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Urban Farming in Atlanta, Georgia: The Seed of Neoliberal Contestation or Hybridized Compromise?

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URBAN FARMING IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA: THE SEED OF NEOLIBERAL CONTESTATION OR
HYBRIDIZED COMPROMISE?

by

JULIA BRYANT

Under the Direction of Katherine Hankins

ABSTRACT

The space on which the urban farm is produced has a history of its own that can be explored for evidence of neoliberal shaping and retooling. This thesis explores how the city and the farm are understood through the complex articulations of farmers and through the account of the specific historical and geographical context of the farm. The urban farm is a uniquely situated land use that can provide the spaces for contestation to the neoliberalization of the city and the United States food system. Through qualitative analysis, including a case study, interviews with farmers, participant observation, and archival data collection, this research examines the city and the farm from the perspective of the farmer to understand the degree to which these contestations are resisting neoliberalism. Furthermore, it suggests that scholars of neoliberalism and urban farming should more fully consider the hybridized nature in which urban farmers understand their work.

INDEX WORDS: Urban agriculture, Neoliberalism, Political ecology, Urban farming

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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DEDICATION

To my husband and children, you are my greatest happiness.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Study

I have always been fascinated with the emergence of a plant from the seed—the tiny pale sprout that bursts from the seed and pokes its first leaf or blade out of the soil to reach for the warmth and nourishment of the sun. There is something beautiful about the intricacies and completeness of the life contained in a tiny seed. The seed cannot act alone though; soil that provides the nutrients for the roots and body of the plant are required, as well as water and sunlight. These ingredients are basic and natural but life giving and necessary to all humankind. We all need the fruits of these tiny seeds to survive, and so the work of the farmer is exceedingly valuable. At the urban farm, these ingredients are the real tools of the trade and the quality and capacity of each is of immeasurable importance.

Agriculture projects that seek to be a social, economic, and environmental alternative to the destructive practices associated with modern corporate or conventional farms can be found in urban settings. The farmers at these urban farms are investing in practices built upon natural cycles and synergism that strive to be productive while minimizing waste.

My interest in urban and organic farming began in the early 1990s while I was pursuing a degree in horticulture. This course of study brought about an awareness of community gardening and the sustainable practices of organic farming as well as the up and coming science of genetically engineering plants to produce foods like the flavr savr tomato. Although I did not literally and figuratively stay in the field, I have always kept an eye on the organic agriculture scene and have attempted my own version of urban homesteading, or more simply, growing food for my family. In more recent years, I have become aware of the corporate or agribusiness farm practices, including the reckless mishandling of GM science,

the exploitation of natural resources, and the loss of the small family farm(er). At the same time, urban farming has been thrust into the spotlight as a 'fix' for food system woes and has captured my attention and imagination.

In the fall of 2009, I had my first encounter with Truly Living Well Center for Natural Urban Agriculture (TLW) when I participated in an urban farm bicycle tour hosted by Georgia Organics (a member supported, non-profit organization based in Atlanta). We biked from Atlanta the short distance down to neighboring East Point, to visit the site of Truly Living Well's base of operations. On this visit the founder, Rashid Nuri and his staff, and their commitment to healthy sustainable farming in the urban setting impressed me. The East Point farm, tucked behind an unassuming brick ranch house was my first introduction to a real urban farm in Atlanta. The setting is natural in its design, following the contours of the residential property and planted in rows of vegetables. Rashid spent a significant amount of time with the tour group explaining how to raise worms for their castings, and we all took turns plunging our hand down into the dark, sweet, and living composted soil. The natural practices that he repeated in his description of the farm struck a kindred chord with my own personal values.

About one year later, I learned of the expansion of TLW to the site on the corner of Old Wheat and Hilliard Street in the Old Fourth Ward of Atlanta just east of the central business district, near Georgia State University. Truly Living Well Center for Natural Urban Agriculture has established this farm in the heart of Atlanta. Since December 2010, the farm has sprouted its seeds, grown its crops, and sold its fruits right next door to its urban neighbors: interstate 75/85, historic Ebenezer and Wheat Street Baptist churches, and Sweet Auburn Avenue. This site, besides being a highly visible and desirable piece of property, is significant because of its relationship to the history of this area. As my interest in the current value and meaning of urban agriculture has grown, so has this local farm grown, which is the subject of my case study for this thesis.

Urban agriculture is a uniquely situated land use that can provide the spaces of social change simply by strategic location and symbolic meanings, and as such, it is an invaluable place to examine the social, economic, and power structures shaping cities and food systems of the US. One framework that represents hegemonic discourses and practices about urban governance and food production is the ideology of neoliberalism. This ideology is influenced by politically inflected discourses about today's capitalistic society and a resurgence of liberal understandings of individual freedom, unburdened markets, and a non-interventionist state (Harvey 2005). Examining the urban farm and farmers to find influences of neoliberalism and threads of resistance is a relevant and meaningful approach to the mounting research about local food. City-based agriculture not only meets consumer demand for fresh, safe, local produce but also creates jobs, strengthens the local community and addresses many social issues. Urban farm businesses come to where people live, work, and consume, and create something that has not been seen on the urban landscape that often. Because of the neoliberal expressions of businesses and governments operating at local, national and international scales, this project will take a telescopic and historic look at the shaping of an urban setting and an urban farm. The individual and his or her perception of this influence are also of considerable importance to the understandings of the push and pull of the systems and processes at play in the urban context.

Missing in most of the discussions are the articulations or perspectives of the urban farmer. Farmers, when asked, do not always see themselves as revolutionaries (see Reynolds, 2010). So what then is their perspective about what they are doing? What motivates these farmers to do their work? Are they contesting the neoliberal philosophy so prevalent in today's economy and society or are they saying something else? In this thesis, I explore these questions and highlight the experiences of urban farmers at the Truly Living Well garden on Wheat Street in Atlanta, Georgia. I argue that the farmers express resistance in many of their practices by fostering collective, non-monetary value around farming and yet they adopt some of the neoliberal discourses of individualism and the celebration of private

property. In effect, I suggest that the urban farmer in the TLW experience offers a hybridized disposition towards the current political economy, offering important resistance to many of the profit-driven dimensions, while adopting key tropes of self-sufficiency and property. In the following literature review, I investigate more thoroughly the spaces and practices of neoliberalism, the rise of the urban farm and the potential contestations to neoliberalism voiced by the urban farmer. I situate my discussion in the context of urban political ecology, which highlights various power relations that produce urban spaces.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In my research, I draw from the lens of urban political ecology to better understand the power structures and systems that situate human-environment relations in the city and help in the understandings of the patterns of urban developments. Several issues in the urban agriculture and urban political ecology literature will be addressed through this research. First, human geographers are interested in the uneven developments associated with the history and revitalization of urban neighborhoods such as access to parks and uneven distribution of urban trees, and this research could be furthered through the evaluation of an up and coming land use contender in Atlanta, Georgia- urban farms (Brownlow 2006; Heynen et al. 2006). Second, human geographers have examined many natural and built -natural environments of the urban landscape through the lens of urban political ecology, but few have examined the human-environment relationship as it pertains to farms in the city (see McClintock 2010; McClintock 2011). This creates a place to evaluate the nature of this emerging urban form of land use being produced and consumed in the city of Atlanta. This work will advance the scholarship of urban geography and urban political ecology through the evaluation of the history of one site, the Wheat Street Garden, in Atlanta, Georgia, during the past century. Urban farmers have unique relationships to the sites on which they farm in the city and assessing their articulations through the lens of an urban political ecology framework can contribute to current scholarship in the field.

Geographers have in fact shown interest in describing and understanding who benefits and loses from the development of urban agriculture projects among races, genders, and food insecure populations (Slocum 2007; Guthman 2008; Jarosz 2011; McClintock 2011). Reynolds (2010) attempted to pull apart the revolutionary components of urban agriculture among farmers in Alameda County, California. She found that not all farmers are motivated by social issues and to investigate the underlying motivations of local farmers is an important component of understanding the revolutionary qualities of urban agriculture (Reynolds 2010). Her research drew on Harvey's theories of revolution and Allen's theory of opposition as she questioned the nature of urban farming- oppositionary or alternative (Harvey 1973; Allen et al. 2003; Reynolds 2010). She investigates whether the urban farm is creating an alternative within the current agrifood system or if something revolutionary is going on, creating a new structure and configuration or 'new reality' (Harvey 1973; Reynolds 2010, p.209). Reynolds (2010) found that these new realities of urban agriculture are firmly grounded in unequal social systems but social movement actors sometimes ignore these unequal systems in order to extol the benefits of urban agriculture. She found that urban agriculture projects in her study area, are working to create social structural changes as well as alternatives in agrifood systems by prioritizing community food security and food justice (Reynolds 2010). She also found that some farmers were interested in self provisioning, commercial profitability and partnering with non profits as potential benefits of farming (Reynolds 2010). Her findings, which echo the hybrid contestations of neoliberalization of my study, are expanded through the specific contextual historical and structural shaping of Atlanta, Georgia in my research. In my study, I also address the motivations of urban farmers, and the neoliberal expressions of businesses and governments operating at local, national and international scales and their impact on urban agriculture. This project takes a telescopic and historic look at the shaping of a particular urban setting (Atlanta, Georgia) and urban farm (Wheat Street Garden). By addressing this case study through the lens of neoliberalization and resistance, this work draws from and expands Reynolds' work.

Emerging scholarship of racial disparity in local food movements show well-intended but often only partly successful efforts to involve poor minority residents in the movement (Slocum 2007; Guthman 2008). As Guthman noted in her study of her students who eagerly set out to 'help' the less fortunate learn to farm and embrace local and healthy food revealed the white perspective in the alternative food movement (Guthman 2008). Enthusiasm was not necessarily shared by the 'subjects' of the food projects and racialized aspects of food production were revealed. She calls for a systemic evaluation of the motivations of these alternative food movements (Guthman 2008). Slocum (2007) discusses how "whiteness forms materially in alternative food practices" but suggests there is a "hopeful possibility for raced connections through coalition building around food" (Slocum 2007, p.521). This 'whiteness' in the local food movement that she describes, emanates from a privileged place that can promote local food through doing good work (Slocum 2007). She suggests, like Guthman, that systemic evaluations or "connections linking the past and present to everyone and everywhere," are useful to those trying to understand alternative food (Slocum 2007, p. 520). Recent work investigating motivations for farming by women in an urban area of the US revealed the nurturing care ethic of women farmers and according to Jarosz, expresses a post-capitalist politics that challenge the "neoliberal subject formation in food production and consumption" (Jarosz 2011p.307). These studies lend themselves to this research centered on understanding neoliberalism and its spatial expressions within urban agriculture and the understandings of the urban farmers who work in these spaces. Guthman, in her recent book *Weighing In*, discusses the challenges of a society determined to define the obese population and the farm policy, subsidies, and corporate farms that help to produce the American unhealthy diet. She suggests that researchers are not taking into account the structural causes for this problem and she asserts instead that social, cultural and political relations affect ecologies, including bodily ecologies (Guthman 2011). She investigates neoliberal capitalism prevalent in the US since 1980 that has made cheap food readily available and the class and racial segregations more pronounced (Guthman 2011).

In what follows I focus on the meaning of neoliberalism as it is expressed in the urban setting and through US agriculture history. I further explore urban political ecology as a way to understand contemporary nature-society interactions. Lastly, this literature review includes work that investigates the contestations to neoliberalism and the potential for a hybrid neoliberalism, or a mixed version of current ideologies. This mixed or hybrid version draws its form from both neoliberal structures and bottom-up social movements.

2.1 Neoliberalism and its spatial expressions

According to Hackworth (2007), neoliberalism evolved from the classic liberalism movement of the 18th and 19th centuries, and the US was one of the few places classic liberalism took hold. An egalitarian strand of classic liberalism was later developed that promoted a larger government role in providing economic freedoms for all (Hackworth 2007). This system paved the way for Keynesianism management that was an open regulatory system of governance and provided welfare rights such as public housing and food stamps. Neoliberalism emerged through the Keynesian structure as a contestation to the Keynesian form during the 1970s and took a more unique ideology of its own during the Thatcher-Reagan era of the 1980s (Peck and Tickell 2007). As the government became the protector of free exchange or free markets, Keynesian welfare was rolled back to leave a hollowed out urban form where policies, agreements, and public housing once stood (Hackworth 2007). Geographers have conceived and described this neoliberal system as the rollback of government services and the roll-out of private sector fill ins or institutions designed to meet social needs (Peck and Tickell 2007).

Guthman (2011) suggests that the shaping of the food system mirrors the shaping of the larger (neoliberal) political economy. Today's agriculture and food production is structured on a commodity subsidy balance that was created through New Deal farm policy to combat "the boom and bust cycles of the agrarian sector" (Guthman 2011, p.120). Expanding and collapsing prices during wartime, dust-bowls, and various other periods of history were financially tormenting American farmers and other

agribusinesses (Guthman 2011). In addition to New Deal farm policy (subsidies), during Keynesian management and regulation, the government began allowing farmers to store excess or surplus food to avoid glutting the market and soon this surplus food (commodities like corn, wheat, and soybeans) were being used strategically in sales abroad (Guthman 2011). The détente period of relations with the Soviet Union during the early 1970s saw a relaxation of trade between the two countries and the US sold off so much grain to the Soviets that a scarcity crisis was triggered (Guthman 2011). Following this event, the Secretary of Agriculture, Earl Butz, told the country to plant 'from fencerow to fencerow' and caused another glut in the market (Guthman 2011,p. 121). Technology in farming was encouraged and the post WWII 'discovery' of hybridization of corn was followed by growth hormones in beef, pharmaceuticals for subsequent diseases in beef, petrochemical inputs, synthetic pesticides, fungicides, and herbicides (Guthman 2011,p.124-5). In a parallel move to other business sectors during this time, companies began to consolidate and form giant corporations (Guthman 2011). The neoliberal approach to farming favors productivity over ecological concerns produced by weakening regulations over farm practices (Guthman 2011). The most significant changes in the farm industry brought about in the last 30 years according to a recent report from the International Energy Agency are summarized in Table 1 at the end of this chapter (Jones and Pimbert 2011, p.43). The farm is not the only space that is affected by neoliberalism, the city as well, has a history of neoliberal shaping and molding.

The neoliberalized city is one that has seen a shift from state and federally supported managed institutions and programs to a local level dependency on entrepreneurial governance that lowers barriers to capital flow rather than regulates it (Hackworth 2007). These entrepreneurs can include a coalition of forces like local financiers, industrialists, merchants, and the chamber of commerce (Hackworth 2007). Hackworth (2007) uses the changing urban regimes in New Brunswick, New Jersey, as a demonstration of how the shift occurs. In that city, an economic crisis occurred that caused the city governance to evolve into a protector of CBD real estate. The regime used its power to create a public private

partnership to generate capital and continue its expansion efforts. The urban regime has become a vessel for capital to move into and out of the city (Hackworth 2007).

Through the shifting of state responsibilities down to the local level of government (municipalities), cities today are responsible for funding their own social programs and maintaining the well-being of its citizens. Because of a more competitive global environment local governments have taken to place-marketing, enterprise zones, tax abatements, public-private partnerships and new forms of local boosterism to lure capitalist development (Hackworth 2007; Leitner et al. 2007). Exploiting resources, creating a consumer environment, and acquiring control centers, are all strategies used in the urban environment to give one city an edge over another (Hackworth 2007; Leitner et al. 2007). Urban areas are developed and redeveloped through the pushing and pulling processes enacted by land development regimes, racial histories and tensions, deindustrialization, neoliberal policies and countless other forces (Allen et al. 2003; Allen 2010; McClintock 2010). These forces may create different patterns of uneven resources in the city landscape, including access to healthy food and the provision of spaces of nature (Allen 2010; McClintock 2011; Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003). Farmers are filling in this unevenness by providing a healthy food alternative and a space of beauty in the city.

Urban agriculture has been defined simply as the “growing, processing, and distributing of food and other products through intensive plant cultivation and animal husbandry in and around cities” (Bailkey and Nasr 2000, p.6). Urban agriculture has also been described in more complex terms as an embedded and interactive land use that is linked to urban residents through labor and consumption, and urban resources like organic waste and water (Foundation 2011). As an integral part of the community in which they are situated, urban farms and farmers compete for land with other urban functions, are influenced by urban policies and plans, and are shaped by local histories (Foundation 2011). Throughout the US, farmers markets, community gardens, community-supported agriculture (CSAs), public municipalities, planners, policy makers, private corporations and public health organizations are

working to connect consumers with growers, to support small farmers, and to ensure the availability of nutritious food through the local food system (Bailkey and Nasr 2000; Brown and Carter 2003; Lyson 2004; DeLind and Bingen 2008). The support that has gathered around local food is a move in a direction away from the global food system that supports large agribusinesses (Allen 2010).

The food system evolution from small family farms to large agribusinesses was made possible through the industrialization of the food processing industry, neoliberal processes of deregulation and globalization of trade and policy, and centralization of corporations (Lyson 2004; Allen 2010; Guthman 2011). A food system based on these neoliberal economic philosophies that intensely values the free market has failed to provide healthy and abundant food for everyone (Lyson 2004; Short et al. 2007; Slocum 2007; Allen 2010).

Enter into this scene, a farmer, living in the city, desiring to start a farm business close to his or her customers or neighborhood. How might the neoliberal regime affect how the urban farmer goes about starting his/her business? Does the farmer recognize this power structure in place that has produced the landscape of the city? Does the farmer desire to change it? Or will the farmer be changed instead? This line of questioning arising from the literature has informed the research undertaken in this project and is further discussed in subsequent sections. To more fully understand the context of the urban agriculture movement the next section of this literature review delves into the history of US agriculture.

2.2 Changes in US agriculture over time up to the neoliberalization era

Farming in the US has transitioned from family oriented farms that allowed for community bartering or selling in the early 20th century to mass production at factory-like farms (Lyson 2004; Dimitri et al. 2005). Lyson, in his work on community based food systems, described these changes over the last century through analysis of agricultural census data. He found that US agriculture saw great structural changes between 1910 and 1997 as it evolved from a system made up of many small farm operators on

small acreages of land to a system of relatively fewer large scale growers producing the majority of food on large acreage farms (Lyson 2004). Not only has the size of the farm changed but also the farming methods have changed as well. Conventional agriculture practices hinge upon three major agriculture revolutions in the United States: mechanical, chemical and biotechnological (Lyson 2004). These three revolutions helped shift production away from the family farm to an agriculture business industry pressured by powerful economic and social processes.

In the urban setting, farming and gardening in the early 20th century took the form of educational school gardens, and vacant lot gardens for economic relief as well as civic improvements (Lawson 2005). As cities grew and industrialized, urban gardens provided a small solution for growing problems like unattractive parcels of land created by land speculation and abandonment (Lawson 2005). Most of these programs were philanthropic in nature until the federal government began promoting gardening programs during World War I, II, and the Depression (Lawson 2005). Programs like the Liberty Garden program, US School Garden Army, and the Victory Garden campaign were designed to encourage citizens to help supplement the nation's food supply (Lawson 2005; Hayden-Smith 2006; Reynolds 2010). After these crises passed, these plots were removed to make way for lawns as suburbanization took hold of urban growth patterns creating trends toward large lawns (Lawson 2005; Hayden-Smith 2006).

Back on the rural farm, the chemical revolution swung into action after WWII chemical plants were converted to agrichemical factories (Lyson 2004). According to Lyson (2004), there was a dramatic increase in the use of synthetic chemicals between 1945 and 1980 in order to boost crop production. The use of chemicals in synthetic fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides increased crop yields so much that "during the period of 1950-1980, 175 million acres were taken out of production and crop yields still increased by 75.4 percent" (Lyson 2004, p.20).

In many cities, during the 1970s and 80s, a growing concern about environmental degradation, and rising food prices was followed by the creation of community controlled gardens promoted by

women's, civil rights, and environmental interest groups (Lawson 2005). Many of the programs were assisted by government funding through federal programs like the Urban Garden Program and Master Gardening (Lawson 2005; Reynolds 2010). Later, during the 1980s though, many of these programs lost their funding as the government began to shrink its support for social programs (Lawson 2005). Neoliberal rollbacks during this time were spurred by the Thatcher and Reagan power structure that sought to liberate the market and dismantle the social programs (Peck and Tickell 2007). In a parallel movement to community gardening, alternative agriculture was gaining a foothold among environmental activists (Allen 1999). This movement pursued environmentally friendly production practices and direct marketing in nearby cities through CSAs and farmers markets (Allen 1999; Reynolds 2010).

While the alternative movement surged, the third mainstream agricultural revolution was sweeping the nation. The biotechnical revolution, beginning in the 1980s, ushered in genetic engineering and recombinant DNA technology to increase productivity even more in both plant and animal agriculture (Lyson 2004). A genetically engineered food is a "plant or meat product that has had its DNA artificially altered in a laboratory by genes from another plant, animal, virus or bacteria in order to produce foreign compounds in that food" (Home 2012). Economic changes were occurring during this time as well, which affected all aspects of food production from growing in the field, to processing in the plant and purchasing in the store. Mergers and acquisitions began to shape the agrifood system from the large national companies into a system of global, multinational corporations that still dominant today and produce the cheap standardized goods we have become accustomed to (Lyson 2004).

According to Lawson (2005), US cities today have four main gardening programs including neighborhood, entrepreneurial, school and food security. Throughout the US, farmers markets, community gardens, community-supported agriculture (CSAs), public municipalities, private corporations and public health organizations, are working to connect consumers with growers, to support small farmers, and to ensure the availability of nutritious food through the local food system (Bailkey and Nasr

2000; Brown and Carter 2003; Lyson 2004; DeLind and Bingen 2008). More and more “health professionals, urban planners, environmental activists, community organizers, and policy makers are recognizing the value of urban agriculture for economic development, food security, and preservation of green space”(Brown 2002, p.20).

In very recent news, GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms) have received plenty of media attention. California’s Right to Know Campaign has initiated Proposition 37, a ballot measure that will require clear labels letting consumer know if the foods they buy are genetically modified. GMOs are being “linked to environmental problems including biodiversity loss, increase in pesticide use, emergence of super weeds and contamination of nearby non-GMO crops” (Home 2012). According to the California Campaign finance website that keeps track of the donors for upcoming propositions, the top five donors in opposition to the labeling are: Monsanto, Dupont, PepsiCo, BASF Plant Science, and Bayer Cropscience (California 2012). These giant agribusinesses fear that labels will scare customers away from their product and that the rest of the country will follow California’s lead and the movement will spread across the nation. This example of the biotechnical revolution speaks to the neoliberal powers that are shaping the US agricultural system today. These giant agrifood companies have the power to influence elections and thereby shape their own incomes. In my research, the power of the agribusiness reach will be explored through the perspective of the urban farmer and how they see their work contesting this neoliberalized industry.

2.3 Urban political ecology understandings of nature-society interactions

Urban political ecology is an important framework for understanding social processes, material metabolisms, and the spatial patterns that form the city’s landscape (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003). Not only do these broader processes and patterns play out across the urban terrain but they also consume and produce a new nature. Cities do not have to be labeled as unnatural human-made developments; rather the city may be viewed as a complex mixture of social and environmental conditions

(Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003). The positioning of political ecology in the city reflects the dominant demographic trend around the world toward urbanization with over half the world's population now residing in cities (Keil 2003). Cities are no longer compact, but rather sprawl out from their centers in an ever-enlarging circle of development. Clark (1998), reports that the last decade of the twentieth century marked the spatial shift of human settlement with the location of the world's people now more urban than rural (Clark 1998). According to Clark (1998), the trend toward city dwelling is made possible through the work of capitalism. Because of the concentrations of production and consumption in city spaces, linkages and control over that capital can be applied (Clark 1998). However, the uneven nature of capitalism produces unequal allocation of resources among those suffering from unjust distributions of resources, and these populations can expect that any practice of redistribution will not be in their favor (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003). Keil describes this unevenness as the complex processes in the urban environment that “privilege some forms of class and race defined settlement over others” (Keil 2005, p.641).

Keil traces urban political ecology back to its roots in social theory and “the intellectual traditions of fundamental social critique: eco-Marxism, eco-feminism, and eco-anarchism” (Keil 2003, p.724). These critiques speak to the work and perspective of the urban farmer because of their own new nature that is produced and consumed on the urban landscape. McClintock (2010) expands upon this eco-Marxism thread and explores more completely the theory of metabolic rift, which espouses that capitalism and urbanization, have led to alienation of humans from nature. A theory of metabolic rift, he asserts, is helpful for analyzing the agrifood system and can shed light on urban agriculture's emergence. This rift, he explains, between humans and nature can be explored at multiple scales to understand separation from natural cycles, rebuilding public spaces, and at an individual level putting the consumer in touch with their food (McClintock 2010). In order to bridge these rifts, urban agriculture in North America have adopted ideals of agricultural sustainability using ecological methods that attempt to “close the

nutrient cycle” left open in conventional agriculture (McClintock 2010, p.196). Urban agriculture is a counter-movement that he calls a “wresting away of food production and consumption from the market via the valorization of unquantifiable socio-cultural values and relations traditionally inherent in food”(McClintock 2010, p.193). His individual rift theorization describes the alienation of humans from the natural world. He believes this rift may be bridged through the active metabolism of nature through physical labor (McClintock 2010). The labor he speaks of, which includes all the growing processes of farming and preparing food reengages individuals with nature and allows the individual to manipulate and utilize nature to develop a product through urban agriculture (McClintock 2010). McClintock (2010), in a call for a more differentiated view of urban agriculture in the US, wonders if it is appropriate to generalize about why people farm in the city. To expand upon his discussion, I insert the articulations of the urban farmers in Atlanta and investigate their perspective concerning the city and the farm and attempt to understand their knowledge about their place in the urban political ecology continuum. By describing and analyzing their perspective, valuable data may be added to the urban political ecology literature, building upon McClintock’s rich theoretical and historical evaluation of urban agriculture. His step toward understanding urban agriculture involved first recognizing the urban environment in which it is situated and this literature review investigates that environment as well.

Brownlow, in his work in Philadelphia, argues that urban political ecology offers a needed framework for understanding how social and environmental systems intersect to shape places across space and time (Brownlow 2006). He uses a case study of two parks in Philadelphia to investigate social and political issues involved in the changing uses of public parks. Using narratives and oral histories provided by residents living near these parks, he was able to draw attention to the political significance attached to events occurring at the parks (Brownlow 2006). These narratives told the story of the changing ecology in the parks from well-kept public retreat and playground to weed ecology. This weed ecology indicates a social disorder and lack of control that triggers fear and avoidance among local residents

(Brownlow 2006). Broader social processes including racial segregation, deindustrialization, and economic downturn, led to the parks decline and devaluation and the resulting suspicion and crime. By using urban political ecology as a framework, Brownlow is able to argue that the relationships between power, control, and access linked to the political ecology on this urban site are shaped by the unique history of social controls in a location (Brownlow 2006). The historical context of a place is important for evaluating the current trajectory of policies and laws that influence land use decisions. Brownlow's work reveals the value of incorporating these histories into the current discussion.

Another study, conducted in Oakland, California, uses historical data to reveal the food access issues and food justice initiatives of a previously industrialized area. Using urban political ecology, McClintock (2011) evaluates the food justice movements' emancipatory potential in a specific location, Oakland, California. He traces and analyzes the historical, structural, and geographical roots of the particular problem, lack of healthy food, in this specific place in order to understand the way resistance is being formed through food justice efforts (McClintock 2011). By drawing upon planning, demographic and economic data and grey literature, he argues that a combination of several structural and developmental processes helped create the uneven terrain of the city that restricts access to healthy food for certain residents (McClintock 2011, p. 93). He investigates the cycles of capital accumulation and devaluation from the turn of the 20th century through the neoliberal era, which have created the city's food deserts and uses the phrase "demarcated devaluation" to describe the devaluation of certain types of capital based upon the poverty and affluence found in the study area (McClintock 2011, p.95). Through highlighting the structural forces and capital devaluation of this landscape, he gives understanding to the growing food justice movement evolving there (e.g., farms, farmers markets). He argues that the struggles with capital's cycles on the urban environment creates experiences of socioeconomic upheavals that are "intertwined with the struggle for a more equitable environment" (McClintock 2011, p.95). These upheavals that manifest as "migration, poverty, hunger, crime, and declining public health" play

out on the urban landscape creating places of uneven terrain (McClintock 2011, p.95). In his work, he finds that the different spatial and temporal scales of structural forces have created the unique history of demarcated devaluation in this study area. He asserts that a more thorough understanding of any food justice movement requires an understanding of these structural forces and the capital devaluation that lead to food movement initiatives. He calls for more layers of this uneven food map in Oakland to be explored through new geographies, exploration of food policies at multiple scales, as well as farm subsidies, food stamps, and free lunch. He also suggest that these areas of exploration are needed as well: “the politics of city contracts and bidding, development and redevelopment programs, planning and zoning; how current economic and demographic shifts in the Oakland flatlands may both fuel and fight the advances of food justice activists” (McClintock 2011, p.113). In my work, I apply McClintock’s call for new geographies by using the urban political ecology literature to frame my work in Atlanta, Georgia. I also investigate the structural forces and the flow of capital through the lens of neoliberalism in my case study site by taking into account the uniquely specific historical, racial, and geographical processes at work on the urban farm situated in a different part of the US. In addition, the articulations of the local farmer in Atlanta are given a platform to contribute to this discussion surrounding the processes at work on the urban farm. By combining the urban political ecology literature with the understandings of the contestations and hybrid understandings of the neoliberal city and farm, through the sites’ unique history as well as through the farmers’ voice, this project contributes to the understanding of urban agriculture in the neoliberal city.

The political in urban political ecology is mostly concerned with making sense of “distributional and systemic inequities in the socioeconomic order that underlies the societal relationships with nature both worldwide (North/South) and locally (environmental justice) class-oriented inequalities and systemic environmental injustices” (Keil 2003, p. 726). Civil society, new urban regimes, governances, and social policy actors are all a part of the political component of urban political ecology (Keil 2003). Deci-

sions to transform the natural environment are often produced by political and economic system actors. Robbins and Sharp, in their work on the moral economy of the American lawn explore land management decisions and assert that these decisions are constrained by “parameters of choice” involving broader “social, political and ecological actors and processes” into the local-level reality (Robbins and Sharp 2003, p.427). This study investigates the use of lawn chemicals by affluent Americans even though these users are aware of the chemicals’ deleterious environmental impacts (2003). By analyzing the consumption patterns and trends of lawn chemical use and the lawn care industries strong arm tactics, as well as class-based household and neighborhood configurations, the researchers are able to problematize the practices of urban land use and evaluate the divisions between differing uses of landscapes (2003). The study included a survey and archival research on the lawn care industry as well as phone interviews and in depth interviews. His findings reveal that a city is a place of multiple meanings; where private ownership and nature consumption may take hold, but also a place where values favoring community, family, and the environment are supported (Robbins and Sharp 2003). Heynen (2006) has researched the production of uneven urban environments in America as the topic relates to urban landscapes such as forests, parks, and suburban subdivisions. He argues that as a critical social theory, urban political ecology has led to increased awareness that humans and nature are not separate but rather, their processes affect both quality of life and the urban form (Heynen 2006). Urban political ecology provides a way to understand metabolizing nature and the power relations that produce uneven urban environments.

The ecology of the urban environment is obviously different from a rural or natural environment but should not be viewed as a place without its own unique ecologies and interactions. The urban landscape is not simply a natural or unnatural setting but rather a special case involving “interwoven knots of social process, material metabolism and spatial form” (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003 , p.906). Decisions to transform the natural environment are often produced by political and economic systems.

Heynen, Perkins, and Roys' work on the uneven distribution of urban forests in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, was also conducted using the lens of urban political ecology. The study investigated how cities can be understood as centers for producing and consuming the environment as a commodity (Heynen et al. 2006). They found through statistical analyses that residential canopy cover is unevenly distributed based on income and racial factors. Using qualitative data from in-depth interviews, they also found that minority communities differed from other communities in their ability to maintain urban forests (Heynen et al. 2006). The uneven forest development resulting from the conditions of increasing privatization also contributes to the production of urban-forest variability and point to the broader political economic processes that contribute to these conditions. These researchers revealed that private ownership contributed to the dispersion and maintenance of the urban forest and private ownership is a byproduct of many sociospatial factors that can be understood through an urban political ecology focus.

Together the three components of urban political ecology shape the resources, energy and wastes that are used, distributed, and also shaped by broader processes of institutions to determine the impact of the city on the environment (Keil 2003). Urban political ecology "intertwines the material and symbolic, the natural and the cultural, the pristine and urban, so that they are realized as inseparable realities in the world we inhabit" (Keil citing Fischer and Hajer 1999, p.728; Keil 2003). Even in the age of information and digitalization, nature continues to be relevant to society and the relationships that form are a part of the cycles of capital, resources and people (Keil 2003).

Because urban political ecology analysis pays particular attention to the relationships between power and control on a particular geographical site through examination of history, it is an insightful research tool to discuss the particular histories and processes that brought the Wheat Street Garden to its present day site. Urban political ecology can be used to reveal how these particular local land managers are driven by contextual forces while living within a broader political economy. The exploration of neoliberal governance in the city as well as neoliberal agriculture may help to shed light on the forces

driving the human-environment relations on an urban farm situated in a neighborhood with a legacy of race-based social movements, in the southeastern United States. Political and ecological actions at the local scale are often manifested as dissensions or contestations and provide an alternative vision as well as a challenge to the forces of neoliberalization (Allen 1999; Leitner et al. 2007). In the final section of the literature review, I will explore these contestations more thoroughly.

2.4 Possibilities for contestation

Bottom-up contestations of the neoliberal agenda entail alternative social imaginaries (ideals, norms, discourses, ethics) and practices that are rooted in a particular place and time (Leitner et al. 2007). Contestations may be a direct reaction to a neoliberal policy that undermines the contesters' livelihood or a reaction to an oppression or injustice dealing with environmental degradation, violations of human rights or insecure livelihoods (Leitner et al. 2007). Allen describes the possibilities within an alternative local food system as those that create spaces for new opportunities to invent new farm methods and include the community (Allen 2010). McClintock describes this as an ecological metabolic rift caused by the expansion of capitalism through the agrifood system (McClintock 2010). This research seeks to uncover the degree to which this ecological rift can be contested by an urban farmer by highlighting his or her perspective and practices on a farm that supports sustainable growing.

Conventional farming systems are often considered linear, centralized and globalised (Jones et al. 2011). In this linear approach, there is an assumption that there is an unending supply of natural resources and that the earth has the immense potential to absorb the waste of these farm practices. The result of the conventional farm system is resource shortages and solid waste, climate change and air pollution problems (Jones et al. 2011).

The individual rift may be bridged through contesting the neoliberal project of industrialized food on an urban farm. McClintock (2010) links guerrilla gardening, backyard gardening, and community gardening to efforts to lessen the impact of individual rifts. The perspective as well as the practice of

urban farming is important to understanding the degree to which urban farming contests neoliberalism. Practices sometimes associated with the contestations are alternative knowledge production, social practices, and livelihood choices (Leitner et al. 2007). The articulated contestations can take different paths including: a resistance to neoliberal corporate and institutional power through a resignification of space or individually through a reconnection to nature. This reconnection or de-alienation of the way basic needs are met is the bridge across the rift that McClintock (2010) describes in his research. I expand upon his Marxian perspective of metabolic rift and explore more thoroughly the perspective of the farmer in Atlanta that is actively metabolizing nature through his or her farming practices. I argue that the urban farmer's work and the location of the farm can be a contestation to neoliberalism. McClintock (2010) calls this 'lifestyle politics' that is driving the awareness or consciousness of the farmer and this idea will be explored more thoroughly through documenting the farmers' perspectives in this research. Within urban agriculture, fostering alternative economic and social practices may be viewed as contestations in some instances but may also have hints of neoliberal compromise mixed in to practice and perspective.

Because contestations are mobilized within the alternative livelihood of urban agriculture practices that continue to operate alongside and within the interstices of neoliberalism, a new hybrid form of neoliberal practice may be forming. The hybrid or mixed neoliberal articulations of urban farming may encompass the philosophies of the farmer as they relate to relationships with city government, business models, agriculture models, and community interactions.

The effects of contestations on neoliberalism may be difficult to visualize and may not challenge neoliberalism directly (Leitner et al. 2007) but the process of articulation can be examined as it plays out on the ground. In the case of urban farms, these articulations can be voiced through media outlets and interviews with urban farmers and local food supporters.

Table 1 Neoliberalization of the food system

Food system changes in last 30 years	Consequences of the changes
Fossil fuel dependency	Greenhouse gas emissions, destruction of forests, and carbon sinks
High levels of inputs (synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, etc)	Higher production cost and dependence on inputs
Industrialized and mechanized farming methods	Monoculture or specialized, non- diversified crops requiring unsustainable amounts of irrigation and inputs
Increased food freight transport	Food loses quality in transport, fossil fuel usage goes up
Increased concentration of supermarket control	Loss of small shops, markets, and wholesalers Table source: (Jones and Pimbert 2011, p.43)

3 RESEARCH QUESTION

Broadly, this research is concerned with understanding urban agriculture in the context of the neoliberal city. This urban agriculture, which localizes food production and promotes direct producer and consumer interaction, is a move away from the corporate agribusiness model. The places on which the urban farm is produced have histories of their own that can be explored for evidence of neoliberal shaping and retooling. In this thesis, I explore how the city and the farm can be understood through the complex articulations of farmers and through the account of the specific historical and geographical context of the farm. Through the investigation of the Wheat Street Garden site, an urban farm operated by Truly Living Well center for Natural Urban Agriculture, farmers' voices and site history can inform the discussion surrounding an urban farm's place in the city.

In this thesis, I argue that urban farmers are contesting as well as compromising to neoliberal ideology through their work. These contestations and compromises are tied to their personal and collective ecological practices, alternative knowledge production, business practices and partnerships, and the actual geography of the farm. These contestations seem to resist neoliberal structuring of big agribusinesses and the uneven cityscape shaped by racial segregation and political processes. Farmers' articulations also reveal a compromise to these forces as well. This hybridized version of engagement with the neoliberal project is also revealed. Through the interviews, participant observation and archival data the degree and type of articulation are examined.

In the following sections, I present the case of the Wheat Street farm, an urban farm site embedded in a specific and significant history in Atlanta. Through the lens of urban political ecology, the site, its farmers, and the city can come into sharper focus.

4 METHODOLOGY

In this research, I utilize qualitative analysis of a case study, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and archival research. Before elaborating on my methods and data collection, I include an in-depth description and history of the Wheat Street Garden site operated by Truly Living Well center for Natural Urban Agriculture.

4.1 Case Study Wheat Street Garden, Atlanta, GA

The case study method was used in this research to give consideration to the development of a property over a period of time in order to give contextual credence to the subsequent argument pertaining to neoliberal contestations through urban agriculture. The particular case of the Wheat Street Garden was chosen because of its close proximity to downtown, thereby ensuring an urban perspective. The particular history associated with this neighborhood of Atlanta was also considered an asset to the research because of the unique African American perspective this case may add to the growing body of scholarship in the field. The research questions seek to understand the neoliberal city through the perspective of an urban farmer and this site, with its uneven landscape of development, seemed a particularly potent setting to conduct my research. The case study as described by Yin, excels at helping us understand a complex issue and can add strength to what is already known about a topic (Yin 2003). To further understandings of the complex articulations of the urban farmer in the neoliberal city, history and contextual data was collected and is reported in the following pages.

As previously mentioned in the introduction, my first encounter with Truly Living Well (TLW) was in 2009 when I participated in the urban farm bicycle tour hosted by Georgia Organics. After learning of the expansion of TLW to the site on the corner of Old Wheat Street and Hilliard Street in the Old Fourth Ward of Atlanta (see Figure 1 at the end of this section), I attended a presentation given by Rashid Nuri, founder of TLW, at Georgia State University. The presentation was sponsored by the Biennial Confer-

ence of the Southern American Studies Association (SASA,) and called Peoples, Publics, & Places of the South. Rashid described his business and philosophy by using powerful language to describe his work “...we’re creating the revolution against large corporations by creating spaces of autonomy.” In addition, when describing his newest acquisition, Wheat Street Garden, his language was forceful and assertive when he said that TLW had “seized the land on Wheat Street” and “taking power can be expressed by taking land.” This was also the first instance that I heard him speak of the three legs (or principles) of his farm: 1. Quality food; 2. Agricultural education through horticultural literacy and natural practice (i.e. all answers can be found in nature); and 3. Community development (Nuri 2011). After a brief encounter with Mr. Nuri at this conference, we began our relationship that led to my involvement in the Wheat Street garden volunteer program and his role as my key informant within the organization. According to the Truly Living Well website, Rashid Nuri, a Harvard-educated agriculture specialist, operates this new farm as well as other plots around the city. The community supported agriculture (CSA) portion of the farm allows a group of individuals or an institution to support the farm by paying in advance for a share of the farm produce (Well 2010). The farm has grown approximately 10,000 pounds of food every year on their small donated plots since the company’s start in 2006 and sells to local markets and restaurants (Well 2010). Not only does the company pride itself on the organically grown fruits and vegetables they produce, but also on the vision they have to “use quality local food production as a platform to provide a range of educational and entertainment activities” (Well 2010) through camps, tours, speaking engagements and other endeavors. According to the website, they recognize three priority needs in our cities and among our food systems:

1. *A return to natural and sustainable production methods that deliver higher quality food enhance the environment and improve human health.*

2. *A return of food as a central focus in family and community life. For most of human history, food was produced within walking distance of where it was consumed, resulting in a direct connection between man, land and his food.*
3. *Development of infrastructure to support the growth of local food production and distribution (Well 2010).*

Through \$120,000 of funding grants from the Atlanta Falcons Youth Foundation (Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation) and the Environmental Protection Agency, Truly Living Well began construction of raised garden beds on the four acre site (Crudele 2010; Hesseltine 2010). The site was previously the location of a 280-unit housing development owned and operated by the historic Wheat Street Baptist Church and their charitable foundation, one of the nation's oldest African American churches (Hesseltine 2010). According to the foundation president, the foundation's purpose is to provide housing and social services for residents and the farm is a good use of the site that fits with the foundation's goals (Hesseltine 2010). Wheat Street garden is more than just the showpiece training center garden of the farming enterprise known as Truly Living Well. This particular site has a significant history as well. Situated between Hilliard and Jackson Street, it is located one block away from Wheat Street Baptist, the site owner, on Auburn Avenue. During the early 20th century, Auburn Avenue became an important and well known commercial district serving and providing business opportunities for Atlanta's growing African American middle class (Pomerantz 1996; Inwood 2007). Auburn Avenue became known as the Sweet Auburn district because of the successful black business and entertainment venues developing in the area as well as the prominent churches that were previously established there (Pomerantz 1996; Inwood 2007). The reason these venues located here was due to the Jim Crow rule, segregation, and racial violence directed toward the African American community during this time (Pomerantz 1996). These rules and practices confined the demographic to certain areas of Atlanta; mainly the downtown area stretching from Atlanta University on the Westside to the Old Fourth Ward on the eastside

(Pomerantz 1996). According to the church website, the church was founded in 1869, and has served as an “important spiritual and social institution for the Sweet Auburn community since its inception”(Church 2011). Located in The Martin Luther King Jr. Historic district, and on Auburn Avenue, the site has given the church a particularly significant history.

The original church building was located at the corner of Auburn Avenue and Fort Street (English 1967) which is just two blocks west of the current location; the corner of Auburn Avenue and William H. Borders Drive. This original location was established just outside of the central business district of Atlanta and was home to a large African American slum in what English called “a discouraging and pathetic church situation” due to “the Great Depression and bank failures” (English 1967, p. 30). The current building on Auburn Avenue (which was previously called Wheat Street), was constructed in August 1921, replacing the original church structure destroyed by the Atlanta fire of 1917 (English 1967; Church 2011). In 1937, Reverend William H. Borders became the fifth pastor during a time of post-Depression recovery and it was under his leadership that the church experienced “the greatest growth in membership, finances, buildings, evangelism, community service and leadership in the civil rights movement” (Church 2011). During the tough economic years, Borders began ministries to help create jobs for his parishioners and the community (English 1967).

During the 1940’s and 50’s, Borders navigated the uneasy landscape of racial segregation and violence in Atlanta and neighboring cities through nurturing important friendships with city leaders and applying peacekeeping tactics in his church and the community. On more than one occasion, Reverend Borders stepped into the middle of a racially tense situation to diffuse the hostility. According to English (1967), one incident involved a young black soldier who refused to leave by the back door of the trolley (as required by segregation law) and was challenged by the motorman and his pistol. Borders happened to be leaving the church at that time and noticed a quiet but angry gathering of local black residents forming around the trolley car. He entered the car, instructed the driver to continue up the street to the

next stop to let the man off so that the driver wouldn't be assaulted by the mob (English 1967, p.44-47). In 1945, after the Monroe lynching of four African Americans, he gathered support to exert 'moral pressure' on authorities to find the perpetrators and raised money as well as took care of the burial arrangements for the distraught families (English 1967, p.64). His acts of resistance became more pronounced but remained peaceful throughout these years, including: leading a group of 200 African American Baptist ministers out to Monroe for prayer and protest, establishing long-standing relationships with city hall officials and mayors in Atlanta, and taking part in a sit in on a segregated bus after notifying the mayor of his intention (English 1967). One rather bold event in Borders' life was the purchase of a 287-acre rural farm designated for urban boys to give them a place to engage in outdoor activities. This move surprised his parishioners and the rural neighbors of the church farm as well. What started as a friendly acquaintance turned hateful when the neighbors formed a coalition to run the black church out of the area (English 1967). Borders sold this land in 1961 and purchased the property across the street from the church on Auburn Avenue with the intention of building a supermarket for his community (English 1967). During this time, urban renewal projects were gaining ground in Atlanta as well.

Due to the combination of slum removal for urban renewal and highway construction, the supply of black housing was diminished, almost 67,000 people were displaced from 1956 to 1966 (Pomerantz 1996). In order to create the great interchange for the new interstates, 50 acres were selected by the developers that were the home to nearly 5,000 poor black renter families (English 1967). Borders was especially moved by the hardship this progress was bringing to African American families and said "the highways were needed but were not good enough to stomp the life out of these underprivileged people who did not have the power to fight back" (English 1967, p. 112). Driven to action he began researching the Atlanta Housing Authorities goals and found they had done the initial survey of 22.5 acres across the street on Old Wheat Street as another site for slum clearance (English 1967). He did not want to see more disenfranchised families driven from their homes and become homeless so he called the FHA to

ask for their assistance in starting the country's first church owned public housing (English 1967). He was approved through the FHA, a loan from the Atlanta Life Insurance Company was secured, and he became the successful bidder for the newly surveyed property bounded by Cain, Jackson, Old Wheat and Fort Streets at a cost of \$450,000 (English 1967; Church 2011). The 119 displaced slum dwellers were rehoused, and by 1969 the Wheat Street Gardens public housing project was completed (English 1967). The fact that this was African American sponsored housing and not just a federally funded project resonated with the residents and the church members already entrenched in the civil rights movement.

In the 1960s African Americans advanced their political power through the civil rights movement to overcome Jim Crow rule in order to desegregate schools, restaurants and other public facilities (Kruse 2005). Through zoning practices of the early 20th century, segregation of neighborhoods was carried out by creating commercial and industrial buffers between white and black neighborhood, using highways and roads as boundaries for neighborhoods (Bayor 1996). When some of these barriers fell or were overcome African American families moved to the west and southwest side of Atlanta while white families began to move to the suburbs (Kruse 2005). The city was divided racially with the city retaining a majority black population by 1970 (Kruse 2005).

Also during the early 1960s, the civil rights movement shifted its center of power to the westside of Atlanta, to the University Center where several African American colleges are located (Myrick-Harris and Harris 2005). The new generation of young activists staged sit ins and designed strategies to further their movement against segregation (Myrick-Harris and Harris 2005). Political power for African Americans continued to grow in Atlanta, despite the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. during this decade. The Auburn Avenue corridor continued to be shaped by the movement when King's widow, Coretta Scott King, established the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in 1968 (Myrick-Harris and Harris 2005). The political landscape for African Americans in the late 1960s and early 1970s

had several ups and downs (Myrick-Harris and Harris 2005). Morale among African Americans was boosted with the election of Maynard Jackson as Vice Mayor of Atlanta in 1969 and then Mayor in 1973, the first African American mayor in the deep south, but the election of Lester Maddox as Governor of Georgia highlighted the work by white supremacists to keep segregation (Myrick-Harris and Harris 2005). Four years later, however, new Governor Jimmy Carter declared the time for racial discrimination was over (Myrick-Harris and Harris 2005). In 1972, another black leader was elected; SCLC leader Andrew Young became the first African American Congressman from Georgia since Reconstruction (Pomerantz 1996). The image of Atlanta during this time was one of inter-racial cooperation thanks in part to the effort of ministers like William H. Borders at Wheat Street Baptist. Through his faith and his work, he helped shape the Auburn Avenue corridor and built the housing called Wheat Street Garden (English 1967).

In 1976, the Sweet Auburn Historic District was given a Federal designation and is loosely bound by Courtland Street on the west side and the interstate on the east (Service 2012). Later, in 1992, the area was called one of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places (Service 2012) because of the trend of deteriorating businesses and black migration out of the area. The Martin Luther King Jr. Preservation District currently extends beyond the actual historic site up to Irwin Avenue in the North, Chamberlain Street on the South, Courtland on West and Randolph on the East (Service 2012) and includes the Sweet Auburn neighborhood. The original smaller MLK, Jr. historic district was expanded and aimed to preserve Dr. King's association with various religious, social and business organizations that were located along Auburn Avenue (Galloway 1987). The Martin Luther King District maintains the fabric of the district and ensures that new development is compatible with the existing architectural and spatial character¹.

¹ The Atlanta Urban Design Commission (AUDC) created by the City of Atlanta in 1975, reviews and comments on any projects within this district that requires rezoning.

“Located in the heart of the Sweet Auburn- Martin Luther King, Jr. Historic Site and Preservation District, the Wheat Street Baptist Church pioneered socioeconomic development in Atlanta’s inner-city through the development of commercial and residential real estate, including Wheat Street Towers and Wheat Street Gardens” (Enterprise et al. 2010, p.14). The Wheat Street Charitable Foundation, an outreach ministry (as well as economic development arm) under the umbrella of Wheat Street Baptist Church, owns the property (Hesseltine 2010) .

The migration of black residents to the west side of Atlanta and the building of Interstate 75/85 through the heart of Auburn Avenue caused the avenue to deteriorate physically. Socially and politically, support for the area was declining as well. According to the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, “application of federal funds has been spotty, and hardly any of it has fallen into the commercial midsection of Auburn Avenue, the area hardest hit by the generation-long downturn - and its heart”(Galloway 1987). In this particular article written in the late 1980s, the condition of Auburn Avenue was described as ‘ironic’ because of its history of saving black America but missing its chance to save itself after the civil rights movement quieted down. But, the article claims “Sweet Auburn finally appears to be on the legitimate threshold of a new era, ushered in by unusually strong political winds, the construction of one downtown Atlanta project and the collapse of another” (Galloway 1987). Some of the political players of that time, like future mayor Bill Campbell (then council member) and county commissioner Michael Lomax, each had a vision for the district, but were “constrained by personal goals, private interest financing, and lack of any federal funding for projects to help revitalize the area” (Galloway 1987). Small business owners and spiritual leaders who were trying to reclaim Auburn Avenue as a significant space as well, also exasperate the push and pull of interests along Auburn Avenue (Galloway 1987). As described in the article, the fact that there are so many powerful political centers located on the street often paralyzes development because of the lack of agreement among the different entities (Galloway 1987). The

spaces of this neighborhood, including Wheat Street Garden Homes are caught in the neoliberal developments of the time.

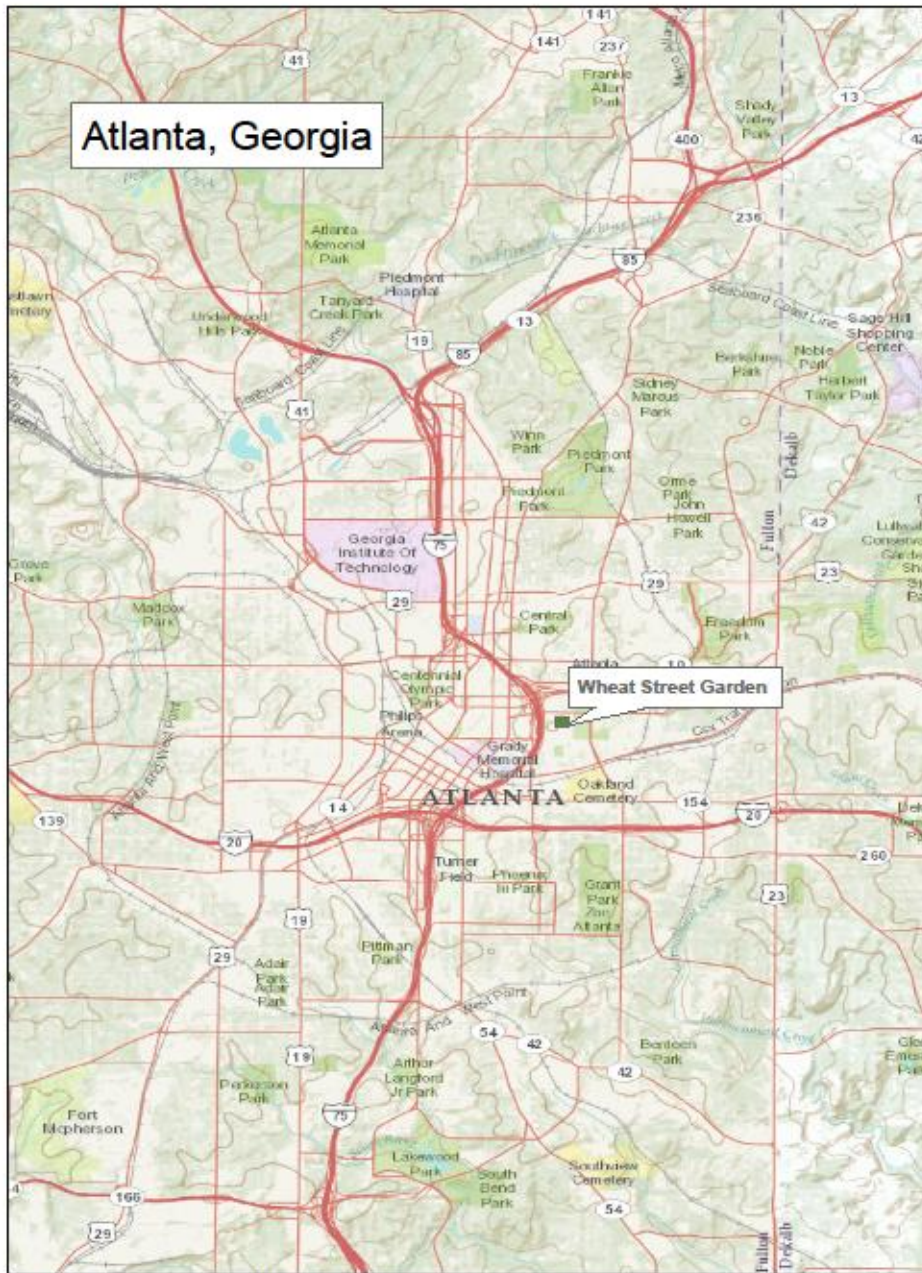
According to an interview with a key church member, in 2008 there was an initiative made by the Wheat Street Baptist Charitable Foundation to renovate the Garden apartments, using tax credit dollars (L.L., 2011). In order to do the renovations, though, the apartments needed to be vacated according to a government mandate (L.L., 2011). After the apartments were vacated, markets started changing (economic downturn) before the tax credit award could take place and the foundation did not have enough funds to do the renovation and bring the residents back (See Figure 2 end of this section). Over the next couple of years with the apartments being unoccupied, homeless individuals moved into the apartments and caused fires and damage, and the apartments had to be demolished (L.L., 2011). Around the same time, the Foundation initiated the process to get a master plan to renovate the full Wheat Street Baptist campus including the Wheat Street Towers, the plazas, and the garden apartments (L.L.,2011). According to the interviewee at the church, the new plan dovetails with a larger plan for the Old Fourth Ward and is a mixed-use plan involving retail and housing as well as the streetcar. When asked what will happen to the farm on the site he responded, "... we have to execute the mission of the board, which is not agriculture. It is housing. We are still a community-focused organization but we have to opportunistic at the same time. What we have, our agreement is one that allows flexibility. But if you ask if I think 15 years from now if the urban garden will be in that location I will say no. I don't think so. Does that mean it could be on another piece of property that the charitable foundation owns? Could be. We like Rashid and like what he's doing" (L.L.,2012). The church's goals are clear- in keeping with the mission of Borders and the church; they would like to provide housing for the community (Hesseltine 2010). The church and the pastor are supportive of the farm but the mission for housing and economic development is clear.

According to the Central Atlanta Progress, Inc. (CAP), a private nonprofit community development organization that works with businesses and institutions to strengthen the economic vitality of downtown Atlanta, the Wheat Street site is listed as an underutilized parcel of land (Progress 2011).² Recently, Georgia State University purchased a small portion of the Wheat Street Garden apartment site to be used for intramural fields within walking distance of its student housing (Sams 2012). In a June 2012 article on their website, CAP highlighted their efforts to attract various developers to the site. “Central Atlanta Progress has been talking to several developers with interest in various sites along the streetcar route that could be turned into new mixed-use, retail or residential projects, including student housing developer Campus Crest Communities and Russell New Urban Development LLC, said CAP’s Jennifer Ball. Property owners like the church don’t have the capital or the expertise to redevelop their sites” (Progress 2011; Sams 2012). A quick search on the internet revealed a preliminary master plan that has been made for the property³ which includes mixed income housing for the site (Progress and District 2012).

Tracing the history of the site and its uses through the broad urban political ecology lens, while recording and describing the archival data and gray literature from the early 20th century through the neoliberal era, helps link the emergent urban form an urban farm, to the previous uses of the site. By utilizing biographies, newspaper articles, websites, and interviews to tell the story of the Wheat Street site, I have set the stage to further the argument that a combination of neoliberal projects and racial histories within city planning and residential development as well as civil rights activism have led to the current contestation of urban farming that is taking place on the property (See Figure 3 Wheat Street Garden)@.

² See Appendix A Map of Redevelopment Opportunities along the Atlanta Streetcar created by Central Atlanta Progress Downtown Improvement Plan <http://www.atlantadowntown.com/initiatives/atlanta-streetcar>

³ See Appendix B Plan view Wheat Street Garden Site Atlanta Streetcar Development and Investment Guide



Sources: Esri, DeLorme, NAVTEQ, TomTom, Intermap, AND, USGS, NRCAN, and the GIS User Community

Figure 1 Wheat Street Garden Reference Map



Figure 2 Vacated Wheat Street Garden Apartments looking toward downtown Atlanta, GA
Photo credit: James Terminus



Figure 3 Wheat Street Garden looking toward downtown Atlanta

4.2 Archival, Participant Observation, and Interviews

The other qualitative methods I used in my research were archival, participant observation, and interviews. These three methods lend themselves to case study research in a supportive and simultaneously convergent arrangement. Because multiple sources were used to collect data, the study was strengthened as well.

One method of data collection that informed the case study considerably and helped to triangulate the data was using archival data. According to Karl Raitz, in his work about geographic methods of research, a rich vocabulary built from maps, recognition of built-environment forms, awareness of historical sequencing, and appreciation of technologies, will help the researcher understand what he or she sees during field work (Raitz 2001). This data was collected through online searches, historical biographies, and newspaper articles, and informs the historical geography as well as the unique character of the urban farm. The archival data was divided into two broad categories; historical information about the site and characterization of urban farming and the farmer.

The data concerning the history of the Wheat Street site was collected through online searches that included the Wheat Street Baptist church history as well as Sweet Auburn neighborhood history. The bibliography of William H. Borders was a key piece of this data and gave considerable background information for the site. This information was extremely valuable for shaping my understandings of the place. Two sources, Central Atlanta Progress website and the Enterprise Community report informed the data pertaining to ongoing and upcoming projects in the historic district. And a search of the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* archives also yielded articles pertaining to the more recent history of the site, 1980 through current time.

To help in the understanding of TLW, I searched the TLW website as well as several other affiliated sites. This search yielded the mission statement, supplementary articles concerning the farms' natural practices, two previously recorded interviews and a video.

While collecting this data, I took notes on pertinent information that gave valuable insight to the particular space and people involved in this urban land use. After this data was collected, I developed timelines for both the church (and neighborhood) and TLW. These timelines proved invaluable incorporation into the analysis of the other forms of data.

Participant observation was conducted on the Wheat Street Garden site in order to gain a greater depth of understanding of the participants, their relationships to the site and, as Dowler suggests, participant observation allows participants to be put at ease in their natural environment (Dowler 2001). By spending time at the garden off and on over a period of almost an entire year, I was not only able to build relationships that led to interviews but also I was able to observe several phenomena that I would have missed otherwise. My first participant observation activity occurred in the summer of 2011 when I requested to spend a day working with the farmers as they traveled to the various sites TLW manages. We visited three sites that day and I was introduced to many of the company's farmers. Many of these contacts led to later interviews. By situating myself as a volunteer on the farm as well as a researcher, my interviewees were more comfortable with me when it came time to an official interview. I spent approximately 30 hours volunteering at the farm mostly over the course of the spring and summer of 2012. These hours were generally spent doing farm work including sorting and sifting compost, digging and preparing garden beds, harvesting, staking plants, sweeping, raking, weeding and planting. These work hours generally took place on Friday mornings when the most workers were present helping with harvesting for the Friday market. During these hours, I spent time engaged in conversations with the farmers about their understandings of what they do and why they do it. Often though, our conversations were just between two new acquaintances talking a myriad of other topics. On several occasions though, I was asked to help with special events as a volunteer including MLK Day, Senior garden party, and interview day for the farmer trainee program. These special days, as well as market days were always bustling with activity and special guests. Through my time spent at the garden, I gained valuable

insight into the perspective of the farmer as well as the practices that are preferred and practiced on the site. My observations were recorded in quickly scribbled notes in the car after my time on the site and later transcribed and summarized for general themes and observations concerning that day's events.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Wheat Street Garden proprietors, trainees in the TLW Urban Oasis small farmer trainee program, TLW employees, a Wheat Street Baptist member, and a farmer educator. In total, 16 interviews were conducted and the breakdown of the interviewees can be found in Table 1 at the end of the chapter.

I chose to do interviews with the urban farmers to gain a better understanding of their perspectives. Reading about farmers and even working alongside of them will reveal very significant information but sitting down, one to one, allows more pointed questions to be asked. According to Dunn (2008) interviews can fill that gap that observations are unable to bridge and can allow diverse, complex opinions and motivations to be explored (Dunn 2008). By allowing the respondents to articulate their own unique understandings of their work and the city, the interviewee can feel empowered through a process of reflection on their experiences. By choosing a diverse group of farmers, the voices of those who may not have otherwise been heard were given an opportunity to express their own perspective not just the mission of the TLW farm. I chose semi-structured interviews as the style for my interviews to allow for some flexibility in the way the questions were asked and ordered depending on the direction initiated by the interviewee (Dunn 2008).

The interviews were usually between a half-hour and forty-five minutes and generally covered six main questions and several sub questions that were ordered but remained flexible. The interviews were recorded and transcribed before later coding. The microgeography of the interview site was considered as I collected the data from the transcription of the words spoken and the participant observation of the site chosen. This reflective process enabled the "ethical implications and analytical significance" of a site for an interview (Elwood and Martin 2000, p.656). By conducting the interviews on site, the interview-

ees generally felt at ease and in several instances, we worked side by side while continuing the interview. This proved to be a helpful interview strategy for some of the respondents that did not feel comfortable taking time away from their work hours to sit for an interview. In these cases, I pulled my questions out of my pocket repeatedly to refresh my memory and strapped the recording device to my arm.

The interviews generally began with a discussion of the farmers' own personal farm history including life experience and work history. I started the interviews in this way to learn about their personal experiences and to put the interviewee at ease. The interviews then moved on to other topics that informed the research about the specific site of this farm, his or her perspective on ecological issues and the food system as well as personal goals for their future. Questions inquiring about the political and contesting nature of their work were saved to the end when the interviewee felt most at ease and I was aware of their trust in my line of questions. The group was equally divided among those with farm and gardening experience and those without. Of all the interviewees (including those not farming at Wheat Street), six had lifelong experience or at least childhood exposure. Thirteen of those interviewed were black and three were white with four females and twelve males. The identities of the farmers are kept confidential through the use of pseudonym coded initials (e.g. T.T., M.T.).

My positionality at the farm changed over time at the farm as my role as researcher, then volunteer evolved. At my initial meeting with my key interviewee or informant, I presented myself as a student and researcher. This was a helpful tool for breaking the ice and approaching a new person whom I wanted to know better. Over time though, my role evolved as I became involved in volunteering and as I interviewed farmer after farmer. I established a sort of confidentiality with each interviewee and that perhaps is a weakness of this research. Without meaning to I may not have asked the follow up questions in quite the same fashion had I not planned to return to volunteer in following days. My previous experience in gardening and farming worked in my favor because the work was easy to understand and I did not have huge learning obstacles in my way. My background put me at ease in this environment

immediately and that created a more relaxed tone for the interviews as well. Despite the limitations, of my own bias in support of urban agriculture, and the personal connections I made with the farmers I developed a large dataset about the different viewpoints of the farmers and the history of the site and was able to draw out the different understandings.

Table 2 Breakdown of Interviewees

Interviewee	Job title	Years experience	Future Farm Goals	Motivation
1	Trainee	None	Start own Business	Curiosity
2	Farmer	4 years	Start own Business	Love nature
3	Trainee	None	Start own Business	Love nature
4	Farmer	None	None stated	Job
5	Harvest Manager	None	Start own Business	Learn
6	Educator	None	Continue here	Educate
7	Farmer	40 + years	Continue here	Educate
8	Farmer	25 years	Continue here	Educate/Change the world
9	Farmer/Admin	None	Continue here	See TLW clone
10	Farmer	Childhood exposure	None stated	Job
11	Farmer	Childhood exposure	None stated	Job
12	Harvest Manager	Occupational farmer	Teach others	Curiosity
13	Educator	5 years	Manage Own Farm	Educate/Change the world
14	Trainee	Lifelong Practice	Start own Business	Learn
15	Educator	Occupational	Teach others	Educate
16	Parishioner @ WSBaptist	None	Wants TLW to succeed	Carry out will of church

4.3 Coding

After each interview and participant observation, reports were transcribed and then printed on paper. Printing the transcriptions out made inspecting and marking them for close association and references to the research question much easier. The themes that began to emerge after several readings of the interviews were based on the farmers' perception of their role in changing the urban landscape and their philosophies that pointed to contestations or compromises of the neoliberal city.

By developing codes for phrases or sections of interviews first at a very descriptive level, i.e. farm experience, job duties, etc. and then digging deeper in subsequent readings, codes that are more analytic emerged. These codes dealt with geographical sites and strategies, work environment, and consequences of outside forces on the work being done on this site. Each code was given a distinct color or marker and each rereading of the interviews resulted in more and more notations. For example when a farmer spoke about his relationship with the soil or the other natural practices of the farm these comments were marked with a green marker. When the farmers spoke of resisting corporations or the agrifood system I would mark those comments in red.

After reading and marking the interviews several times the two dominant themes of contestations and compromise emerged and several subthemes were acknowledged as well. These findings will be discussed in the following sections.

5 FINDINGS

Through the archival, participant observation, and interview research and data collection process, several themes presented themselves. These themes point to two underlying currents within the articulations of the data. One theme draws upon the urban farmer's *interest in* and *articulation of* contesting neoliberalized food systems processes and city spaces. The other major theme revealed is the

farmers' own adoption or cooption of neoliberal practices and understandings collectively and individually. Their perspective was important for answering the question of whether this urban farmer is contesting neoliberalism or doing something else. The two findings, contestations and what I refer to as compromises, are discussed at length in the following section and draw upon the literature to interpret and analyze the degree to which the farmer's resist hegemonic structures associated with the neoliberalization of American society. Each finding reveals the various ways the farmers go about using their voice and work to represent their ideals.

The non-contesting dialogue centers around the findings that reveal the individualistic and private property articulations in the data. Both sides of the coin are revealed so to speak, and the question of what the farmers are saying about neoliberalized contexts and practices are shown through the analysis. Neoliberalism and its contestations may be (re)shaped and negotiated on the site of urban farms through the dependence of the farmers and the structures they are embedded in. The effects of contestations on neoliberalism may be difficult to visualize and may not challenge neoliberalism directly (Leitner et al. 2007) but the articulations of the farmers can be examined for their degree of contestation.

5.1 Contestations

The contestation dialogue centers on the resignification of the site – Wheat Street Garden and the associated civil right movement as well as the ecological component of taking back the food system through sustainable practices at the urban farm. In the following section, I will discuss the similarities between the local food movement of which urban agriculture is a part, and the civil rights movement. Similarities may be drawn between the two movements, and the actions taken within the movements have been viewed by some as a resistance to capitalistic forms of governance.

5.1.1 *Resignifying space*

Location in a social movement such as this one is paramount to the strategy of introducing surprise and meaning to an abandoned or undeveloped site. Spaces, such as the Wheat Street Garden, are latent with histories and meanings, and drawing upon all of those nuances resignifies the space by capturing an earlier vision for the site as well as incorporating local meaning into the site.

“...So really that’s what we’re dealing with, understanding and reinvisioning – I think that’s where Truly Living Well is getting its shine and getting its light because of how many issues we’re highlighting just by choosing our locations the way we do. Choosing this location is crucial” (R.E., 2011). This farmer is vocalizing his understanding of how valuable a particular place may become by (re)introducing a productive land use that addresses health and jobs to the space. He went on to mention in this interview that when choosing a site the leadership of TLW generally follows gentrification patterns. He stated that he did not quite understand gentrification but knew that the inner city neighborhoods of Atlanta were a popular place for property development and placing their urban farms in the crux of these significant spaces could be valuable to the local food movement. By choosing a site that is visible to a large population, introducing something beautiful and promoting social good (healthy food) on the site, the resignification of a once vacant space can take place.

As outlined in the case study history, the site of Wheat Street Garden has been shaped by a very particular and significant history. The most recent use of the property was the Wheat Street Garden public housing, which offered a needed service to this community when slum housing was being torn down in the 1950s and 60s. Through the dedication of the church that oversees the property, the site became a refuge for citizens in need during a time of great upheaval and restructuring in the city. As the country moved from a Keynesian social support system to the neoliberal system of privatized housing and public private partnerships that we have now, the church saw fit to push forward to provide the most basic needs of the community -housing. The mirroring of this previous use with the current

use, food production helps to create a space of value instead of feckless profitability. The church does not receive a monetary reward through this partnership with TLW; instead church leaders see a use of their land that garners attention to a social issue, which is the lack of healthy food in this neighborhood. This type of space signification contests neoliberalism by prioritizing a land use not solely concerned with bringing in a profit. The urban farm also reintroduces natural beauty to the city, which has been overlooked in recent years in the press for public housing.

As I have heard and witnessed while on the site during my many visits, the beauty of the space is appealing and gives the observer a pause, as he or she is affected by the juxtaposition of so many urban and rural sensory associations melded together in one space. Lending themselves to the visitors' experience is the sight of concrete and compost lying next to each other, the smell of sweet soil mixed with carbon monoxide fumes, and the sound of dull waves of droning engines up and down the freeway while the clucks of hens punctuate the air. This space filled with lush growth and vitality stands in stark contrast to its neighbor the gray dismal interstate highway. This structure, which is elevated in a way that dissects the view of downtown Atlanta, truncates the buildings on the other side and blocks direct access to the city. To the east, though, lies a symbolic and hopeful vision of faith and history that values civil rights, embodied in Ebenezer Baptist Church and the Martin Luther King Jr. historic district.

As one respondent put it "when Rashid told me the story of how he acquired that place I was just blown away, it's such a strategic place it has the potential to become a widely known national role model, the synchronicity of all the events and meeting with different people is incredible. It seems destined for greatness" (B.B., 2012). I have witnessed this enthusiasm on the site, I can attest to the significance of being in the shadow of Ebenezer Baptist Church on MLK Jr. Day. On that day in 2012, the parking lot and all the surrounding streets were buzzing with bus and carloads of churchgoers, tourists and volunteers filtering into the neighborhood to be a part of history. By being a part of the Wheat Street garden project, in this case; raking mulch, building benches, and hanging hardware in the greenhouse on

this significant day, participants were acknowledging the value of the current movement and its strong ties to the previous civil rights movement. As African American farmers coming into a space rich with important civil rights history, they are (re)claiming the site as a significant place through their work.

Some of the farmers view the local food movement, embodied in the site at Wheat Street, as a form of resistance similar to the civil rights movement so closely tied to this area. One farmer put it this way when asked if he thought what he was doing was a form of resistance, “resistance, yeah, I think in the shadow of Dr. King, it’s a great form of non-violent resistance. It is creating instead of destroying; it is leading by example instead of trying to (necessarily) bash what others are doing. Our gates are open come and see what we’re doing. I think we provide an alternative so I think in that way we are offering a form of resistance to the status quo...” (S.T., 2012). This farmer believes the work is resisting conventional agricultural practices through the sustainable practices used on the farm and these practices reflect King’s vision of non-violent resistance. He is also saying that opening up the door for others to follow their example is resisting the secretive, profit driven strategies of the corporate farm system.

Inwood, in his study of Dr. Martin Luther King’s Beloved Community, found that King spoke of going beyond traditional capitalistic economies to find a new way of relating, pulling from both capitalism and socialism (Inwood 2009). He found that King, in his later speeches spoke of the current cut throat capitalism creating gaps between the wealthy and poor and he advocated instead for a Beloved Community. Inwood describes King’s Beloved Community or third economic way as a complete transformation of society, bringing together Western and African American notions of justice and calling for a redistribution of wealth and privilege through a guaranteed annual income, and provisions for the poor and disenfranchised (Inwood 2009). Although I never heard the TLW farmers speak in such revolutionary terms, King’s focus on social justice is reflected in the farmer’s voices. “So we are saying the focus is now –integrate all these other social justice issues into being able to feed ourselves. So if its sexism, racism, housing disparities, all of those can be integrated around feeding ourselves. And once we integrate

them we all gotta focus and our focus is to take land in our own communities and make it productive and then make sure that the food from our community stays within our own community” (R.E., 2011). This sort of articulation reveals a sense of land sharing or land redistribution that provides for community members instead of private land ownership shaping the landscape. The owning of land was an interesting topic among the farmers because they saw it as a step toward independence from power structures as well as a step away from government interference, which will be discussed in later sections. This farmer also mentioned the possibility of farming on land held by the public schools, churches and public park systems as a means of providing for the community. Truly Living Well did, in fact, acquire a new partnership on a parcel of land owned by the Good Shepherd church in the West End during my time spent volunteering and has begun the process of turning the lawn landscape into a productive landscape. Additionally, there are several African American farmers and farm projects doing work around Atlanta that I learned about during my time at the farm on Wheat Street and most of these farms are found on public school or church land as well. This partnership between the African American farmer and the public land manager may be a place for a tiny opening in the neoliberal economy that refocuses attention on the Beloved Community that MLK Jr. envisioned.

Reverend Borders had a realization during his time at Wheat Street that all of life is political. He said, “the preacher is involved in politics by necessity, if not by choice. Jobs are political, from dog-catcher to President of the United States. Streetlights are political. The church simply cannot escape politics, nor should it.” (English 1967, p.160). In an interview with a key member of Wheat Street Baptist church, we discussed the impact the church had on local business and the civil rights movement. His historical account of the church’s involvement reflects the generosity that Borders established through many of the projects or ministries of the church.

The (Auburn Street) plaza allows and always allowed for small startups to have an opportunity to grow. Several businesses in Atlanta have started out of these shops... Going back to the civil rights movement and our church's involvement in politics, we've always been there, and the church has gotten involved in politics and with politicians to provide better lives for African Americans and those lives included those businesses. It's not that much different (than what TLW is doing) (L.L., 2011).

The businesses established here have a higher purpose than just the bottom line and the comments made by the church reflect that purpose. The black churches in the Sweet Auburn district have been leaders in the civil rights movement; will they also be leaders in the local food movement? The leadership of black churches in a local food movement in a city marked by uneven racial retail and housing patterns could be seen as an opening in resistance to the neoliberal city governance.

One farmer also mentioned the space as a tool for others to share in the bounty of nature and food as a goal for the site. This farmer reflected on the fact that Reverend Borders had intentions to provide a space for boys to experience nature and to provide a local grocery store in the neighborhood. He commented, "It's crazy how closely history repeats itself" (C.K., 2012). Indeed, the farm does repeat the goal and vision of the late Reverend Borders by helping to create a sense of purpose here in the Sweet Auburn district among the farmers and that purpose is not simply making a profit.

Lastly, the site is resignified through the same kind of articulations of love and kindness reflected in King and Border's vision. "Do we try to relate from a place of fear and go into a protection modality or do we try to relate from a place of love and abundance and make sure we are out in the community showing people how to do this work" (R.E., 2011). This farmer went on to relay a story about a recent interaction he had with the business owners on nearby Edgewood Avenue. These business owners were discussing their 'need' for a security patrol on the street to rid the area of loiterers. This farmer responded with the comment above and went on to say that Wheat Street Garden is always open and if a neighbor needs food then he or she is welcome to come get it. Farming in a way that is not solely concerned with the bottom line is an important step in the direction away from the agribusiness model that

is disconnected from a local perspective. This farm embodies a resignified space with localized values, natural beauty, and history as priorities that contest neoliberalized farm practices and uneven city spaces. The articulations of the farmer also revealed a contestation of the current practices supported by conventional farms through their own bodily contact with organic materials and the communal support of sustainable systems, as I will discuss in the next section.

5.1.2 *Ecologies of Contestations*

Since the dust bowl era of the 1930s and the end of WWII, there has been an effort by government and corporate America to industrialize American agriculture. There has been an emphasis on efficiency and quantity rather than on growing quality food and protecting natural resources. Agriculture is estimated to represent approximately 20-25% of the US annual energy budget and as much as 40% of that energy goes toward production of artificial fertilizers and pesticides. Chemical based growth stimulants produce large quantities of food at the expense of the minerals, vitamins, and trace elements that create flavor and nutrition. Evidence of the poor quality of our food can be seen in rising rates of obesity, vitamin deficiencies, and food borne illnesses. We Americans are in the early stages of reclaiming our food sovereignty as evidenced by the fast growing organic sector and urban agriculture initiatives (Nuri 2010).

According to the international movement (La Via Campesino) which brings together peasants, farmers, landless people, women farmers, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers, food sovereignty is defined as “the right of peoples to define and produce healthy and culturally appropriate food through sustainable methods”(Campesina and Voice 2012). It is a concept that puts the goals, and work of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems rather than the markets and corporations (Campesina and Voice 2012). Food sovereignty through urban agriculture then must prioritize the farm worker and consumer ahead of market and corporate demands. Mr. Nuri also seems to be saying that his goal is to separate himself and TLW from the market and corporations through his work on the farm.

A typical modern, conventional farm in the US produces cheap, food using technologies that have not been proven safe for human consumption, that strip the land of healthy nutrients, pollute the water, and use practices that will not be ecologically sustained over time (Jones et al. 2011). Urban

farmers are vocalizing their resistance to these farming practices and applying methods of farming that mitigate farm impacts on the environment. In order to farm efficiently on the small plots of land allowed in an urban setting, conventional agriculture practices like plowing with large tractors or reaping harvests with a combine do not apply. Urban farmers support methods of farming that not only fit the space they grow in but they also try to grow in a way that is ecologically sustainable. Many of these farmers are sincerely interested in creating a new food system that will undo the damage of conventional agriculture. In his presentation at Georgia State University, Rashid asserted that “Urban agriculture topples the myth that food production has to occur in wide open spaces on large tracts of land, local food economies create enterprises that grow, handle, process, and sell food produced in the local urban area”(Nuri 2011). In this statement, he suggests that not only does urban agriculture deal with smaller spaces but also the impacts of harmful inputs are minimized. The small urban scale allows the farmer to employ practices that are ecologically sustainable and have fewer detrimental impacts on the environment. As one TLW farmer suggests, “agriculture should not be built on the technologies of reductionism or simple science, but instead on natural practices that mimic the biological systems of the planet” (T.T., 2012). The reductionism and simple science he speaks of is the method utilized by the big agribusiness that seeks to reduce its inputs and maximize outputs at whatever cost to the environment is necessary (Jones and Pimbert 2011). By turning to sustainable methods of farming that will be described below, these farmers are contesting the neoliberal farm through their work.

As McClintock asserted, the Marxian perspective describes the de-alienation of humans from the physicality of labor and the experience of nature (McClintock 2010). By actually doing the work to turn the urban environment into a productive landscape (metabolism), the farmer is bridging the individual rift of human and nature through contact with nature and through consumption of nature – the fruit. This theme was repeated through practice and articulations in this research. The natural practices employed on the farm that I witnessed and learned of from an online interview during my time spent

at Wheat Street are included in a conceptual drawing (see Figure 4 at end of this chapter) and the practices are referenced throughout the analysis of the interviews (Organics 2011). The ecological practices are divided into three general areas: producing, knowing, and sustaining. These practices are implicitly and explicitly linked to contestations of the current (neoliberal) systems of farming through the farmer's articulations and choices of practice and livelihood. The multiscale dimension of the contestation is evident in the personal journeys and metabolisms, and the outward looking and collective or social components of the farm practice.

During the interview process, it became vastly clear that soil is the fundamental component of the farm. TLW farmers and volunteers invest a good portion of their time and effort in creating and maintaining soil through compost, raising worms, and garden bed structure. On one occasion, I was given the privileged position of compost sifting. This task involved unloading the truck of the hundreds of pounds of wasted fruits and vegetables from the Sweet Auburn Curb Market. The arrangement that TLW has with the Curb Market is mutually beneficial by creating an ecological place to dispose of the market waste and the farm is gifted with a great source of rotting organic material for compost. Every day, an employee of the farm drives the truck to the market and loads about eight 30-gallon receptacles of wasted material onto the truck. At the farm, the material is spread along the top of a long mound of compost in an even layer and then sifted for human made materials (e.g. plastic, rubber bands). After this sifting and spreading is done a layer of sawdust is spread across the top to create the correct layers of carbon and nitrogen balance and then recovered with a sheet of plastic. When the mounds reach the proper height they are left to decompose down to a rich, deep, dark soil that is used in all of the farm beds and is also sold to customers. The decomposition process is helped along by an innovative process of aeration through a corrugated pipe resting under the mound and allowing the proper air circulation for the microbes to do their work on breaking down the material. This process is repeated daily all year long, ensuring the farm always has the right ingredients for a growing medium.

The farmers realize the value of the compost and the significance of this first step (and last step when returning the spent plants and fruit to the compost) in the ongoing cycle of soil generation. One farmer, when asked if he valued the soil practices at the farm replied,

“Yes, I view the soil as my life. When I first learned about the compost system with the cycle of life with the leaves, and fruit -I knew it, but I didn’t understand it. The day I (really) learned it, I remember feeling bad when I finished a banana and I was walking with the peel to the trash can. It needed to serve its purpose, the rest of its life. So now I look at the world differently. We get shipments of compost from the farmer’s market (Auburn Curb Market) - it’s literally a ton of food that could have been eaten and we turn it into compost, and I think of all the food across the country that is going to waste- all the food being packed into landfills under concrete” (B.B., 2012).

This statement reinforces the values of TLW and its emphasis on growing naturally. This farmer has internalized these values and they have become a part of his general life view. The farmers help produce healthy soil by layering organic matter with living organisms to create dark, rich soil full of micronutrients and life. Not only do they produce soil, but they are in touch with the soil as well. One farmer recommended spending time in the soil to build a relationship and be associated with the natural world around us as illustrated in the following comment, “if we spend 80 minutes a day barefoot on the earth, or swimming in a stream (we learn the laws of this planet and align ourselves), most of us spend our time in rubber shoes, cars, or whatever and never touch the earth. Growing food gets us away from our insulation” (blogtalkradio.com 2010). These farmers are voicing their desire to move past the corporate food system toward a personal encounter that values natural cycles.

The choice of a grower’s seed has now become as much of a political endeavor as any other item in the food politicians’ agenda. Seeds have become imbued with the neoliberal leanings of our agri-food system and as such researching the source of our food has become vitally important. TLW values the seed that does not come from a GMO or hybridized source and remains true to the genetic information gained from being saved over generations (Cooke 2010). One Truly Living Well grower who was interviewed on blogtalkradio.com, when speaking of the importance of the seed spoke about the method of putting seed into your mouth and mixing it with salvia before spitting into the earth. “Seeds

know what we are so they can seek out any mineral that we need in the soil to help us... they know how to convert the water into what they need and get the right minerals from the soil for what we need” (blogtalkradio.com 2010). This sort of back to the earth articulation speaks to the complete distancing from the corporate model of sterilizing the soil and seed in order to eradicate all pests, weeds, and genes that do not conform to the agribusiness model of high production and reduced cost inputs. Several farmers voiced their concern over the GMO seeds and food so commonly found today as well as food shortage issues. When asked what they perceived as the most important goal(s) of the farm, a farmer replied, “getting more people access to fresh and non GMO foods that they can access easily and affordably” (J.L., 2012). Another farmer stated, “I will say this- hybridized foods are genetically modified (often, not always) and GM food is dangerous when genes are spliced” (blogtalkradio.com 2010). These comments point to the direct resistance these farmers are displaying toward agribusinesses through their refusal to use GM and hybrid seeds.

When discussing if they felt like we could run out of food sources if we do not adhere to the conventional methods a TLW farmer responded during an online interview, “part of this depends on how you define food sources, there is plenty of food in the world for the starving children in India, it is purely political why some people do not have food. We need to look at the quality of our food because that is the source of the dis- ease in our bodies” (Keidi 2007). This dis-ease, as he put it, points to the unknown relationship we have with the modern technology of our food practices and inputs. In an interview another farmer vocalized real anxiety over his concerns about agribusinesses, “The pharmaceutical, medical, industrial complex does not seem to care about that (consumer’s health), it is just more people through the door making up hospital revenues and stuff. That gives me anxiety because systems are not in place to keep people healthy. They have to have sick people to stay in business. It’s not in their interest to keep people healthy” (T.T., 2012). Real concern is shown in this statement for the scale

of the issue the urban farmers are addressing and the importance of producing quality produce to contest the agrifood system.

The fruit of the farm is a topic that has been discussed at length in popular media but is worth mentioning at least once in this thesis. I had the lovely pleasure of partaking in the fruit of my own labor and the labor of many others on several occasions. On one particular occasion, I was invited to eat ripe melons in the course of a hot summer workday. The fruits of the labor at a local farm far outweigh the produce bred for shipping across the country. Shopping at the market at Wheat Street on Friday afternoons, after my volunteer hours wrapped up, was a small pleasure and reward for my labor (I was often given vegetables as my payment). Through my own taste testing of little samples of grape tomatoes, mints, raspberries, raw okra, arugula, green beans and cantaloupe, on any given workday, I can attest to the quality of locally grown food. These farmers do in fact know how to make food taste better. What one takes into his or her body does affect the flow outward to the rest of the world. When I take a healthful bite of raw produce I feel a little better about my own well-being and I am more likely to continue a healthy flow throughout my day, seeking out more fresh, raw produce. The transforming power of a healthy diet was also given mention during an interview at a point when we were discussing local business owners wanting to set up security for their businesses and remove locals who were disrupting their customers.

Well I'm optimistic that people will wake up to a higher consciousness and a higher understanding and I think a lot of it will have to do with the food that we ingest. If we can eat food that is grown in a way that is natural and grown by hand and with intention of transformation, I don't know how it could not carry the vibration of transformation to the individual that chooses to eat it. But if we have people who are living on a diet of processed stuff and washing it down with intoxicants then yeah and then coming into a neighborhood and kicking people out than yeah that seems about right. It makes sense" (R.E., 2011).

These sort of articulations point to the metabolizing of healthy food as a sort of contestation of neoliberalized food production. These articulations also point to the spiritual component of growing food that several farmers addressed in their interviews.

According to one TLW farmer, "keeping your garden close" is a practice as old as farming itself (Cooke 2010, p.2). By growing food naturally and without the aforementioned inputs (heavy machinery, synthetics) the farmer puts him or herself in touch with the cycles, systems, and forces of life on the planet. Urban farmers, through their farming practices, have the opportunity to return to more "primitive" and "natural" methods of growing that many see as sustainable (Cooke 2010). These methods give a new frame of reference that is based less on individualism and profit-seeking and more on the personal journeys that can bridge the human and the environment that in several instances of farmer comments, bordered on spirituality.

This spiritual connection permeated some of the interviews and observations in the field. Several farmers when asked about their connection to the earth and the language used by the farm leadership (e.g., the earth is alive and she is Mother Earth) echoed their belief in the life force of the soil and the vibrations found there. In an online interview, Rashid explained the company logo, "The feminism principle- is what is at play at our garden Asase Ye Duru⁴- the earth has weight. The earth sustains us; our (company logo) symbol is a double Sankofa⁵- the symbol relates to people from African descent, return from what we came from. Just as a mother can't really grow a baby, the baby produces itself, we can nourish her (the mother). We can do that with mother earth. The plants and trees don't need us we need them. We nurture the earth" (Keidi 2007). Also, the spiritual component was tied back to ancient Egyptian practices and electromagnetic systems and energy found in the soil and in people. As the

⁴ Asase Ye Duru is an Adinkra symbol meaning "the Earth has weight" divinity of Mother Earth Danzy, J. (2009). *Adinkra Symbols: An Ideographic Writing System*. Diss. The Graduate School. Stony Brook, NY, Stony Brook University.

⁵ Sankofa is an Akan philosophy expressed in a (Adinkra) symbol used in the county of Ghana, that means 'to go back and take.' Okrah, K. A.-A. (2008). "Sankofa: Cultural Heritage Conservation and Sustainable African Development." The African Symposium: An Online Journal of the African Educational Research Network 8(2): 27.

TLW farmer mentioned in his online interview, “we need to take the intention in our heart that we want local food and we want to have healthy food that knows who we are” (blogtalkradio.com 2010). This sort of perspective on food and production is not the typical type of conversation that is found when hearing about the importance of a local food system but their words add a deeper meaning and substance to the conversation. By internalizing these more spiritual components of the human environment relationship, either by physically putting the seed or produce in ones mouth, or by acknowledging and teaching the deeper connection to the cycles, systems, and forces of life on the planet, the farmers contest the corporate food model that does not practice these methods.

A general awareness of the sustainable systems and the food we eat is an ecological approach to contesting or challenging typical practices of agribusiness today. “There is a level of awareness we need to have. We tend to get consumed with ourselves and advancing forward but there is a level of awareness we need to have to make sure were respectful to the life forms around us because we do share the earth with many other life forms” (M.T., 2012). This respectfulness is evidenced in certain practices associated with natural farming practices that are quite different than the corporate model of farming. Not all farmers share this view apparently, as voiced in one interview, “And I think how are you a farmer? You are just one instrument in these bodies that already have a relationship – the sun, moon, earth. They have their own relationship that is steady. And we want to jump in the middle and dominate, steer it or we just don’t want to pay attention to it at all. I don’t know which is worse” (R.E., 2011). This farmer was speaking of another (non TLW) farmer with whom he had had recent contact and who caused him to voice his concern over the disconnected nature of farming that others employed. When TLW farmers were asked, ‘do you feel connected to the earth?’ several said yes emphatically, “I’m always thinking about how the earth is positioned and which way the water would flow. The best place to position gardens and utilize the sun I’m trying to get more in tune with both the sun and moon cycles. I’ve been able to explore some of the subtleties through the work I do in the last few months” (S.T.,

2012). These practices of ecological sustainability have infiltrated the community and the rhetoric of the farmers' world.

Sustainability rests on the idea that farmers must feed people now but not at the expense of the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Nature that is transformed for consumption by human labor creates a touch point for ideas and ethics to manifest. How much this transformation from nature to urban is affected by capitalism is reflected in the uneven food environment at the macro level of agribusiness production and at the microlevel of neighborhood food access as well. The neighborhood that does not have access to fresh fruits and vegetables is a manifestation of the unevenness through the retail environment, through charitable giving, through government distribution and through access to land to grow one's own. As citizens of the city, we become alienated from the natural environment where we derive our sustenance. These farmers contest the practice of ignoring the natural rhythms of life by introducing natural growing methods into the local food system. They use their labor on the farm to transform the urban environment. Not all of the articulations claims and practices of the urban farm contest the neoliberalization of the city or the urban political economy. In the following section, I highlight the articulations and observations that have a mixed or hybridized view of the potential that urban farming has to resist hegemonic (neoliberal) practices.

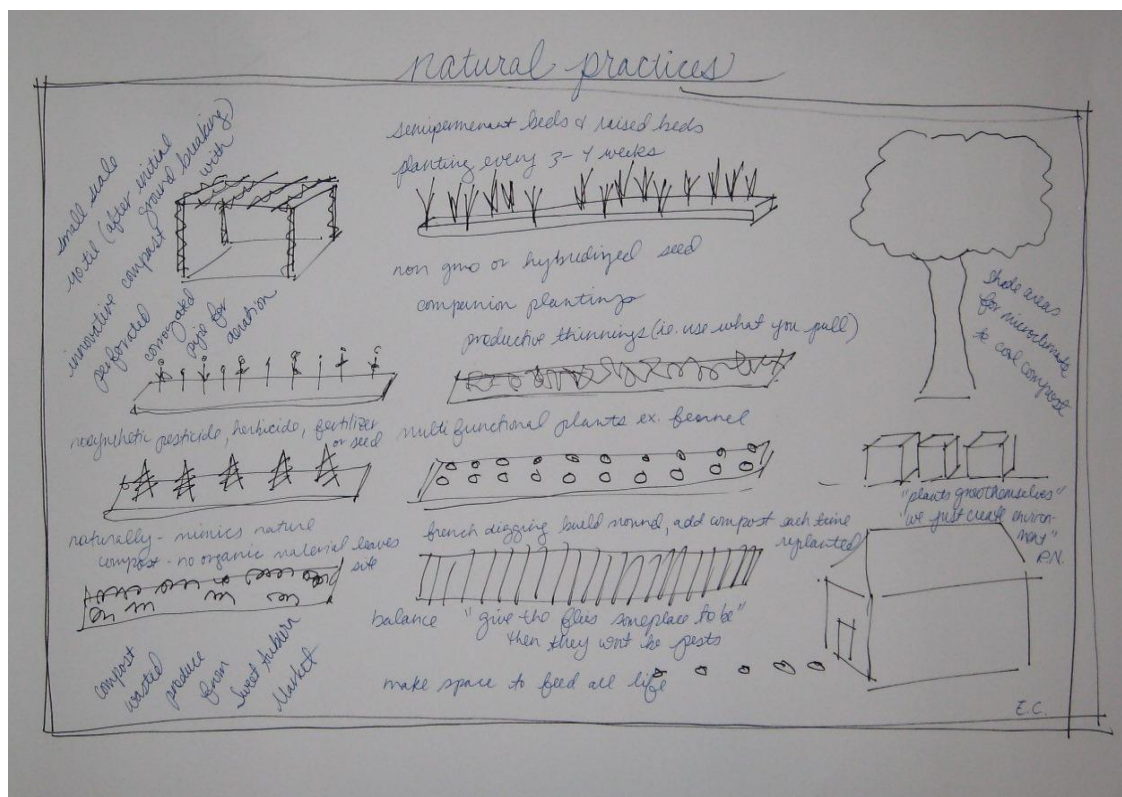


Figure 4 Conceptual Drawing of Natural Practices at Wheat Street Garden source: Julia Bryant

5.2 Compromising not contesting

At this point in the project, it is important to acknowledge that not every articulation these farmers voiced was a direct contestation. Within the transcripts, observations and other media were traces of a different kind of theme. This theme was less concerned with how to promote a locally significant practice that values people and food more than profit and more interested in protecting the individual and turning away from government standards and regulations. These sorts of dialogues were less contestation and more cooption or compromise and adoption of neoliberal forms of independence and privatization. Also noted in the following section is the hybridization of business models, incorporating neoliberal ideologies into the urban farm. In the following sections, I highlight three themes found in the data that support this hybridized model of neoliberalization. These sections include a discussion of

the future use envisioned for the site, perspectives on the individual and governmental role in food production, and the nonprofit business model.

5.2.1 *Mixed use and mixed feelings*

The mixed-use project has been advocated as the balm for urban problems by the neoliberal agenda (Hackworth 2007). As Hackworth puts it, “large commercial developers...are the iconic facilitators of the neoliberal spatial fix. The giant projects they build are transforming the physical landscape of cities while also serving as symbols of a new form of urban governance” (Hackworth 2007, p.153). The Wheat Street Baptist church is not immune to this neoliberal planning environment. The church and the pastor have voiced their support of the farm but have also maintained that the real mission of the church is to provide housing and economic development to the community. In an interview with a key church member, the economic activity of the farm was the most important point of interest for him. He mentioned that the economic arm of the church (Charitable Foundation) has moved ahead with creating a master plan to develop the Wheat Street Garden site, which includes housing and green space. When asked what will happen to the farm on the site he responded,

“... we have to execute the mission of the board, which is not agriculture. It is housing. But we are still a community-focused organization but we have to opportunistic at the same time. What we have, our agreement is one that allows flexibility. But if you ask if I think 15 years from now if the urban garden will be in that location I will say, ‘No, I don’t think so.’ Does that mean it could be on another piece of property that the charitable foundation owns, could be. We like Rashid and like what he’s doing” (L.L., 2012).

The farm is not the first priority for the church but rather a flexible use of land. The fact that urban agriculture has risen in popularity quickly during the past four years during post 2008 recession, repeats similar trends highlighted in the agriculture section of this paper. Viewing the local food system as a temporary fix and not the hopeful crack in the neoliberal food system may reveal the hegemony of neoliberal ideology that has crept into the public response to this kind of initiative. If the economy improves and building and developing intown properties returns to the pre-recession level, this farmland

may once again return to housing or perhaps something else will be developed in this location. The once vacant site is a highly desirable development site according to a report (Enterprise et al. 2010) that looked at several nationwide master plans dealing with affordable housing near transit. The report states that the Wheat Street Charitable Foundation has developed a master plan for a mixed income housing project on their Hilliard Street property and this project includes approximately 500 units of mixed income housing including rental apartments, townhomes and single-family detached homes (Enterprise et al. 2010). Several developers have shown interest in the property for mixed use, retail, residential and student housing project (Sams 2012). The church must consider how it will pay its own bills and support its ministry as well. The farmers have worked hard to acquire the site, work the land and produce a harvest. The beautification of the property cannot be denied, but this beautification may also invite encroaching development.

The farmers are clearly at the mercy of the economic development priorities of the city, the church and local interests. When asking the leaders of the farm about the competing interests for the farm one replied, "Oh yeah there are lots of people that want this spot. Georgia State would like this land; they offered them (the church) a lot of money but the church turned them down". Since this interview though, the foundation has indeed sold a portion of the property to Georgia State University in order to develop intramural fields within walking distance of its student housing (Sams 2012). Much of the interest is spurred by the streetcar project-taking place on nearby Edgewood and Auburn Avenues that developers and city officials hope will create economic development in the area. The farm seems to be in a spot that is slowly being encroached upon by the power structure of the city and private developers. The farmers understand this is a precarious situation but continue to work as if they can somehow influence these players with their good work. The beautification brought by their efforts may be some of the appeal to the developers who are scouting the neighborhood.

When I asked the farmers how important owning the land is to them one replied, “Oh land ownership is essential. Everybody else who is farming owns the land. We don’t own anything. I could never afford this. But you’re not gonna find this any place else, right here in the city. This is an ideal station right here in the shadows of the downtown skyscrapers” (F.P., 2012). This farmer reveals that his goal is to actually own land and this suggests an underlying desire to move toward the perceived secure position in American society of land ownership. He also revealed the special arrangement the farm has with the city: “...they have decided (city zoning) they have to figure out the rules to accommodate us. We have the support of the city. We are influencing a lot of people. And what we’re doing is for the positive good and outrageous” (F.P., 2012). Another farmer had this perspective, “So when people ask me about working on land I don’t own, well I think, damn, you never asked the slaves that. Now suddenly I’m worthy of asking that question because you have found out that I’m a worthy human being. So now, in the last 200 years you have discovered that we are humans. So when I look I feel like asking how do you feel about building these buildings up on top of this land? That is what I want to know. To build a skyscraper and a highway took tremendous amounts of beautiful productive land, and it must not have been yours because you didn’t feel anything. If it was yours you wouldn’t do that” (R.E., 2011). The farmer was more interested in tying his experience to the spiritual component of the land. Another important piece of the food sovereignty concept suggests that the land belongs to the people who work it. In the case of the Wheat Street Garden, the farmers here have declared that they will never be able to own this spot of land but they are able to make it productive. Providing a basic human need- healthy food- may be best supported by a government that is concerned for its citizens’ well being and subsequently provides plots of land for those are willing to do work and produce food on these sites. This battle for land between the city’s economic engine, the small farmer and the property owner has raised the question of what is the best use for this urban site. The farmers I interviewed spoke to the idea that they must work around the institutions and histories to get what they wanted but at the same time they

are working within the system by forging important influential relationships with private corporations, public officials, and other nonprofits. This theme is carried into the next subsection discussing the motivation of farmers to seize what they need to take care of their own and to separate themselves from government.

5.2.2 *Less government, more me*

Several interviews were permeated with a theme of distrust toward the government. One farmer explained that as his awareness of nutrition grew so too did his awareness of the things government was doing to make it challenging for people to get the nutrition they needed. He said, “So food security became important to my family and me. That is one reason I do it is because I don’t feel like the government has my best interest at heart” (B.B., 2012). This anti- government sentiment reflects B.B.’s desire to put the farmer in charge of his or her future and safety instead of relying on government suggestions or supervision. Another farmer stated similar emotions “I am gardening because I don’t trust the government to tell me what is good, and it’s up to me to decide and me to control what’s going into my body. We all need food but to depend on someone else to tell me what I should be eating is crazy now” (M.R., 2012). The government’s role in suggesting eating habits and potentially enforcing their version of healthy food was the topic of this farmer’s distrust. These same farmers were concerned over the traditional four food groups being a misleading healthy eating plan that was supported by the USDA for many decades and has since been discredited. Because of this discredit, these farmers have chosen to find their own version of healthy eating that they hope to provide for themselves.

The farmers also expressed their uncertainty over the future and felt it necessary to take action to preserve their own food security. Some of the dialogue symbolized the growing uneasiness in the economy and general fear of an economic collapse. A farmer put it this way, “The powers that be want the people that are down to stay down. They want them weak and ignorant and hungry, and lazy. So I think by providing any avenue for growth and self-sustainability [is resistance]. For knowing that if the

global economy collapses I'd be ok because I've got this little patch of land and I've been saving seeds for a year" (S.T., 2012). Another farmer liked the idea of being off the electrical grid, incorporating solar panels to power the buildings' electricity, and using well water at two of the sites. This idea also speaks to the distrust of the government and the refusal of its services in an effort to be self-sufficient. This attitude is more in line with the neoliberal philosophy that celebrates the individual and entrepreneur who can and should pull himself or herself up by his bootstraps. This sort of dialogue also speaks to the ongoing discussion surrounding food security and food access.

These days everyone is talking about access to food in underserved areas. When the farmers discussed what they felt was the best solution to the issue of food access I heard several different ideas, "The idea of bringing farmers' market to what they call underserved populations is not an answer; the real answer is figuring out how people in urban areas can grow the food themselves and then looking at a really dynamic power shifts at how land is being used" (R.E., 2012). As S.T. puts it, "If your food is not in your control then you really are at a disadvantage. In Atlanta we have food deserts... and one of our main goals is to transform people individually and city landscapes, to make it more commonplace to have markets and edible landscapes" (S.T., 2012). The idea of transforming public land for productive uses is clearly a contestation to neoliberal unevenness on the landscape. The hybridization of this idea comes from the fact that these farmers are also running a business. The second farmer especially seems more interested in selling to a market rather than taking public land and putting it into production. The business model employed by the farm is one that at first glance seems like a bottom up alternative to the neoliberal food retail system where customers help fund the farm by purchasing a share of the produce before the season starts through CSA. This is not the only income stream for the farm though the nonprofit arm of the organization will be discussed in the following section.

5.2.3 *Nonprofit Volunteer*

Truly Living Well began as a business in 2006, and then transitioned to a non-profit later in an effort to remain sustainable. By creating this private and public sector partnership, the farm has been able to garner the assistance of large volunteer groups and gain financial donations from institutions. This neoliberal practice of partnering has also provided more funding from US grants while enabling TLW to keep a profit-based arm as well. The farmers do not see any problem with this arrangement as voiced by one, “I do know I like the nonprofit aspect- it gives it more credence. People hear that and think oh they must be doing something for my community” (F.C., 2012). There is also the awareness that this status and farmwork in general will not garner a large profit. As J.L. puts it, “Well it is a non-profit. If you make an effort to go from LLC to nonprofit you gotta know what you are doing. They want to provide jobs, not just through TLW but also to go out and make jobs. They tell us if you just want to get rich, you are in the wrong place, if you take that and see that they are trying to build community capacity around food. There is also an awareness that were not going to make money, but there are other rewards” (J.L., 2012). These farmers are filling in a gap for the neoliberal city by offering much needed programs that train small farmers to create more jobs, and bringing healthy food into the neighborhood.

The rollback of support for small farmers through the decontextualization of the farm and the government partnership and support for large agribusinesses has left the small urban farm with little support or safety net. A farmer mentioned it this way, “Because as we know even in big agribusiness in the US they are heavily, heavily, subsidized. People are not actually making a living off food that they grow. ...Now TLW has transitioned to a nonprofit, education-based institute so we teach people as many styles of urban agriculture as we can” (R.E., 2011). Transitioning to nonprofit status not only creates an education-based institute but also provides the potential for other funding streams. Through their status they can apply for US grants like the USDA beginning farmer and rancher program and grants from Georgia’s department of health. Through the USDA grant the farm was tasked with educat-

ing future farmers and also given the benefit of their labor. This creative use of public private partnership displays the hybrid path of the movement. The other piece of the nonprofit status is inviting more labor in to help through volunteer partnerships.

Since the state and city have very little means to help support healthy food initiatives the nonprofit status allows this farm business to tap into voluntary associations that are part of the rollout neoliberal initiative. Funding and aiding the large agribusinesses streamlines the flow of capital nationally and internationally and leaves small businesses without support. By inviting the large volunteer pool interested in local food, the farmers at TLW create a kind of hybridized resistance to neoliberalism. I witnessed on several occasions a large volunteer labor pool more than willing to support the cause. On one occasion, the volunteers helped put on a Senior Garden Party on the property. This event, which was a partnership between TLW and Open Hand Atlanta (a nonprofit that serves meals to seniors), served a local, fresh meal to a group of 200 seniors. TLW volunteers, employees and Hands On Atlanta (a volunteer work group) provided the labor. In this instance, volunteers were standing in to fill in the gap of feeding the seniors through this public and private partnership. The regular work of volunteers like me was important to help keep the business flowing. Another point that is revealed in this example is the type of worker that can be found at the farm.

In more 30+ hours spent at the Wheat Street site over the course of the summer, many other volunteers joined the effort to create change in the city. Many of the regular volunteers (at least during my hours) that were able to come on a regular basis or were a part of the Hands On organization were white and middle class. These active citizens who have taken it upon themselves to unburden the state of its duty to provide healthy food through an equitable food system were part of the 'whiteness' of the alternative food movement described by Guthman and Slocum. This point was not lost on the staff and was voiced by a farmer who noted that the African Americans he talked to (in his neighborhood) do not want to work on a farm. He noticed that most of the volunteers are inverse- they are white and felt like

black people are not as interested (G.E., 2012). Having more interest among whites in the food movement speaks to the problem of the uneven neoliberal city and the way the local food movement has taken shape. One farmer had noted that when attending an ALFI (Atlanta Local Food Initiative) meeting the previous year (2010) he was surprised by the face of the movement. He commented that he was the only African American there and that most in attendance were older white women. The private interests of this white local food movement 'face' may be part of the reason fewer African Americans volunteer. This phenomenon may be changing though. With the support of the African American council person in this district and mayor as well as the recent promotion of Rashid to chairman of the board for Georgia Organics, the movement may be shifting to better represent all the farmers (Organics 2012).

In order to keep the support of the community Truly Living Well has formed relationships with the local councilperson, mayor, other nonprofits, businesses, government agencies and churches. A farmer supported this move,

"As far as government and corporations are concerned, we need to work with them.

People view the government in such a bad light, there is [sic] good things the government does and bad things, but really what we need to shoot for is maximum efficiency.

The way we do that is not resisting the government but working with them to help further our goals "(M.T., 2012).

The efficiency the farmer is talking about may be seen as a hybrid form of contestation that will help to push forward the ecological and resignification articulations. In his view, maximum efficiency could be the public-private partnership that enables federal and state dollars to fund the TLW goal of bringing healthy food to others and training others to grow their own food.

This sort of work lays wide the opportunity for building a new kind of model for developing a farm business built on thoughtfulness, trust and relocalization not just capital building. Determining

whether they see themselves as contesting or compromising their vision is shifting and complex, which I discuss in more detail in the conclusion.

CONCLUSIONS

The empirical study undertaken in this project allows one to see the complex nature of understandings voiced by the urban farmer about his or her work. Each farmer had a unique voice shaped by his or her own personal history and understanding of the urban environment as well as the broader context of the agrifood industry. In this research, I address the question of the degree to which the urban farmer is contesting neoliberal ideology through his or her work. Through the interviews, participant observation and archival data I explored the practices and expressed motivations for urban farming practices at the TLW Wheat Street garden. What I discovered was a complex blend of both contestations and hybridized neoliberal adoptions among the farmers.

These urban farmers are indeed contesting the agrifood system by the simple act of doing the work they have set out to do. Farming in a way that is not solely concerned with the bottom line is an important step in a direction away from the agribusiness model that is disconnected from a local perspective. The TLW farm embodies a resignified space, with localized values, natural beauty, and history as priorities that contest neoliberalized farm practices and uneven city spaces. How much this transformation from nature to urban is affected by capitalism is reflected in the uneven food environment at the broader level of agribusiness production and at the local level of neighborhood food access as well. The neighborhood that does not have access to fresh fruits and vegetables is a manifestation of the unevenness through the retail environment, through charitable giving, through government distribution and through access to land to grow one's own food. As citizens of the city, we become alienated from the natural environment where we derive our sustenance. These farmers contest the practice of ignoring the natural rhythms of life by introducing natural growing methods into the local food system. They

use their labor on the farm to transform the urban environment. The contestations do not stand alone, though. They are combined with practices that compromise and bend to the neoliberal project as well.

Several themes were found in the data that spoke to this compromise. These farmers voiced articulations that were interested in protecting the individual and turning away from government standards and regulations as well. The farmers spoke to the idea that they must work around the institutions and histories to get what they wanted, but at the same time they are working within the system by nurturing important influential relationships with private corporations, public officials and other nonprofits. This sort of hybridized form of neoliberalism comes from the fact that these farmers must also run a business to support themselves. The business model employed by the farm is one that at first glance seems like a bottom-up alternative to the neoliberal food retail system where customers help fund the farm by purchasing a share of the produce before the season starts through the CSA. But, the other parts of their business model, which incorporates neoliberal principles of public-private partnerships as well as volunteered labor, in addition to including the CSA trust economies, presents a paradox. This paradox is the sort of work that provides the opportunity for building an exciting new kind of model for developing an urban farm business built on trust and resignification of space not just capital building. This hybrid form of neoliberal work may be an important way forward in the city controlled by neoliberal governance and shaped by its histories.

Urban agriculture can be seen as a way forward in undoing the large corporate agrifood system so prevalent in our society. The neoliberal food system that mirrors the larger political economy is ready for a new kind model. The farmers at TLW are leaders in the local food movement and are bringing good food to others in a way that allows for better management of ecological cycles and individual contact with nature. TLW is an organization that invites the public in and encourages involvement in order to forward the local food movement as well as their business.

By expressing their perspectives of the work they do and the condition of the broken agriculture system in the US, the farmers have created a space for identifying issues that could be explored in further study. One area of research that could be explored further is the use of land at the site of religious institutions. An urban church and farm can make a partnership to encourage local food production in an underserved neighborhood and the potential for future partnerships is worthy of exploration. Another area of inquiry could be the government's role in providing spaces for farming in the city. By allowing urban farmers to take land that belongs to the city, they would be providing a potential way for individuals to meet their basic needs. Also, more work needs to be done to evaluate the expansion of urban farms to create a stable local food network. By understanding the sustainable methods and labor needs of a small farm, tools can be provided to help the urban farmer succeed. Finally, these farmers need more political power to help coordinate networks with other farmers and to help disseminate their knowledge. In many ways, TLW is ahead of the other local farms in this capacity through training other farmers in their ecological methods and by Rashid's presence on the Georgia Organics Board.

In order to be effective at performing the time consuming sustainable agricultural methods at their farm there is little time left for promoting political and economic connections (e.g., public land use, market space) for local agriculture. More work needs to be done to find ways to assist these farmers in the good work they are doing. Farming in the city is influenced and being influenced by the city in which it is situated. The opportunities for growth, networking, and change are prevalent and need to be explored for linkages.

The urban farm is a place where the histories, politics, and ecologies of an urban space can coalesce into a new expression of resistance to the neoliberal project. These urban farmers are indeed contesting the agrifood system by the simple act of doing the work they have set out to do and that opening in the neoliberal project may be enough to find a new way forward.

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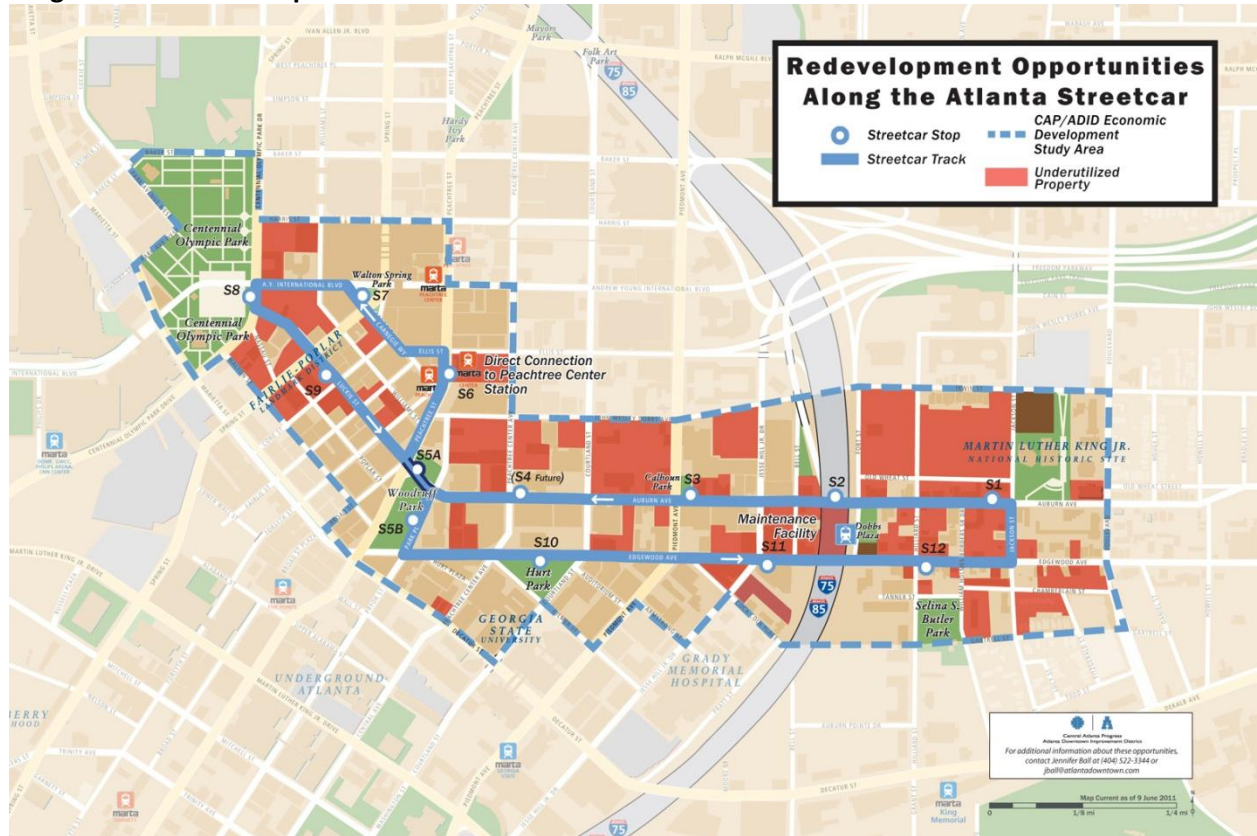
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APPENDICES

Appendix A Map of Redevelopment Opportunities along the Atlanta Streetcar source: Central Atlanta Progress Downtown Improvement Plan



Appendix B Plan view of Wheat Street Garden Site source: Central Atlanta Progress (CAP) Atlanta Streetcar Development and Investment Guide p. 28

