

Chapter 4

Greater Than the Sum of the Parts?: Unpacking Ethics of Care Within a Community

Supported Agriculture Scheme

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Introduction

Several commentators have recently identified the emergence of a new ‘moral economy’ of food, which is concerned with building a fairer, healthier, more environmentally sustainable and democratic food system (Jackson et al 2009; Morgan et al 2006). As noted by Jackson et al, this ‘moral economy’, in which notions of trust and reciprocity are foregrounded, can be contrasted with powerful impulses towards the growth and consolidation of a ‘neoliberal’ economy, characterized by distant and anonymous relations between the producers and consumers of food, and profit maximization at the expense of social justice, fair trade, individual well-being and environmental sustainability. In the ‘moral economy’, local and place-based ethical frameworks are often contrasted with what DuPuis and Goodman (2005) have described as the ‘systemic placelessness’ created by global industrialized agriculture and food systems.

The concept of the moral economy directs our attention to the moral and ethical frameworks through which everyday decisions are framed and enacted. It provides a helpful context for our work, in which we foreground the concept of the ethic of care as a framing device for understanding participant motivations in EarthShare, a Community Supported Agriculture scheme in northern Scotland. Drawing on the work of Tronto (1993) in particular, we argue that care, when understood in broad terms as acts of reaching out to something other than self, provides a powerful incentive for participation in the scheme.

Not only this, but our work underlines the significance of care ethics as the basis for the emergence of what DuPuis and Goodman (2005) have described as a ‘reflexive politics of the local’. This is because care not only requires recognition of the needs of others, but also demands *action* which prioritise those needs. An everyday ethic of care is relational and responsive to the needs of others; it breeds tolerance of difference rather than condemnation.

In this chapter, we show that by exposing the very real differences in the priorities and actions of EarthShare members, we can escape imaginings of local food systems as ‘perfect’ or entirely free from ambiguity or conflict but still see them as sites of political potential. The chapter begins by introducing the concept of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and locating CSA within a broader literature on local food, moral economies and ethics of care. We next introduce our case study CSA in more detail and describe the research methods used. We then explore the various cares and priorities of EarthShare members before looking at how they negotiate these priorities at three key moments of interaction: planning meetings, workshifts and social events. By understanding members’ differing motivations in terms of care ethics we can accept their multifarious nature, respect their differences and see them as complementary rather than competitive. Moreover, by concentrating on the everyday acts that make up EarthShare members’ ethical practice, we illustrate the ways in which embodied and quotidian practices can be understood as sites of political engagement (Thrift 2008). While we do not argue that EarthShare has achieved a *fully* inclusive politics in place, we suggest that in the subscribers’ interactions and reflections on practice, we may see the beginnings of a process of constructing a more ‘reflexive’ politics of place, such as that envisaged by

DuPuis and Goodman (2005), and one that works to entangle—or ‘transgress’ in the parlance of this volume—the self and others, the political and the practical, the careful and the ordinary and, importantly, bodies, spaces, places and (alternative) food.

Community Supported Agriculture, Local Food and Ethics of Care

CSAs have been heralded as offering opportunities to strengthen place-based community relationships between food growers and eaters (see for example DeLind and Ferguson 1999; Wells, Gradwell and Yoder 1999; Cone and Myhre 2000; Grey 2000). Feagan and Henderson (2008) frame CSAs within a ‘moral economy’, which includes exchange based on social or moral sanctions; the de-commodification of food; attempts to develop non-market relationships among people, social groups and institutions; and the re-organisation of food systems for the reinvigoration of familial, community and civic agriculture (adapted from Feagan and Henderson 2008). Whilst there are several variations in the form that a CSA can take, at its core, it involves local people investing in a crop in advance of the harvest. This guarantees an income for the farmer and shares the risk amongst the subscribers. In return, the subscribers get a share of the harvest. This is often an organic vegetable box, but it could also be fruit, eggs or meat. Many CSAs also include elements such as social events and work details for members to help at certain times of year. Some CSAs involve members in decision-making and even in owning the farm (see Soil Association [2007] for information on the UK; USDA [2007] and Robyn Van En Centre [2007] for information on USA CSAs). In the USA there are now over 1200 CSA schemes (Robyn Van En Centre 2007) but in the UK they are still rather rare – the latest available figures suggest that in 2006 there were thirty in the whole country (Cultivating

Communities 2006). The number stands to grow, however, with money from the UK's National Lottery being directed towards supporting the establishment of new CSAs.

Whilst advocates of CSA routinely stress 'localness' as a key strength, DuPuis and Goodman (2005) raise important questions about whether 'the local' is any more likely to be a site of altruistic and caring behaviour, and query the ways that 'normative localism places a set of pure, conflict-free local values and local knowledges in resistance to anomic and contradictory capitalist forces' (359). They argue that there are many problems with associating the local with an ethic of care: who gets to define what is local? For whom do you care and how? In their view, the local as a concept intrinsically includes and excludes particular people, places and lifestyles. They question whether localism itself is socially just, and suggest that it can be associated with an 'unreflexive politics' whereby a "small, unrepresentative group decides what is 'best' for everyone and then attempts to change the world by converting everyone to accept their utopian ideal" (361; see also Winter, 2003, Feagan 2007). They cite the work of authors such as Hinrichs (2003; also Hinrichs and Kremer [2002], Allen et al [2003] and Winter [2003]) to demonstrate that many of the actors in alternative food movements and other local-based social movements are middle class and white and are able to steer reforms in their own interests and to reflect their visions of perfection.

DuPuis and Goodman (2005: 362) stress that their aim is not to 'de-legitimize' localism, but 'to provide a better understanding of the complexity and pitfalls of local politics and the long-term deleterious effects of reform movements controlled primarily by members of the middle class'. They call for a greater recognition of the role of spatial politics in the construction of food localism, and argue that a more open and reflexive

‘politics in place’ is needed which recognises the mutual constitution of scale, and allows for the emergence of a democratic politics of ‘respect’. In this paper, we argue that a powerful route towards the construction of more reflexive politics in place is to recognize the significance of every day care ethics in daily consumption decisions, and to examine the structures (in this case of food production and consumption) which enable people to express their desire to care. We interpret our case study, EarthShare, as an example of a structure which enables people to express diverse cares, and also to tolerate and understand the cares and priorities of others, without feeling alienated or excluded by them.

The literature on care ethics then, offers a lens through which to see the actions of people (CSA members here) as based in, and belonging to, their *relationships* to others. The articulation of care and relations to others is conceptualised as a position from which decisions are taken and practices develop. Within this wider literature we have found Joan Tronto’s (1987, 1993, 2006) work particularly useful. She focuses on the political potential of an ethic of care and proposes that ‘care’ can be used as a basis for rethinking the moral boundaries which preserve inequalities of power and privilege (1993, 2006). Her conceptualisation of care has several key features that make it particularly relevant to our work. Summarized in brief, they are first that ‘care’ is not restricted to human interactions with other humans; it can also include objects and the environment. Second, caring is not presumed to be dyadic or individualistic as often assumed in the relationship between mother and child; limiting our understanding of care to such relationships, threatens to reduce the social and political potential of care (Tronto 1993: 103). Third, the activity of caring is largely defined culturally, in that it will vary among different cultures. Fourth, caring is ongoing - it can describe a single activity or a process. Caring, moreover, is ‘not

simply a cerebral concern, or character trait, but the concern of living, active humans engaged in the processes of everyday living. Care is both a practice and a disposition' (Tronto 1993: 104). In Fisher and Tronto (1990: 4) caring is further defined as 'a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible.' Crucially, care implies reaching out to something beyond the self and it involves some kind of action (see Tronto 1993: 103). As noted above, care is more than simply disposition, and it is more than 'concern'. In Tronto's words (1993: 103) 'we would think someone who said "I care about the world's hungry," but who did nothing to alleviate world hunger did not know what it meant to say that she cared about hunger.'

Community Supported Agriculture has been identified specifically as a form of food production/consumption that can be characterised as 'caring practice' (Wells and Gradwell 2001). By forging relationships between the growers and eaters of food within comparatively small geographical areas, it has been argued that not only do CSAs reduce food miles and excessive food packaging, but they also promote 'closeness' between producers and consumers in terms of improved mutual knowledge, understanding, and relationships. Wells and Gradwell (2001) found care within the CSAs they studied in terms of the treatment of the environment, resources, other growers and shareholder members. They found that concern for land, water and other resources, non-human nature, people, community, place, the future and a need to make a living, were all motivational aspects for involvement in CSA. Moreover, the growers they interviewed revealed the 'primacy of relationships' as they spoke of 'closing the gap between grower and eater, and between people and nature; of land, plants and animals as community members, not commodities;

and of moving from control of nature to partnership and respect' (2001: 117). Similarly, we have shown in our work elsewhere (Cox et al 2008, Kneafsey et al 2008) that participants in EarthShare – both producers and consumers- have recognised the relationships they are entwined in and the existence of needs such as the need for producers to make a fair and 'decent' living, the need for consumers and their families to have access to safe, fresh food, and the need for community and environmental resources to be protected, enhanced and sustained. We have argued that the people we encountered in our research all exhibited a preparedness to act to meet the needs that they had recognized, whether these be the needs of their children, spouse or partner, or the needs of the producer or the wider community and environment, or the needs of all of these recipients simultaneously. In this chapter, we extend our analysis to demonstrate how the sometimes contradictory and competing cares of EarthShare subscribers are negotiated through different forms of interaction between and among the individuals involved. Moreover, we argue that within these interactions we can identify the formulation of reflexive and responsive consumer identities which are concerned simultaneously with the politics of food *and* of place.

In our discussion of the ethical practices of EarthShare members we draw on an understanding of everyday ethics and embodied political practice as expressed through quotidian objects such as food, household cleaning products, recycling bins and ordinary, everyday acts such as eating and sorting waste¹. Relationships within and beyond the home are negotiated through such objects and practices and they can be used to try to influence the behaviour and ethics of others (Hawkins 2006, Hobson 2006). Hobson (2006: 331) has

¹ We would like to thank the reviewers for suggesting this literature.

commented that the use of eco-efficient technologies by her interviewees is not an overt politics but that dwelling with eco-efficient technologies, creates change:

[T]hrough these objects' continual prompting of environmental considerations that permeate other areas of daily life and further sensitise individuals to the environment, thus providing the means through which participants talk to others about sustainability. This gives rise to a form of techno-ethics—relational, reflexive, and evolving, through the extension of new practices to other domains and domestic.

Hawkins suggests that it is impossible to engage in changing everyday practice without engaging in a process of reflexivity. She goes on to argue that politics, as a process of 'active experimentation' is located in such minor practices and everyday actions, and in questions of bodies, ethics and materialities (2006: 6). It is in this sense of everyday practice as political that we consider the potential of EarthShare CSA. This is not to claim that reflexive consumption is the only, or best, form of politics available to EarthShare members – it is certainly not the only form they are involved in. Rather it is to recognise the myriad embodied and routine practices that constitute the political possibilities of a CSA and to show how discussions of food consumption are able to reveal who cares, how and why.

With this in mind, the next section gives some background to EarthShare and explains our research methods. The chapter then reflects on the cares and priorities of EarthShare members in order to reveal their differences and potentials for conflict and ambiguity.

Researching EarthShare CSA

EarthShare is a not-for-profit co-operative organization which was founded in 1994 in Forres near Inverness, Scotland. It is the longest running CSA in Britain. Members pay a subscription in return for a weekly organic vegetable box containing a share of that week's harvest. The cheapest way to subscribe is to pre-pay at the start of each year, but a monthly standing order can also be set up. Subscribers can also receive a substantial discount if they help out at three workshifts each year. Workshifts are an important part of the scheme, with three-quarters of subscribers taking part in activities such as weeding or harvesting. For a standard box, providing enough vegetables for a family of four, the cost in 2008 was £9.17 per week if the workshares are undertaken. Up to 20 per cent of the cost of subscriptions can be paid for through LETS (Local Exchange Trading Scheme) and people who provide extra help with harvesting are in turn paid for their work in LETS. Thus EarthShare represents a comparatively cheap way for some consumers to access organic, locally produced food. Indeed, a price comparison undertaken in 2004 showed that if an equivalent box of produce was to be sourced from a supermarket it would have cost £11.50; at the time the maximum cost of an EarthShare box was £8.95.² Similar comparisons have been undertaken with other CSAs (Hamer 2008). Money from subscriptions is used to fund the rent of land and the pay of the growers and a scheme manager, all of whom are paid agricultural minimum wage (about £6 per hour in 2007). Although subscribers fund the scheme they do not actively direct it in terms of its organization or goals, as happens in some CSAs (see for example Stroud Community Agriculture [2007] another well established CSA in Britain, or De Lind and Ferguson [1999] for a US example). If there is a

² See Hammer (2008) for similar comparisons with other CSAs.

bumper crop, subscribers get lots of produce, but if there is a poor harvest they get less. Produce is not brought in to supplement what is grown. The scheme has a capacity of 195 subscriptions, and although most members do stay on from year to year, numbers do vary. In 2004, when we first interviewed the manager, there were 165 subscribers but by our next interview a year later the scheme was oversubscribed and a waiting list had been set up. At the end of 2008 there were 170 subscribers.

EarthShare is located in a relatively remote area of northern Scotland. Average incomes in the area are below the Scottish average, as are house prices and rates of car ownership. Unemployment is relatively high but educational attainment is slightly better than average, as are life expectancy and rates of limiting long-term illness. One important aspect of the location is that EarthShare operates in the same area as the Findhorn Foundation³ – an ‘alternative’ spiritual community, ecovillage and holistic education centre that attracts many downshifTERS and those interested in less materially-focused ways of life. Over 300 people live at the Findhorn Foundation park and many other members and supporters of the Foundation live in the immediate area. The Foundation provides a wide range of workshops and education opportunities which attract visitors from all over the world who use services, such as shops, bed and breakfasts and alternative therapies, in the local area as well as at the Foundation. The Foundation is a major subscriber to EarthShare (taking 75 subscriptions for its kitchens and 10 to sell on in its shop) but has no formal control of the scheme.

³ See http://www.findhorn.org/about_us/display_new.php for more information.

Research was carried out with EarthShare over a two year period between 2004 and 2006. This involved two rounds of interviews with the manager and growers, including visits to the field and garden; two rounds of workshops with subscribers (11 people in the first workshop and 14 in the second); two rounds of interviews with subscribers (9 people in each) and an in-depth household study with two households. This involved the participants in keeping food diaries, notes, receipts and photographic records of their eating over four weeks and being visited by a researcher two to three times during that period to discuss their food procurement, cooking and eating in detail. Subscriber participants were contacted through a leaflet that was put into boxes. This invited them to reply to the research team, either by phone or e-mail or by leaving their contact details in a folder at the box pick-up point. The self-selecting nature of participants is likely to mean that those subscribers who are most committed to EarthShare and who identify with it most strongly could be over-represented amongst the group. However, we have found that workshop and interviewee participants varied widely, including those who had been subscribers for a less than a year, as well as those who had been with the scheme since its inception, and encompassing people who had never attended workshifts or social events, as well as others who regularly attended all of these and contributed to the scheme in other ways. We collected some socio-demographic data from interviewees and this showed a wide range of income levels and household arrangements. Interviewees ranged in age from 43 to 78 and 63 percent were female. Annual household incomes varied from below £20,000 to over £50,000 (average household incomes in the UK 2005-6 were £26,500 [Jones 2007]). Typical forms of employment amongst the sample were either in the public sector such as

in education and social work or self-employed, for example as writers or providing alternative therapies.

Motivations and cares within a CSA

In this section we explore the different cares of EarthShare subscribers by focusing on the motivations they described for joining and remaining with the scheme. Everyone we spoke to had their own motivations for participation in EarthShare, which combined different types of care – care for different things and different philosophies about how best to care for those things. These priorities could also be seen as mapping onto the meanings subscribers gave to their vegetable box and the scheme as a whole. In general subscribers each understood EarthShare to be a response to their priorities and highlighted the specific aspects of the scheme that they thought exemplified this.

To give an idea of the range of motivations and priorities subscribers had, at our second workshop we asked the subscribers to tell us what they thought made a successful CSA. Table 1, below, shows the range of responses we were given. The discussion surrounding these responses revealed that the subscribers were listing the things that they value about EarthShare rather than answering an abstract question about CSAs. The groups talked enthusiastically and participants often used concrete examples of events or practices to communicate the ideas they wanted included. As the table shows, the responses were extremely diverse and this diversity was repeated in interviews when we asked subscribers about their motivations for being members of EarthShare

Insert Table 1 here

Care for the natural environment, both the specific local environment and the natural environment more generally was an important motivation for many of the EarthShare

members we spoke to. This was expressed through concerns about farming methods (conventional versus organic), the transport of food (food miles) and the types of foods eaten, for example reducing consumption of meat and fish, and increasing consumption of vegetables because of the environmental damage meat production does, seasonality and reduced packaging. One subscriber, Ian – who was one of the original members of EarthShare – was extremely articulate about his motivations for being in the scheme. These are part of a philosophy which rests on respect for the environment and an ethic of inter-generational responsibility. He said:

[F]or ourselves, my wife and myself, it isn't the food, that's partly it but it's really because you can't say that the present generation owns the soil. One can't say that a person from whom EarthShare rents the 22 acres owns that for you, he doesn't, he's the tenant, he's the tenant for the ... in a sense for the generations to come. We feel this very deeply indeed, you cannot hand over to your incoming people, your incoming generations, soil that is so desperately polluted and inert it's lost its life.

He went on to add:

I see it very much as a political experiment in social organisation which has the material benefit of producing organic food and it's whole objective is to hand over to the community roundabout that's coming, the soil in good condition.

Ian also mentioned the benefits to community and personal health of being in the scheme but his interest in the natural environment clearly predominated and was a crucial influence on many of his practices. Another subscriber, Mark, showed how his care for the environment was closely related to care for other people and a whole way of life, he said:

[T]here's also an element of looking after the land and of feeling that, you know, if you actually replace instead of just throwing chemicals at everything, and actually sort of looking after the

land, good husbandry in other words, then you're actually using people in sort of an inherently satisfying way and you're, you know, it's, it's a life that's kind of what we're supposed to live as a being, as apposed to being this sort of artificial sort of commercial type, commercially driven life. And I think there's a sort of an element of "yeah I'd like to support that".

Strongly related to the wish to care for the local environment was a desire to care about people in place and to support or build the local community. For most of our interviewees this was mentioned as an added benefit in addition to a primary motivation perhaps related to their health or the physical environment, but for a small number of subscribers we spoke to, care for the local community was their main reason for joining the CSA. Shaun and Eleanor, two subscribers who were very involved with the Findhorn Foundation, perhaps best exemplify this approach. Their motivations for participating in EarthShare revolve around community building and a desire to support the 'alternative' lifestyle culture that has developed around the Foundation. When asked why they are subscribers they said:

Eleanor: Well because it's organic stuff, it's good stuff, you know it's, its yeah local produce you know.

Shaun: We know who grows it, we can taste their sweat (laughter)... Yeah it's a community... We are part of the community and that is, with EarthShare it's so much part of the whole conglomeration, Findhorn Foundation so of course how can we not basically. We are so much part of the Foundation and EarthShare is part of, part of the whole thing.

Shaun went on to add:

There's no sense of belonging [with Tesco], this [EarthShare] is really the belonging of the family again yeah. We know the people who grow them. Like a few years ago, when there was a GM crop field north of Inverness we were in the field together chopping the things down, this kind of thing, so really total involvement in, in the organic scheme. ... We meet each other in the meetings in the Foundation, we meet each other in social events in the Foundation, concerts

and sharing, yeah. ... So the social events are part of that and Earthshare organises some of the social events that, the harvesting and the tattie feast and whatever else and the Foundation organises things and we organise things in our house and so everything just intermingles, it's just one exchange of energies. Yeah that's basically what it is, that's it, an exchange of energies.

The aspects of the scheme that Shaun highlights - its close relationship to the Findhorn Foundation, the social events organised and the direct connection he feels to the people who grow the food – illustrate the way in which he is able to focus on those things which are most important to him and thereby understand EarthShare as particularly addressing his cares.

While the relationship to the local community was clearly important to many EarthShare members, this was also one aspect of the CSA that was identified as off-putting by other members, particularly when EarthShare was seen as too closely related to the Findhorn Foundation. For example, Mary, who described her reasons for joining as not 'political' in any way, just 'private and personal', commented:

[T]here are some of us who would much prefer it to be a much more mainstream thing and there are some of us who suspect that were the Findhorn Foundation not so involved it would be a much more mainstream thing, because people are, are silently rejecting of this value system. ... I mean it doesn't bother me but I know lots, I know it does bother a lot of people.

And Julie, another subscriber said she is not involved in the community building side of things, although she says she is glad that this happens, but she is positively put off by the association with the Findhorn Foundation, saying:

I think well some of them, well how do I say this without being, sounding horrible and unkind...I sometimes think some of them are just, you know from a different planet, I think would I have anything really to say to them?

Julie describes her participation in EarthShare as ‘selfish’ as the cares that drive her are for her own health and her own convenience, motivations that she shares with many other subscribers. When asked about her motivations she said:

I would say health [...] Yes I would. Yeah, because, well I’m 52 now and I mean you realise when you’re filling in forms especially, there’s very few little boxes left for you now. And I think, oh, well that sort of centres you and you think “wait a minute here, and I am sort of trying...” As I get older if I can help this body be more healthy, as I get older, that’s what I sort of strive for.

However, her reasons are clearly complex, she aims to buy organic food whenever she can and uses ‘environmentally friendly’ products when possible. She also has strong opinions about supermarkets and will particularly avoid Asda/Walmart because:

I don’t agree with what they do in America, what they’ve done. I just think “why should they be allowed?”

Thus her motivations suggest a care for unknown human others, and for the natural environment, as well as the ‘selfish’ cares that she herself highlighted. Other subscribers also mentioned a desire to buy less from supermarkets as a motivation for joining EarthShare, stating their care for the natural environment and local communities as the reasons behind this.

EarthShare subscribers appear to be able to take from the scheme the elements which best address their own cares and priorities. In part they do this in the ways they make meanings through their involvement in the CSA. Hobson (2006: 320) comments that

‘individuals not only use eco-efficient objects to achieve rational ends, but also produce meaning through the material world.’ We can see in the way that EarthShare subscribers highlight different aspects of the scheme their processes of negotiating meanings that make sense within their ethical frameworks. For Shaun it is community building that is important, for Julie, organic production and for Ian, protection of the soil. EarthShare subscribers are using both material objects (the food within their boxes) and also the relationships that the CSA allows to negotiate these meanings.

Greater than the sum of the parts? Negotiating competing cares in a CSA

As the discussion of motivations above illustrates there is a wide range of cares and priorities that motivate participation in this small CSA. The people we spoke to generally felt passionate about their own positions and also passionate about EarthShare. Most of them perceived EarthShare as having the same priorities that they had even though they were all different from each other. Given these passions, differences and, to a certain extent, disagreements, EarthShare could, in theory, be plagued by destructive in-fighting, domination by the most powerful and suffer other problems identified by DuPuis and Goodman (2005) as typical within locally based movements. Yet this does not appear to be the case. EarthShare is a very long running, very successful CSA and when the different subscribers are together, in our workshops at least, the effect is of a harmonious, though multi-faceted, enthusiasm. Indeed, our findings are similar to those reported by Feagan and Henderson (2008) in their detailed research on the Devon Acres CSA in Ontario. They illustrate the ‘patchwork’ quality of individual participation, and the ‘messy’, complex and contingent nature of the CSA they studied.

In this section we examine the practices that allow this diversity to exist and EarthShare to flourish. By focusing on three moments at which EarthShare subscribers can meet each other: planning meetings, workshifts and social events, we explore how individuals experienced and negotiated (or more often did not negotiate) the competing cares within the group. Subscribers are able to join in with any or none of these things, and so participate in ways which are convenient or practical for them and that resonate with their cares and priorities. The way in which EarthShare is organized means that it does not require that members agree about philosophical principles or on the details of how the scheme operates, nor do they have to interact often. It enables different cares to be prioritized while still allowing continual reflection on consumption practices, through contact with the food in the box and other EarthShare members, which can create change in subscriber behaviour which ripples out to others too.

Planning meetings are the formal mechanism by which subscribers feed into the running of the CSA. They normally involve discussions about what should be grown in the coming year and subscribers feed back what they liked in past seasons' produce. All subscribers are invited to meetings but in reality very few go, the vast majority seem to be happy to let others make decisions about how the scheme is run. Few of our interviewees or workshop participants had attended many meetings (except Ian) and those that had were not the same people who also took part in other activities. As Julie comments:

I would say if you went to the work shift you would be closer to it, you would feel more involved. I feel I'm just you know on the periphery of it and reaping the benefits and maybe from a selfish point of view, you know I just pick and choose what I want from what they can

offer and I mean I'm getting all the vegetables and if there's a little meeting that I want to along, oh well I'll go to that [...] I wouldn't want to be on committees or, or anything like that.

Julie's slightly distant 'pick and choose' attitude was typical of the subscribers we spoke to. We got no impression that there was a small group with time or resources who were influential upon the scheme and, in fact, the scheme manager commented that they would have liked more people to be more involved. There was no evidence from formal meetings that the different cares of subscribers caused conflict within the operation of EarthShare or that the most privileged members are trying to inflict their version of what is 'best' on others (DuPuis and Goodman 2005).

There are other events where EarthShare members can meet and these are also sites where the nature of the CSA is negotiated, or not negotiated, by its subscribers. Workshifts are an important element in differentiating EarthShare from a commercial vegetable box scheme. The shifts allow members to spend time in the fields gaining a better idea of the practices involved in food production, and allow them to cut the cost of their subscription. Subscribers who did the shifts highlighted this social element and clearly enjoyed them. For example Mark commented:

[S]ometimes you go [to do workshifts] and its a wonderful day and there's loads of people there and its sort of really a bit of a jolly party except you have to do a little bit of work.

Mary said that she does the workshifts for sheer enjoyment but has actually met many new people through them:

Int: Do you know anybody else in EarthShare?

Mary: Oh yes, I mean quite a lot of people especially from working on the land you get to know, with your work shifts.

Int: You do them then?

Mary: Oh yes, I love them absolutely love them because I mean otherwise you know I mean that's just the perfect foil for the rest of my life because I'm very much, well I was going to say cerebral, but I'm not at all, but you know I do sit behind a computer a lot and it's wonderful to go off on your bike you know and pick strawberries for an afternoon, can you imagine with this heavenly world around you up here and the views and, and just lovely, I love doing it. Not for any idealistic reason I just enjoy it, I enjoy pulling weeds up in the rain too.

Mary is emphatic that she does the shifts for pleasure rather than for 'idealistic' reasons and this would not be uncommon amongst our interviewees. However, her description of the experience, which brings out so vividly the joy of being outside in a beautiful place, suggests that she finds the activity satisfying in many ways.

The subscribers that we spoke to who did not do their shifts generally expressed regret about this, and put it down to lack of time rather than any lack of support for the CSA. There were also members who had made the decision not to do the shifts and did not feel guilt or regret about this. As Julia put it 'I contribute in other ways and I pay more so they can pay someone else to do it.' Workshifts, while being a distinctive aspect of EarthShare membership, were not something that all members felt they had to do or to do for the same reasons. They were something that could be dipped in and out of, embraced or rejected. There was no criticism of people who did not do them by those who did, except that Mary commented that she wondered if some people did not do them because they thought they were 'above' menial work, and no evidence that those who did shifts were considered to be 'better' subscribers.

However, workshifts did appear to be a site for reflection on behaviour and engagement in the food system. Ruth commented:

They ask you to do 2-3 shifts then that's good, because I think people appreciate if they have to do the work, it's hard work. I think if you do experience it directly, then you know what's involved, so you're going to less likely get on your high horse and complain about things ... but I think its important people realise just how much work goes into their food. I mean in supermarkets ... you forget.

Even for Julie, who does not do the shifts herself, the visibility of this work within the scheme encourages her to reflect upon her food and the relationships that it is part of:

if you think about where your food came from and who's work has gone into getting that, the growing of it, the planting of it and getting it to you, and now when I'm doing the vegetables I think well somebody's been out in that field and you do feel better having those kind of thoughts and its not just an anonymous carrot (laughter) it has come from that field and somebody had to plant it, somebody had to pick it then box it and you think well a lot of people have gone to a lot of effort.

She went on to explain that this affected how she used her food and made her anxious not to waste it. The food in Julie's box each week provides a physical reminder of the labour involved in food production which spurs her to further reflection on the wider food system and her engagement with it in a similar way that Hobson (2006) found that living with a shower timer was an impetus to considering household resource use more widely.

EarthShare members also meet at social events organised by the CSA, and although these are seemingly not about the formal organisation of the scheme, they were the element which prompted the most critical comments from interviewees. There are three large social events each year, a Summer garden party, the 'Tattie Fest' (for the potato harvest) and a Spring blessing. While they were the favourite element of some interviewees the 'spiritual' aspects of these events elicited strong negative comments from some members. Mary, who

was also critical of the influence of the Findhorn Foundation (above) commented about the Spring Blessing:

[B]ecause it's just new age, it's just crap and shit you know, dancing round a bloody sacred pot, you know, its just not really my scene ... for me its very unattractive but that's me. I'm just not into nature, spirits and talking to trees and things.

Michelle appeared to link the social events with a particular approach, or set of behaviours when she said:

I don't go to the to the thanksgiving thing and *all that kind of stuff* (emphasis added).

These comments suggest that certain aspects of EarthShare are experienced as unwelcome or exclusionary by some members and there is in no sense a shared philosophical approach. Yet this dissonance was not threatening to the success of the CSA because subscribers just chose not to participate in the elements that they did not like. Michelle went on to say:

[U]p till now I haven't done the work share but I will do that, but that's more just a time thing. This year I meant to do it and I just didn't and I, but I will do it next year so no it's not from, I don't have a great deal of contact with them.

Mark similarly commented:

The other thing about EarthShare is that you go out and do some picking and weeding or whatever it is and do your bit, so you're still connected but you don't actually have to do all the bits.

Many other interviewees also talked about just joining in with the bits that they wanted to. This suggests that rather than getting into disagreements about their differences, or negotiating to find a shared position, EarthShare members opted simply not to arbitrate between their differing cares or priorities.

We have found that despite their differences EarthShare members were generally respectful of each others' cares. They liked the fact that other subscribers felt passionately for things even if they did not share those passions or agree with the actions that people took. Repeatedly in interviews subscribers would hedge their opinions by stressing that they were personal and not for everyone and would show sympathy for subscribers with different opinions or forms of engagement by saying they did not expect everyone to act or think in the same way. In our workshops subscribers were united in their praise of their scheme and their desire for more people to have access to something similar. When asked how that would happen they sought for solutions that would include as many people with different views and circumstances as possible. There were never suggestions that only some groups or some people would be appropriate or welcome members.

One result of this approach was that people left each other alone to concentrate on the bits of the scheme that interested them – some would do workshifts, others go to social events, two members had written a cookery book and did cookery demonstrations, Ian does 'wild larder' walks, while Shaun and Eleanor destroyed GM crops. Each of these activities carried on with the support of only some members. There was no evidence of powerful groups dominating or of certain people or groups of people being driven out. Whilst we did not interview any former members of EarthShare we were able to ask the scheme manager about the reasons people gave for leaving. We were told that these were generally expressed in terms of the food received – there being too much food to cope with being the most common issue – or because of changes in circumstances such as moving house. Some reasons for leaving could be read as showing a lack of commitment on the part of members and perhaps an instrumentalist or functionalist approach to CSA as found by Feagan and

Henderson (2008). However, these attitudes did not appear to cause friction within the scheme nor threaten its stability once it was well established and the majority of subscribers continue with their subscriptions from year to year.

This ‘live and let live’ attitude may suggest that EarthShare does not operate as a group or a ‘food democracy’ in any meaningful way, yet we also found evidence that being a subscriber to EarthShare did involve people in reflection on their practices and changes in their behaviour because of their contact with other members and could, therefore be seen as a forum for political action. This happened in utterly mundane ways, as subscribers reflected on their own consumption and exchanged information with each other. For example Ruth, describes the importance of ‘a supportive community’ in helping her to reject mainstream forms of consumption:

[W]hen you do start to question things of course it’s very unsettling as well, and this is what I mean that ... you know, a sort of supportive community, and people that have got the same kind of like minds so you don’t feel suddenly you’re the odd one, because you don’t want to shop at supermarkets anymore or you don’t want what everybody else is you know happy [with]. ... And you wonder if anybody else was thinking about these things...to the depth or breadth you are...but, I mean, of course they are. And, but then you kind of feel quite powerless at times. It’s quite important to either have, you know, a sort of group of friends or people that you can connect with so that you don’t feel that you’re quite an oddball.

EarthShare provides Ruth with the support she needs to resist ‘what everybody else is happy with’ and to act on her cares. The connection to ‘like minded’ people helps her to overcome the powerlessness she feels when thinking about supermarkets. Other subscribers talked about exchanging information with each other, this could be simple things like recipes that help deal with a glut of vegetables, but it could also be about sources of eco-

friendly products, community-based services or how to do something like composting. Through these exchanges of information subscribers are able to become informed about each others' interests and to adapt their behaviour if they want to. EarthShare thus supports myriad small-scale changes to people's lives without ever demanding that they share each others' goals. Participation in this CSA is helping members to engage in a broad range of caring practices. These include practices which care for the self and known others, for the local environment and community and for unknown others and the natural environment more broadly. These priorities are not in competition but accrete to become greater than the sum of the parts.

Conclusion

The extant literature on CSAs has identified them as 'caring practice' (Wells and Gradwell 2001) – a possible space within which members and growers can care for people and places both near and far. This is in keeping with writing on alternative and ethical food movements more generally which suggests that food procurement is one area in which people can act to care for others (Popke 2006, M. Goodman 2004; see also Goodman et al 2010). Yet existing literature also identifies CSAs as possible sites of disagreement or conflict with member participation being characterized as instrumental, partial and conflicted (Feagan and Henderson 2008, see also Cone and Myhre 2000, Hinrichs 2000, Perez et al 2003, Guthman et al 2006). More broadly, local food initiatives have been criticized as unlikely to deliver the economic, social and environmental sustainability that they have been heralded as producing (Feagan 2007, McCarthy 2006). DuPuis and Goodman (2005) have highlighted the potentially problematic nature of local food movements and query their ability to meet goals of equality, and to bring about social

justice. They caution against assuming that locally-based food movements will necessarily involve non-instrumental, ethics-based interpersonal relations and show how open such movements are to becoming unreflexive, elitist and reactionary.

Whilst we have discussed EarthShare here in the context of local food movements, we do not claim the CSA is a local political movement in any traditional sense. For example, it does not require active participation from members nor does it require that members sign up to any set views or beliefs. Similarly, our interviewees did not describe their food practices as political for the most part but rather understood their membership of EarthShare as a way in which they could address their own rather than shared priorities, a way that they could move through their careful geographies of consumption. However, in terms of its potential to prompt and/or support individual movement from ‘passive consumers’ to ‘informed citizens’, EarthShare does provide a space in which community building can happen and traditional forms of political practice - such as opposition to GM crops – can be organized. In addition EarthShare is organized in such a way that subscribers can meet each other regularly and the CSA brings together people who share an interest in one aspect of their food consumption but who might otherwise have different priorities, politics and motivations. For some subscribers interaction with the other members will be an important source of information about food and political/ethical issues more generally. Such interaction can be significant in raising people’s awareness of issues, and can be seen as part of an everyday political practice (Hobson 2006). Conversations between members serve to locate EarthShare within networks and relationships helping subscribers to see the scheme as something more than a source of organic vegetables. However, because these conversations are informal, between peers, they do not necessitate a sharing of conclusions

or ideals. They may be a spur to reflection and to a change in practices for some consumers, but there is no pressure from the scheme for conformity of views and no privilege given to one position over another.

In this chapter, we have used the lens of care ethics to unpack the differing motivations of members within a successful CSA and have shown that while these are focused on a local food scheme they extend far beyond the immediate area. While they include ‘selfish’ cares for individual bodies and locally-focused cares for community development and the local environment, they also embrace care for the natural environment *en toto* and for unknown others. The motivations of EarthShare members cannot be characterized as privileging the local over more global concerns and as yet the scheme has not shown any risk of being dominated by more powerful groups of members.

Although we accept DuPuis and Goodman’s criticisms of the ‘purifying’ and potentially exclusionary nature of local food movements, we also want to support local food initiatives in forging sustainable forms of local democracy and offering alternatives to the capitalist food systems. We have argued that by exposing differences in the priorities and actions of EarthShare members we can escape imaginings of EarthShare as perfect or entirely free from ambiguity or conflict, as has sometimes been the case in reporting of local food movements. Yet by also understanding members’ differing motivations in terms of care ethics we can accept their multifarious nature, respect their differences and see them as complementary rather than competitive. Moreover, we propose that using the lens of the ethic of care to focus on people’s motives for their regular food consumption practices reveals the political potential of everyday actions, both to shape one’s own behaviour and reach beyond the self. We suggest that EarthShare is a forum which supports this form of

politics because - however flawed or partial - it offers an environment in which people can address their cares and influence others.

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