

The Tensions of Food System Localization in Ontario's Buy-Local Procurement

Alena Cawthorne

Submitted: July 29, 2016

A Major Paper submitted to the Faculty of Environmental Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Environmental Studies, York University, Toronto Ontario, Canada.

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ABSTRACT

Buying local has become a recent trend within the food movement across the world. The purchasing of local foods is seen as a way to support local economies, and relationships while also promoting better environmental practices. Recently the push to buy local has extended past individual consumers to a focus on public institutions. Institutional procurement is seen to have opportunity to influence food system changes through the huge amounts of purchasing power institutions hold. At the same time, within academia there are growing critiques of the buying local trend, highlighting the limitations within food system localization. This research is an exploration of the tensions between local food procurement within public institutions and the food system localization literature. Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted of food service directors, and not-for-profit experts. Although this research is situated in Ontario, comparisons are made both out of province and out of country to demonstrate different procurement programs and thoughts towards buying local. A Marxist food justice lens is used to analyse the potential of procurement, and its limitations for addressing food system change.

FOREWORD

I entered the Master of Environmental Studies (MES) program with significant interest in understanding the problems within the food system, and the multitude of potential solutions. These interests were fostered through working on organic farms via the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) program. While working on farms, I developed a relationship with farmers and a better understanding of their place in the food chain, as well as their position against industrial farming. With a multitude of questions, I entered in the MES program to begin to flesh out some of these initial thoughts. I entered the program to develop my theoretical understanding of the food system as well as increase my personal experience in the food and farming sector. Therefore, within my first semester I began a field experience at Sustain Ontario to develop a first-hand understanding of key issues and strategies within an Ontarian context. In my opinion, it is vital to have experience within the field, as well as the theoretical understanding to adequately critique one's experiences.

I started at Sustain Ontario, a local not-for-profit organization that focuses on provincial food and farming policy, as an Intern for their Municipal Regional Food Policy Network. I began by researching and comparing local food procurement policies initiated by various municipalities. Eight months later I became the Municipal Food Policy Assistant and researched and authored a report on Local Sustainable Food Procurement (see Cawthorne, 2015). This research provided me with significant background knowledge of procurement, a thorough understanding of relevant policies, and networking opportunities to connect with food service directors and researchers in this field. This field experience has greatly shaped this research project by providing me with connections to those I've interviewed and significant background research and mentorship on the topic.

In the MES program, I worked on enhancing my theoretical understanding of both the food system, and the structures (i.e. capitalism and racism) in which the food system is situated. I pursued courses that added to my understanding of capitalism and neoliberal policies, in addition to those focused on food sovereignty and food justice movements. In order to further add to my theoretical understanding I attended conferences and workshops specific to the food movement, including: Dismantling Racism in the Food System training, Growing Food and Justice Initiative's HEAL conference, and Sustain Ontario's Bring Food Home conference. Overall all of these experiences have greatly shaped my current positionality to be hyper-critical of the food movement. I believe that alternatives to the industrial food system need to include anti-capitalist and anti-racist frameworks, my positionality can be further understood in the theoretical framework (see Chapter Two).

My Major Research Paper (MRP) is related to the components of my Plan of Study (POS). The three components of my POS are: food justice, capitalism, and critical pedagogy. Under the component of food justice, my MRP will help me achieve learning objective 1.2 and 1.43, giving me a greater understanding of the food movement in Canada, and various sites of resistance against the globalized food system. Under the learning component of capitalism, my research will enable me to develop a Marxist theoretical framework (objective 2.1), and explore various sites of

exploitation under capitalism (objective 2.2). Lastly, under the component of critical pedagogy through analyzing workers in the food system under procurement I will address learning objective 3.3: education as organizing, education as liberation. As my area of concentration lies at the intersection of these three components this major paper will help me to understand how they relate together by theoretically applying them to a case study, in this case procurement programs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people I would like to thank for their support throughout this research and writing process. Most importantly, my supervisor Rod MacRae for his support, constructive feedback, and time. I'd also like to thank Martha Stiegman, whose critical perspective and feedback helped me grow and learn tremendously during my time at FES. In addition, my partner Adam, for his constant encouragement and kindness throughout my masters. Lastly, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Bailey and Sandy for their support and keen eyes during the final revision stages of my major paper. I couldn't have done it alone, and am thankful for the wonderful support system I found at MES.

INTRODUCTION

The food movement has been working hard to create a new, 'better' food system. Many within this movement are interested in addressing a multitude of issues that emerge from the current industrial food system in the hope of creating a more sustainable and just food system.

In Ontario, there has been a strong emphasis on local food as an alternative to the growing industrial food system. With 80% of shoppers preferring to buy locally-grown produce, and over half reporting that they purchase it at least once a week, it is clear that buying local is a growing trend (Telford, 2008). This trend is also reflected in government policy through Ontario's Local Food Strategy, which aims to "to enhance awareness of local food, to increase access to local food and to boost the supply of food produced in Ontario" (Local Food Report, 2016).

At the same time, critiques of local food and the local food movement are emerging. These critiques focus on ideas of white privilege, and the idea that local is inherently good. As this research will demonstrate, although these critiques are growing amongst academics, they are often left out of popular literature and thus are distant from public awareness.

This research project began with an interest in critically evaluating the problems within the food system, as well as proposed solutions by various groups within the Food Movement. Specifically, I was interested in how food system localization is understood by some as a strong solution to the industrial food system, and yet is seen by others as a privileged notion with empty rhetoric.

Throughout my Masters in Environmental Studies (MES) program at York University, I worked with Sustain Ontario - the alliance for food and farming, researching local sustainable food procurement for the broader public sector. Through this experience I became well versed in institutional procurement within an Ontarian context. I was able to see how food system localization is intertwined with institutional procurement in Ontario, as the focus rests almost exclusively on buy-local procurement programs. This research project developed as I worked to more fully understand the intersection. Therefore, this research is equally a critique of food system localization, as well as an analysis of institutional procurement in Ontario.

BACKGROUNDER ON INSTITUTIONAL PROCUREMENT

Institutional procurement is the purchase of goods and/or services by and for an institution. Typically, these goods and/or services are purchased at the lowest possible cost relative to other considerations, such as quality of product, sustainability, or locality. Food procurement is the

formal acquisition of food. This research focuses specifically on public institutional procurement by paragonovernmental agencies in Ontario, which are commonly referred to as the Broader Public Sector (BPS)¹. Procurement of food is often bundled together with other related services including equipment and processes used by food service providers and kitchen staff. Institutional procurement was selected as the focus since BPS institutions use publically funded dollars for their purchases, and there is a strong emphasis within the food movement to have such public dollars used for the public good.

The procurement process begins with a BPS institution (i.e. schools, hospitals, long-term care facilities) needing to acquire food. The institution will want to establish a contract with a food service provider for the quantity of food, price, and other qualifiers required by the institution. In order to obtain a contract the institution needs to put forth a request for proposal (RFP). The RFP informs suppliers that the institution is interested in purchasing food, and the priorities of the buyer are communicated in an evaluation matrix at the end of the RFP. The RFP process is kept transparent for all potential food suppliers in order to maintain a fair process. Food suppliers will then make bids (becoming bidders) on the RFP. The institution will use the evaluation criteria they created to determine which bidder best meets their criteria. That bidder wins the contract and becomes the food service provider for the length of the contract (Cawthorne, 2015).

All food service contracts and purchases need to follow the guidelines of the Broader Public Sector Procurement Directive, which specifies procurement rules for goods and services that are purchased by public organizations². Contracts also need to adhere to relevant policies or trade agreements, these agreements vary by place as each province can have a different set of rules. It is beyond the scope of this paper to evaluate the details of the various trade agreements and relevant policies, but in general, procurement rules are affected by: North American Free Trade Agreement, World Trade Organization Agreement on Procurement, Agreement on Internal Trade, the Broader Public Sector Procurement Directive, Discriminatory Business Practices Act, Ontario's Local Food Act, and any municipal or institutional led policy such as Toronto's Local Food Procurement Policy (Cawthorne, 2015).

RESEARCH GOAL, OBJECTIVES, AND QUESTIONS

The ultimate goal of this research was to understand the tensions and interconnections between institutional procurement in Ontario and food system localization. The following objectives guided me towards this goal:

- Understanding the tensions within food system localization literature
- Comparing institutional procurement programs and policies between Ontario and other provinces, as well as a few jurisdictions in the United States
- Examining the differences between various programs and policies, and their perceptions of local food

From my research goals, three main questions were developed that guided my research: Why is there a focus on local food procurement in Ontario, whereas other jurisdictions focus on more than just local food (i.e. environmental sustainability, fair labour)? What is the connection between food system localization and institutional procurement? And, how could procurement in Ontario be improved to move beyond local food to encompass other criteria such as labour?

¹Broader Public Sector organizations according to the Broader Public Sector Accountability Act, 2010, S.O. 2010, c. 25 mean “(a) a designated broader public sector organization, and (b) a publicly funded organization; (“organisme du secteur parapublic”)”. **Source:**
<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/10b25>

² The guidelines of the BPS Procurement Directive can be found online at:
[https://www.doingbusiness.mgs.gov.on.ca/mbs/psb/psb.nsf/Attachments/BPSProcDir-pdf-eng/\\$FILE/bps_procurement_directive-eng.pdf](https://www.doingbusiness.mgs.gov.on.ca/mbs/psb/psb.nsf/Attachments/BPSProcDir-pdf-eng/$FILE/bps_procurement_directive-eng.pdf)

CHAPTER ONE: METHODOLOGY

BACKGROUND AND FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH

The foundation of this work is analysis of both academic and public documents. I use the term public documents to describe what is more often referred to as grey literature to highlight that grey literature is what is typically shared with the public and those operationalizing procurement projects. Procurement toolkits, not-for-profit reports, and program case studies would all fall under this category. This range of literature is used to understand and compare procurement programs and their potential to address food system issues. The background research focused on understanding the current state of procurement in Ontario, discussions around the inherent goodness of local food, coupled with an exploration of some procurement policies outside of the province and potential changes that could be brought to Ontario. Publications by lead researchers in the field including: Allen, Alkon, Guthman, Holt-Giménez and Hinriches were foundational to this background research. Industry reports allowed me to map out the landscape of procurement in Ontario in contrast to elsewhere in North America, including reports by the Greenbelt, Sustain Ontario, My Sustainable Canada, Real Food Challenge, Center for Good Food Purchasing, and Food Chain Workers Alliance.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

8 Semi-structured interviews were conducted for primary data collection. The individuals represented three different groups to constitute a well-rounded understanding of procurement. The first group of individuals were procurement managers or food service directors in Ontario. Essentially these individuals have first-hand experience procuring food within broader public sector institutions in Ontario. Next, were individuals who either research or support institutions in the transition to local or good food procurement. This group consists of individuals in Ontario, across Canada, and the United States. The last category consists of an individual who works in the labour movement to explore how food workers' struggles could be incorporated into procurement policies and/or programs.

The interviewees represent a range of ages, yet all were female. I did not purposely set out to interview only female participants, there were a combination of factors that lead to this result. For group one, I reached out to an even number of male and female procurement managers, however only females responded that they were willing to be interviewed. For the second two groups, I asked individuals based on their job, not gender, which resulted in me asking more females than

males. All males that were asked either didn't respond or redirected me to a female co-worker to conduct the interview. For group three, I had asked two individuals to participate, however due to scheduling difficulties, only one could be interviewed. This change did shift the focus of my research, as I was not able to engage as thoroughly around questions of labour as I would have liked. A full list of interview subjects is attached as Appendix 1.

The interviews occurred over a span of six weeks, between March 16, 2016 and April 19, 2016. All interviews were conducted via Zoom, a cloud meeting application. Zoom was selected due to the various locations of the interviewees across Ontario, Canada, and the United States. The duration of the interviews varied slightly, ranging from 30 minutes to an hour. Each of the interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participant.

The interviews were semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews are the most common form of qualitative research methods (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The aim of semi-structured interviews and analysis is to "produce a detailed and systematic recoding of the themes and issues addressed in the interviews and to link the themes and interviews together under a reasonably exhaustive category system" (Burnard, 1999, p. 461-462). An interview guide was created (see Appendix 2) in order to address themes in a consistent and systematic manner across all interviews (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Often semi-structured interviews will also contain probing questions to elicit more elaborate responses when the interviewee states something surprising or interesting (Qu & Dumay, 2011). I chose to use semi-structured interviews for their advantages as an effective and convenient means of gathering information. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to modify the style, pace, and ordering of questions to evoke full responses from the interviewee. Semi-structured interviews also permit the interviewees to provide responses in their own terms, and in a way that is familiar to the way they think and use language (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Semi-structured interviews allowed me to gather information with the ability to be flexible and probe further into certain topics when an interesting point of conversation arose. There were 10 main questions, the first half of them tailored to the particular group the participant aligned with. The rest were general questions regarding the potential of procurement, its limitations, and barriers. The interviews were relaxed and open-ended, therefore, not all interviews followed the same question sequence. Sometimes certain questions were ignored to afford more time and detail on another matter.

There are also disadvantages that need to be addressed. When it comes to analysis of the data, semi-structured interviews make the assumption that it is reasonable and accurate to compare the insights of one person to another (Burnard, 1999). Burnard (1999) asks the question "are common

themes in interviews really common?” How much of this insight is really bias of the researcher? Other disadvantages of this particular method lie in the difficulties of analyzing the data and comparing answers of open-ended questions. Lastly, as with most research cause and effect cannot be inferred. Therefore, in all of my analysis I have been careful to not extrapolate the responses of one individual to represent a larger audience.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All participants completed a written informed consent form approved by the FES Research Committee. On my consent forms, participants could individualize their consent to being recorded, if direct quotes or paraphrasing could be used, and if I could cite their name and title. All participants were provided with the option to remain anonymous. The informed consent form also made clear that participants could refuse to answer any question, and withdraw from the study at any point.

DATA ANALYSIS

Interviews were audio recorded and detailed notes were made of each interview. Afterwards observations were grouped into general themes. Categories were made as the interview notes were read multiple times. Once an exhaustive list of categories had been developed, I integrated similar categories into broader ones. The detailed notes were then coded based on the categories. I coded based on the previously established themes, yet remained open to unexpected ones that emerged upon further reading. Observations were grouped into themes which were then triangulated for confirmation from other sources, particularly the existing literature. Repeated themes became the basis of my analysis and discussion.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are multiple ways to approach the topic of procurement policies, as well as different theoretical lenses through which one could analyse the food system. Some of the theoretical ideologies used in this study were identified during the original visioning of this research. Others became apparent during data collection and analysis. At the core of my research is a critique of the alternative food movement through an analysis of institutional food procurement programs.

I used multiple frameworks to analyse the food system and procurement policies as a potential solution to problems within the food system. Individually, these frameworks do not provide a holistic understanding of the food system, problems within the system, and potential solutions. Rather, it is through an integrated approach that it is possible to develop a more nuanced understanding of procurement policies. I used what I call a Marxist food justice lens. The combination of Marxism and food justice will allow my research to develop an understanding of how capitalism and racism are interconnected within the food system. It will also provide a lens to evaluate proposed solutions, such as procurement policies, and whether or not they adequately address structural issues or are replicating the same structures they claim to be working against. This analysis will also highlight the contradictions that many food advocates and community organizers tend to get caught in.

DEVELOPING A FOOD JUSTICE FRAMEWORK

A food justice perspective is now regularly employed to analyze issues within the food system, or the food movement itself. Before providing a definition of food justice, it is necessary to emphasize that although I commonly refer to 'the food movement', as my research will show, there is not one coherent food movement. Rather, there is a spectrum of actors and organizations with different material interests within the food system. I will also refer to different groups within the food movement (i.e. food justice, alternative food, food sovereignty, etc.) and it should be noted that these categories are not necessarily exclusive. At certain moments and within certain contexts, different groups may incorporate more than one definition into their work, and change their emphases, depending on what projects they are undertaking. Furthermore, there can be just as much difference within these groups as between them. What I am creating in this section is my interpretation of the concepts and generalizing them to the various groups. With that said, I will lay out foundational concepts that have been used in developing my theoretical framework.

In simple terms, Gottlieb and Joshni (2010) describe food justice as “seeking to transform where, what, and how food is grown, processed, transported, acquired and eaten” (p.5). From this perspective, transformation of the current food system is needed due to the abundant injustices within the system, characterized by the “maldistribution of food, poor access to a food diet, [and] inequities in the labour process” (Lang & Heasman, 2004, p.8). Food justice is situated as a North American food movement, joining the radical ‘food sovereignty’ movement from the Global South, both of which aim to change the industrial food system by providing a more equitable and ecologically viable alternative (Cadieux & Slocum, 2015). What distinguishes the food justice (and food sovereignty) movement from the mainstream food movement is the aim to undermine the exploitative social and economic conditions present within the food system, while promoting equitable access to good food (Cadieux & Slocum, 2015).

There are two primary reasons for the use of a food justice framework: first, for its critique of the alternative food movement, and second, for its focus on racial inequalities within the conventional food system and the alternative food movement. The food justice movement developed in response to the alternative food movement, which has its base in predominately white, middle class consumers, who are opposed to the corporate industrial agri-food system (Holt-Giménez & Wang, 2011; Guthman, 2011). Although the alternative food movement (AFM) is critical of the industrial food system, the AFM often reproduces the same systems of oppression it claims to be working against as it relies on neoliberal ideologies to construct solutions (Allen, 2008; Alkon, 2013; Cadieux & Slocum, 2015; Holt-Giménez & Wang, 2011; Guthman, 2008). For instance, many within the AFM tend to focus on consumer choice (Holt-Giménez & Wang, 2011) which not only ignores race and class structures and policies that have shaped the geographical location of healthy food, it is also devoid of temporal and monetary constraints (Guthman, 2008).

A food justice perspective is vital to an analysis of the food system to call out the racism that is present within both the food system and various groups within the food movement (Morales, 2011). Racial and economic inequalities are embedded throughout the food chain, from production to distribution to consumption, and the food justice movement works to address the multiplicity of ways that these inequalities emerge and maintain themselves (Alkon, 2013). Those within the food movement who engage in food justice often include, or attempt to include, race and class in their analysis. This is often portrayed in the form of culturally appropriate, economically viable food options for low-income, racialized communities (Guthman, 2011; Yen Liu, 2012). Although there is

a focus on race and class, quite often within a food justice perspective this focus is restricted to consumers, instead of encompassing the workers who produce, distribute, and sell the food.

Therefore, within a food justice framework, there are gaps that need to be addressed, the most critical being an absence of workers' rights as a key component of food justice. Allen (2010) argues that the lack of attention to workers is due to the absence of social justice within a food justice framework. Allen (2010) argues that these movements, particularly the local food movement, fail to address issues of equity especially in relation to labour.

Local food systems serve many purposes and improve the quality of life for many people. However, they do not automatically move us in the right direction of greater social justice. In particular, workers as actors and justice as principle are missing in both theory and practice of alternative agrifood consumer efforts. (Allen, 2010)

For this reason, Allen (2010) proposes a social justice framework to include equity, especially equity of food labourers across the food chain. Allen (2007) claims that calling out social justice issues is an important role for academics. While I agree that food justice literature leaves workers out of a just food equation, and that there is value in academics identifying voids in order to "redress the beliefs that legitimate inequality in the agrifood system" (Allen, p.158, 2007), I believe that a Marxist perspective provides a more explicative lens to analyse labour within the food system than does solely a social justice lens. Although social justice literature may include some class analysis, social justice and food justice frameworks tend to promote capitalist interests, rather than critique the capitalist system.

The lacuna of labour highlights a void in understanding capitalism. Furthermore, some within the food justice movement advocate for entrepreneurialism, thereby promoting the same neoliberal structures these groups claim to fight against (Allen, 2010). This contradiction within the food justice movement is demonstrated by Alkon (2013), who describes food organizations taking over state functions due to neoliberal budget cutbacks, and then in their struggle to receive funding, they must claim that they can perform social service roles better than the state. This complicated situation leads food groups to call on local residents to support alternative food systems that focus on local as a solution to food system issues, rather than working for structural change (Alkon, 2013). However, it needs to be understood that relying on the local food movement only

encourages local capitalists, rather than dismantling the system of oppression created by capitalism.

INTEGRATING A MARXIST ANALYSIS

A Marxist analysis (taken from Capital Vol 1) will provide a fuller understanding of capitalism and its contradictions. Through this lens, I will be able to establish an anti-capitalist analysis to my research. A Marxist perspective can add a much needed critique of the food system that is often ignored in the literature.

Capitalism is a mode of production based on wage-labour and private ownership over the means of production. According to Marx, capitalism is more than an economic system, it represents a system of social relationships between the owners of the means of production and the labourers. The social relationship that is formed through the productive forces (a combination of means of labour and human labourers) represents a historically specific mode of production. This historically specific mode of production (capitalism) is important to understand from a Marxist perspective, as the social relations of people involved in the system are often masked by the economic exchange of goods and services. I will focus on a few key concepts of Marx that are relevant to this research, namely: primitive accumulation, commodity fetishism, social relations, and class struggle.

Marx's 'so-called primitive accumulation' is the process through which pre-capitalist modes of production, such as feudalism, transformed into capitalist modes of production. Adam Smith in *Wealth of Nations*, describes the process as 'original accumulation' through which a few individuals saved their money and worked hard to become the owners of the means of production. Marx critiques Smith's depiction of history as a peaceful process that ignores the violent reality of capitalism's history. Thus, Marx describes the 'so-called primitive accumulation' process, the birth of capitalism, as violent and brutal. He states that in the process that allowed one subset of the population (the capitalists) to gain control over the means of production and expand their capital, large swaths of the population were dispossessed from the land and lost their traditional means of self-sufficiency. Through this process, large populations became 'free' labourers, having to sell their labour to the owners. Marx's analysis is important for its recognition of the violent history of accumulation, and for distinguishing the two classes of capitalists and labourers.

David Harvey (2006) expands upon the theory of primitive accumulation, creating the concept of 'accumulation by dispossession'. Harvey argues that the term primitive accumulation suggests a

transitory phase that once complete is not repeated, however accumulation of capital is an on-going process. Accumulation by dispossession provides a theoretical understanding of the continual dispossession of peoples from their land, and labour power. From Harvey's perspective, this type of accumulation is grounded in neoliberal policies, focusing on the concentration of wealth, and the privatization of resources (Harvey, 2006).

Commodity fetishism, according to Marx, is the perception of material relationships between commodities on the market, rather than the social relationships behind their production. The market exchange of commodities obscures and mystifies the human relationships between the capitalist and worker behind the object. It is critical to understand that, from a Marxist perspective, the solution is not for individuals to produce their own products as this will not defetishize the commodity. The problem with commodity fetishism is not that there are social relations behind the commodity. Rather, the problem lies in the naturalistic way of thinking about the social relations, and the lack of control workers have over the process. As Marx explains, "[t]he veil is not removed from the countenance of the social life process, ie the process of material production, until it becomes production by freely associated men and stands under their conscious and planned control" (Capital, Vol 1, ch 1). From Marx's perspective the social relations of exploitation need to be removed and replaced by worker control over the means of production. This is the only way to overcome commodity fetishism.

The social relations behind capitalist modes of production can also be understood as class relations. Essentially, those who own the means of production are capitalists, and those who must exchange their labour for wages are workers (or labourers). Constant capital (the goods and materials required for a commodity) is at a fixed cost, whereas the cost of variable capital (labour) can be negotiated. Therefore, it is through labour that surplus value of the commodity can be extracted. It is in the best interest of the capitalists to lower the variable costs (labour) to increase their profits. The extraction of this surplus value from the labourers results in their exploitation, seen in lowered wages, bad working conditions, and alienation from the process. Thus, the interests of the workers (i.e. higher wages, better working conditions) are in direct conflict with the interests of the capitalists. This conflict of interests between the classes is what Marx calls class struggle. From a Marxist perspective, class struggle is also the only path that can overcome capitalism. Capitalism needs to be understood in class differentiation between those that own the means of production, and those who must sell their labour. These two classes have different material interests that will

always be at odds with one another. Historically, it has been through class struggle that the workers have achieved gains in terms of increased wages, the standardized work day, and other benefits. Marx believed that only through workers' struggles will they be able to overcome capitalism by sharing the means of production across all workers.

Incorporating a Marxist's perspective into my research will help me to demonstrate how some food projects end up replicating the same systems of oppression they are fighting, through their reliance on capitalist mechanisms (i.e. entrepreneurialism). It will also enable me to provide a theoretical critique of proposed solutions to food systems issues from an anti-capitalist perspective.



The theories and approaches outlined above will be integrated to form a general framework for this research. It is the intent of this research to analyze procurement as a proposed solution by the food movement, and the tensions therein. Through this analysis contradictions with the capitalist production in agriculture will also be exposed. Multiple frameworks have been used to adequately analyse proposed solutions and their relation to racism and capitalism. Often these proposed solutions while fighting for class or race, may create tensions with another, or completely disregard both. It is through an integrated approach that both can be exposed and addressed.

CHAPTER THREE: SETTING THE TABLE

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FOOD SYSTEM: POWER DYNAMICS THAT CULTIVATE AND MAINTAIN OUR FOOD SYSTEM

This history of the food system is not a simple account of human evolution from hunter-gathers to the industrial food system. Rather, the focus is on understanding the food system in relation to colonialism, racism, and capitalism and how these power dynamics have historically shaped and continue to maintain our current food system. As McMichael (2014) explains, it is necessary to understand the shifting political landscape to understand how counter-movements act within and against the global industrial food system. This brief history of the food system is focused within a North American context; therefore, it is not an all-encompassing perspective of the food system. Rather, this history provides an understanding of various struggles and their opposition to the food system.

This history has been created upon Boler and Zembylas (2003)'s 'pedagogy of discomfort'. A 'pedagogy of discomfort' is "an educational approach to understanding the production of norms and differences" (p. 108). This pedagogy focuses on students as well as educators moving beyond their comfort zones forged by cultural and emotional terrains shaped by hegemony. In examining emotional reactions "one begins to identify unconscious privileges as well as invisible ways in which one complies with dominant ideology" (p.108) I have chosen to use a pedagogy of discomfort to understand how the food system has always been broken, and to tease out common sense notions of the food system, and confront the problematic history that exists within it. Although my research cannot be a fully engaging pedagogical tool, I aim to use this section to provide space for stories about the North American food system that are often invisible. In learning about these stories, I have taken a personal journey of discomfort in part to recognise my privilege and complacency. As Corntassel and Gaudry (2014) explain, people have become too comfortable and complacent about the land on which they live. I would like to work on undoing this notion, and understanding my complacency in the system, and become critical of the notion of "going back to the land" which is commonly discussed within the food movement.

INDIGENOUS FOOD SYSTEMS

Alkon and Agyeman (2011) state that within the food movement, colonisation often gets combined with racialization which problematically leaves out indigenous experiences of colonialism. This

void of engagement with colonialism extends past the food movement, and is representative of a larger failure to recognize settler colonialism in North America (Wolfe 2006). Wolfe (2006) states that this failure stems from an unwillingness to engage with how settler states were founded upon the genocide of indigenous peoples. Further, other scholars have asserted the need to understand colonialism as a distinct structure of oppression with its own goals and processes that are separate although related to processes of racialization and capitalism (Smith, 2012).

The basis of our current food system, the land we grow food on and the boundaries we create as local, are only possible through the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and a genocidal military strategy (Holt-Gimenez & Harper, 2016). The effects of colonization are still detrimental to Indigenous peoples, their cultures, and their food systems, with each region and community facing a different set of struggles inherited by colonialism. Food Secure Canada's Indigenous Food Sovereignty working paper highlights two main events that effect Indigenous food systems across Canada. The first is the Indian Act, legislated in 1876, which brought "First Nations and Inuit life under the control of colonial governments without any meaningful consultation." Secondly, residential schools, aside from their part in the cultural genocide, also served poor quality foods to the children, while separating them from traditional foods (Food Secure Canada, n.d.). These separate events point to a larger history of oppression. Furthermore, these elements cannot be generalized to all Indigenous nations. Rather, each has its own historical context and current struggles.

SLAVERY, RACISM & OUR FOOD SYSTEM

Alongside the "discovery" of the new colonies and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, people from West African regions were enslaved, forcibly shipped and sold as chattel in the Americas (Holt-Gimenez & Harper, 2016). Historically speaking, slaves had been acquired through war and trade in numerous societies for thousands of years, however "the widespread commerce in human beings did not appear until the advent of capitalism and the European conquest" (Holt-Gimenez & Harper, p. 2, 2016). This section focuses on African slavery and its continuing effects in both the United States, and Canada. This historical account will also try to demonstrate how slavery is intricately linked to capitalism.

Holt-Gimenez and Harper (2016) (amongst others) contend that African slavery was due to their supposed biological inferiority. It was through constant religious and scientific justification constructed on the new concept of "race" that allowed for the ownership and violent treatment of individuals racially constructed as blacks (Holt-Gimenez & Harper, 2016). Williams (1964) explains

how racial differences made it easier to justify and rationalize African slavery. “The reason was economic, not racial; it had to do not with the color of the laborer, but the cheapness of the labor.” (p. 19). One of the origins of slavery was thus for the purpose of economic expansion and profits. As Gibbon Wakefield stated that the reason for slavery “[is] not moral, but economical circumstances; they relate not to vice and virtue, but to production” (as cited in Williams, 1964, p.6). Slavery and the dispossession of Indigenous nations was central to the emergence of capitalism (Holt-Gimenez & Harper, 2016). It was through African slaves that agricultural production as well as other industries grew in North America.

The Civil War and the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in 1865 (Hinson & Robinson, 2008). Along with the passage of the Fourteenth (1868) and the Fifteenth (1870) Amendments, it appeared there were to be monumental improvements for African Americans (Hinson & Robinson, 2008). However, these changes did not bring an end to racism, rather new laws were passed to segregate and disenfranchise African Americans, maintaining racial inequality even in the absence of slavery (Holt-Gimenez & Harper, 2016). With Field Order #15¹ revoked by President Andrew Johnson, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, the Civil Rights Act of 1883², and the Jim Crow Laws³, racial repression reduced African Americans to second-class citizens (Hinson & Robinson, 2008). These traumatic historical processes have extended the lasting impacts of racism far beyond slavery. The racial inequalities that were structurally created are still expanding and impacting African Americans and their relationship to agriculture and food. This is demonstrated by statistics from the Department of Agriculture (USA) that African Americans once owned 16 million acres of farmland, yet by 1997 less than 20, 000 Black farmers owned just 2 million acres of land (as cited in Holt-Gimenez & Harper, 2016).

In examining the literature related to black farmers and their plight, little has been written about black farmers in a Canadian context. There were multiple waves of black settlement in Nova Scotia. Between the 1600s and 1800s, black slaves worked predominately within households, as Canada didn’t have the climate for plantations (Ontario Black History Society). In the late 1700s there were around 3500 Black Loyalists in Canada who had been promised grants of land and other provisions for remaining loyal to Britain during the American Revolution (Ontario Black History Society). The Black Loyalists predominately settled in Nova Scotia and have been cited as solely responsible for building the Government House, and the Halifax Citadel (Ontario Black History Society). Gosnine (2008) demonstrates how in both policy and attitude Canadians try to act as if racism does not exist in Canada. This problematic stance which ignores structural racism is also prevalent in our history

which downplays or completely ignores the traumatic racism faced by people of colour not just on the east coast but across Canada. The racism and traumatizing events of the Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia is often removed from Canada's history. However, it is important to include that the black communities have a conflicting history in Nova Scotia, infused with racism as demonstrated by multiple attempts to relocate the community and disposes them of their lands (including farmland) (Sutherland, 1996).

Returning to the US context, land-use policies and institutional discrimination in the 1900s continued to segregate Blacks through redlining policies. Redlining policies essentially created boundaries around poor neighborhoods that were predominately racially mixed to exclude where banks could invest, seen through the policies of the Home Owners Loan Cooperation, Fair Housing Administration, and Veterans Administration (Barker, Francois, Goodman, & Hussain, 2012; Giancattarino & Noor, 2014). Redlining policies, compounded with 'white flight'¹ (where white residents moved out of racially diverse neighborhoods), further segregated Black communities. As middle-income whites moved into the suburbs, business (including grocery stores) relocated with them. Supermarkets in the city could no longer compare to those in the suburbs. Within the city, supermarkets weren't large enough to brand their own products to sell at a discount, land cost more, and people could buy more in the suburbs because they had cars to transport goods (Barker, Francois, Goodman, & Hussain, 2012). Redlining policies, white flight, and the dispersion of supermarkets create the beginning of food deserts. The absence of supermarkets relates not only the absence of healthy foods available in racially diverse neighbourhoods, it also could be associated with the lack of jobs available to low-income racialized communities (Barker, Francois, Goodman, & Hussain, 2012). What becomes clear through these historical accounts is how ingrained racism is within our food system.

MIGRANT WORKERS

Racial division and inequality continued to remain present in society and the food system after the abolition of slavery. When there became a need for labourers in North America, programs were created to hire foreign workers to fill the shortage. This began a new form of oppression and

¹ White flight is a term used to describe the migration of white residents from racially diverse neighbourhoods into white homogenous neighbourhoods. In 1962, 61% of white Americans believed that "white people[had] a right to keep blacks out of their neighborhoods if they [wanted] to, and blacks should respect that right." (Barker, Francois, Goodman, & Hussain, 2012).

structural racism in our food system through migrant farm workers. In the United States during World War II the Mexican Farm Labor Program Agreement used Mexican peasants to provide the labour for the US food system as American citizens were off at war (Holt-Gimenez & Harper, 2016). The US's Bracero program (1942-1964) brought in close to half a million annual migrant workers at its peak (Preibisch, 2010). Similar programs that imported migrant workers for low-skilled jobs, predominately in the agricultural industry, were implemented in many high income countries across North America and Western Europe (Preibisch, 2010). Canada implemented the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) in 1966 to provide migrant workers for the agricultural industry (Preibisch, 2010). The use of migrant workers in the Canadian economy has grown drastically since 1980, surpassing the number of workers entering Canada with permanent resident status or citizenship rights (Preibisch, 2010). From 1987 to 2007 the SAWP program expanded from 5000 workers to 25 000 workers, with an additional 11 160 workers under the Low Skill Pilot Project (LSPP) to fill jobs in other supportive activities for agriculture (i.e. crop production, animal production).

Programs such as SAWP were formed and maintain themselves due to a combination of the need for cheap labour in Canada, and the displacement of farmers and workers in the Global South. The effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have been researched and documented to show that over one million Mexican farmers were displaced, and over fifteen million Mexicans were forced into poverty (Walia, 2010). Many of these displaced peoples now work as undocumented laborers, or migrant workers in Canada and the United States. The displacement and forced vulnerability of workers is a consequence of neoliberal restructuring. William Robinson explains:

“the transnational circulation of capital and the disruption and deprivation it causes, in turn, generates the transnational circulation of labor. In other words, global capitalism creates immigrant workers ... In a sense, this must be seen as a coerced or forced migration, since global capitalism exerts a structural violence over whole populations and makes it impossible for them to survive in their homeland.” (as cited in Walia, p.72, 2010)

Meanwhile the workers ‘apartheid citizenship’, as Walia (2010) argues, is due to the state’s regulation of the ‘national community’ based on racist and colonialist ideas. As a migrant worker, individuals are often tied to one employer with wages frequently below minimum wage, working long hours with no overtime pay (Walia, 2010). These workers often face dangerous working

conditions, being forced to live in crowded unhealthy accommodation, while also being denied healthcare and employment insurance, despite paying into these programs (Walia, 2010). Workers in the SAWP program have no chance at attaining citizenship rights; and are on forced rotation, meaning they can work in Canada for four seasons then must return home for four years before they can come back (Preibisch, 2010). In Ontario, these workers have no legal right to bargain collectively, which makes it extremely difficult for migrant workers to organize (Walchuk, 2009). To further complicate their ability to organize, employers have the power to specify the sex and nationality of their employees, which is in conflict with human rights legislation at both the provincial and federal levels (Preibisch, 2010). These selective criteria are used by employers to limit workers' ability to organize and defend themselves against their bosses by creating cultural divisions and limiting the number of workers from certain countries (Preibisch, 2010). Migrant workers' status makes them extremely vulnerable to abuses, both physical and sexual, with no means to assert their rights, as any such attempts often lead to the termination of their contract and deportation (Walia, 2010). In consequence of these injustices, migrant workers represent what Walia describes as the "'perfect workforce' in an era of evolving global capital-labour relations: commodified and exploitable; flexible and expendable" (p. 72).

"A BROKEN FOOD SYSTEM" – BROKEN FOR WHOM?

Within the current food movement, some food activists claim we need to "fix the broken food system" by returning to the past with traditional agriculture and "going back to the land", and "getting our hands dirty". Guthman (2008) demonstrates how these romanticized notions of a 'traditional' food system before industrialization are common amongst groups in the food movement. Furthermore, Guthman highlights how these sentiments are problematic in that they assume the old system used to work well, ignoring histories of colonialism and racism. This is best explained by Holt-Gimenez and Harper (2016):

"[t]he food system is unjust and unsustainable but it is not broken—it functions precisely as the capitalist food system has always worked; concentrating power in the hands of a privileged minority and passing off the social and environmental "externalities" disproportionately on to racially stigmatized groups." (p. 3)

Quite simply, our food system is not broken, it functions precisely the way any capitalist industry should. It may not be morally ideal in terms of social justice criteria; however, the food system never has been free from oppression. Rather, these nostalgic ideas urging a return to the way our grandparents use to farm are filled with ignorance. Ignorance of the violent history of colonialism

and racism within our capitalist food system, and ignorance of how colonialism, racism, and capitalism continue to unequally affect Indigenous nations, people of colour, and economically disadvantaged communities. Statistics have confirmed the racial injustices within our food system on both sides of the production and consumption spectrum. Many Indigenous nations and people of colour bear the brunt of the horrors that the traditional food system has created, as seen in unequal access to healthy foods and high rates of diet related illness (Holt-Gimenez & Harper, 2016). Moreover, these marginalized groups are also the ones who work the majority of the jobs in the food industry (Yen Liu & Apollon, 2011), thus facing an extra layer of abuses within the capitalist system.

Colonialism is a process that still affects Indigenous Nations in Canada. Aboriginal households have the highest rate of food insecurity in Canada, with rates three times higher than non-aboriginal households (De Schutter, 2012). The state of food insecurity in Nunavut demonstrates the damaging effects of its colonial oppression, as well as environmental degradation, and climate change, with 70 per cent of adults being food insecure (De Schutter, 2012). The rates of food insecurity in Nunavut are six times higher than the rest of Canada and are the highest documented rates of food insecurity for any aboriginal population in a developed country (De Schutter, 2012). For many Indigenous food activists, Indigenous food sovereignty is not just restricted to food, rather it is a part of a larger struggle for sovereignty (Morrison, 2011; Papatsie, Ellsworth, Meakin, & Kurvitis, 2013). For Indigenous activists it is not that the system is broken now, the system has always been broken since the expansion of settler-colonialism.

The current food system has been built upon and continues to flourish due to the exploitation of marginalized peoples. As Holt-Gimenez & Harper (2016) explain the capitalist food system functions exactly as it should. Capitalism only functions when surplus value is extracted through labour, exploiting the workers for the benefit of the capitalists. The food system functions precisely in this manner: power is concentrated in the hands of a few privileged companies, while the social and environmental “externalities” are disproportionately placed on racially and economically stigmatized groups (Holt-Gimenez & Harper, 2016). These effects of the food system have been statistically demonstrated in every stage of our food system from production all the way to consumption. People of colour are overrepresented at the production and processing stage of the food system. In the United States people of colour represent 34% of the population, yet they are 50% of food production workers, and 45% of food processing workers (Yen Liu & Apollon, 2011). Furthermore, farm workers suffer from lower wages and more exploitative conditions, with higher

rates of toxic chemical injuries than any other sector in the U.S. economy (Yen Liu & Apollon, 2011). Continuing across the food system from production and processing to distribution, jobs within the food system have the lowest wages with little access to health benefits (Food Chain Workers Alliance, 2012). Racial and economic inequality continues into the retail sector of the food system. Restaurants are the largest employer of people of colour in the United States, and the second largest employer of immigrants (Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, 2013). The precarious nature of the food and retail industries means there are often no sick days provided by employers, and in a recent survey more than half of the workers reported they had picked, processed, sold, cooked, or served food while sick (Food Chain Workers Alliance, 2012). The poverty wages of food workers demonstrates an ironic consequence of our food system where the ones who grow the food have higher levels of food insecurity than the rest of the population (Food Chain Workers Alliance, 2012; Holt-Gimenez & Harper, 2016).

Although the majority of these statistics describe the landscape of the food system in the United States, they are still relevant to a Canadian context on two fronts. First, with transnational circulation of capital, the food system doesn't really have borders. A lot of our food is imported from the U.S., and the Canadian government's role in international trade policies has led displaced people from the Global South to our food system. Just because some Canadians have the privilege of being removed from the exploitation of the food system, does not exclude us from the system. Secondly, although the history and current contexts of racism in the food system in the U.S. are different from Canada, the same structural inequalities remain, as demonstrated in Canada's migrant worker programs. Furthermore, there are some statistics that demonstrate the racial inequalities within Canada. Statistics Canada has shown that food insecurity is higher among recent immigrant households than non-immigrant households (see Statistics Canada, 2007-2008). And as already stated, aboriginal households have food insecurity rates three times higher than the average Canadian household (De Schutter, 2012). These historical accounts and recent statistics demonstrate how ingrained racism and colonialism is within our food system. Furthermore, racism, colonialism, and capitalism are not limited to the food system, they are structural issues of our society. There needs to be a consideration for these issues, their injustices, and their intersections in order to combat problems within our food system. For instance, advocating for the eradication of food deserts does not address issues of culturally appropriate foods, historic redlining policies, or monetary or time constraints. Arguments to return to pre-industrial agriculture, ignore the violent history of the food system. It is critical to understand this history to fight for food system change that does not replicate systems of oppression.

LITERATURE REVIEW: FOOD SYSTEM LOCALIZATION: CRITIQUES AND CHALLENGES

The global industrial food system has faced its fair share of critics from the left. Our current food system, filled with deregulated markets and the concentration and centralization of power, has erased many small scale farmers, while also leaving devastating impacts on the environment. People across the world have responded to the new food system and the side effects of globalization with local food campaigns (Allen, 2008). However, until recently there hasn't been a substantial critique of the food system localization strategy. The purpose of this literature review is to understand food system localization, and critique the notion that local food systems are an adequate response to the issues.

The idea behind the local food movement is that local food is inherently good, and therefore food system localization stands in strong opposition to the global industrial food system. This belief lacks a critical understanding of the intricacies of the food system, as well as the workings of capitalism. This literature review will break down the notion that local food is a solution to problems and instead I will argue that it replicates the same structural systems of oppression present in the global industrial food system.

LOCAL FOOD: THE SOLUTION TO THE GLOBAL INDUSTRIAL FOOD SYSTEM?

The use of local food as a counter to the global industrial food system has been well discussed in the academic literature. Localized solutions, according to Morgan (2009), have become "one of the most important social movements of the early twenty-first century in the global north" (p.343). Critics of food system localization are less abundant, yet it is increasingly discussed. Levkoe (2011) highlights that the focus on local has led to poorly evaluating the interconnected nature of problems within the food system and set up local food as innately positive. Scholars have highlighted that local food is increasingly seen by some in the food movement as a binary opposite to the trends in the industrial food system (Levkoe, 2011). Thus, local is paraded as a solution.

This notion is also demonstrated in the Ontarian procurement literature. In reviewing the public resources and toolkits around procurement, it is evident that this rhetoric is used as rationale for procurement. As demonstrated in the claims that local food helps to build connections between growers and eaters:

"The lack of formal and informal communication channels between farmers and buyers can make it challenging for creating the change needed to increase local food purchases

within institutions. For this reason, it is critical to build connections between the agricultural industry and members of the foodservice value chain.” (Greenbelt, 2014)

The literature that promotes local food systems will often not provide substantial claims as to why local food is a better food system than the current industrial food system. Arguments that are often put forth don't divulge how the local food system is working to challenge the industrial food system, rather there appears to be an assumption that local food is inherently just. Within the academic literature, arguments for local food are increasingly contested. However, the narrative for local food is particularly abundant in the public literature used by procurement professionals and program coordinators. This section will compare the public literature surrounding institutional procurement to the academic literature on food system localization to demonstrate the contrast and highlight the gaps in the public literature. Within the public literature, the rationale for local food is often categorized as environmental, economic, and social, so this section will follow the same breakdown.

Environmental Impacts of Local Food

Food miles are the most commonly cited environmental rationale in the public literature. Food miles take into consideration energy use and impact of greenhouse gas emissions in the transportation of the global industrial food system which often lends support for more local food (Pirog et al., 2011). A study conducted in Toronto (Bentley, 2005) demonstrate the significant difference in mileage between locally grown foods and imported foods. This difference should not be surprising, however what is often ignored is that transportation is only one stage of food production. Life Cycle Analysis (LCA) provides a more holistic method of calculating environmental impacts by measuring impacts at each stage of production (McLeod & Scott, 2007). Studies have demonstrated that by using a life cycle analysis in many cases local food is not more environmentally friendly (Pirog, 2011; Garnett, 2003; McLeod & Scott, 2007). Understanding the environmental effects of the food system are much more complicated than what the public literature suggests, and general blanket statements that local food is better for the environment add to the disillusion. One buy local procurement toolkit states how, by supporting local farms, individuals can help support farming practices that product biodiversity and improved air and water quality (Guelph Wellington Local Food, n.d.). However, academic literature and scientific studies critique the notion that local farmers are inherently better environmental stewards. Hinrichs (2003) examines how there is potential for local farmers to take better care of the land due to owning fewer acres or stock to care for. However, small scale farmers tend to be disadvantaged

by economic marginality and may therefore lack awareness or means to follow environmental practices.

Within academic literature, local food is noted to reduce food waste, but this rationale is absent from the institutional procurement literature. A United Nations Environmental Program (2008) report stated that 40 percent of household waste that goes to landfill is food packaging. Locally produced food does not inherently have less packaging, as industrial food could be produced in one's local region with comparable packaging to imports. This statement is more directed at fresh produce that is purchased locally at farmers' markets, farm shops and food schemes that eliminate the excess packaging (Community Planning and Development Program, 2010).

In comparing the academic and public literature, there is clearly an absence of analysis of the environmental impacts of the local food system. This void is detrimental as it hides the fact that local food is not necessarily a solution to environmental problems within the food system, especially as the academic literature highlights the complexity of the food system and its environmental impacts. It appears that in the majority of cases, the situation is more complex, and life cycle analysis demonstrates that local isn't always better. The case by case nature of the benefits of costs in my opinion, would make it very difficult as well as unrealistic to evaluate every purchase's environmental impacts. Furthermore, I think it distracts from the main issue, that if we want better environmental standards then why don't we fight for that, instead of fixating on local food procurement assuming it is improving environmental standards.

Economic Impacts of Local Food

The economic benefits of food system localization are the most commonly cited rationale for local food in the public literature. The rationale states that by purchasing local food, one is supporting local farmers by giving them a place to get into the market. This is demonstrated in a study conducted by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada where 54 % of respondents stated that they purchase local food to support the local economy (Edge, 2013). Public procurement is viewed as having the capacity to support local and sustainable farming while allowing midsize farmers to grow and get a place in the market (Lapalme, 2015; Norfolk County, 2012; Guelph Wellington Local Food, n.d.). Mentorship programs, such as 3P, focus on identifying local producers, reaching out to them, and educating smaller producers on how to competitively bid in the RFP process (Lapalme, 2015). The literature argues that by increasing communication along the supply chain (as seen in the 3P program) and engaging small producers, the public procurement process can give opportunities to small businesses to competitively engage, while also supporting local food

entrepreneurs to grow (Megens, Roy, Murray & Harry Cummings and Associates, 2015; Laplame, 2015; Greenbelt, 2014; Norfolk County, 2012). The growth of local businesses is assumed to grow the local economy through the multiplier effect. Essentially, investment in small local businesses will multiply the amount of money that is spent and kept within the local economy, thus allowing local regions to thrive (Sustain Ontario, 2013). A study entitled Dollars and Sense (2015) demonstrates how \$29.3 billion dollars could be greater through the multiplier effect of local farmers and suppliers spending money on resources. I will not dive into the criticisms of economic impacts in this section (see Discussion). However, I believe the more important questions are who benefits from this economic prosperity, and who is left out?

Social Impacts of Local Food

The social rationale for local food tends to rest on broad social benefits such as greater flexibility compared to non-local suppliers, and a distinct sense of community and customer service (Knight & Chopra, 2013). One of these broad social benefits mentioned in the public literature is that it allows growers and eaters to build a relationship with one another. It is assumed that building multiple relationships like this will bring positive change to our food system.

“The lack of formal and informal communication channels between farmers and buyers can make it challenging for creating the change needed to increase local food purchases within institutions. For this reason, it is critical to build connections between the agricultural industry and members of the foodservice value chain.” (Greenbelt, 2014)

This assumption is problematic, and is criticized in the academic literature in two ways. Firstly, this idea rests on building up local economies and relationships which Allen (2010) argues ignores geographic construction of certain regions which through often-violent accumulation have enriched some areas while impoverishing others. Secondly, from a Marxist perspective, building relationships with those who produce our food does not inherently make our food system better. Fridell (2007) highlights how commodity fetishism cannot be overcome by simply knowing who grows your food, if we want to create a better food system with standards we agree with and better working conditions we would need to not only recognize these relationships, but change them so that workers have control over their workplaces (in this case: farms, processing facilities, etc). In my opinion, the social benefits of buying local focus more on allowing the consumer to feel good about themselves and their purchases than actually addressing any structural issues within the food system. This will be further discussed in the following section.

This section highlights the stark difference between the academic and public literature on the topic of procurement. The public literature provides no solid evidence that local food systems are more just in terms of environmental, economic or social impacts. Rather the public literature rests on an assumption that local food is inherently a just system. Hinrichs (2003) explains how using local as a proxy for good, and global as a proxy for bad can overstate the value in proximity, while also obscuring negative social and environmental outcomes.

THE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM REPLICATES STRUCTURES OF OPPRESSION

The first section has demonstrated the different representations of local food between academic and public literature, highlighting that the public literature rests on the notion of local food as inherently good. This section will now highlight the critiques of food system localization in the academic literature. I have grouped these critiques into two categories: first, local food ignores the historical realities of the food system, and second, localization creates a culture of individualism.

Primitive accumulation and accumulation by dispossession, as explained in previous chapters, not only divided owners and workers it also shaped the geographical landscape of our food system. Allen (2010) describes how “current geographic constructions and allocations of resources among localities and groups of people are the product of often-violent accumulations that have enriched some areas and impoverished others” (p.302). Therefore, when we talk about local food we are creating boundaries that may automatically exclude certain regions that have been historically impoverished. As Levkoe (2011) explains:

Put simply, encouraging consumers to “know where your food comes from” ignores the historical and structural conditions that have led to contemporary inequalities and ecological exploitation. Without being part of a broader political strategy, this tactic is consistent with a culture of individualism. (p.691)

In supporting local food, we are ignoring the history of violence and oppression that has shaped the food system. Instead of addressing structural issues within the food system by collectively working to bring about a better food system for all individuals, localization creates an ‘us’ vs ‘them’ mentality. It creates borders and a sense of responsibility for only those within our borders. Allen (2010) invites the question “what responsibility do local food movements have to those in other regions that might be less endowed or indeed historically impoverished in the region?” (p.302)

This question is vitally important as it highlights the flaws in the current thinking, which ignores the struggles of others outside their community. By focusing on locality, regions are building up competition between places pitting communities against one another, a process which Harvey (1996) highlights produces winners and losers. Food system localization rests on ideas of individualism which are a central tenant of neoliberalism, rather than focusing on collective action to overcome damaging neoliberal policies.

Localism can be based on a category of “otherness” that reduces the lens of who we care about. The politics of “defensive localism” has been a key feature of the politics of race and poverty over the last 15 years Defensive localism has been based on reducing federal spending, pushing responsibilities down to lower levels of government, and containing social problems within defined spatial and political boundaries. (Allen, 1999).

Allen demonstrates how food system localization cannot solve issues within the food system. Rather, buying-local can be problematic as it creates a defensive localism, pitting communities against one another, and ignoring histories that have impoverished certain areas. From the academic literature I have highlighted how local food has become a proxy for good food. Yet conflating local with good food is highly problematic as there is nothing about local food that is inherently good, as this literature review aimed to demonstrate. Rather food system localization, by promoting individualism while ignoring historical realities, is maintaining and replicating the same systems of oppression within the food movement that it is trying to fight against.

¹ Field Order #15 was proposed during the Reconstruction era in Savannah, Georgia by William Tecumseh Sherman. Field Order #15 was designed to help former enslaved Africans cultivate land. However, the bill died when President Andrew Johnson vetoed it. It marked the plight of many African-American farmers.

² The second Civil Rights Act deemed the previous Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional. The 1875 Civil Rights Act allowed all persons regardless of race and colour full and equal enjoyment of many public establishments.

³ Jim Crow Laws are state and local laws that enforced racial segregation in the southern United States.

CHAPTER FOUR: INSTITUTIONAL PROCUREMENT INITIATIVES: AN OVERVIEW OF KEY INITIATIVES

FRAMEWORK TO EVALUATE PROCUREMENT

For this research, I have created three main categories of procurement. In reality, these groupings do not exist as separate silos as there is not a clear distinction between them in practice and the categories are not exclusive. For instance, an institution may be practicing several of the categories concurrently, yet without knowing it or without specific policy in place. These categories have been created to help compare different institutions' foci within procurement.

The first group, or what I have named traditional procurement, is influenced solely by what Nijaki and Worrel (2012) refer to as internal goals. Internal goals focus on meeting the internal operational needs which are often reflected by purchasing based on the lowest possible cost to attain the highest quality of goods. The next group focuses on local food procurement. Aside from costs, institutions may have external goals outside of internal operations (Nijaki and Worrel, 2012). These external goals are a way to move beyond purchasing based on lowest costs, moving towards some sustainability goals. This is often reflected in an institution's RFP. For the local food group, their additional qualifier is purchasing local food, based on their definition of local. The final group, or what I will refer to as progressive procurement, could encompass a wide range of issues within the food system such as just labour (i.e. workers' rights), agricultural sustainability, animal rights, etc. There can be significant variation within this group according to their scope and intent.

Within the progressive procurement group, there is not consistent language to describe these programs. Some groups use the term real food while others use good food. In examining each of value categories, it's clear that they all include in their concept environmental, labour, and animal welfare standards. Thus, for the purpose of this paper, I have decided to use the term real and good food interchangeably.

AN OVERVIEW OF EXISTING EFFORTS UNDERWAY

There are a handful of institutional procurement initiatives and policies in Ontario. Most of these were created to to fix the food system through changing production practices based on internal value systems. The purpose of this section is to provide a general understanding of the landscape of procurement in Ontario, with a focus on the programs discussed further in the following chapters. It

is beyond the scope of this section to provide an analysis of the various procurement programs and policies, rather I simply described each program. Since this research includes a comparison with some programs in the United States, these initiatives have also been included.

MY SUSTAINABLE CANADA 3P MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

In 2014 the first cohort of the 3P Mentorship Program began with mentees from a hospital, university, long-term care home, and college. The project was lead by My Sustainable Canada and MEALsource with funding from the Greenbelt. The mentees had mentorship from experts within the field, and regularly set and revisited goals to work towards sustainable purchasing at their facility.

FOOD SECURE CANADA'S INSTITUTIONAL FOOD PROGRAM

This program is run in partnership with the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation's Sustainable Food System initiative. The goal of Food Secure Canada's program is to increase the supply of fresh, local, and sustainable food in institutions across Canada that can promote supply chain shifts towards more sustainable food procurement and food systems. The Program has a variety of strategies: providing learning support to grantees of the Institutional Food Fund, creating toolkits, compiling resources and best practices, and promoting the benefits of local food. The Institutional Food Program provides support for institutions, as well as engages private sector actors and policy makers towards sustainable procurement initiatives.

REAL FOOD CHALLENGE

The Real Food Challenge leverages the power of youth and the purchasing power of post-secondary campuses to create sustainable, socially just, humane, and healthy food system. The Real Food Challenge originated in the United States, and will be piloting in British Columbia. The Real Food Challenge US has four value categories that the use to calculate real food: local and community based, fair (i.e. workers' rights), ecologically sound, humane (i.e. animal treatment).

LA'S GOOD FOOD PURCHASING PROGRAM

The Center for Good Food Purchasing evolved out of the Los Angeles' Food Policy Council. In 2012 the Good Food Purchasing Policy was adopted by the City of LA and LA Unified School District. The Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP) was developed to to support institutions in implementing the Policy and verify compliance. The GFPP is an adaptable model and the Center for Good Food Purchasing exists to guide the national expansion of GFPP. There are five categories that are used to

rank food as good food, they include: local economies, environmental sustainability, valued workforce, animal welfare, and nutrition.

CHAPTER FIVE: THEMES AND POINTS OF TENSIONS WITHIN THE RESEARCH

This research initially set out to understand the tensions and interconnections between institutional procurement in Ontario and food system localization theory. I had set out to explore how procurement in Ontario could move beyond local food to encompass other criteria such as labour. However, the research became focused around the tensions within local food systems. To start, due to scheduling difficulties it was not possible to arrange interviews with more group 3 participants, this limited the amount of insight I had into including labour into procurement programs. Secondly, during the interviews conversations tended to focus more heavily around tensions within local food system, than on including other criteria (e.g. labour). Lastly, as a few interviewees have not finalized their procurement programs I was unable to provide detailed examples of procurement programs that include labour. Therefore, I have shifted the focus my research to food system localization and procurement.

Furthermore, I am unable to include every theme that was discussed during the interviews. Rather I have focused on those that bring new information to the conversation of food system localization and institutional procurement, and highlighted the tensions that exist between these two areas. It should be noted that although these themes have been separated into individual categories, each builds on the previous and all are interconnected.

THEME 1: INSTITUTIONAL PROCUREMENT CAN BE A TOOL TO CREATE POSITIVE CHANGE

When asked about institutional procurement in general, all interviewees echoed the literature: institutional procurement can be a tool to create positive change. There was a unanimous belief that the huge purchasing power of public institutions can significantly shift public dollars to enhance our food system and our communities. In addition to shifting our food system, institutional procurement was also understood as a way to create a cultural shift around how we view food. The following quotations illustrate this point:

It's not just about grocery stores or us as individuals making those kinds of purchases there's an opportunity for corporations to be able to do that [influence food system change] (Food Services Manager 1, Healthcare)

I don't remember off the top of my head how many billions of dollars public institutions spend on goods and services every year, I mean its billions right. And so I guess we see that

there is a great amount of potential for public institutions to use their dollars which most comes from our tax dollars, so there's a built in, well their should be right this system of accountability to tax payers of how we want our tax dollars spent and so it gives us as the public some leverage to demand certain policies from our public institutions right. So that was one thought, that our public institutions should be using our tax dollars in a way that is a benefit to society and to workers, and to local farmers to local businesses rather than that harms our society. (Joann Lo, Food Chain Workers Alliance)

In the context of the food system being inseparable from the economic system I think that procurement can impact almost every aspect of concerns we might have in terms of sustainability or justice. I guess that ties in with the concept of voting with your dollar and although that's problematic because it limits peoples' interactions with food to an economic interaction and doesn't address people's ability to influence food systems beyond economic influences, I still think that at the institutional level when there is such large amounts of money either supporting or not supporting certain behaviours or practices in the food system it can drastically change the way food system operate. (Celia White, Real Food Challenge)

Overall main intention of the work is to have institutional purchasing be a driver for food systems change so that we are building towards greater sustainability (Jennifer Reynolds, Food Secure Canada)

Although all participants agreed that procurement could be a tool to influence food system change the majority were also clear that procurement cannot solve all issues within the food system. Rather what was put forth was the idea of social responsibility of institutions to take on this work due to the purchasing power that exists within them. Many interviewees were clear that the responsibility should not rest on the individual consumer, mainly with the rationalization that individuals do not have as much power as institutions to influence systematic change.

If money is being spent by government by society that there's an opportunity for civil society's engagement and support for shifting public procurement. (Jennifer Reynolds, Food Secure Canada)

Well public procurement specifically is harnessing public tax dollars which aren't fulfilling their full potential if there is not a social impact goal that is attached to them. So I think we are able to harness that potential impact, there's a lot of natural alignment for that to

happen with public dollars. And then I think the institutions have in aggregate a significant financial purchasing power that can create leadership for system level change that ought not to be placed on the individual consumer, the individual consumer ought not carry the responsibility of changing the food system but our institutions I think have the financial capacity and a sort of the social commitment or responsibility to do that. And they also have the reputational capacity and ability to access information and to thoughtfully steward in that kind of change. (Hayley Lapalme, 3P Program)

Some of the strengths [of procurement] are that institutions such as hospitals or universities are partially publically funded and have a responsibility to provide some sort of service to the public that they can lead by example to purchase food that promotes or enhances things like organic practices or fair trade practices and they can make that food more accessible to the people who participate in those institutions I think the strengths are or the way that institutions can change purchasing practices is supporting foods that are certified because the institution operates at such a macro scale that its very difficult for institutions when they are purchasing food to have a close relationship with say producers or individuals in the food chain supply and the ability to pay for and strengthen food chains that have certification in that macro scale that are third party audited. (Celia White, Real Food Challenge)

There is only so much that an individual can do but when we're talking about an institution that's buying 150 million dollars' worth of food a year they have power, they have much more power... So that's really why we've focused on large public institutional procurement and we've seen really important outcomes from LA unified school district (Alexa Delwiche, Centre for Good Food Purchasing)

Overall the data shows that individuals involved in institutional procurement believe in its ability to influence positive change in the food system. These individuals are also critical of its limited ability to address structural issues within the food system. Rather than focusing on the structural issues, procurement is framed as a 'social responsibility', to use tax dollars in a way that benefits society. Unanimously, participants also stated that the onus should not rest on the individual, in terms of 'social purchasing'.

TENSION 1: WHY DOES ONTARIO FOCUS ON LOCAL? THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN GROUP 1 AND 2

As previously mentioned, institutional procurement was seen by all participants as a tool that could influence change. However, a divide between participants became apparent when each explained what type of procurement they were currently focusing on and their original goals for public procurement. Group 1, which consists of food service directors in public institutions, focused their procurement initiatives solely on buying local. In contrast, group 2, individuals who both research and guide procurement programs, unanimously saw the term local as arbitrary. Rather than focus solely on local food procurement, many in group 2 were working on addressing a wider range of value categories (e.g. sustainability, labour, etc.). This disconnect is important because it is the researchers and not-for-profit experts (group 2) who work with food service directors (group 1) to both set up and enhance progressive procurement programs and policies in public institutions. The division between the two groups is made clear in the following statement:

So the focus [of the institutional procurement program] ... was on sustainable food systems, and the local is the point of entry that most people seem comfortable to talk about. That has been the dominant frame because I believe that has been where the money is available for institutions, you know they get money through the Greenbelt fund in Ontario, which focuses on local product of Ontario and institutions, or the local food fund. And so people are used to talking about local, although the interest of the program was not just in supporting local food as inherently good but in supporting sustainable food systems. (Hayley Lapalme, 3P Program)

Hayley's suggestion that Ontarian institutions focus on local due to funding and the hype around local was also supported by those in group 1, as portrayed in the previous theme. What is interesting is that the intent of the program wasn't local food, but sustainable food systems, yet the end result focused solely on local food. Furthermore, group 1 stated that their interest in local was due to the buzz around local, and the push from external organizations (i.e. group 2). When group 1 was asked if they would take on other value categories such as environmental sustainability, fair labour, animal welfare, etc., they stated that they (as institutions) weren't there yet. The following quote exemplifies the sentiment:

I think we aren't there yet. We've got a long way to go yet, because I've had some conversations with my purchasing department and that [environmental sustainability] is not top of mind for them ... because... if I can get specific with food: our contracts are negotiated through meal source [a group purchasing organization that procures for multiples hospitals]. That [environmental sustainability] definitely is top of mind for meal

source, their focus is a little bit different from [institution name] in that they do focus on environmental issues, local issues, sustainable issues. Which benefits me, right? Because they are putting all of that language in their RFPs. It helps from food service perspective, but organization wide we're not even looking at environmental issues when we are putting out RFPs which is kind of sad. (Food Services Manager 2, Healthcare)

However, when I followed up to ask what sort of supports would be needed to take on other value categories, and if those supports existed would they themselves and their organization be interested in taking on more value categories, they both responded saying there needs to be knowledge sharing around the topic, and a push from outside organizations demonstrating that these new value categories are priority areas, otherwise it's hard to bring them into institutions.

Oh absolutely... the shared resources and being able to take advantage of knowledge transfer like if somebody's already done it, let's take advantage of what they've done, learn from it, and you know implement our own kind of thing (Food Services Manager 1, Healthcare)

I think education, knowledge... if all health care orgs in Ontario got together and made that [other value categories: environmental sustainability, labour] a priority than companies would have to make that a priority if they wanted our business, I think the more power [the better]. It's like the local food movement, right? If there were more organizations that were on board not just with the food piece, but with housekeeping supplies, with our plastics that we bring into the organizations, and disposables, etc. ...I think as health care organizations we should look at that kind of stuff. But until there is a huge push for that, people just keep things status quo. (Food Services Manager 2, Healthcare)

These quotes show that group 1 felt local food was a priority area, and thus should be the focus of their institutions. However, these conversations also show that food service directors in Ontario are open to new value categories if it's made clear that these value categories are priority areas. These insights raise new questions about why other value categories weren't made priority areas in Ontario? How did the focus on local food come about, especially if group 2 themselves are critical of local food being considered analogous to real food? It is beyond the scope of this research to answer these questions. Although it is not possible to determine causation I have provided possible reasons for why public institutional procurement in Ontario focuses so strongly on local food, based on the interviewees' responses. There are three interrelated ideas:

1. Ontario has a strong local food movement

Across Ontario there is a huge focus on local food, as witnessed in the Local Food Act, as well as provincial funding for buy-local campaigns from various government and not-for-profit agencies (e.g. the Greenbelt Fund, McConnell Foundation). The focus on local food in Ontario becomes particularly evident when comparing initiatives to other provinces. Jennifer Reynolds from Food Secure Canada offered some valuable insights on these differences:

I think only Ontario has the local food legislation that's giving this a bigger policy driver, but also [institutions are] being supported by the resources from the broader public sector fund, I think maybe has changed where that driver is coming from. I can almost see it like the pendulum has swung more to institutions seeing this as an opportunity. I think the Ontario context is kind of different, just at a very high level different than other provinces...I mean I'm not on the ground in each province as well... I think most other provinces, I would typically say, its external actors to the institutions that are pushing for the change, just in a very broad high level. (Jennifer Reynolds, Food Secure Canada)

However, as Jennifer stated, this is a high level interpretation, and may not represent the general understanding of procurement in Ontario. Within food service director networks, one interviewee stated that although some institutions are aware of the Local Food Act and decided to get ahead of the game by stepping up local food procurement in their institution, not all food services directors are aware of the Local Food Act. Furthermore, since there are no recording instruments attached to the Act there isn't a strong push for institutions to follow it. Therefore, the Local Food Act, coupled with other Ontarian initiatives focusing on local food procurement (i.e. grants) can be seen as a potential reason for some institutions transition to buy-local procurement.

2. Local food is easier to track

Although there isn't an agreed upon definition of local, once one is created it is relatively easy to track, especially compared to other criteria such as 'fair labour'. Tracking local food has been cited as a barrier to institutional procurement, especially for processed goods, as it requires institutions to ask suppliers to provide extra information. The difficulties tracking other criteria, such as sustainable food, were demonstrated in the 3P mentorship program. Hayley Lapalme explained the program began with an interest in sustainable food systems, and locality was used as a point of entry to discuss other attributes. However, when it came to tracking sustainable, Lapalme stated:

One of the big challenges is tracking progress, and benchmarking and with limited time and resources I think people were still most comfortable dealing with local and to ask them to track other things was too much. And they were not wanting to dilute their messaging to their distributors or manufacturers because they were already asking for local and so it made sense to continue to make that ask. And so whereas the evaluation in my tracking tools that we developed for them included space to indicate benchmarks and progress on other indicators of sustainability so things like foods that were organic, or fair trade or ocean wise... None of the participants filled out or measured any of those other areas. (Hayley Lapalme, 3P Program)

When examining the combined factors of local food being easier to track, and funding grants created specifically for local food in Ontario, it's easy to understand why the focus has remained on local food.

3. Suppliers are prepared with locally tracked products

This conclusion stems from a combination of the first two, yet nevertheless is important as its own point. When discussing public institutional relationships with suppliers, interviewees noted that most suppliers seem to have caught on to the local trend with many implementing a local stock keeping unit (SKU) into their system. The local SKU is a positive for those focusing on buy-local procurement. However, according to Celia White from the Real Food Challenge BC, this can be a barrier for institutions that want to switch to real food.

The feedback has been really mixed, some institutions are like 'oh that's great we were never really good at purchasing local anyways' and then some institutions are very concerned because unfortunately for them they've put a lot of effort into following the local food movement and trying to support local farms and local companies and now suddenly we're changing the agenda and saying oh that actually doesn't matter now you have to meet an even higher standards or totally different standards. So usually the feedback is whether or not it benefits the institution and I think on a superficial level, without fully understanding what criteria real food requires many people might have certain, might be relieved that we are no longer requiring local food or promoting local food but once people get into the nitty gritty of the standards that we are looking for it's actually much more robust and rigorous than geographical limitations and then I think the institutions are a bit frightened. (Celia White, Real Food Challenge)

THEME 2: CRITIQUES OF THE LOCAL MYTH

Most commonly discussed in all the interviews was a debate around whether 'local' had any real meaning. In particular, group 2 was highly critical of procurement's sole focus on local food, as portrayed in the following quote:

I think we can run a risk if we only focus on that one narrow piece of local you know maybe not having the impact that we could and missing out on opportunities there. (Jennifer Reynolds, Food Secure Canada)

All those in group 2 had their critics of local food, and after being asked about it, lengthy conversations would ensue around the complexities of local food. The critiques brought forth in the interview have been grouped into 2 categories: local food is arbitrary, and local food is problematic.

LOCAL IS AN ARBITRARY TERM

In the interviews, it was most commonly stated that local is an arbitrary term. There is no clear definition of local food, and each institution or program uses their own roughly based on the boundaries of the province. Therefore, local only truly defines political boundaries. Local food does not inherently indicate high quality food, environmental sustainability, fair working conditions and wages, or humane treatment of animals. There is nothing implicit within a geographic boundary that could guarantee anything other than where it was grown or produced. The following quotations highlight this point:

The weakness of institutional procurement is that purchasing local as an example doesn't necessarily mean anything because local is a nebulous, arbitrary term and if the institution doesn't have a personal transparent relationship with the individuals they are purchasing from then there is no guarantee that local is a means to the end that they're searching for: being sustainable agricultural practices, or social justice or whatever. (Celia White, Real Food Challenge)

Some campuses use kilometers from production or processing to define local. This means that for some campuses, Pepsi, from a local bottling factory is considered local. (Sarah Archibald, Real Food Challenge Canada)

I believe that we as educators and activists in the sustainable food movement or the local food movement have failed to adequately communicate that local food is not an end in itself but a means to an end. Local doesn't matter because it's better for it to come from your

backyard, it matters because when it comes from your region, there's a chance to see and own and interact with the food system and ensure that the food is being produced and processed and distributed in a way that is equitable and sustainable and local creates the opportunity for that. It's not just that it's better, you can have an unsustainable huge monoculture in your backyard and that doesn't make it good because it's local. So I think we have not communicated why local means something. (Hayley Lapalme, 3P Program)

Local food is not a clear indicator of what individuals are trying to improve within the food system. There has not yet been, to my knowledge, clear guidelines for these inherent goals within local food. As local food is currently defined, local is a political boundary, rather arbitrarily created without any clear framework of what people are trying to achieve with local food purchasing.

LOCAL IS A PROBLEMATIC TERM

In discussing criticisms of local food, some interviewees went a step further to suggestion that not only is local an arbitrary term, it's a problematic term. It should be noted that this theme was only highlighted by two individuals who both work for Real Food Challenge. Nevertheless, it is important to discuss as this perspective has not yet been discussed within procurement literature. In essence, the Real Food Challenge has a value category entitled 'local and community based', however the RFC Canada received feedback from Indigenous stakeholders that local is a colonial concept, and asked the group to rethink this language. This notion is best exemplified through the following quotes:

At a discussion at the B.C. Food Systems Network gathering last year, we explored how local is actually really a colonial term ... you know working with campuses collaborating with campuses and actually being able to distill and get past that sort of jargon and really get into some meaningful connections. And recognizing that trade has been a vital piece of community building on 'turtle island'. (Sarah Archibald, Real Food Challenge Canada)

The concept of local is problematic because its a neocolonial concept. Where we limit locality based on geographic distance which is related to specific measurements, which although the measure is not arbitrary, its significance is completely arbitrary... When we took the initial ideas of the real food challenge to the BC food systems network annual gathering where a large component of the participants and leaders and organizers there are from indigenous communities and are really active in the Indigenous food sovereignty movement and their feedback was that relying on a concept of local is not reflective of

indigenous understandings of local food systems because historically indigenous people have expansive trade networks and their food was more relationship based rather than geographically based... And so bringing in concepts of local into the real food guide is also another iteration of undermining the indigenous concepts of food systems and is just another force of a neocolonial food system. They encouraged us to reimagine what community based could mean in that indigenous lens where rather than limiting food coming to us within a certain environs we could be thinking about food coming to us through certain types of relationships or that rely on information and trust and again that's extremely difficult if not impossible at the institutional scale. But we didn't want to create a tool that marginalize food systems and indigenous food sovereignty yet again through a process of prioritizing colonial concepts. (Celia White, Real Food Challenge)

This theme brings a new analysis of local food to the procurement literature in that it is absent from the specific sub section that focuses on procurement. It highlights a different way of conceiving what is important, evaluating food based on the relationships, not political boundaries. This notion will be discussed in further themes/tensions, as well as in the discussion.

TENSION 2: HOW TO MOVE BEYOND LOCAL FOOD PROCUREMENT

Many participants offered criticisms of the local food movement, and were critical of using the term local. Some interviewees raised the question of whether to move beyond local food and select other value categories that better represent their goals. Both LA's Good Food Purchasing Program and the Real Food Challenge had extensive debates and a long process to finalize their value categories.

In discussing the process at the Real Food Challenge Canada:

It is a conversation that has been ongoing for over 2 years to decide to include or remove local. A big component of that conversation is understanding that local doesn't guarantee anything (Celia White, Real Food Challenge)

...the Real Food Guide asks for food to meet other criteria that local would normally symbolize such as sustainable agricultural practices, animal welfare, social justice. There are some who aren't sure we need to also include locality. And so there is a debate in removing mileage because we believe that although mileage can impact things like carbon footprint it's comparison to the use of pesticides and fertilizers or agricultural machinery is somewhat... its carbon footprint is somewhat negligible and more important shouldn't

carbon footprint belong in the category for environmental sustainability rather than local and community based? (Celia White, Real Food Challenge)

Alexa Delwiche of the Good Food Purchasing Program:

There was sort of a divide in the group there were people who were focused on local sourcing and local economies and then those who were really focused on food security and food access and so it took some time... I dedicated a lot of my time to recruiting the right people... I think getting those voices to the table was really key both in terms of expending on the definition of good food during that task force processes and then so we did a lot of targeted recruitment during the task force process just get a wide range of voices and that really helped to expand beyond the food security, food access and local sourcing and kind of tell more complete systems story and I think, and hope, that that systems perspective was reflected in the good food for all agenda. (Alexa Delwiche, Centre for Good Food Purchasing)

The difficulty around the use of local food and determining other value categories that reflect food system change are reflected in both organizations' process. Based on the interviews and research, it appears there wasn't as long a process or as wide a range of stakeholders involved in the other two procurement programs. Overall these tensions around local food and value categories reflect the academic critiques of local food. What is important to note is that the literature review demonstrated different portrayals of local food between the academic literature and public literature on procurement. However, these interviews have demonstrated that there are some individuals within the field who are more critical of local food, this had not yet been adequately represented in the public literature on institutional procurement.

These conversations ultimately raised the question of whether or not we should move beyond using the word local? Or how can we incorporate other value categories? In discussing various ways to include other value categories in Canada, there were a few suggestions put forth by various interviewees. Some, however, did not have a coherent response to these questions and others stated the language of local needs to remain. This tension is demonstrated in the quotations below.

Those considering moving beyond local sourcing also understand that language such as 'real' is also as arbitrary as local. However, as local food now has certain connotations and identity, this provides the possibility to move beyond certain ideas and create a different symbol.

I mean the term real food is just as meaningless and arbitrary as local food until you... Until someone can dig into all of the components of what it means and what we're actually looking for and I think they are very similar. The local food movement isn't blindly supporting local food because of some misled sense of patriotism, its supporting local food because people want to promote food security and promote sustainable agricultural practices and support animal welfare and that's what real food is trying to achieve as well it's just with different... I think we've relied on a different symbol or a different pathway perhaps. (Celia White, Real Food Challenge)

However, they also placed concerns on moving beyond local, because of 'kick backs' from institutions and producers:

We have had some push back in terms of local, I think some people think community based is a little hokey at this point and it doesn't really jive with a lot of the policy language especially from a provincial view, and when it comes in terms of suppliers were seeing lots of challenges too. (Sarah Archibald, Real Food Challenge Canada)

One the biggest issues we are going to come across is kicks backs and we are going to get into a gross terrible world of kickbacks.... So for example working with a big company three major food service providers plus independent ... That work on all sites/institutions from oil to prisons to schools and hospitals they are super excited about local and campuses too, but if we take away the coca cola contract there goes \$5 million dollars for a new arts program on a campus, or if we say start buying local chicken all of the sudden all of the Tyson chicken that they are getting every 40 cases that they get they get \$1000 , and that really adds up and it's just a messed up part of our industrial agriculture and corporate world. (Sarah Archibald, Real Food Challenge Canada)

One interviewee argued to continue using the word local and spend energy to change the conversation around it.

Okay so I think there is a risk any time we introduce new language that we dilute the message that's being communicated to the value chain and that diminishes their capacity to respond because then they don't have the same aggregate demand for certain thing. So then the ask sounds flimsy and so unfortunately we are stuck right now with this imperfect word, local food, which has traction and I think the real task now is not adding new words or characteristics but I think it is to reframe the conversation around local and make sure

that it is understood that this is not about 'is it 100 km away or is it 101 km away?'. It is about the symbolism of local which is a commitment to building more resilient regional food systems as opposed to relying on the unsustainable long supply chains that exploit land, labour, in conventional supply chains. So that's what I would say to any of the new like language that would be introduced. You have to be careful of diluting the conversation and actually hurting the current effort. (Hayley Lapalme, 3P Program)

People get obsessed with definitions and I think conversations stall and break down there. I think it's about a conversation around local that is expansive and that engages people critically in understanding where their food is coming from and how it's produced... So if we could do that, if we could associate local food not with like a definition but associate local food with a conversation that is critical about how food is produced and distributed like those patterns of consumption and distribution and production, that is where I think we need to be heading. (Hayley Lapalme, 3P Program)

However, another interviewee raised an interesting point that local at the institutional level shouldn't be considered analogous to better food, as local in itself does not guarantee anything:

On the institutional level local can't be conflated with sustainability or social justice or animal welfare because as long as local does not have a guarantee it doesn't mean anything and so some of the downfalls or weaknesses of institutional purchasing could be the lack of transparency and the fact that institutions operate on such a massive scale of food purchases that its difficult to support farms or businesses that have extraordinary sustainability or social justice practices without paying for certification. (Celia White, Real Food Challenge)

Ultimately, while recognizing the need to move beyond local food to include other value categories, despite the difficulties of leaving the word local behind, there does not appear to be a coherent idea of how to implement that within procurement institutions.

THEME 3: SCALING UP LOCAL PROCUREMENT

The theme of scale that came up in a few interviews tended to mirror the conversation that exists in the literature. The points made around scale tended to focus on the difficulties of small-scale producers to engage in institutional procurement due to their capacity. This often resulted in the

idea that local producers need to scale up in order to bid and engage in the process, as demonstrated in the following quotations:

Public purchasing is typically speaking dealing in terms of large volumes which can exclude certain vendors who are small or midsized who might not have the volume to supply them and then they are also often purchasing through RFPs which are structurally exclusive as well to the producers and manufacturers and distributors whose businesses are built around responding to those things but that are not, but that small medium sized producers who often are the ones ...that are the best or ...who are farming with some ideas of stewardship of land or sustainability whose scale is operating... whose operations are more at that scale, they don't have the capacity to bid on those contracts and if they do they are encouraged to scale up and find, essentially to join this drive to efficiency that would allow them to be competitive in a bidding process and there seems to be this tension between efficiency within operations and actual ability to produce in a way that is sustainable and encourages, like enables resilience in the food system. (Hayley Lapalme, 3P Program)

I think one of the biggest weaknesses of institutional procurement is that it requires a certain size of farm like it can't be a very small scale farm that works directly with institution unless they are working through a distributor because not only do those farms often chose not to get certified because they can't afford it or innumerable other reasons but they also can't produce at the macro scale that institutions are looking for which is a huge hindrance to institutional procurement because of the lack of streamlining that food service providers often require in their busy schedule. (Celia White, Real Food Challenge)

I think that comes down to values within an organization and I think an organization like VG Meats from that case study I wrote up they have by design built their businesses around values which produce a product that is more tender, because ... the product and ... the process that they are using is a more sustainable one and their whole business model is built around that idea, so how do you scale without losing those values? Talk to VG meats, there are certainly others who are doing it, but I think it's hard. (Hayley Lapalme, 3P Program)

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

LOCAL FOOD IS ARBITRARY AND PROBLEMATIC

In this research it was frequently highlighted that local food is an arbitrary and problematic term. These sentiments were reflected only by group 2, researchers or experts in not-for-profits. These critiques of local are not necessarily new to the academic literature, however their absence from group 1 (those engaged in procurement programs within institutions) is problematic as it identifies a gap in knowledge dissemination between group 2 and group 1.

According to Allen (2008), there is a responsibility for academics to share their knowledge, and yet critical insights have not been disseminated to those working in the field. This is demonstrated in two ways, first in the public literature (see Literature Review) and secondly through the interviews. If one was to read only the public literature it would appear that buy-local procurement is a no-brainer, and there are no criticisms of local food. It should be noted once again, that this is the only information the majority of the population has access to, particularly food service directors working in institutions. This is further conflated with the fact that critiques that are known by procurement experts are not shared with those in the field. According to Allen (2008) it is part of the responsibility of academics to work on disseminating this knowledge. In my opinion this work needs to extend beyond academics and incorporate the experts in the field (i.e. group 2) to address the social justice issues and make others (i.e. group 1) aware of the inequality that exists within the agri-food system.

Why have individuals within the field critical of local food not conducted more nuanced conversations in their reports and discussions with food service directors? The public literature often endorsed or written by group 2 becomes the rationale used by group 1 to advance local food procurement in their institutions. This is highly problematic if specific critiques of local food are continually left out of the conversation. There are a variety of reasons why the critiques of local sourcing have remained absent from conversations. Yet this is beyond the scope of this research project and should be a point for further research.

When discussing with interviewees how to move beyond local food, there were two main takeaways that could be used for future research and programs. First, programs that had a wide stakeholder engagement from the beginning with representatives from multiple sectors were also the programs that included other value categories besides local. Therefore, it would appear that

engaging in wider stakeholder input could be a way to create more holistic procurement programs that incorporate other value categories. Secondly, identifying clear goals and objectives of procurement programs, not just buzzwords, through stakeholder engagement could help determine standards that could meet these objectives. Further research and collaboration would be needed within Ontario to understand new value categories and to determine standards.

CRITIQUING THE NOTION OF SCALING UP LOCAL PRODUCERS

Less commonly discussed, yet still apparent in the interviewees, was the idea that small-scale local farm production needed to be scaled up to supply public institutions. It was not clear from the interviews whether they meant scale up in terms of growing bigger, or in terms of aggregating smaller farms to sell producer together. However, since both perspectives rely on the 'local as inherently good' fallacy, they will both be discussed in this section. The process of building up small-scale local producers to be competitive on RFPs and produce enough to provide for public institutions does not necessarily help to create a more sustainable food system. The fallacy here rests on the notion that local food is inherently good. As Sarah pointed out in the interviews, according to this logic a local Pepsi factory would be providing better food. Furthermore, there is nothing that aligns geographic placement with one's environmental sustainability, or fair labour standards. This critique of local food shared by some interviewees was also found in the academic literature. Allen (1999) highlighted studies that have shown that small-scale farms can have worse labour violations than larger scale farms. In terms of environmental sustainability, as already cited in the literature review, local farmers are not inherently going to follow sustainable practices. As Hinriches (2003) explains, those small-scale local farmers disadvantaged by economic marginality may lack awareness or means to follow environmentally sustainable practices.

Furthermore, such arguments seem contradictory to the original values of local food as anti-corporate or anti-industrial farming. It is not clear how scaling up local producers is going to address any structural issues within the food system, or how it can create a more sustainable food system. This perspective lacks a critical understanding of capitalism as a mode of production because in order for small-scale local producers to compete and keep their farm or business running they are likely to adopt values of large-scale industrial producers in order for their business to be profitable. In the process of trying to maintain profits and scale up to compete with larger farms or companies, these small-scale local producers will end up looking like the large scale producers the local food movement is fighting against. Individual values are hard to maintain when

businesses exist within a capitalist mode of production, as they will need to produce and compete like the others in order to survive.

This contradiction within the food movement is consistent with many scholarly arguments (see Allen, 2010; Alkon, 2013; Guthman, 2008) that the mainstream food movement often ends up replicating the same structures that they claim to be fighting against. This is due, in part, to the fact that structural problems within the food system are not addressed, rather groups become fixated on other potential solutions that rely on entrepreneurialism (which supports local capitalists) to solve structural issues. These potential solutions cannot address structural issues (i.e. capitalism) as they are using and supporting capitalism in their efforts. This is best described by Alkon (2013):

These movements tend to foster neoliberalism in three basic ways. First, they locate social change potential in consumer market behavior, namely the provision and purchase of organic and local food, rather than collective action. This reflects the fundamentally neoliberal idea that social change should be pursued through economic action and substitutes the creation of alternatives for the restriction of bad actors in the corporate food regime... Lastly, these approaches to food system reform produce neoliberal subjectivities. Neoliberal subjectivities are the bio-political disciplining of the self, and one another, in ways that mirror and support the market. Neoliberal subjectivities prize striving for self-improvement through improved health (including and especially healthy eating). Health becomes evidence of personal responsibility, moral character and social worth, and individuals are evaluated as responsible for the maximization of their own well-being. Taken together, these avenues limit what Julie Guthman calls “the politics of the possible,” constraining the “arguable, the fundable, the organizable [and] the scale of effective action” to entrepreneurialism and individual consumer choice (pg. 5-6).

This quote highlights how local procurement cannot address structural issues within our food system. Interviewees stated that procurement is a tool to influence change, yet were aware of its limitations to fix the food system. It is important to place realistic expectations on the possibilities of procurement and food-system localization. As Allen (2010) argues

While no one would argue that food-system localization can undo the inequities created by histories of colonialism, imperialism and neoliberalization, localist efforts must nonetheless be cognizant of this context. If increasing equity is a priority of these efforts,

this pre-supposes a dedicated engagement with justice issues, rather than assuming that local food systems are necessarily socially just. (p. 297)

This is not to discredit procurement, it does have the ability to shape and influence certain new standards or policies. However, it should also not be inflated as major social change. Rather it is important to have a realistic understanding of the potential of procurement, and actively engage in critiques of procurement, including understanding its limitations in addressing issues of inequality within our food system.

THERE IS NOT ONE UNIFIED FOOD MOVEMENT

The above discussions both highlight a larger underlying conclusion of this research: there is not one food movement. In my opinion it is critical to understand that there are different groups within the food movement who have different vested interests and goals; in other words they have different material interests. This research has highlighted a number of tensions or contradictions within the procurement field, especially between procurement programs and their goals related to creating a sustainable (or local) food system. These individuals or groups have different goals for the food movement, that rest on their own material interests or values. Local business owners, farmers, or not-for-profits with grants focused on local food are only interested in building up the local economy. This is not to say that they may not also have an interest in environmental sustainability, or animal welfare. However, most of these individuals will not care if local is arbitrary or problematic because for them local food directly enhances their profits. Those with a local food label rely on it for profits, and if local is critiqued, it becomes a threat to their business. It could be argued that these business would rather have local as an arbitrary term than have the food movement switch its focus. This is not a question of individuals' moral character, but rather it is rooted in their material interest in the market.

In Ontario, not-for-profits and institutions rely on local food grants from government for procurement programs. The provincial government approach concentrates on boosting the local economy, not on creating more sustainable food systems as such systems do not help their material interests as much as boosting the local economy would. Furthermore, in comparing the various procurement programs it was clear that some had a focus on solely local food, whereas other programs covered a variety of value categories. These differences are due to the group's material interests. There are individuals within group 2, and the food movement, who don't have material interests in local food. These individuals tend to be working to address structural issues within the food system. For them, the current focus is how to move beyond this language of local. Given their

struggles to date, a point for further research is to determine how certain groups can move beyond local food, specifically in Ontario, and evaluate the potential for other procurement programs to address different issues within our food system.

Of crucial importance for this section is the realization that there is not one giant unified food movement. The food sector, like any other industry, has a variety of problems rooted in structural issues of society, and these issues are not isolated silos. There are a variety of actors, with different vested interest, so assuming that we are all fighting for the same 'better' food system is absurd. As Allen (2010) explains:

Goals of local food efforts generally include providing markets for local farmers and food processors, reversing the decline in the number of family farms, creating local jobs, reducing environmental degradation and protecting farmland from urbanization, fostering community and strengthening connections between farmers and consumers (Allen and Hinrichs, 2007). Others see local food systems as increasing or embodying social justice (for example Feenstra, 1997; Kloppenburg et al., 1996). And, some local food initiatives are seen as inherently just. For example, McFadden (2001) states that community supported agriculture is guided by associative economics, which puts the needs of fellow human beings rather than profit at the center of the enterprise. To be clear, many of those working in local food campaigns are interested in other priorities and do not include equity or social justice as a goal or benefit of food-system localization. However, now that food-system localization has become the tonic note of the alternative agrifood movement, it is time to reflect on its potential to meet the movement's three primary goals, one of which social justice (p.296-7)

If we want to move forward in our efforts, we need to come to the realization that we are not all fighting for the same thing. We need to be clear in our objectives, and evaluate the potential of our own proposed solutions.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF INTERVIEW SUBJECTS

	Interview Subjects, job title	Location	Grouping	Date of Interview
1	Food Services Manager 1 Healthcare	ON, CAN	1	March 15, 2016
2	Alexa Delwiche Executive Director at Centre for Good Food Purchasing Formerly known as LA's Good Food Purchasing Program	CA, USA	2	March 16, 2016
3	Sarah Archibald Meal Exchange and Real Food Challenge Canada	ON, CAN	2	March 21, 2016
4	Food Services Manager 2 Healthcare	ON, CAN	1	March 23, 2016
5	Jennifer Reynolds Institutional Food Program Manager at Food Secure Canada	QC, CAN	2	March 29, 2016
6	Hayley Lapalme McConnell Foundation formerly Program Designer and Facilitator at My Sustainable Canada 3P Mentorship Program	ON, CAN	2	April 5, 2016
7	Joann Lo Executive Director at Food Chain Workers Alliance	CA, USA	3	April 12, 2016
8	Celia White	BC, CAN	2	April 19, 2016

	Real Food Challenge BC Coordinator at Real Food Challenge, Meal Exchange			
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APPENDIX 2: LIST OF SEMI-STRUCTURE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE FOR PROCUREMENT MANAGERS

1. How did [name of organization] become involved in local or sustainable purchasing?
2. What type of procurement do you focus on at your institution? Local? Sustainable? Fair? Other?
3. What type of supports did you receive in the transition? What type of supports would have been helpful?
4. Did you receive funding? How crucial was funding to achieving your goals?
5. Can you describe the transition to procuring local/sustainable/fair at your institution? What sort of rationale did you need to provide to staff or managers in order to make the transition?
6. What have been the benefits of providing local/sustainable/fair food at your institution?
 - a. What are the benefits to your staff? Clients? Community?
7. What have been some of the barriers to changing procurement in your institution?
8. Which of these barriers are myths? How did you overcome them?
9. Do you think there are other issues that could be addressed through procurement?
10. Explain the Good Food Purchasing Program, or the Real Food Challenge... Would your workplace see value in adopting these issues within their procurement policies/practices?
11. Do you think it's possible to address these issues within procurement policies or practices?
12. Is it possible to add these values into your workplace?
13. What sort of supports would be necessary to transition to this type of procurement?
14. What would be some potential barriers to addressing these issues within your institution?

INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE FOR NOT-FOR-PROFIT EXPERTS

1. To start, can you provide a brief background on [program] and your role in public procurement for food services?
2. Why did [organization] decide to become involved in public procurement?
3. What type of procurement is [program] advocating for?
4. How can public institutional procurement address these issues?
5. What sort of supports does [program] offer to those in the transition? What sort of supports are generally needed in order for institutions to reach their goal?
6. What is the process like for those transitioning to [real/local/good] procurement?
7. What are the strengths to using procurement to address issues within the food system?
8. What are the limitations to using procurement to address these issues within the food system?
9. What are some common barriers?
10. What sort of rationale or evidence do you need to convince people to focus on more than just local food?
11. What are barriers in transitioning people from traditional procurement, or local procurement to real/good food procurement?