and community solidarities—loyalties—achieved under a particular kind of oppressive and uncaring industrial order (Harvey, 1996, p. 40).

Much of the agrifood literature to date speaks critically to the common experience of agricultural industrialization and globalization. Both scholars and activists emphasize the problems of the 'industrial' food and agricultural system (e.g., Grey, 2000; Kloppenburg et al., 2000; Pretty, 1998). McMichael (2000) refers to the 'excesses' of the industrialization of the food system, and Clancy (1997) to the 'invisible costs' of industrialized farming. Murdoch and Miele (1999) link environmental problems in agriculture to the use of industrial agricultural techniques. When health issues such as nutrition and food safety (e.g., Clancy, 1997; Marsden and Arce, 1995; Murdoch et al., 2000) are mentioned, these are often linked with the industrialization and mass production or the commodification of food (Gilg and Battershill, 1998; Kloppenburg et al., 1996; McMichael, 2000). The issue of globalization is coupled with the increased power of agrifood corporations. Henderson (1998) decries the restructuring of the world food system under corporate control, and Pretty (1998) condemns the increased ability of agrifood capitals to extract value throughout the food system, resulting in lower returns to farmers. Authors mention not only the decreasing viability of family farms, but also the deterioration of rural culture (Grey, 2000; Kloppenburg et al., 2000; McMichael, 2000).

New, locally situated and decentralized agrifood initiatives are framed as counter-movements that challenge the control of corporations and other national and global institutions and resist the ecologically and socially destructive practices of the contemporary global agrifood system (for example, Goodman and Redclift, 1991; McMichael, 2000; Raynolds, 2000). Some suggest that the agency of consumers acting within alternative agrifood efforts presents an opening for a significant restructuring and transformation of agrifood systems (Murdoch et al., 2000; Nygard and Storstad, 1998; Whatmore and Thorne, 1997). For Whatmore (1995), consumer resistance to industrial food products forms an important basis for new political alliances and networks between consumers and farmers. Gottlieb and Fisher (1998) suggest that food-system alternatives create and connect economic and social spaces and establish new models that engage public concerns about community, social justice, and environmental sustainability. Observers also assert that disparate alternative food efforts can combine with each other to constitute a powerful social movement for change; Henderson (1998) claims that decentralized efforts and organizations are 'swelling into a significant social movement' and that their decentralization is a source of vitality and strength.

In all of these claims, the 'local' has played an increasing role in framing resistance. Yet, to both activists and scholars, 'local' (in the food system) can have multiple and conflicting meanings. Perhaps the most common is the idea of regional provisioning through a selective and voluntary regional closure that links production and consumption around particular sites, through concepts such as the 'foodshed' (Kloppenburg et al., 1996). The Rodale Institute's Cornucopia Project of the early 1980s was an early initiative that sought to enroll consumers to selectively purchase products from local farmers, accepting the consequences in terms of seasonal availability and cost in order to support greater diversity and resilience in regional farm economies. Farmers' markets and CSAs are the same concept at a much smaller scale and for only certain foods; they ask consumers to commit to buying food—at least fresh food—from farms and farmers who could have only a marginal and subordinated position in the

Table 1
Core forms of alternative food initiatives

Author	Activities included
DeLind (1994)	CSAs, cooperatives, urban gardens, farmers' markets, community land trusts, food policy councils
Clancy (1997)	Farmers' markets, CSAs, labeling, direct marketing, community gardens, value-added marketing, cooperatives
Feenstra (1997)	Food policy councils, farmer's markets, CSAs, community and school gardens, urban farms, college-level educational farms, cooperative agricultural marketing programs
Pretty (1998)	Direct marketing, community gardens and cooperatives, alternative knowledge networks, eco-labeling
Grey (2000)	Direct marketing, community supported agriculture, food cooperatives
Lacy (2000)	Farmers' markets, farm stands, CSAs, community gardens, sustainable agriculture organizations, community food security coalitions, food policy councils, producer and consumer cooperatives

larger agricultural economy.[1] Buttel (2000) suggests that activities like CSAs and local food system projects are the primary way in which consumers are expressing resistance to problems in the food system. Other observers agree about the importance of specific institutional forms in supporting close, 'local' practices and relationships (Table 1).

The local in this sense carries the multiple connotations of common interest, of the construction of community through the development of *links* within everyday life, of the incorporation of a moral economy of interaction between neighbors or allies mutually engaged in production and consumption. The local is assumed to enable relationships of aid and trust between producer and consumer, eliding the faceless intermediaries hidden within commodity chains and industrial foods. The local is also assumed to encourage both producers and consumers to internalize the externalities of conventional agriculture, paying the full costs of food production directly, rather than indirectly through displaced environmental and social harm.

A second meaning of locality refers to *sites* and through them to product differentiation, in which particular characteristics of a terrain or territory are attached to a commodity, imbuing it with environmental and/or social qualities. This meaning is probably better developed in Europe, but it is appearing in various ways in the US as well. Examples include regional labels for specialty crops and their products (Napa wine, Washington apples, New York cheese). The characteristics attached to the commodity may be an assertion of quality in the sense of the material characteristics of the product; they may also be an assertion of the environmental or social circumstances of production, including social relationships of equality or inequality. For example, country of origin labeling in food is an example of this in all of its forms; country of origin labeling allowed European consumers to selectively boycott produce imported from South Africa under apartheid.

In this project, we used both of these two meanings of 'local'—links and sites—to identify a population of California NGOs with which to engage. Later in this paper, we present preliminary results from our continuing study of 37 AFIs. We selected these organizations from a larger population (80 organizations) identified from our prior research and experience, and by snowball techniques. Review of this larger set of organizations suggested that there were several distinct patterns of engagement: some groups emphasized building local links between growers and consumers, others focussed on agricultural or environmental education, still others sought to address problems of access to healthy food, particularly for low-income communities. We constructed a preliminary typology of patterns of engagement and selected specific organizations to reflect this range and (as possible) to explore the distribution of these activities throughout the state. Our research draws on documentary sources (such as mission statements, internal reports, web pages, and press releases) and on extensive semi-structured interviews with organization leaders.

It is remarkable that these two concepts of local have been so widely and rapidly adopted in so many places. However, our research suggests that we need to know more about those places if we are to understand not just the commonalities, but also the differences that arise among these initiatives. These differences have implications for the success of the initiatives' shared goals of environmental sustainability, economic viability, and social justice. We suggest that behind this apparent identity of engagement in alternative agrifood activities in many places there is militant particularism, as well as global ambition (Harvey, 1996), since the circumstances in which these practices and relationships are coming into place vary widely.[2] This may be particularly visible

[1] Another issue that requires further examination in the assessment of the implications of AFIs as a general movement of resistance to industrial agriculture is the question of *which foods can be localized?* We note this here to remind ourselves and our readers that local food systems rarely seek to provide a complete diet; they focus on the provisioning of fresh food and certain animal products, not on the grains, legumes and oils that make up a necessary direct and indirect part of most people's meals. Movements for localizing diets do not in fact seek to restrict consumers to only what can be (or is) produced locally. This topic needs further consideration from both activists and scholars.

[2] We admit in our own work to the implications of our standpoint—the view from California—but we suggest that there are also views from Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, New England, and Wales. In each

in California, where both the labor and environmental practices of industrial agriculture and the urban and rural implications of ethnicity and class must be considered.

3. Situating California AFIs in time and place

The historical development of AFIs in California over more than 30 years reflects both local and national circumstances. As these circumstances have changed, the balance between oppositional and alternative themes in the missions of these organizations has also changed. Where in the early years AFIs combined the search for alternatives with a direct critique of existing industrial agricultural practices, that critical stance about conventional agriculture has more recently become subdued and framed as alternative *rather than* oppositional. We suggest that this may result in part from an attenuation of the linkages between these organizations and broader social movements for labor justice and environmental regulation, in the context of the neo-liberal revolution that weakened these larger movements after 1980. The loss of this structural critique and the rise of a political culture of entrepreneurialism appear to have left these organizations with only neo-populism to explain the politics of their engagement (Allen, 1999).

The relatively long history of AFIs in California offers an opportunity to situate these initiatives in place and time and to examine the complex interactions among allies and opponents, and with other social movements, that their struggle presents. As Williams suggests,

> In authentic historical analysis it is necessary at every point to recognize the complex interrelationships between movements and tendencies both within and beyond a specific and effective dominance (1977, p. 121).

From statehood (1848) to the beginning of World War II, California built an economy of wealth and power based on the use of natural resources (Walker, 2001) and the subordination of immigrant workers (McWilliams, 1935, 1971). In that period California agriculture developed the industrial form that allowed it to produce fresh fruits and vegetables for national and international markets. Post-war rapid growth in both economy and population brought California to its current status as the world's sixth largest economy, with an area equivalent to the UK and a 2000 population of 34 million people. This population is fundamentally urban: more than 90 percent of the state's population is located in metropolitan areas. Many people are poor and socially marginalized by race or ethnicity, in both city and countryside.

The political economy of California agriculture is strongly industrial at the point of production (Friedland et al., 1981; FitzSimmons, 1986, 1990; Wells, 1996). The most important characteristic of this system is its dependence on temporary and marginalized farm labor. Temporary farm labor is ubiquitous in California agriculture. Very few farmers rely primarily on family or household labor. California employs more than half of the nation's temporary farm workers, over 800,000 people, the vast majority immigrants from Mexico (Martin and Taylor, 2000). The California industrial pattern of separation of farm ownership from farm labor affects smaller, marginal farms as well. Where (everywhere) immigrant farm workers are available for low wages, farmers employ them. Only the smallest or most politically committed farmers structure their farming practices to avoid hiring at least a seasonal supplement of workers. Former farm workers who become farmers hire farm workers. CSAs hire farm workers. Some farmers will say that their intensive farming practices (whether organic or conventional) are *fertilized* by the availability of temporary farm workers. These workers receive low wages, suffer difficult working conditions, experience hunger, live in substandard housing, and are insecure and vulnerable in their employment and citizenship status. Therefore the issue of social justice for labor is always present in California agriculture, whether or not it is seen.

California agriculture is also particularly chemically intensive. The long growing season and lack of winter cold allow production of a huge range of valuable fruit and vegetable crops but also allow pest populations to grow. Leafy vegetables are stimulated by high levels of fertilizer and irrigation. Cosmetic standards for these crops also encourage intensive pesticide application. Californians for Pesticide Reform, using state data from 1999, reports pesticide application rates in intensively farmed areas from 15,000 to 200,000 pounds of pesticide per square mile.[3] High levels of pesticide and fertilizer application and intensive irrigation generate significant environmental problems.

In the 1970s new attention to the politics of industrial agriculture in California gave rise to a range of challenges that involved both opposition to current practices and the search for alternatives. These challenges had a social dimension—to recognize and address the implications of poverty and racism in both the production and consumption of food—and an

(*footnote continued*)
site, locality matters because there are different social relationships of power in place. Solidarity with Wisconsin dairy farmers or the producers of Welsh farm cheeses is quite different than loyalty to California dairymen (who may have herds of 2000 producing cows).

[3] Maps based on the California Department of Pesticide Regulation database can be viewed at www.igc.org/cpr/datamaps/maps.html.

Table 2
Social movements of the 1960s

In the US	In California
Civil Rights Movement (leads, in Johnson administration, to War on Poverty, Great Society programs)	Civil Rights Movement takes the form of support for farm worker organizing
	Civil Rights Movement also focuses attention on urban poverty, community empowerment
Environmental movement (from *Silent Spring* to Earth Day)	'Back to the land' movement includes environmental and social concerns in beginning of organic farming movement
'World food crisis' (NeoMalthusianism) supports growth of production agriculture	*Diet for a Small Planet*, *Food First* challenge Malthusian argument

environmental dimension—to control the human and ecological health impacts of chemical technologies in agriculture through regulation and at the same time to develop alternative practices that did not threaten the same harm to people and others.

The earliest AFIs in our study (or their antecedent organizations) were formed in the context of these movements for social justice and environmental regulation (see Table 2). During the Civil Rights movement, African Americans in the rural South and urban North received the most attention, but across the Southwest, people of Mexican ancestry struggled for justice for their communities as well. In California, one form this took was support for farm worker organizing, leading to the end of the *bracero* (Mexican guest worker) program and creating the conditions for the successful inter-ethnic coalition that became the United Farm Workers (UFW) union. The UFW was successful in part because it was able to organize for justice among urban consumers as well as workers in the fields. Federal Great Society programs, beginning with the War on Poverty, provided support for organizing urban communities around basic needs (such as food) and community empowerment. The publication of *Silent Spring* in 1962 catalyzed the new environmental movement, encouraging the more rigorous regulation of pesticides and, through the search for environmentally benign alternatives, encouraging the movement for organic farming. National 'productionist' agricultural policies focussed on competition for world export markets and the international marketing of green revolution technologies were justified by claims of a looming 'world food crisis'; opponents countered these modernization claims with books such as *Diet for A Small Planet* and *Food First*.

Eight of the organizations (or their antecedents) in our survey were founded between 1975 and 1980. Several were initially allied with farm workers. What is now the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) began as the California Agrarian Action Project in 1978. Its first activities included demonstrations in support of farm workers and participation in a lawsuit intended to force the University of California to shift research funds from underwriting technologies for industrial agriculture toward improving the circumstances of farm workers and small farmers. In the 1980s the Agrarian Action Project fought pesticide poisonings, organized victims and, with allies such as the UFW, provided the political pressure behind strong new regulation of pesticides by the state. It helped organize the annual Ecological Farming Conference, and it joined other organizations in a lawsuit against the Federal government to force the redistribution of large landholdings that benefited from government irrigation programs.

The Interfaith Hunger Coalition, founded in 1978, worked to meet the food needs of the urban poor, organizing inner-city farmers' markets in low-income communities. Several of the oldest farmers' markets in our study ('Heart of the City Farmers Market' in San Francisco and the Richmond Farmers' Market, among others) were begun to serve these unmet needs. Other farmers' markets, such as the Davis Covered Market founded in 1975 were initiated jointly by food cooperatives and local organic farmers. The 'back-to-the-land' movement, with roots in resistance to the Vietnam War, alienation from consumer culture, and environmental concern, brought middle-class students into organic farming and environmental education through alternative agriculture education programs such as the UC Davis Student Farm and the UC Santa Cruz Apprenticeship Program. The same impulse led activists to add gardening to the activities of youth social services programs (Berkeley Youth Alternatives, founded in 1976) and community economic development initiatives in public housing (the San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners, founded in 1983). Even the typically production-oriented University of California's Cooperative Extension got involved, setting up an urban agriculture program for low-income communities in East Los Angeles (Common Ground, founded in 1978).

The seven AFIs we surveyed that began in the 1980s had similar agendas, but did not take a strong oppositional stance. Symptomatically, after 1980 new AFIs were less likely to address the problems of California's migrant farm labor force (See Table 3).

There may be multiple reasons for this. In 1978 the UFW terminated their relationships with Anglo groups within and without the Union. The election of a Republican governor in California and president in Washington signaled and supported successful challenges from industrial agriculture and broke down government agencies that had provided legal support

Table 3
California agrifood issues in contemporary context

Era	Key events	Orientations of AFIs
1970	War on poverty Environmental movement Farm worker organizing	AFIs frame issues as both institutional and political; social justice questions address production and consumption; environmental questions consider alternative practices and state regulation of hazards
1980	Break between UFW, social movements Environmental, in agriculture, becomes 'organic'	New AFIs emphasize producer and consumer education, food access, local connections, personal development—but lose link with political economy of agriculture, farm worker issues
1990	1992 Rodney King uprising in Los Angeles 1996 federal welfare cuts	Community food security appears as a significant theme, but most AFIs are silent on social justice issues in production (except for some food policy AFIs)

for farm worker organizing. As the UFW lost position (and contracts), farm workers became less visible. Even long-committed organizations like the Agrarian Action Project became less active in support of farmworkers themselves, though this AFI continued to raise critical oppositional questions about toxic substances and concentration in land ownership until the early 1990s.

There is another potential explanation for this change, however, that lies in the continuing importance of temporary farm labor to all California farmers, even those that consider themselves family farmers or organic farmers. In the context of this dependence on non-family workers, often different from the farmers themselves in ethnicity, citizenship, and class, AFIs that raise the question of social justice in production can encounter tension with even the small or alternative farmers to which the alternative food movement seeks to connect. Though some suggest that farm workers are better off on organic farms because they are not exposed to pesticides, there is some indication that the workers themselves prefer to work for larger farmers when they can thus get benefits and sometimes better wages. This is an important area for consideration and future research.

The 20 AFIs formed since 1990 that make up the majority of participants in our survey have little to say about farm labor. Though they may often have social justice commitments, these are not to rural workers. Instead, their commitments are urban in focus, following one old and one new theme. The old theme is food access; the new theme is gardening or farming as rehabilitative therapy and social development. The issue of food access emerges again as a consequence of two events: the 1992 destruction of the inner city food system in central Los Angeles during the uprising after the Rodney King verdict, and also the substantial cuts in welfare and food stamp availability in the mid-1990s. During the uprising, food markets (both small and large) were often targets. In the period immediately following, it was very difficult for Black and Latino inner city residents to get access to food. A study by students at UCLA (Ashman et al., 1993) examined the issues related to the food system of the inner city and suggested a number of social strategies to improve residents' access to food. Out of this rose the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC), which has since provided regional, state, and national leadership to new initiatives for food access. Other AFIs arising during this period, such as Food from the 'Hood, have used urban gardens and value-adding activities to teach entrepreneurship and micro-enterprise strategies, just as the San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners began to do a decade earlier. These more recent AFIs may be quite intent on social justice issues, but their constituencies are urban—the urban poor.

The second theme, rehabilitation and empowerment, intersects with some of this but focuses on training and empowering even more marginal populations: the homeless (Homeless Garden Project, begun in 1990), the substance-dependent (St. Anthony's Farm), and those in jail (The San Francisco Jails project, begun in 1992). In each of these, education in organic production is combined with training in entrepreneurship and life skills to help people to learn to function more successfully (and independently) in their everyday lives. These organizations are also some of the most innovative: the Homeless Garden project not only sells at farmers' markets and runs a CSA but also supports the Women's Organic Flower Garden and its craft shop; St. Anthony's farm runs an organic dairy of 200 cows; and the Jails Project provides transitional services and gardening employment to inmates leaving jail.

In this recent period, some of the older AFIs have modified their engagements. The Agrarian Action Project, which combined with the California Association of Family Farms (a long-time ally) in 1993, to create the Community Alliance with Family Farmers, shifted away from its oppositional engagements to emphasize farmer-to-farmer education (its Lighthouse Farms project), the Rural Water Impact Network (which seeks to protect water access for small farms), and its Biologically Integrated Orchard Systems

initiative (which supports biological strategies for pest and fertility management in orchards) (Campbell, 2001). Its urban manifestation is focussed on alternative marketing pathways for small farmers, including farmers' markets and CSAs.

Farmers' markets, CSAs, and organic production are currently important programmatic strategies to many of these AFIs (over half of the organizations we interviewed operated or facilitated a direct marketing effort). They serve to strengthen connections between farmers and consumers, to fund AFI participants and activities, and to build a 'moral economy' of concern for people and nature. Farmers' markets and CSAs are inherently scale-limited, since larger industrial farms with a more central position in the production of particular California commodities have no interest in taking on the transaction costs of direct marketing. Both the practical geographies of transport to market and the institutional rules of farmers' markets and CSAs effectively limit participants in these arrangements to local connections. The same has not proved true of organic production, however. The organic movement (in the production of fresh fruits and vegetables) developed rapidly in the 1970s. California organizations such as California Certified Organic Farmers, and later the Organic Farming Research Foundation, took on a leading role in promoting both organic practices and certification, providing what was later to serve as a template for the development of national organic standards. This has opened up an opportunity for industrial agriculture. As Guthman (1998) has shown, the market for organic produce that was initiated by small farmers marketing locally has become a value-added opportunity for some of the largest growers, who provision 'organic' markets nationally and internationally with foods produced under the same relations of production as their conventional products. Smaller growers and those with more social (and environmental) concerns have not found a solution to this 'scaling up' though many consumers strongly resist the industrialization of organic agriculture (Vos, 2000).

The history and genealogy of these AFI organizations in California thus gives evidence of the importance of the inevitable embeddedness of such initiatives in social circumstance in place. During a period in which political claims about civil rights for working people of color were supported by a larger social movement, California organizations were able to include these claims for justice in their agendas. As claims for these rights were replaced by neo-liberal arguments about individual responsibility (Allen, 1999), AFIs withdrew from direct opposition to powerful political and economic structures and framed their programs in terms of the rights of consumers to choose alternatives, rather than in their rights as citizens (Allen and Kovach, 2000).

4. Alternatives to what? Visions from inside the alternative food movement in California

Discovering how people working in these organizations view the world and how they see their place in challenging and reshaping the agrifood system is an essential step for better understanding the role of these organizations in social change. Kloppenburg et al. (2000) argue that existing conceptual framings of alternative food systems do not reflect the understanding of those who are most active in the movement. Feenstra (1997) suggests that the first key element for developing sustainable, equitable food systems is leadership, including clear, identifiable leaders who can build strategic relationships.[4] In this section, we report the views of AFI leaders we interviewed and assess their identification of problems in the current system and solutions to those problems.

We interviewed leaders from 37 California AFIs active in alternative agrifood education programs, therapeutic agriculture programs, local and regional food labels, agrifood micro-enterprises, urban agriculture and community gardens, food policy advocacy, direct farm to school salad bar provisioning, CSAs or farmers markets, the initiatives suggested in Table 1. Many AFIs operate more than one of these programs. The distribution of our study sample reflects the geographic array of these organizations around the state. In California, AFIs are primarily clustered around the major urban areas (the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles). Where they are located in rural areas, they are mostly outside the industrial agricultural regions. Table 4 lists the organizations whose leaders we interviewed.

The second column of the table identifies the location of the organization but may be misleading as to its genesis. Even rurally located organizations are likely to be urban in their origins; for example, the St. Anthony's Foundation Farm is in rural Sonoma but serves resident clients from inner-city San Francisco. Similarly, the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center is made up of urban expatriates seeking the graces of an alternative rural life. Only Amo Organics (successor to the Rural Development Center which sought to prepare farmworkers for independent small-scale farming) and the regional labels arise primarily out of agriculture.

Our goal in the interviews was to learn about the worldview and transformative potential of AFIs by listening to the perspectives and insights of AFI leaders as expressed through an in-depth interview process. In these interviews we collected basic information about

[4] Feenstra's other two key elements focus on the participants in the organizations. In the second phase of our study, we will interview participants or clients of a subset of the AFIs included in this first phase.

Table 4
California agrifood initiatives

Organization	Location in California	Year founded	Programmatic focus
St. Anthony's Foundation Farm	Rural northern	1956	Rehabilitation of low-income and homeless substance dependent people
Davis Covered Market	Urban northern	1975	Farmers' market
Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy	Urban northern	1975	A 'think tank' for issues of food and justice internationally, a membership organization
UC Davis Student Farm	Rural northern	1975	Agricultural education for university students
Berkeley Youth Alternative Market Gardening	Urban northern	1976	Youth services and rehabilitation
Southern California Interfaith Hunger Coalition (defunct)	Urban southern	1977	Inner-city hunger; set up farmers' markets in low-income urban areas
Community Alliance with Family Farmers	Statewide	1978	Statewide organization, precursor advocated for justice for farm workers but current organization is more focussed on agricultural environmental issues, economic opportunities for family farmers
Common Ground Garden Program	Urban southern	1978	Urban agricultural education and access to urban gardens for low-income communities in Los Angeles
Berkeley Farmers' Market	Urban northern	1981	Farmers' market
'Heart of the City' Farmers' Market	Urban northern	1981	Farmers' market in the inner city
San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners	Urban northern	1983	Urban economic development, community organizing and empowerment
Richmond Farmers' Market	Urban northern	1984	Farmers' market in a low-income area
Select Sonoma	Rural northern	1988	Regional label
Santa Cruz/Watsonville Farmers' Market	Urban central	1989	Farmers' markets
Homeless Garden Project	Urban central	1990	Rehabilitation and support of homeless people
Arcata Educational Farm	Rural northern	1992	Agricultural education, CSA
California Food Policy Advocates	Statewide	1992	Food policy, food access
Food from the Hood	Urban southern	1992	Urban agriculture, microenterprise for scholarships for low-income youth
Humboldt Harvest	Rural northern	1992	Regional label
San Francisco Jails Project	Urban northern	1992	Rehabilitation of people in jail
Occidental Center for Food and Justice	Urban southern	1992	Policy and program development for inner-city food needs
Berkeley Opportunities for Self Sufficiency	Urban northern	1993	Food security, community economic development, community gardens
Center for Urban Education about Sustainable Agriculture	Urban northern	1993	Urban agricultural education, farmers' market
Center for Urban Agriculture at Fairview Gardens	Urban southern	1994	Demonstration organic farm, urban agricultural education
Long Beach Organic	Urban southern	1994	Community gardens for urban poor
Occidental Arts and Ecology Center	Rural northern	1994	Agricultural education, lifestyle change, intentional community
Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems CSA	Urban central	1995	CSA associated with Apprenticeship in Ecological Horticulture, a practical education program
Marin Food and Agriculture Project	Urban northern	1996	Regional food security policy
Park Village	Urban northern	1996	Community gardens for residents of public housing
Berkeley Community Gardening Collaborative	Urban northern	1997	Community gardens, community food policy
Berkeley Food Systems Project	Urban northern	1997	Agricultural education, alternative markets to schools, hunger issues
Escondido Community Health Center	Urban southern	1998	Community gardens for Latino residents
Amo Organics	Rural central	1999	Latino farmer marketing cooperative, CSA
Yolo/Davis/Winters Farm to School project	Urban northern	2000	Farm to school program
Community Food Security Coalition Farm to School Project	Urban southern	2001	Food and agricultural education, farm to school program

the organization's history, activities, obstacles, and influences. We provided opportunities for respondents to share their perceptions of key problems and solutions in the food system. Each interview was taped, transcribed, and tabulated.

We asked AFI leaders: 'what do you see as the most pressing problems in the current food system?' Components of problem categories are shown in Table 5.

Responses to this question were tabulated in two ways: first, by how many times the issue came up in all responses (since those interviewed could provide as many distinct responses as they chose), and second, by how many of the organizations mentioned that particular category of problems (Table 6).

Half of the food system problems cited by organization leaders were those of alienation and concentration, what we term 'populist' issues. An indication of the prevalence of these issues in the minds of AFI leaders is that issues of this type were mentioned by over two-thirds of the organization leaders. Populist issues included people's concern that the food system is controlled by others, primarily corporations, and that ordinary people have little decision making power in the food system. Another populist issue that came up frequently is the idea that people have lost knowledge about how to grow, select, or prepare food; people are seen as disconnected both practically and spiritually from a fundamental practical experience of life, as well as from the social relationships surrounding food. Some leaders suggested that this missing knowledge about food, along with the lack of relationships between consumers and farmers, causes consumers to undervalue food and therefore be unwilling to pay its 'true price.' They saw this as reducing the viability of small farmers, who cannot survive in a cheap food system; if people were to pay more for food, small farmers would be able to earn a living. Higher prices would also allow farmers to use more ecological (and perhaps more expensive) production methods.

Table 5
Components of problem categories

Problem type	Component issues
Populist	Lack of economic opportunities for farmers, food is too cheap Corporate control of food system, lack of democratic participation Globalization, non-local food system People are not connected to the land or source of food People are inexperienced in growing or preparation of food Lack of knowledge about health, cooking, nutrition
Environmental	Urbanization, loss of agricultural land Overuse of agricultural chemicals Water quality and depletion Proliferation of GMOs
Class	Inequitable distribution of wealth and resources Poverty, low wages Lack of access to healthy food by low-income people

Table 6
Types of problems cited by organization leaders[a]

Problem type	Percent of problems listed	Percent of organizations citing problem
Populist	50	69
Environmental	29	41
Class	21	48
Total	100	

[a] $N = 37$.

Environmental issues were cited somewhat less frequently than populist issues, though nearly a third of the responses were in this category. We classified concerns about pesticide use, water quality, loss of agricultural land, and the proliferation of genetically modified organisms as environmental issues. Forty-one percent of organization leaders listed environmental issues as key problems in the food system, indicating that these kinds of problems are very much on the minds of those working in alternative food initiatives in California.

The kinds of problems least-frequently cited by organization leaders are those that we categorized as core class or political-economic issues. Here we included inequitable distribution of wealth and income or lack of access by low-income people to fresh, healthy food. While class issues represented only 21 percent of all the specific problems listed, we should note that almost half of those interviewed did at least cite these issues as pressing food-system problems, slightly more than those mentioning environmental problems. However, no AFI leaders brought up farm labor issues as problematic in response to this question.

The leaders we interviewed generally reported the same types of problems that are mentioned in the literature, with two notable exceptions. First, the academic literature sometimes focuses on taste and the aesthetics of food as objects of resistance, but our respondents did not mention this. Second, what we term class issues are rarely addressed in the literature but were frequently reported as problems by California AFI leaders. The responses are consonant with the literature in emphasizing the links among populist, environmental, and class related aspects of food-system problems. Many leaders identified problems of all three types.

After asking about problems, we asked our respondents what they thought the best solutions were. We encouraged them not to confine their answers to the

activities in which their organizations were engaged, and asked them to think about the issues from a broader perspective. The most striking thing about the responses is the extent to which they accept the structures and parameters of the current food system. In general, leaders of California AFI organizations prescribe working to develop alternatives within the overall structure of the current agrifood system rather than working to reshape its architecture.

The most frequent solutions they suggested were local entrepreneurial initiatives (Table 7). These are neighborhood- and community-oriented, hands-on programs to foster direct producer–consumer relationships. They usually rely on production by local farmers but may include community gardening by food consumers themselves. The second most frequently cited solution involves policy reform, but most of the policies are at a local scale: instituting a progressive city or county food policy, reforming local school lunches, or instituting food belts of farmland protection around urban areas. Only four of the 24 respondents suggesting policy initiatives referred to national-scale policy reform. None of their solutions related to the US Farm Bill, which was being debated in Congress concurrently with much of this research. Among California AFIs there seems to be recognition of the need for national or state policy work, but they are more focussed on local policy initiatives. Twenty-seven percent of the solutions offered embraced some kind of popular education and outreach. This is education for personal change: helping individuals recognize that they have power as consumers to grow some of their own food, purchase food directly from local farmers, develop a healthier diet, and choose foods that are tied to the biological rhythm of their locale.

Table 7
Solutions cited by organization leaders[a]

Solution type	Percentage of total responses	Examples of this type of solution
Local entrepreneurial initiatives	37	Alternative economic models (Farmers markets, CSAs), neighborhood production (urban agriculture, community gardens), direct marketing
Advocacy for alternative food policies	29	National policy reform, environmental stewardship incentives, local farmland protection initiatives, creation of city food policies, improvements in public school agrifood education and lunch programs
Education, outreach, consciousness raising	27	Popular education about the origins of their food and the power of their food choices, education of people in production of their own food, education about nutrition, food selection, health and diet

[a] $N = 37$; 84 total responses.

Table 8
Positive effects cited by organization leaders[a]

Positive effects	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Promoting direct access to local food through farmers markets, CSAs, direct marketing, community gardens	27	29
Educating students and apprentices (all age levels)	17	18
Promoting farming and economic opportunities for farmers	16	17
Doing advocacy (local, state, and federal)	14	15
Promoting or operating community gardens	10	11
Socio-economic development (therapy and employment for low-income people)	9	10

[a] $N = 37$; 93 total responses.

This agenda is generally reflected in what these AFI leaders report their chief accomplishments to be, with one exception, that of policy (Table 8). Comparing the relative emphasis on entitlement and entrepreneurial approaches (see Allen, 1999), it is apparent that market-based and entrepreneurial approaches are predominant in California AFI programs. Over 70 percent of the organizations engaged in entrepreneurial activities. These groups are much more focussed on the day-to-day operations of the business or technical aspects of their work than on political activities or advocacy for broader food-system change. Very few organizations' activities focussed primarily on changing the food system through public policy and advocating entitlements. Most California AFIs are oriented toward developing alternative economic relationships that allow people to acquire fresher, more local food or helping farmers to become or remain economically viable. This parallels Clancy's call for a more diverse food system in which people can have more choices; she writes that people will 'need to examine carefully the effects of their (mainly) passive acceptance on the present food market and decide to go into or develop markets in a more active, empowered way' (1997, p. 56). The education these AFIs do, as well as the training and employment they provide for low-income people, is designed to produce local food entrepreneurship.

California AFIs appear to agree with Kloppenburg, Hendrickson, and Stevenson (1996) that people should work incrementally within the food system. These authors argue that people will need to create 'insulated spaces' within which to create alternatives, given the dominance of the current agrifood economy. They

advocate 'secession' or withdrawal from the dominant food system and the creation of alternatives, rather than challenging the system. They suggest that those who seek change pursue a gradual 'hollowing out' of the global food system by reorganizing 'our own social and productive capacities.' The level of political and institutional opposition that confronts many of the efforts of California AFIs demonstrates the need for such insulated spaces. One AFI leader pointed out that to accomplish anything in California agriculture, one needs the cooperation of the Farm Bureau. Yet they found that in their work that sometimes the Farm Bureau was their biggest obstacle, stating that, 'Anything that seemed like a challenge to poisons and development was a concern to them.' Trying to work within the system to change the system poses a real Gordian knot for many of the California AFIs.

The most striking difference between what these leaders identified as solutions and what AFIs are actually doing lies in the political realm. They prescribe political advocacy and changes in agrifood policies at all scales of governance, but they are not inclined to do this work themselves. Ten of the 14 groups claiming advocacy as a positive effect of their organization act only at the school board, city, or county level. One respondent stated it this way: 'As a farmer, I have a pretty fundamental need to have to see a physical manifestation of our work. In other words, even though I've had a role and an influence on the policy level in more of a traditional political realm, I'm more interested in seeing physical projects establish themselves, kids be educated, you know, the inspirational part.' He questions whether policy-oriented groups have lost touch with the physicality of food systems:

> I look at a number of organizations that are active in this food realm, and I wonder whether in the process of the analysis and the discussion and the policy work, whether they've actually forgotten the physical connection that I think is necessary for any food organization to be successful. I think we have to have some relationship to the people who are eating and to the land … We want to feed people good food, and when possible, go out and help people get their own projects started.

Faced with the choice between advocating policy change in distant legislatures and establishing and maintaining tangible, material programs in their locality California AFIs are choosing the latter. Even though they are aware that political economic change is a critical part of solving food-system problems, AFI leaders express greater enthusiasm for the personal, relational, and entrepreneurial.

This preference for the alternative over the oppositional has an organizational logic as well. These organizations are quite vulnerable economically, with over half of the AFIs reporting that funding is a major obstacle—three times the second most frequently identified obstacle. Many AFIs are engaged in entrepreneurial initiatives because that is what they can find funding to do (especially from public funding agencies). In the current neoliberal political climate, organizations working in the food system find funding community gardens and CSAs much easier than policy initiatives.

At the same time, there is evidence that new relationships and increased levels of cooperation are being formed with more traditional institutions. When we asked the AFIs to identify which organizations they worked with regularly, half identified local governments, the most frequent response. One respondent remarked: 'the city officials changed the designation of our zoning from a soccer field to a sustainable agriculture education park, demonstrating their support of this project.' Another said that the city in which they were working had 'turned its attitude 180° from being against community gardens to now actively finding land for us to use, and encouraging us to apply for grant money that is out there to get gardens started.' It appears that government institutions at the city, county, and state levels are engaging the work and vision of California AFIs, which may work toward the long-term integration of the priorities and programs of the alternative AFIs into urban public programs.

For many current California AFIs, changing the food system means increasing the diversity of alternative markets such that consumers have more choice, rather than making deep structural changes that could reconfigure who gets to make which kinds of food choices. Yet, as Hinrichs (2000) cautions, direct marketing from farmer to consumer remains tinged with both marketness and instrumentalism that does not necessarily or fundamentally challenge the commodification of food.

This does not mean, however, that AFIs are not important at other levels. They may have effects in ways that are unexpected or out of proportion to what it seems they can actually accomplish given their small size and neoliberal orientations. For example, it is possible that alternatives like CSAs may indeed begin to increase members' interest and engagement in food-system problems and solutions. The importance of the growth of the organic market lies primarily in the opening it provides for the conscious 'defetishization' of food, enjoining people to think critically about the food system (Allen and Kovach, 2000). Raynolds (2000) points to this in the fair trade movement: the importance is not the volume of trade (which is extremely small) but the challenge it presents to exploitative relations in the agrifood system.

We did find evidence of the fact that this kind of critical consciousness is present and growing within California AFIs. In one interview, a young, 'typical'

environmentalist who said he had no position on social justice began to talk later about the problem of putting profits before feeding hungry people because of the consequences of treating food as a commodity. A common belief among the AFI leaders was that if people come to view food as more than a commodity, even more than mere sustenance for the body, this could lead to changes in people's food choices which in turn could lead to political, economic, and social changes in both the food system and the larger society. AFI participation may get people and communities to think about issues they may never have confronted or considered before, and to then become effective agents of agrifood system change.

Finally, California alternative AFIs tend to be both diverse and ecumenical. They engage a broad spectrum of the population, including affluent and low-income consumers, farmers, workers, businesspeople, and students. Several respondents remarked on the degree of class, cultural, ethnic, and religious cooperation that has emerged within a number of AFI projects. This successful establishment of these initiatives across potential lines of social difference underscores their promise as a foundation for political change.

5. Fractured plates and slow erosion

Alternative AFIs, in California as elsewhere, challenge the time–space distantiation that characterizes the continuing development of the dominant agrifood system. They seek to counter this by building often-local and accountable social relationships—farmers' markets, CSAs, regional foodsheds, short supply chains, fair trade networks—that connect food consumers with farmers and that allow consumers to choose in their purchases to support social relations and environmental practices that they value. They work to educate consumers to see the ways that these social relations and environmental practices are hidden within conventional food commodities. A growing academic literature draws our attention to the appearance of these initiatives in many places in the advanced industrial countries.

In California AFIs have relatively long historical roots. The earliest organizations begin at a time of political challenge to the social and environmental geographies of industrial agriculture, in the context of the national movements for civil rights and environmental protection that erupted in the 1960s and 1970s. The agendas of these early initiatives were oppositional as well as alternative; they framed their engagements in terms of changing the structural relationships that characterized and supported industrial agriculture while also seeking innovative strategies to organize the production, exchange and consumption of food in alternative ways. In California, where agriculture depends heavily on temporary farm labor and on the use of agricultural chemicals, these early initiatives drew popular and political attention to issues of social justice and environmental sustainability in agricultural production.

Though these issues of labor and environment continue today, California AFIs are not currently addressing them symmetrically in production and consumption. The social justice claims of the initiatives we surveyed attend more to questions of food access, urban community empowerment, and support for small farmers than they do to justice (a living wage, job security, recognition) for farm workers. Environmental issues in agriculture continue to be important, but civil rights issues for workers in production agriculture were rarely mentioned by the organizations we studied, in our interviews or in their program statements. The political engagements that supported connecting change in agriculture to justice for farm workers in California are absent in the present circumstances. For us, this silence raises the question of what 'social justice' means.

We suggest that this is likely to be different things in different places, given the heterogeneity of agricultural and rural social forms that we can see, from our own and others' observations. There are, as Harvey points out, ' a plurality of theories of justice' (1996, p. 398), just as there are a plurality of localities from which justice can be claimed. These differences may be obscured by the universalization of the local as a site of resistance. We are concerned that observers may be misled by the fact that different localities are manifesting commonalities of form (farmers' markets, CSAs, short-supply chains, regional foodsheds, and so forth) and may overlook important differences of circumstance. These differences are likely to affect the likelihood that these initiatives, however well intentioned, will be able to achieve their goals of environmental sustainability, economic viability, and social justice locally or at a larger scale. The disappearance of farmworkers from the framing of social justice in food in California gives us evidence of the importance of a broader movement of struggle for labor justice and civil rights that can support and legitimate raising these questions in agriculture and food.[5] (The same questions should be raised about workers in food processing and food services, if we are to confront the conventional food system in all of its sites of exploitation of labor.)

Therefore, in this paper we have begun to open up this question of local resistance, using particular concepts from the work of Raymond Williams and David Harvey as tools. The concepts we use—alternative and oppositional, militant particularism and global ambition,

[5] The fair trade movement begins to do this, though there are still questions about gender, land tenure and child labor to consider here.

urban and rural—delineate axes of tension, not categorical alternatives. Each axis is useful in examining the local as a site of resistance.

There is a tension between alternative and oppositional stances in many of the AFIs we studied, but this is more evident in their positions on environmental sustainability. Organic or low-input production techniques have achieved some counter-hegemonic legitimacy among activists and consumers, though this is still strongly contested by proponents of conventional agriculture (Allen and Kovach, 2000; Vos, 2000). Foundations are willing to fund AFIs working in partnership with farmers to find new ways of addressing environmental issues in agriculture (Campbell, 2001), in the hope that new practices will induce voluntary change without the political conflicts that environmental regulation gives rise to. These changes nonetheless encourage rising expectations about food and environmental safety, and may be opposed by those supporting the conventional food system. But this converges with the broader shift toward ecological modernization that Harvey describes:

> As a discourse, ecological modernization internalizes conflict. It has a radical populist edge, paying serious attention to environmental-ecological issues and most particularly to the accumulation of scientific evidence of environmental impacts on human populations, without challenging the capitalist economic system head on (1996, p. 382).

Many of the initiatives that address food access and food security also locate themselves carefully within an alternative, rather than opppositional, frame. Empowering (or rehabilitating) poor people, allowing them the circumstances to provide for their own needs, engages their condition without raising questions of rights and entitlements. Directly oppositional stances cannot be successful when they are only local; they require the power of a broader social movement to prevail.

This is the tension between militant particularism and global ambition which Harvey emphasizes. Discussing the environmental justice movement (which offers some revealing similarities and differences with AFIs), Harvey writes:

> They can either ignore the contradictions, remain within the confines of their own particularist militancies, … or they can treat the contradictions as a fecund nexus to create a more transcendental and universal politics. … But any such discourse has to transcend the narrow solidarities and particular affinities shaped in particular places—the preferred milieu of most grass roots environmental activism—and adopt a politics of abstraction capable of reaching out across space, across the multiple environmental and social conditions that constitute the geography of difference in a contemporary world that capitalism has intensely shaped to its own purposes. And it has to do this without abandoning its militant particularist base.
>
> The abstractions cannot rest solely upon a moral politics dedicated to protecting the sanctity of Mother Earth. It has to deal in the material and institutional issues of how to organize production and distribution in general, how to confront the realities of global power politics and how to displace the hegemonic powers of capitalism not simply with dispersed, autonomous, localized, and essentially communitarian solutions … but with a rather more complex politics that recognizes how environmental and social justice must be sought by a rational ordering of activities at different scales (1996, p. 400).

This more complex politics requires careful attention to the existing and variable ordering of the rural, seen from the view of the now-urban world from which many of these initiatives arise. As Williams reminded us

> …the idea of rural community is predominantly residual, but is in some limited respects alternative or oppositional to urban industrial capitalism, though for the most part it is incorporated, as idealization or fantasy, or as an exotic—residential or escape—leisure function of the dominant order itself (1977, p. 122).

We are concerned that alternative AFIs elsewhere, like many of those we have studied in California may, through their silence about social relationships in production, inadvertently assume or represent that rural communities and family farmers embody social justice, rather than requiring that they do so. Only a symmetrical attention to the embedding in food commodities of social and ecological relations of production *and* consumption can fully support the transformative goals of environmental sustainability, economic viability, and social justice to which so many in this movement aspire.

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