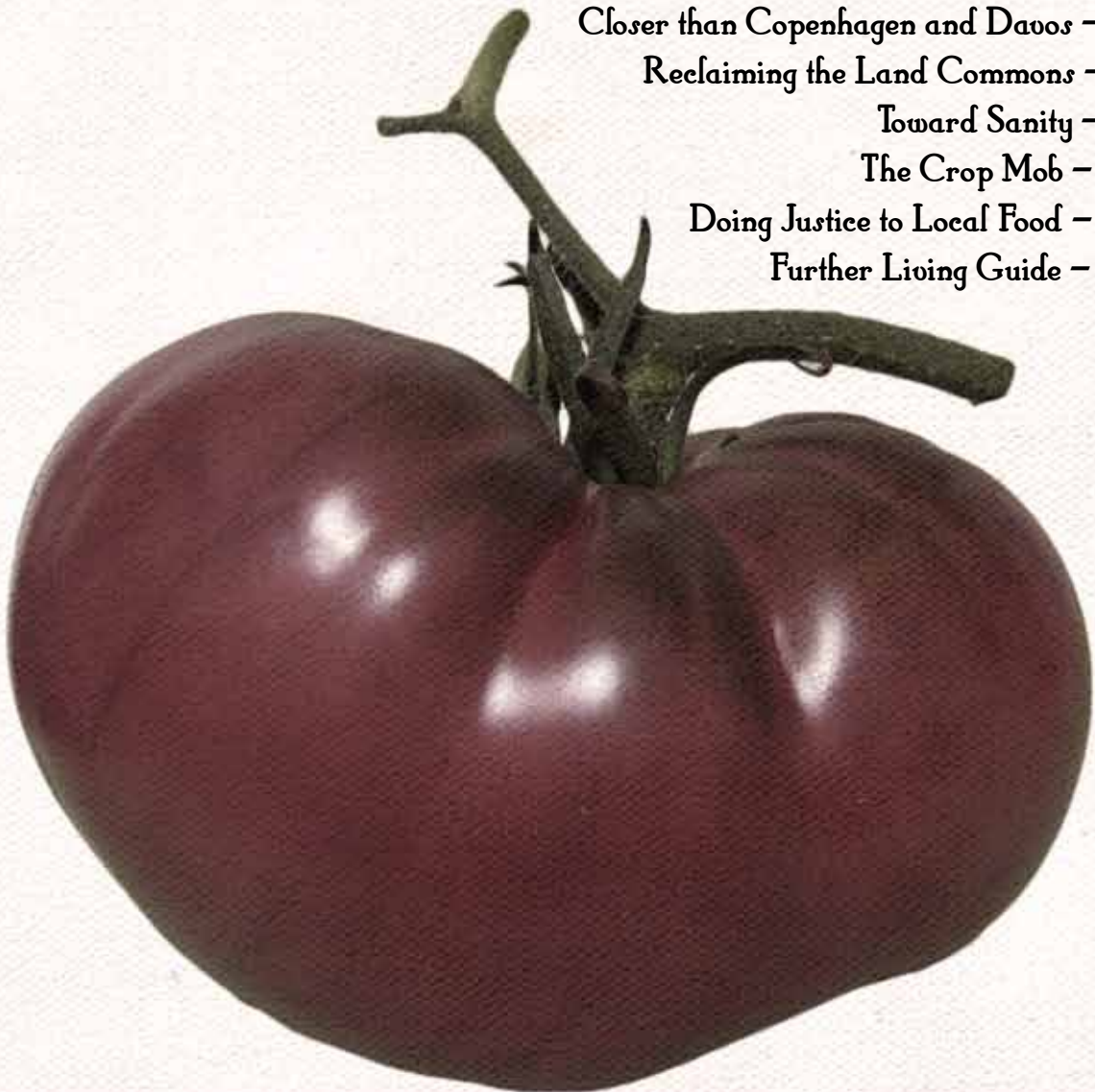


# Urban Farm Tour

Food We Can Live With	- 2
Growing Farmers in Town	- 2
The Case for a Grow-Food Movement	- 3
Jesus, Eating, and Peace	- 3
Carrboro Community Garden	- 4
Closer than Copenhagen and Davos	- 6
Reclaiming the Land Commons	- 8
Toward Sanity	- 9
The Crop Mob	- 10
Doing Justice to Local Food	- 10
Further Living Guide	- 12



# Food We Can Live With

Why “voting with your fork” doesn’t cut it.

*Tom Philpott*

By now, most of us know that our food system is failing on many fronts. Prevalence of diet-related maladies (e.g., excess weight and type 2 diabetes) rises, even as the nutritional value of conventionally grown produce drops. The handful of multinational firms that control our food supply reel in billions of dollars in annual profit, while farm and food-service workers live in poverty, earning some of the lowest wages in the U.S. labor force.

Meanwhile, industrial food production sucks in tremendous amounts of fossil fuel and spews out more greenhouse gases than the entire transportation sector. Chemical and fecal runoff from vast cornfields and factory animal farms fouls waterways, poisoning drinking water and blotting out aquatic life. The list goes on.

The question isn’t whether to reform the food system, but how. Author Michael Pollan and others urge us to “vote with our forks,” preaching that we can create a new food paradigm by choosing local, organically grown, and/or in-season foods.

But we can’t simply consume our way to a just national dinner table. To try to do so risks creating two food systems—an artisanal one for people with the resources to care about what’s on their plates and a low-quality, industrial one for everybody else.

“Vote with your fork” neglects the vast role of government and corporate power, decades in the making, in setting up the current system. To really challenge the slop being served up by Big Food, we’ll have to vote with our feet as well. We’ll have to take seriously what Wendell Berry has called the “agrarian responsibility” borne by all eaters. That means community- and municipal-level organizing.

Does your town have a food policy council? If so, consider participating; if not, consider starting one. These entities bring together various stakeholders—farmers, community members, anti-hunger activists, and more—to assess a community’s food assets and gaps and strategize about ways to improve things. There are currently 50 food policy councils nationwide—and the number is growing fast.

Do you shop at the farmers market? If so, talk to the farmers. What infrastructural gaps add to their costs, reduce their profitability, and force them to sell at higher prices? What could the community do to help? Take those ideas and concerns to local policymakers—including representatives in Washington.

Visit the institutions that serve vulnerable populations: soup kitchens, nursing homes, hospitals, and schools. Are they serving life-giving food that nourishes and heals (and provides important markets for local farmers)—or processed dreck that sickens and enfeebles? Document what you see and write it up for the local newspaper or your own blog. Be a troublemaker.

Meanwhile, plug into national networks through information-rich Web sites such as The Ethicurean, La Vida Locavore,

Civil Eats, and Grist. See what other people are thinking and doing across the country—and throw in your two cents.

Big Food will not slink away just because you shop at the farmers market. Food and agriculture conglomerates own literally trillions of dollars of assets designed to cheaply, profitably churn out processed fare—health and environment be damned. Those assets will be defended—and hundreds of millions of dollars will be spent on advertising and lobbying to keep their goods at the center of the national plate.

Creating viable, locally accountable alternatives will require smart political organizing. That bell you hear in the distance doesn’t signal “time for dinner.” It means get thee to the streets!



## Growing Farmers in Town

*Marianne Prince*

Contrary to the childhoods of many 30-year-olds, I spent mine enraptured by the nature of farm life. My grandparents were farmers in Tennessee, and I grew up eating fresh German Johnson tomato sandwiches in the summer, and picking apples and blackberries destined to become the most delicious pies I have ever tasted. I collected fallen apples that were not fit for my own consumption, and gave them to pigs who were thrilled with the treat. I remember the magic of finding eggs in the chicken coop, and having my grandmother fry them for my breakfast. I have seen wisdom and sensitivity in the large magnificent eyes of cows that I knew would one day become a pot roast. As a child I knew that life was fulfilled through a magical connection between the land and what I eat.

As an adult in this rapidly changing landscape, I have incorporated these ideals into the context of my urban life. I have the luxurious freedom of riding my bicycle anywhere I need to go, and raising food on my half-acre lot just like my grandparents did. I grow organic fruits and veggies in my side yard, and raise chickens, ducks and goats in my backyard.

In April, I petitioned Carrboro town hall to amend the out-of-date animal control ordinance and allow for a limited number of goats to be kept on areas of land less than 2 acres. With overwhelming support from my community, the town recently passed an amendment to allow 2 fainting goats (the breed that I own) to be raised on 25,000 square feet of land. I am incredibly thankful for the support that I received from mayor Mark Chilton and alderman Dan Coleman. Both have come to visit my homestead on several occasions, and shared my first batch of roasted banana frozen custard made from my doe’s milk.

The battle to keep my goats has not gone without controversy. There were valid concerns within the neighborhood about how my lifestyle might affect property values, and I have made it a priority to keep my way of life invisible from the street, with the exception of my garden. I am glad that a neighbor spoke up about her concerns as it truly motivated me to finish projects that were getting put on the back burner.

I am a farmer, and I invite anyone who questions that to follow me as I go about my daily routines. I may not yet rely on my harvests for my livelihood, but I have found a way to earn an income by inviting children to work with me at my farm. This country needs young farmers; I aim to grow some.



## The Case for a Grow-Food Movement

*Robert Jones*

Please, grow something and eat it. If you enjoy the growing part, or the eating part, repeat indefinitely. We the people need to grow more food.

The industrial food system is ecologically unsustainable: unsustainable for our health and soon enough will be unsustainable for our wallets. Relying heavily on a diminishing supply of fossil fuels at every point along the process from seed to the dinner table, industrial agriculture accounts for 17% of our annual energy budget making it as a sector the single largest consumer of petroleum products. We're not likely to run out of oil anytime soon, but the cost of oil will continue to be volatile if not downright expensive and the role that the CO2 released from the burning of these fossil fuels plays in global climate change is well-documented.

So why do we need a grow food movement? Richard Heinberg has estimated that it will take 50 million farmers to feed the population of the U.S. sustainably. According to the 2007 USDA Census of Agriculture there are about 2.2 million U.S. farmers (undocumented migrant farm labor is of course significantly underrepresented in these numbers) and the average age of a farmer is 57. Needless to say we need more people growing food whether they be farmers, market gardeners, community gardeners, backyard gardeners, or even window box gardeners.

Many question how much of our food we could actually produce on small farms and in home and community gardens. Our own North Carolina Ag Commissioner Steve Troxler stated recently that "no man can make a living off of two acres" and yet small scale sustainable North Carolina farmers practicing intensive year round diversified vegetable production are doing just that. Bio-intensive gardening pioneer John Jeavons declares that a person could sustainably grow all of their food for a vegan diet including compost crops for soil fertility on 1/11th of an acre. During World War II victory gardens supplied 40 percent of the vegetables consumed in the United States. Undeniably small scale sustainable farming and growing has played and will play a significant role in feeding the people of the United States.

There is a lot of hype around local and organic food right now but a lot of people are being left out. Good food, food that is good for people and the planet can be expensive to buy and hard to access. The food that is generally most affordable and easily accessible is the most processed high-calorie low-nutrition food made from highly subsidized commodity crops. This has led to and epidemic of diet related health problems such as diabetes and obesity.

Also, food will never be cheaper than it is right now. As food prices begin to reflect increased demand, soil depletion, water

shortages, rising costs of fossil fuels and other inputs, etc. people who can't afford to buy good food today are even less likely to be able to afford it tomorrow. This is a serious problem, but it does potentially present an opportunity. As food prices increase the opportunity costs of growing food decrease. This means that at some point it becomes cheaper to grow food for yourself than to get a second job in order to be able to afford increased food prices. If you grow a bit more than you need you might sell some to a neighbor and bit by bit small garden plots might grow into profitable urban farms. Even beyond community gardens, communities could organize growing of vegetables based on conditions in a particular yard and trade produce.

Permaculture educator Jeff Lawton said "you can fix all of the world's problems in a garden." That statement has always resonated with me. We can do a lot for ourselves, our communities, and our environment by growing food. The simple act of growing food to nourish our bodies empowers us. We realize that we can make a difference in our own lives and the lives of others. In a world of growing uncertainty the garden roots us and reminds us of our interdependence. Together we can grow the world we want to live in. Plant a seed. Grow food!



## Jesus, Eating, and Peace

*Stan Goff*

There are a lot of voices trying to interpret our moment. And I believe the world is in a moment, as opposed to a period or an age.

My voice on this is Christian. Saying that is not meant to exclude non-Christians; on the contrary, I hope to invite fellow Christians – there are quite a few of us – to reflect on how we can faithfully join our voices to many others who are trying to make critical sense of the world right now. New fellowships are emerging in response to food: food-as-fuel, food-as-commodity, food-as-environmental-impact, food-as-cultural-production, food-as-situated-in-history, and most importantly, food-as-politics.

Many voices are speaking to the momentous-ness of our time... to the foreshadowed ruptures in environment, culture, and personhood.

We call these breaks *kairos* to differentiate time-moments from time-chronology. *Chronos* is metered, or meter-able, time; and *kairos* is God's time. *Kairos* is punctuation, not equilibrium. *Kairos* is a moment, a phase-shift in history. *Kairos* can be very destructive and also very creative.

Taking decisions that strengthen the creative potential of *kairos* time, and that minimize the destructive potential of it, then, is a moral imperative.

This imperative – for Christians – is already condensed within our two key directives for living as faithful Christians: Love your neighbor (including your enemies), and make peace. Christians are too often tempted to play the lawyer with God in getting around these directives.

So how do I come to feel that as simple a thing as food figures large in this revelatory time; and why would Christians or anyone else care?

Well, our roots are in subversion of power at the table. The little band of men and women around Jesus of Nazareth were a gastro-nomic outfit. In 1st Century Palestine, eating together, rich and poor,

male and female, was a horrendous scandal, akin to sitting at segregated lunch counters during the Civil Rights Movement. Eating reproduces social hierarchies, and the production of food employs those hierarchies. Power can be reflected or resisted at the table and in the field. Jesus left behind a shared meal as the cultural glue of the church, and made a point that at the table of the Holy Spirit there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Gentile, master nor slave.

Lest we forget: our liturgical reproduction of this table fellowship is of a last meal before a political execution. Food is political. Jesus was as political as they get.

Jesus and his outfit ate with broken people, foreigners, the poor, prostitutes, and habitual wrongdoers. They used breaking bread to transgress the social boundaries that were reproduced around tables, and they talked about peace.

Peace was poetically described by Jesus as a banquet... or a garden.

This little itinerant cadre talked about peace, and they talked about love... the very things that are mocked in today's culture as somehow effeminate (Yes, I contend that Jesus was a gender subversive.).

There was a lot of talk about love. And the practice of love was putting food into bellies.

There was a lot of talk about the poor, and what differentiated poverty from misery was the presence or absence of enough food.

Food was understood, as it is not now well understood in our shiny, entropic, high-tech global metropolises, as physical, emotional, inter-subjective, cultural, and spiritual.

People are beginning to understand food that way again.

The emerging relocalization and food self-sufficiency efforts around the world are coming to these conclusions about the social significance of food, independently of Christianity; and more Christians need to pay attention. Many Christians already are.

The food-underground networks who are making these changes, a piece at a time now, are taking decisions that strengthen the creative potential of kairos time, and that minimize the destructive potential of it. Many Christians have welcomed, embraced, and participated in this spreading "food underground." Many more need to.

Subversive eating is part of a biblically-derived Christian economics, called Jubilee, a periodic leveling of society by forgiveness of debts. This ideal took form out of centuries of witness to the pernicious effects on any society of parasitic urbanization and the subjugation to an economy that is increasingly monetized. Debt is seen as a sinful structure, a structure that reproduces sin, a condition that tempts people to violate the bonds of good fellowship.

Read the New Testament, and you are reading about a complex struggle between agriculturally-based peasants and an imperial urbanization project. You will also read about an end-time whereupon the "kingdom of God" will assert its authority, a kingdom characterized by love, grace, and right fellowship. In trying to give that vision form, the bible gives a garden as an analogy.

Gardens are places where we learn to imitate and coordinate with nature, places where beauty and bounty cohabit, and places where the bright, lethal line between urban and rural can be broken down. They are also places where we can understand that no one of us – neither any collective of us – can be God, and that we have no wisdom without at least that much humility.

Lack of humility by the powers has led humanity into this historical, and ever more directly physical impasse. The biosphere is being shattered. Capitalism, a demonically dog-eat-dog system, has captured many churches. The militant, war-making patriarchy of the millennia has merged with the modern proponents of a dead universe, a heap of "resources." These are the aspects of a tendency that has accelerated this destruction beyond some of our worst imaginations.

Now we have kairos. Things are changing abruptly, and time points only in one direction.

Things can't stay the same. They can get worse. They can also get better.

Better doesn't happen from the top or the center. Better happens with neighbors and the works of hands. The doing gets done at home. Natural life itself, we are discovering as we respectfully study it, adapts piecemeal, locally. God's not micro-managing from the top. Our God is a wild God; not subjected or domesticated. Where did we get off attempting this kind of control ourselves?

Relinquishing control is the basis of creativity. We are made in God's image – that is, we have creative intelligence. We can learn to love our neighbors, make peace, and break bread. Redefining stewardship of land and the relations of production and consumption with regard to the way we eat is a precondition for the full flowering of this creativity.

What should we aiming at in this kairos moment? I go back to, rely on, lead with the prophetic agrarian tradition that Jesus represented during His mission in occupied Palestine:

They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.  
– *Isaiah 2:4*



## Carrboro Community Garden

*Keith Shaljian*

CARRBORO/DURHAM—Nearly 10,000 square feet of mostly unused lawn had to be maintained at Martin Luther King Park before the Carrboro Community Garden began its thriving tenure there 2 years ago. Today, meticulously dug out and biologically active beds of homemade soil are bursting with fruitful rows of vegetables, flowers, and meandering wood chip laden paths built for human traffic. A ride-on lawnmower would now have a difficult time maneuvering amidst the patiently accumulating biomass and foodstuffs.

"You wouldn't know by looking at it, but a big part of what drives this garden occurs underground," says Sammy Slade, a co-founder and sometimes spokesperson of the collectively run Carrboro Community Garden Coalition (CCCG). "Earthworm tunnels and mycelial networks under our feet and in the compost we spread are in some ways doing the work for us. One of the great things about this being a municipal park is that we have access to free bulk materials like leaf mulch that can be turned into rich organic soil for the people that are producing here."

The North Carolina Cooperative extension estimates that there are more than 25,000 acres of lawn in the Triangle. Cumulatively, this land remains trapped in a holding pattern, with a large net energy loss in the form of seeding, fertilizing, human labor, and mowing to keep the lawn alive each year. With state budgets shrinking, it is hard to see how the current estimate of about \$1200 an acre to maintain lawns per year can continue to be funded without some divine intervention. And as maintenance budgets shrink, these ecological niches are increasingly being maximized by groups that are eager to learn how to produce food and beauty efficiently, by doing it together collaboratively.

Through an agreement with the Town of Carrboro, the CCCG broke ground just two years ago after the still active Carrboro Greenspace lost their bid to maintain ‘usufruct’ garden space on privately held land they were leasing. In 2007, the group had approached alderman Dan Coleman and the Town of Carrboro Parks and Recreation Department were seeking input on interim uses for the MLK park, while simultaneously, a coalition of permaculturally minded community members had been having a charrette visioning session at MLK park. A critical mass was in place resulting from the cumulative efforts by the Greenspace to engage the broader Carrboro community through free gardening workshops and weekly workdays. This democratically run incubator provided a readily transferable community gardening maintenance model for the park site, and an easy case for a community garden at MLK Park when the opportunity arose.

“Parks and community gardens are a natural potential partnership because they are after all publicly held land,” said Mike Lanear of Orange County Extension. “These gardens can enhance the community’s ability to work out large scale problems like community food production out in the real world. These parks, vacant lots, and schoolyards in the Triangle contain many acres of land that introduces a different, and regenerative form of maintenance. Its something I hope we see a lot more of.”

The last decade has seen a huge upsurge in Farmer’s Markets, ‘local food’ at mega-grocery chains like Whole Foods, and community garden advocacy, where a populist appeal to sustainability does not necessarily deal with the structural inequalities that have brought us to this point in the first place. Michael Pollan’s widely accepted critiques in films such as ‘Food, Inc.’ and books like ‘The Omnivore’s Dilemma’ have demonstrated the profit-driven agricultural choices, massively subsidized by petroleum, that put the average meal in the US at an energy cost of 7-12 calories for each calorie of food consumed. Attempted answers to this equation by the very same people and corporations that brought us here are often immune from criticism, so long as they slap a local or organic label on it.

What many of the most durable community gardens share in common is a willingness to reconsider practices such as individual plots, which often breeds a paternalistic relationship between the ‘bosses’ of the community garden and the surrounding folks that live there. Community gardens of this type begin their journey with the quest for funding, the desire to sell produce before a seed has been planted, or, can end up reinforcing local structural inequalities in the name of progress and neighborhood improvement.

Community gardens can invest heavily in longevity from the outset by breaking out of the ownership model and moving to one that is more territorial and intimately tied to their surroundings. Anathoth Gardens in Cedar Grove, NC began in response to the 2004 murder of beloved community member Bill King, with the goal of non-violent peace-making through the praxis of gardening. Though far from perfect, the garden increases its membership each year as a result of its slower process and lower fences, which was the first step in building trust across racial and socioeconomic lines.

“When members join they pay five dollars for the entire year and agree to work two hours a week on one of our three work-

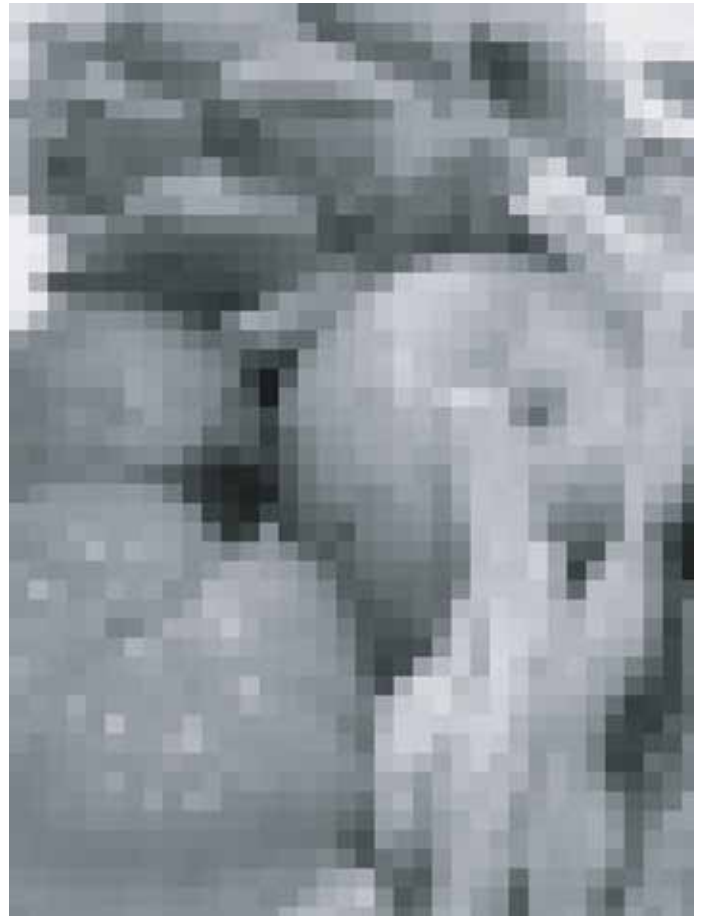
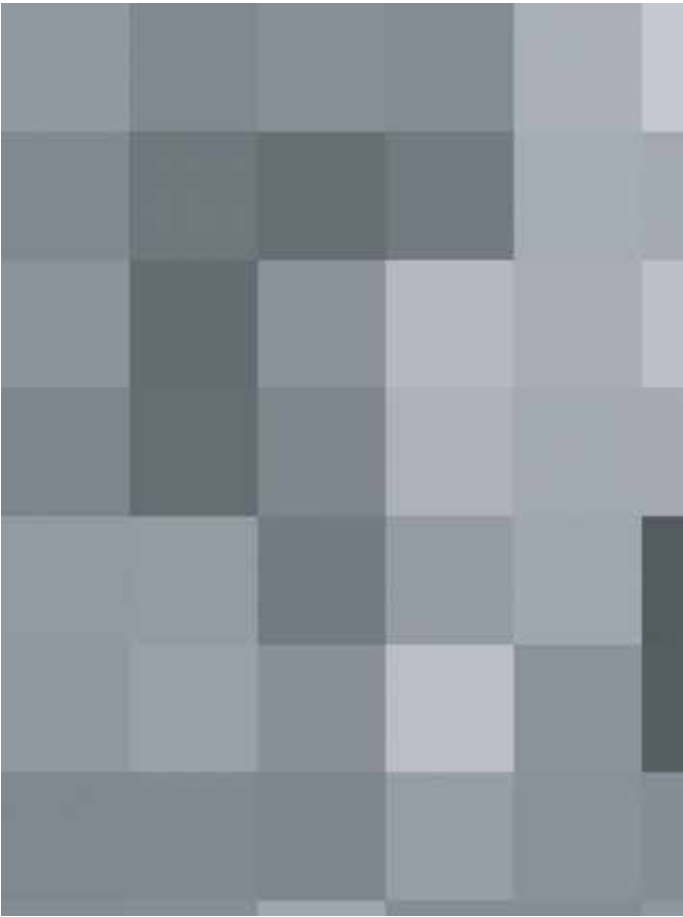
days,’ said Fred Bahnson, the former director of Anathoth Community Garden. ‘In turn, they receive a share of the weekly harvest—everything from arugula to Zapotec tomatoes—from April through November. We advertise by word of mouth. Though we seek out migrant and low-income families, anyone can join. We grow our food at Anathoth without fertilizers or chemicals, relying instead on cover-cropping, manure, and the compost we make ourselves. Nearly all ongoing tasks—carting manure, weeding, planting—are done manually. Our goal is to make Anathoth Community Garden sustainable in the most basic sense: it operates almost entirely on sunlight and the work of human hands.”

The CCGC garden, in its organizational structure is also non-hierarchical. Gardeners agree to ‘farm’ the 4000 sq. ft. of interwoven bed space with a view to the shared total output of the garden. There is a loosely aligned core group of bi-weekly rotating ‘queen bees’ serving as managers for the garden on workdays. While sustaining the sense of responsibility and participation in management of the garden by all gardeners is always a challenge, the CCGC now boasts more than 200 engaged members in just two short years.

“The efficiency in production that may be possible through centralized leadership has been exchanged for a system where everyone is in charge,’ said Michal Osterweil, a doctoral candidate in the UNC Graduate Anthropology Department and co-founder of the Carrboro Green Space. ‘The hope is to cultivate a culture of responsibility, leadership and empowerment by the gardeners themselves to grow both community and food. Finding the balance between the seemingly simple cultivation of vegetables is insured by a focus on the social production of self-determination and autonomy by and for all.”

On this August day, a couple of goldfinch scouts inspect the ripening seeds for a meal later when temperatures cool down. Before leaving they make a snack of some squash bugs that were migrating from the repeated reduction of their number by the beneficial birds and insects attracted to the park. Its dusk and Sammy, Catherine and his brother-law Christian are unloading fruit trees for the beginnings of an edible orchard expansion of the garden that will bring fruiting trees and shrubs to the large perimeter of the garden this September 12th. Hardy Elberta Peaches, Rabbit-eye Blueberries, Serviceberries, Sour Cherries along with dozens of beneficial flowering and medicinal perennials will add many years of fruit production to the sizeable annual garden. When mature in two to five years, these plants will produce an abundance of highly nutritious fruit year after year. They will also form the anchor for people to collectively build a lower-maintenance perimeter food forest full of plants.

“Community gardens benefit hugely from planting perennial food forests,’ says Chuck Marsh, a nurseryman and permaculture teacher based out of Earthaven Ecovillage in Black Mountain, NC. ‘Plants like Muscadine Grapes and Blueberries have greater nutritional benefits and higher yields with less work than annual gardens. Planning for the first five years must account for the complex and sophisticated aspects of establishment, fertilization, and maintenance. To do this requires nothing less than a complete reevaluation of our contemporary cultural practices. Moving from an economy based on the machine to one that is rooted in our home ecosystems requires the willingness to practice main-



tenance, which is ultimately an act of love that will enable most of these plants to produce abundantly for many generations.”

The natural territory of community gardeners are the ecological niches that our parks, schoolyards, and vacant lots supply. Photosynthesis marked the limits of human welfare on earth for most of the first 18,000 years of human history. The ‘discovery’ of fossil fuels such as coal, and then oil in the modern era, has led to the continuation of ever greater reliance on technologies that are based in the exploitation of the cumulative environmental resources of places we don’t necessarily have to see. These historically entrenched geographical inequalities have ‘funded’ the technological contemporary world by externalizing costs for future generations to pay. The machines and resources that drive our current food system, dependent as they are on ever increasing intensity of energy flows from larger and larger tracts of land, will be forced in to a new incarnation in a world of diminishing resources. Meanwhile, the growing presence of collaborative and community based solutions continues to develop simultaneously in the spaces that contemporary capitalism has abandoned or cannot profit from. Working with nature to ‘fill’ these ecological niches with abundance now in our own territories can lead to the liberation that so many are seeking today.

“We’re at the point where the old rules no longer apply, and food is our entrance point to changing things permanently because everyone eats!” said Bernard Obie of Abanitu Organics, a fifth generation African-American Farmer in Pearson County and former Co-Director of the D.I.G. program at SEEDS Community Garden in Durham. ‘Coming out of the eighties and nineties, where it seemed the nameless multinational corporations had

won, its clear now, I mean everyone is realizing that these entities are unwilling and incapable of creating community for folks. Its an exciting time, because everyone is going to have a role. Elders of a community can be properly valued as a repository of wisdom based in experience, and ordinary folks are poised to rediscover their power, autonomy, and self-reliance again. A culture no longer afraid of scarcity can be rooted in the new values of the 21st century: health and abundance.”



## Closer than Copenhagen and Davos

*Sammy Slade*

This year much of the world’s hopes for dealing with the specter of climate change is focused on Copenhagen – the sequel to the failed Kyoto protocol. The dynamics underlying negotiations within higher scales of governance is compromised by the disproportionate inverse relationship between the degree of influence and responsibility for damage that some nations have. Rather than allocating CO2 emissions quotas equitably per capita globally irrespective of national boundaries, over-developed countries seek to maintain the status quo by demanding compromises that are more sensitive to their national economic advantage and legacy.

Fortunately, throughout the world many people acting within locales of various scales are not waiting for the assumed prerequisite action by higher scales of governance to make change. Local first campaigns, urban food movements, food sovereignty



movements, local living economies, Transition Towns, are all examples of local initiatives that intentionally or not serve to mitigate and cope with Climate Change/ Cheap energy effects. These initiatives are positive in the sense that their focus is not on reforming what is wrong with the current system but rather, instead are creating alternatives to it.

Some of this re-engagement in self-determination, because it engages with local pre-existing political, economic and social processes, may appear reformist and not truly of ‘another world is possible.’

Cheap energy had made possible and ushered in an era of ‘modernization’ when apparent efficiencies were gained through the homogenization of nearly everything. Local discourse had been exchanged for nation-scale discourse set by large scale media outlets. And political participation had been reduced to a 4 year cycle of casting a ballot during presidential elections. Trade Agreements and rulings by the WTO suddenly trumped national sovereignties, streamlining the efficiency with which ‘goods’ could travel across borders. The hard fought achievements of the labor movement were suddenly getting undermined by jobs going overseas to places that are courting corporations in a competition and race to the bottom of who could be the most lax in labor and environmental standards. Alternative systems appeared more costly because the fossil fuel economic system had externalized it’s costs by exporting them to the future or to different places of the present. The fossil-fuel economic system, deriving its power from cheap energy (while it lasted), was no match for systems less robust than itself.

There was no time or reason to engage in local politics, economic and social processes as everything was provided from very far beyond.

As fossil fuels peak making energy more expensive, and a major cost of their use is reckoned with – namely Climate Change – global heterogeneity, local responsibility and local accountability must become the norm again.

While Climate change is global in scope, responsibility for dealing with it is, and must be ultimately local. After all, our town hall and shopping venues are closer than Copenhagen and Davos are. Yet, awareness of climate change as an issue to be dealt locally is not sufficient unless the degree to which it has to be dealt with locally is also taken into account. The local expectation for solutions by global-scale political entities is slow to fade and diffuses the urgency and degree to which local action must happen. This year, 2009, we are at 385 parts per billion and the ‘tipping point’ that climate change scientists describe is 350 parts per billion! The luxury of gradual change is not an option.

Similar to higher scales of governance, in over-developed countries, insufficient action on the local scale is a result of the disproportionate relation between the degree of influence and responsibility for damage. This in turn is sustained and embodied by our over-consumptive culture. Both higher scales of governance and lower scales will justify the maintenance of the status quo by claiming a need to protect their nations/town/county economic health as measured by economic growth – a kind of ‘economic growth’ that is inextricably linked to the fading fossil fuel economy, the costs of which, for the over-developed, are finally becoming local in both space and time.

# Reclaiming the Land Commons

David Harper

Who owns the land and is it secure as a community asset? For Jose Garcia, South Central Farm was a place of safety. Elders told stories about their homelands and taught others to nurture crops, and parents sang folk songs by the fire while children played hide-and-seek between rows of heirloom corn. Located in the South Central neighborhood of Los Angeles, California, South Central Farm was once the largest urban agriculture site in the U.S. At its peak, the 14-acre tract was home to an estimated 350 garden plots providing food, flowers, and solace—primarily for Latino families with indigenous roots in North America and Central America. It was one of those rare places where the ancient cultural identity and wisdom of hundreds of varieties of medicinal and nutritional plants, carefully-selected heirloom seeds and fruit trees was passed on to the next generation. For over a decade, the farm was an oasis of living soil, edible biomass and biodiversity amidst a cityscape of warehouses, factories, parking lots, weeds and dead dirt.

South Central Farm was located on vacant land offered by the Mayor of Los Angeles to the L.A. Regional Food Bank to use as a community garden that would help heal the wounds of the 1992 riots. But 14 years later it became all too clear that this community asset was not secure. The City of Los Angeles owned the land, and the City Council saw it not as a public park, but prime light-industrial real estate it could sell to generate income. In 2006, following days of protests by urban agriculture activists, gardeners and a cadre of Hollywood stars, the City evicted the gardeners to make way for a warehouse. A phalanx of Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) in riot gear cleared the way for bulldozers that leveled the urban farm. Three years later, the warehouse remains to be built, and South Central Farmers is holding its third annual encampment to reclaim the land as a commons. The Garden, a 2008 documentary film about the farm, received an Academy Award nomination ([www.southcentralfarmers.com](http://www.southcentralfarmers.com)).

The demise of South Central Farm points to the questions we must ask when building community gardens and designing permaculture projects: what is the land tenure? who owns the land? and is it secure as a community asset? Without written guarantees, leases, conservation easements, or ownership by a community organization, South Central Farm could legally be sold to the highest bidder. The saying, “heal the land, heal the people,” holds meaning in places like this—but only if the land truly belongs to the community.

## Creating a Permaculture Commons

What can we learn from the struggle at South Central Farm? How can we keep it from happening again wherever land is the true wealth of the community? As a land conservation professional with 20 years of experience, I believe the answer lies in building community stewardship of strategically-chosen tracts of land, or recreating the “commons”. As someone who has worked shoulder-to-shoulder with permaculture designers for a number of years, I also believe that the permaculture movement is well positioned to advance this new, community-based land stewardship through creative land tenure strategies.

The Permaculture Principle, “apply self-regulation and accept feedback,” calls on us to discourage inappropriate actions that keep systems from functioning well. As landless poor people in South Central Los Angeles and around the world can attest, the predominant system of land ownership favors land use for individual or corporate profit—an inappropriate action—over meeting the needs of the community and creating a functioning human ecosystem. Mountaintop removal coal mining; the clear cutting of biodiverse forests for pulp mills; industrial agriculture; and disinvestment in low-income neighborhoods all reveal the tyranny of this private, often corporate, absentee land ownership in the name of profit.

Permaculture can inspire us to use a different paradigm, one in which land is a community to which we belong, not a commodity belonging to us.

An important first step is to determine the pattern of land tenure for permaculture sites in the U.S. and globally—are they on private land or public land? A survey of this kind would be a valuable undertaking. Based on what has been reported to date in this publication, various websites, and other sources, it appears that the vast majority of permaculture designs are installed on privately-owned land, while fewer are on public or semi-public land, and very few are on land held by non-profit land trusts. Of those sites, it is important to understand who really holds the deed to the land and, therefore has control of the site, whether the surrounding landscape is urban, suburban, rural, or wilderness.

If a permaculture design is installed on land owned by individuals and families, is it free and clear of liens or debts? If there is a mortgage or loan, how much of the equity is held by the bank or other lender? If the design is on public or semi-public land such as a school, park, or nature center, are there agreements in place to protect the designs from threats associated with changes in land use? Will the fig trees, hazelnuts, microswales, wild edible greens, and Jerusalem artichokes outlast the payoff of the 30 year mortgage, the sale of the land to a different owner, a parking lot expansion, or the passing of the land to the next generation?

One way to address these questions, whether the land is held privately or publically, is to ensure that agreements are in place recognizing that permaculture designs are an asset offering both community security and individual security. Collective ownership strategies such as intentional communities, cohousing, ecovillages, and some community supported agriculture (CSA) farms offer enhanced opportunities for securing permaculture designs as a community asset. Community land trusts offer an even more secure land tenure to ensure that permaculture designs to thrive in the long-term.

## What is a Community Land Trust?

A Community Land Trust (CLT) is a non-profit organization using common land ownership to promote affordable, ecologically-sound land stewardship for housing, food production, forestry, and other community-based land uses. CLT's acquire land by gift, purchase, or bargain sale and hold it in trust for the community, thereby reducing the impact of land appreciation and speculation driven by the real estate market. By allowing individuals and organizations to obtain long-term (99-year), inheritable leases on the land they hold in trust, CLT's provide a secure, affordable



land base for communities and individuals seeking to re-establish resilient bioregional economies. While the vast majority of the 200 CLT's in the U.S. are essentially urban housing trusts which own land to reduce the cost of affordable housing, the origins of the CLT model are strongly rooted in land stewardship. The first Community Land Trust was the 4,800-acre New Communities Farm, founded in 1967 to provide African-American families in rural Georgia with affordable access to farmland.

Several Community Land Trusts offer a model of land ownership that is well-suited for permaculture designs:

Troy Gardens - Madison Area CLT, Madison, Wisconsin: provides residents with affordable access to 31 acres of land, combining 30 green-designed, affordable, privately owned cohousing homes on 16% (5 acres) and extensive community gardens and a community supported agriculture (CSA) farm with a farm stand and educational programs for school children, native prairie and woodland edges with extensive edible landscape plantings of fruit and nut trees and shrubs on the remaining 26 acres. Every acre of land has been secured, taken off of the speculative market, and held in permanent trust for sound ecological stewardship by the community. (<http://www.affordablehome.org/neighborhoods/troy-gardens.html>)

The School of Living CLT: Founded during the Great Depression on 40 acres of commonly-owned land in Suffern, New York, as a center for teaching homesteading skills to people seeking alternatives to the industrial economy. Founder Ralph Borsodi and partner Mildred Loomis shared a vision that families and communities could take greater responsibility for healthy living if they could afford access to the land and its bountiful resources. Over the past 75 years, the School of Living has evolved into a regional community land trust that holds over 600 acres of land on 5 sites in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia. Homeowners have created their own affordable, naturally-built homes and grow much of their own food on these sites, and pay an affordable ground lease on the common land. The Heathcote Community in Maryland regularly hosts permaculture design workshops and is a regional center for Gaia University. ([www.schoolofliving.org](http://www.schoolofliving.org))

## Land Reform for the 21st Century

Looking ahead, we must ask: what are the possibilities for land reform in the 21st century? The traditional 20th century model of government seizure and redistribution of land from wealthy landowners to the landless poor has been short-lived in countries as diverse as Brazil, Japan, and Zimbabwe, often for similar reasons. This version of land reform does not address the root causes behind the concentration of land and wealth. The networks of credit, finance, and distribution of goods that allow landholdings to be concentrated and profitably managed tend to remain in the hands of a small wealthy minority which eventually reassemble large tracts.

Successful land reform will require a secure land base for permaculture design and relocation in communities around the world. Imagine an international network of Community Land Trusts, established by and for local communities, formed to hold urban, suburban, and rural land in trust for this and future generations of permaculture designers. As the examples above illustrate, the opportunities are there—every community has the potential to hold land in common.

# Toward Sanity

## Rebuilding Orange County's Food Economy

*Taken from 'Rebuilding Local Food Systems; A Start Toward Rebuilding The Local Economy and Community Self-Reliance' a presentation by Mike Lanier, Orange County Agriculture Extension Agent*

The 1950's US food system may have been the best model in history – and the model we should aspire to again. Today, food in the US has travelled at least 1500 miles to our plates. Cost for fuel, fertilizer, road maintenance, and a decline in government revenue could negatively impact the conventional system.

More than \$4 billion are spent on food in Wake, Durham, and Orange Counties annually – \$34 billion in North Carolina. Because most food is imported, there is an enormous outflow of economic gain from the community. Producing and distributing local food makes farmers more profitable, creates local jobs, improves public health and animal welfare, preserves farmland, increases community wealth, reduces oil consumption and CO2 emissions, and makes our community more self-reliant.

In the 1950's Orange County had about 1/3 the population it has today, but it produced:

- 2 million gallons of milk
- 2 million dozen eggs
- 544,000 chickens in 1944 (180,000 layers)

### Orange County Farming (1950):

- 125 fish ponds
- Almost 2000 acres of vegetable gardens
- Wheat, barley, pasture-raised hogs, beef cattle
- Diversified farms (output for one system used as input for another)
- Crop rotations
- Soil conservation and soil building programs were a priority
- Many people had fruit trees in their yards
- Food was eaten seasonally and preserved for the winter

### Orange County Food Infrastructure (1950):

- Dairy processing facilities
- Grain mill(s) in every community
- Slaughter and meat processing facility
- Hatcheries
- Farmers' Mutual Exchange sold excess farm products in the amount of \$84,000,000 (today's dollars)
- Hillsborough Livestock Market
- Cooking oil processor? (soy and cotton)
- Canning facility in Cedar Grove?

Beyond rebuilding the local food infrastructure that existed in the 1950's we also need:

- More edible landscaping
- Program for existing untended fruit trees
- School garden and fruit production programs
- Composting and vermiculture projects
- Entrepreneurial food businesses

# The Crop Mob

Robert Jones

Growing a local food system is really about building community. It is a process of personalizing our relationship to food and those who grow our food. In order for our communities to be healthy and successful we need to deepen our relationships not just between producers and consumers, but also within the community of producers. To that end, a few weeks ago a bunch of the young, landless, and wannabe farmers associated with the Triangle Food Commons got together to talk about the challenges and opportunities presented to us as we try to make a life of growing food. There was talk and debate about wages, healthcare, land, and retirement. At some point the discussion shifted to community, overwhelmingly these people who represent the future of the food system are interested in working and growing collectively as part of a community of growers rather than as individual farmers.

I think this desire for community is about us reaching for something that is conspicuously absent from the dominant culture. We get it in bits and pieces, little snapshots of community, at summer camp, on vacation, or during a disaster. These are times when we are removed from our “real lives” and the habits and pressures that go along with them. Ultimately we are lured/forced back to “reality” by our schools, televisions, jobs, and mortgages, but some piece of the experience persists.

Many if not most people have a nagging sense that something is not right, that something is missing in their lives. This dissatisfaction manifests itself in addiction to substances, television, and general consumption. We are constantly looking for something to fill the hole left by a lack of community, a sense of belonging or purpose.

Before the development of industrial agriculture, growing food was a community affair. Your community might be a large extended family on a family farm or a collection of families on nearby farms. Everyone played a role and contributed in one form or another. Community was essential for agriculture and agriculture for community. As agriculture became industrialized and mechanized, there were fewer and fewer meaningful roles for people to fill on the farm. Neighbors needed each other less, fewer family members were needed on the farm so more left, fewer farms were needed so many were sold.

Now we need to repopulate small farms and rebuild that sense of community as we transition from fossil fuel based industrial agriculture toward a more intensive hands-on system. We need to grow food not only on farms, but in our backyards, front yards, porches and alleys. Urban, suburban, and rural communities will all have to come together to plant, harvest, and put up the fruits of their edible landscape.

The group of young farmers decided to do just that. Instead of coming together to sit around a table and talk, we would come together and harvest, plant, or weed. This “Crop Mob” as it came to be called is about working together, co-creating the world we want to live in. We build much deeper relationships working side by side rather than sitting stiffly around a table. We can address the challenges and embrace the opportunities presented to us, we

can feel a sense of purpose, and we can build the community that we yearn for so deeply, all while we grow food.



## Doing Justice to Local Food

Alice Brooke Wilson

*Much of the inspiration for this essay comes from British feminist geographer Doreen Massey’s work, specifically her argument that space is not an absolute independent dimension, but instead “constructed out of social relations,” as Massey writes in her collection of essays Space, Place, and Gender (1994).*

“Eat ‘what your grandmother’s mother ate,’” advises the influential U.S. food writer Michael Pollan, conjuring up a simpler time, when nearly all food was produced and consumed within a short distance. It has become received wisdom within the movement to challenge the industrial food system.

Yet the advice obscures serious historical inequalities. For example, North Carolina’s local agricultural system was built on slave labor and sharecropping, as well as the unpaid labor of women and children. The current exploitation of farm-workers—particularly those without proper documents—has largely maintained these dynamics. Nearly all food may have been local a century ago, but the social relations that held sway then aren’t ones we should strive to recreate now.

Work within the “local food movement” in the United States over the past ten years has increasingly highlighted what I see as a serious risk constraining this movement’s transformative possibilities: simplistic conceptions of space and place, resulting in a romanticized, depoliticized “local.”

Part of why I study food is the sheer volume of social and ecological relationships involved in the daily need to eat. No matter where you start in the food network, and no matter which trajectories you follow, you will be faced with manifold ecological, political and ethical options and concerns. Food has the potential to become a central domain for imagining alternative futures and for embedding these imaginaries in ever-expanding geographies of sustenance in the present, by which I mean the embedding of agriculture and food practices into ecologic, economic, and ethical concerns. However, I see real risks involved with imagining “local” as the solution to the industrial food system. When defending the local becomes the primary political project, then abstract space has triumphed and with it the possibility for creating, alternative futures has been eclipsed.

Thus, a movement that has taken an explicitly spatial strategy—“local”—to describe its goals requires serious analysis of its conception of space and place, particularly to avoid an “exonerated local,” or a sense that local is good simply because it’s local, what British feminist geographer Doreen Massey calls an “a priori politics of topographies” in her 2005 book *For Space*. The current discourse of local food connotes all the elements traditionally ascribed to place contra space: authentic, singular, fixed, with an unproblematic identity.

Massey argues against a static and abstract view of space—the Cartesian idea that space can be cleanly defined and mapped out, presumably by some purely objective observer. (Think of the screen of a car’s GPS device as you move through the countryside.) If this view is replaced with a recognition of the “inherent dynamism of the spatial,” as Massey writes, then a sense of how space is implicated in both history and politics—the spatiality of power—emerges, and with it the myriad of political issues at stake in the food system, from stagnant/declining wages to agribusiness subsidies to the health and environmental injustices associated with agrichemicals.

The local-food movement risks marginalization if it misreads “local” as merely resistant to global forces. This misreading quickly leads to an overly simplified local (good) vs. global (bad). In fact, some of the “buy local” campaigns inadvertently support inequality by supporting traditional (racist, sexist, etc) American agrarian structures (Allen and Wilson 2008: 537). Further, one may ask, does a movement based around local food represent a triumph of neoliberal logic that valorizes reactionary individual consumption practices, or does it imply a liberatory political potential indicated by the politics of space, through this movement’s active re-imagining of “local”? To what extent do imaginaries of the future introduce a different dynamic between space and place?

In my experience, most U.S.-based local-food movements ignore the relations that constitute the local and the global, or at best accept them as a given; another lesson from Massey is to take these relations as an object of dispute, interrogation, and study. Taking seriously a relational understanding of space also means tackling the historical trajectories inhered in each place—something at which the U.S. local food movement has not excelled,

An example from close to home: the Carrboro Farmers’ Market, a place literally buzzing with life and fragrant with fresh produce and flowers on Saturday mornings. There is much to admire about the Carrboro market, in a world of faceless, generic food; this place brings Carrboro residents face-to-face with human-scale, ecological-minded farmers selling fresh and nutritious produce. “Buy local” rhetoric proliferates, on T-shirts and on bumper stickers in the parking lot. Given the conviviality of the scene and the quality of the produce, celebration of the local seems appropriate. Yet the scene has very little class or ethnic diversity; often, some of the only non-white-ethnic faces on view belong to a family of multi-generation African-American farmers who have a popular farm-stand selling high-quality organic produce and meat. (Most of the other farmers are first-generation white farmers who moved “back to the land” in the ‘70s and ‘80s, as a reaction against the post-industrial economy.) I’ve found out that they farm in a rural community over 30 miles away (the market limits vendors to a 50-mile radius), where most people have long since been driven out of farming by its economic challenges. In order to keep their farm alive, this family charges prices that most people in their economically poor rural community cannot afford to pay. Instead, they truck their produce into Carrboro, where their prices are quite attractive to middle-class white-ethnic consumers. In this case, the emergence of “local” food in Carrboro precisely mirrors the absence of local food in a low-resource African-American community. The situation is not simple, of course; access to the Carrboro Farmers’ Market essentially preserves the last family farm in that community. Interrogating the case of Carrboro

Farmers Market’s lone African-American vendors leads easily to a critical look at Carrboro’s history—its trajectory from a working-class African-American mill-town to a largely white, affluent part of Chapel Hill, with a few, largely hidden, low-income pockets.

I suggest that critically assessing the construction of “local” in Carrboro could help lead to a more inclusive, broad-based food movement in the area, based around integrating ecological, social, and ethical commitments with food and agriculture practices. Rather than conceive of a “local” food movement, perhaps it is time to think in terms of a food justice movement.

Works cited:

- Allen, Patricia and Alice Brooke Wilson. 2008. “Agrifood Inequalities: Globalization and Localization” *Development* 51(4), (534–540).
- Massey, Doreen. 2005. *For Space*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Massey, Doreen. 2004. “Geographies of Responsibility.” *Geografiska Annaler* 86 B (1): 5-18.
- Massey, Doreen. 2002. “Don’t Let’s Counterpose Place and Space.” *Development* 45 (2): 24-25
- Massey, Doreen. 1994. *Space, Place, and Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Pollan, Michael. 2008. *In Defense of Food: An Eater’s Manifesto*. New York: Penguin Press.



# Further Living Guide

This document is a work in progress—a living document—it needs community input to gain better accuracy. Please visit this wiki and update with what you know: <http://tinyurl.com/furtherliving>

## Green Businesses

- Abanitu Organics <[www.abanituorganics.com](http://www.abanituorganics.com)>
- Bountiful Backyards <[www.bountifulbackyards.com](http://www.bountifulbackyards.com)>
- Cure Nursery <[www.curenursery.com](http://www.curenursery.com)>
- The Gardener's Kitchen <[www.thegardenerskitchen-nc.com](http://www.thegardenerskitchen-nc.com)>
- Grassroots Press <[www.grassrootspress.net](http://www.grassrootspress.net)>
- Niche Gardens (beneficial perennials and medicinal plants) <[www.nichegardens.com](http://www.nichegardens.com)>
- Useful Plants Nursery <[www.usefulplants.org](http://www.usefulplants.org)>
- Will's Wild Herbs <[www.carrborofarmersmarket.com/willswildherbs.shtml](http://www.carrborofarmersmarket.com/willswildherbs.shtml)>

## Community Resources and Agencies

- Bull City Headquarters <[www.bullcityhq.org](http://www.bullcityhq.org)>
- Carrboro Greenspace <[www.carrborogreenspace.org](http://www.carrborogreenspace.org)>
- Clean Water for NC <[www.cwfnc.org](http://www.cwfnc.org)>
- Durham Bike Co-Op <[www.durhambikecoop.org](http://www.durhambikecoop.org)>
- El Kilombo <[www.elkilombo.org](http://www.elkilombo.org)>
- Good Work <[www.goodwork.org](http://www.goodwork.org)>
- Land in Common <[www.landincommon.org](http://www.landincommon.org)>
- NC Botanical Garden <[www.ncbg.unc.edu](http://www.ncbg.unc.edu)>
- Bicycle Recyclery <[www.recyclery.info](http://www.recyclery.info)>
- Crop Mob <[cropmob.org](http://cropmob.org)>

## Community Gardens

### Carrboro

- CCGC <[www.carrborogarden.org](http://www.carrborogarden.org)>
- Baldwin Park Community garden (Coming Summer 2010)
- OCPYC <[www.orangesmartstart.org](http://www.orangesmartstart.org)>

### Chapel Hill

- Carolina Garden Coop <[www.unc.edu/~elinor](http://www.unc.edu/~elinor)>
- Northside <[tinyurl.com/northsidegarden](http://tinyurl.com/northsidegarden)>

### Durham

- Community Wholeness Venture
- Feed My Sheep Community Garden
- Seeds <[www.seedsnc.org](http://www.seedsnc.org)>
- W. D. Hill Community Center Garden

## Ammendments

### Nitrogen

- Local farmers do bulk order of feathermeal in January

## Compost

- Make your own by tapping into the municipal waste stream
- Leaf mulch
- Coffee grounds
- Brewery hops

- “You sweep” loose straw that falls from the bales (Southern States, etc..)
- Worm Bins for Vermicompost
- Soldier fly farming = free protein-rich snacks for chickens
- John Jeavons carbon crops
- Compost toilets and humanure

## Seeds

- Start a local seed swap
- Southern Exposure Seed Exchange

## Mulch

- Carrboro Public Works, pick up for free, weekdays from 9-4
- Chapel Hill Public Dump, pick up mulch for \$

## Rain Gardens

- Bountiful Backyards <[www.bountifulbackyards.org](http://www.bountifulbackyards.org)>
- NC Cooperative Extension <[www.bae.ncsu.edu/topic/raingarden](http://www.bae.ncsu.edu/topic/raingarden)>

## Doug Jones Piedmont Planting Guide (PDF)

- <http://tinyurl.com/plantingguide>



A special thanks to all the contributors including Chris Rumbley (for “Further Living” help)  
Sammy Slade – editing and graphic design  
Keith Shaljian – editing  
Forrest Oliphant <[sembiki.com](http://sembiki.com)> – text layout and cover design  
Produced by Carrboro Greenspace and Bountiful Backyards  
Printed by Grassroots Press, Inc. <[grassrootspress.net](http://grassrootspress.net)>