

Guest Editors' Introduction

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Over the last 20 to 30 years, the excesses, externalities, and inequities inherent in conventional agriculture and the global food system have grown increasingly visible. Food safety, food insecurity, environmental degradation, urban sprawl, labor exploitation, the loss of family farmers, and the collapse of rural communities and economies have become familiar concerns for producers, academics, political activists, and the public at large. For many, our land-grant universities have not done enough to address these critical concerns. In fact, over 25 years ago Jim Hightower's *Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times* (1972) and Robert van den Bosch's *The Pesticide Conspiracy* (1978) explicitly identified and critiqued the relationships between the land grants and corporate business that continue to be at the center of many of these problems. Since the articles in this collection directly address possibilities for repositioning agricultural research for the people, it is useful to recall briefly the contested nature of land-grant universities and their role in U.S. agrarian development.

Two significant features characterize the political battles and economic biases that have surrounded land-grant universities and agricultural research in the United States for over 150 years. First, what we currently refer to as the land-grant university was established by different pieces of legislation that responded to a series of political demands and battles over separate, but related, issues concerning higher education, agricultural science, and finally agricultural extension.

Consequently, the "land grants" continue to embody sets of often divergent, institutionalized interests related to these three domains. Second, under a populist guise of serving "the American farmer," the land-grant system has always been most responsive to larger, wealthier farmers and more highly capitalized farming and business interests. At issue for us and the authors in this collection is whether (and if so, how) there might be opportunities to reconfigure these features in favor of more localized food systems.

The Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 laid the foundation for what we now call the land-grant system. This act provided the means for each state to establish an agricultural and mechanical college offering children from farming families the opportunity to receive a broad, not vocationally based, education similar to that available primarily to city dwellers (Marcus 1987). Contrary to common perceptions, the curriculum of these colleges was highly contested by those who favored vocational agricultural education and new college faculty who believed in the potential of science for transforming agriculture (Bonnen 1990).

During the same period, America's "gentlemen farmers" were also key players in defining national and state governmental agricultural agencies. These farmers lobbied for the creation of a Department of Agriculture (1862) oriented toward the collection and dissemination of agricultural information for the private and local agricultural societies in which these farmers were active (Wiest 1923). At the state level, and largely as a way to protect themselves from fraudulent products (especially fertilizer), wealthy farmers asked their state governments to establish testing facilities or "chemistry shops" that reported to farmer-controlled boards. In many states, these facilities became the first publicly funded research offices—separate from the land-grant colleges and directly responsible to wealthier farmers (Marcus 1987).

These new state research offices marginalized the agricultural scientists in the land-grant colleges and, in response, the scientists convinced Congress to recognize their colleges as the legitimate sites for state-based agricultural research through the Hatch Agricultural Experiment Station Act in 1887 (Marcus 1987). Several years later, the creation of agricultural extension through the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 helped the colleges consolidate their role in agricultural education, science, and extension and establish what is now commonly known as the land-grant system.

This brief, chronological interpretation of land grants suggests at least two sets of questions for efforts promoting civic agriculture. First, if land grants continue to embody divergent educational, research, and extension interests, what strategies will allow these institutions to become known more for promoting local food and farming and civic agriculture, than for corporate farming and industrial agriculture? Will the creation of chairs and programs of sustainable agriculture be sufficient or will they simply become marginalized by the overwhelming influence of corporate agriculture and science? In short, can the land grants continue to be real political and scientific battlegrounds for shaping the character of our food and farming system in the United States?

Second, since land-grant scientists have been largely responsible for centralizing and defining a role for agricultural research in their institutions, can we expect today's land-grant researchers to play a leadership role in developing research programs that support more localized food systems? Recent challenges to scientists who have questioned biotech research and the earlier contract between Novartis and the University of California at Berkeley suggest that corporate agribusiness continues to dominate research direction at the land grants. In addition, the disciplinary biases toward molecular instead of agronomic research, as well as the continued quantitative and productionist orientation in applied economics, dampen hopes that young scientists might strike out in new, more local, more people-centered directions. Nevertheless, as more citizens become attracted to more localized food and farming systems, land-grant scientists may slowly see how their professional futures depend on becoming responsive to a new constituency.

There has been a slow, but steady, increase in food and farming enterprise that deliberately embraces sustainable practices and that relocalizes food systems by decreasing the distance between people and their food

supply. Community-supported agriculture, farmers markets, farmer coops, bed-and-breakfasts, community kitchens, school gardens, and urban agriculture are a few of the creative alternatives that have come to exist alongside of (and often in open opposition to) the dominant, corporately controlled agrifood system. While these alternatives have been individually championed and studied for decades, it has only been in the last five years that they have been given a collective name—"civic agriculture."

The term *civic agriculture* (CA) was coined by Thomas Lyson as a way to think and speak about a growing repertoire of socioeconomic relationships and institutions that actively questions productionist models of food and farming, their mechanistic methods and hyper-rational assumptions. For Lyson, CA has a number of distinct, though hardly discrete, characteristics (see Lyson 2000, n.d., 2004, and the article in this collection). First, such efforts attend to the development of local markets as an integral part of the local economy and the daily life of the community. Second, CA is concerned with quality (versus quantity) and with adding value to local products, which, it is understood, should "fit" the region, ecologically and socioculturally. Third, CA is distinguished by being land and labor intensive rather than capital intensive—production is humanly scaled and artisanal (i.e., it still shows the "hand" of its maker). Fourth, CA is site specific and relies heavily on the knowledge and the meanings that belong to and evolve within a particular place. Together, these characteristics describe a mind-set as well as individual and collective behaviors that innervate and depend on an engaged, knowledgeable, and responsible local citizenry.

As a conceptual tool, CA lends legitimacy to a wide range of local ag- and food-based solutions and constituencies. Unlike related concepts such as "sustainable agriculture" or "community food security," however, CA does not have "a primary constituency or specific agenda (e.g., farmers, hunger) closely associated with it. CA does not protect against, as much as it opens up, social spaces within which new community relations and place-based understandings may take shape" (DeLind 2002:223). As a concept, CA is large enough and inclusive enough to "widen the scope of ag-related concerns" well beyond those of simple production and consumption. It has the creative energy to embrace an exploration of how local residents variously express, negotiate, and share the meanings and relationships embedded in their soils, ecologies, histories, cuisines, and communities of place. It is, in other

words, a term that encompasses programs and actions that do two things simultaneously: reintegrate local food and farming into everyday life and reintroduce public awareness, the vernacular, and the artistic back into agricultural venues and practices.

Yet, despite CA's potential to address the many dimensions of food citizenship, its projects have focused mainly (at least to date) on the internal operation and financial success of market-based relationships and activities. The "civic" aspect of civic agriculture, as a consequence, has received stepsister-like status. It is too often viewed as the logical (and desired) outcome of sustainable agricultural development (i.e., first make the numbers work and the expressive stuff is sure to follow). Local food is increasingly being made available to local populations, and local populations are increasingly purchasing and eating local food. But there is little attention being paid to the less overtly functional, quantifiable, and privatizable aspects of this behavior or to how it contributes to, or is enabled by, the ecologies and cultures of place.

In response to this partial perspective, DeLind (2002) called for an "expand(ed) discussion of the nature and potential of civic agriculture not only as an alternative strategy for food production, distribution, and consumption, but also as a tool and a venue for 'grounding people in common purpose'—for nurturing a sense of belonging to a place and an organic sense of citizenship" (DeLind 2002:217). Initiating the discussion, she argued that the existence of a real place and embodied work in place are critical elements for enabling the collective engagement, the identity, and commonwealth inherent in civic agriculture.

Four of the five articles in this collection are direct responses to DeLind's call (i.e., DeLind and Bingen, Chung and Baldwin, Thorp, and Chung et al.). They were first prepared for the session "Searching for the 'C' word: Michigan Case Studies in Civic Agriculture" at the 2003 joint meetings of the Agriculture, Food, and Human Values Society and the Association for the Study of Food and Society held in Austin, Texas. Each of them offers an expanded discussion of CA, often experimenting with alternative forms of expression in an attempt to do so. Thorp's article, for example, explores CA as educational praxis (cf. McDonald 2004:5). She deliberately uses a postmodern, discursive style to highlight the emotion and discovery—the lived experience—that resides within a child's relationship to the garden. Chung et al., by contrast, take issue with a particular aspect of DeLind's initial argument. They question whether the

civic engagement that she finds so essential to CA must necessarily come from resources held in common. They compare and contrast two distinctly different types of land tenure arrangements and consider the degree to which each inspires a sense of community and the common good. Chung and Baldwin move the CA concept into the proverbial belly of the beast—the land-grant university. They wonder whether the food waste generated by research farms is viewed as a public resource and, if so, how it is made accessible (and collectively valuable) to the wider, off-campus community. DeLind and Bingen, in turn, consider the relationship between today's land-grant university—its political agenda and research protocols—and organic food and farming. They argue that a once place-based and civically sensitive organic agriculture is being re-formed, practically and philosophically, to fit industrial standards. As a result, they caution organic farmers and the organic community at large "to look before you leap"—to be clear about their common cause before pressing for more land-grant science and research involvement.

The fifth article (which actually comes first in the collection) was specifically commissioned for this issue. Quite fittingly, it is by Lyson himself. It provides a formal introduction to the concept of civic agriculture and to the basic characteristics that (up to this point) have come to define it. It serves as both an orientation to and a catalyst for the other four articles. Together, they probe the contexts and cultures—the relationships, language, and meanings—of civic agriculture. Ultimately, their purpose is to better understand how, in Lyson's words, such activity "provide(s) forums where(in) civic farmers and food citizens can come together to solidify bonds of community."

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