

FROM

THE LOCAL FOOD REVOLUTION

HOW HUMANITY WILL FEED ITSELF
IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Identify the:

1. Mental Models &
2. Structures (policies, organizations, physical things) that support or negate this vision.

To discuss in class

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2016



North Atlantic Books
Berkeley, California

CHAPTER 1

Toward a Local Food Revolution

Hegemony: preponderant influence or authority over others (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*). A form of power in which those who have power maintain their position not through force but through the elaboration of a particular world view, an ideology, a particular notion of common sense, which is infused in everyday cultural practices. The result is that people do not submit to power; rather, they consent to it, even though it might not be in their best interest.

We are a hungry people, malnourished and underfed.

Yet, for the most part, we do not suffer from a lack of food. One-third of our citizens are chronically obese. Our food is so cheap and abundant that we throw away more than a third of it (even though, as environmentalists remind us, there is no "away").

But the food that is so reliably delivered to us by the global industrial food system does not nourish us or support us. Instead, it undermines our health, degrades our environment, poisons the biota, destroys the soil, weakens our economies, and eviscerates our communities. This cannot, in any meaningful sense, be considered "food."

Meanwhile, we suffer from a different kind of hunger, a deeper, existential or spiritual hunger that is too often unspoken, unconscious, and ignored. Silently, we hunger for meaningful connection with the earth. We hunger for connection with the cycles and processes of nature, for

connection with the sacredness of life. And we hunger for connection in community with each other.

Our global industrial food system has broken these connections.

It's not that our current food system is broken, for it functions very well indeed. It is more that it has broken our connections with the most fundamental relationships of life itself. Our food system has left us starved for life.

Our food system is breaking us. Participating in it disconnects us from living systems and from each other, unintentionally producing broken economies, broken communities, and broken people.

We could think of industrialized civilization today as a huge concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO)—not much nicer than the massive feedlots that we subject our cattle to or the factory farms that house and process our pigs and chickens and lambs and fish. And, for the most part, we humans are not much better off than those poor suffering creatures. We're not raised on the open range, with free access to the foods that are natural to us where we live. Instead, we're pumped full of hormones and antibiotics and fed a synthetic diet of highly processed food-like items laced with toxic chemicals and drugs designed to fatten us up for the market of the industrial health care system. We are not encouraged to be cage free or grass fed or pasture raised. Almost everything about our diet and our lives is artificial, controlled by transnational corporations. *We are being ranched.*

There is much anguish about food deserts these days, and rightfully so. But the uncomfortable reality is that *almost all of us* live in something of a food desert, where healthy, fresh, local, sustainably produced food is available to almost no one except the relatively wealthy and those who have learned to grow it for themselves.

Amazingly, most of us have been almost completely unconscious of what is happening to our food supply and what it is doing to us. For the most part, we have passively accepted our plight. However, this is quickly beginning to change.

The way we compensate for our unmet hunger is what has come to be known as *consumerism*—a social and economic order (and ideology) that encourages the ever-increasing acquisition and consumption of

products and services. We have been trained even to identify ourselves as consumers—a lifestyle that emits toxic wastes that foul our air, land, and water (to say nothing of the mental and emotional toxicities that we produce along the way). While it's amazing that we are able to “live” this way at all, it is a life that does not remotely resemble the life of which we are capable—or the purpose and meaning for which we seem to be designed.

While this sad state of affairs seems to dominate our society, something new is stirring across the land—a much-needed revolution in the way humanity feeds itself. We are beginning to take back our food supply, reclaiming our food sovereignty, and building local foodsheds.

THE UNHOLY ALLIANCE

It's necessary to understand how we got into our predicament before we can begin to see the path beyond it. Here's the backstory.

Since the advent of industrial civilization, but especially since World War II, we have become increasingly dependent on a globalized, industrialized, corporatized food system, controlled by an Unholy Alliance of transnational corporations—known by the familiar monikers of Big Ag, Big Food, and Big Pharma—all empowered by Big Banking and Big Government, and fueled (not coincidentally) by Big Oil. This industrial food supply chain is tightly intertwined and highly focused on producing profits and consolidating power above all else.

In this system, our farmers and ranchers are told that their job is to “feed the world.” But this is pure propaganda, an insidious reframing of reality—for in less than a century, this Unholy Alliance has successfully colonized most of the industrialized world, almost completely displacing humanity's ability to feed itself, creating a ruthless dependency for the most fundamental requirements for life.

Altogether, the industrial food system—now by far the largest and most destructive industry in the world—burns about 23 percent of global oil and gas supplies, and is apparently responsible for more than half of global greenhouse-gas emissions and 80 percent of fresh-water resource use.

With the goal of producing commoditized food as cheaply as possible while maximizing corporate profit and control, the architects of this behemoth have put the well-being of life on this planet at risk, for it has been steadily fouling our natural environment, destroying topsoil (half of which has been lost in the last 150 years), depleting ancient fossil-fuel and fresh-water reserves, dramatically warming our atmosphere, and gradually destroying the very conditions conducive to life. Our industrial food system has become the equivalent of mountaintop-removal coal mining—to the point that it is now an overwhelming contributor to the sixth mass extinction of species in planetary history, producing what Paul Ehrlich and his fellow researchers are now calling “a global spasm of biodiversity loss,” the worst planetary crisis in sixty-six million years.¹

The Unholy Alliance has unleashed a wave of rapacious and disastrous economic growth, uprooting small farmers and converting farmlands into urban and peri-urban developments, transforming cities into human CAFOs, and making inevitable an explosion of the human population—an estimated 70 to 90 percent of whom will be forced to live in overcrowded urban environments by midcentury.

All the while, this system delivers to us food of ever-poorer quality and diminishing nutritional value, weakening our bodies and minds, causing an epidemic of diet-related diseases, decreasing our life expectancy, undermining our local economies, creating a profound economic disparity among our people, and severing our relationship with the land and with all that is sacred in life.

If left to continue, the trajectory of this juggernaut in the coming decades portends an unavoidable collapse of ecosystems, economies, and human populations.

We must recognize that the global industrial food system cannot be redeemed, for, like the fossil-fuel industry on which it depends, it is so deeply corrupt and corrupting, so morally and spiritually bankrupt, that its inevitable fate is entropic decline or even widespread collapse. As Fred Bahnson says, “You can’t trust Babylon with the food supply.”²

It is an obvious, if largely unspoken, reality that this food system on which we depend is profoundly unsustainable. Less obvious is the reality

that it is also becoming dangerously unstable. The system is teetering on the brink of collapse just at the moment when it purports to be ramping up to feed a world of some nine or ten billion people by midcentury. But in fact, this global food system has itself become *the greatest threat to humanity’s being able to feed itself*, and it is already beginning to fail us. How we answer this challenge could well determine the future of humanity and even the future of life on this planet.

FOOD INSECURE

We’re one disaster away from complete anarchy.

—BOB DANDREW, LOCAL ECONOMIES PROJECT,
HUDSON VALLEY, NEW YORK³

“America is the most food insecure country in the world,” a farmer from Kenya recently told one of our young food entrepreneurs in Denver. “If the truck doesn’t make it over the hill,” he said, “you have no food.” In his village, everyone has a garden, and everyone knows how to grow his or her own food.

With the advent of the global industrial food system, controlled by a handful of multinational corporations who operate in concert, we, as a people, have essentially lost our capacity to feed ourselves. This is especially true in the United States.

Rusty Collins, Colorado State University’s extension agent in Denver, himself a local food revolutionary, reminds us that during World War II there were some fifty thousand victory gardens in that city alone. Large-scale truck farming of vegetables in the area near Denver was a major industry. But today, like most cities, Denver has only an estimated two days supply of food. And, according to Collins, less than 1 percent of Colorado’s food is now produced within this supposedly “agricultural” state.

By allowing ourselves to become so dependent on the global food system, we have given up our food security. We have surrendered our food sovereignty. In effect, we have relinquished our freedom. If this continues unabated, a global food catastrophe is inevitable—and it will

quickly land on our own shores. For tens of millions of our people, the truck from over the hill will simply not arrive.

Here's the principle that we are learning all too painfully: To the extent that we are dependent on distant sources and foreign powers for our essential needs, we have lost our freedom.

THE UPRISING

There comes a time for declaring that all this is unacceptable, a time for withdrawing from the current food system and building something new to regain our food security and sovereignty. There comes a time for our people to become self-reliant, to meet our own essential needs locally, beginning with food. *That time is now.*

If humanity is to have a future that is both tolerable and resilient, on a planet where life can thrive, we must regain control over our food supply. We must recover our capacity to feed ourselves. In doing so, we will regain our food sovereignty and food security, which have been almost completely lost over the last seventy years. All this is essential to secure the future of humanity and the viability of life on this planet.

For all these reasons, we can reasonably conclude that localizing our food supply is among the most important and urgent social causes on our planet today. The process of food localization has the power to reverse our downward spiral, bringing healing and wholeness to people and communities and regeneration to the land and its living systems. This requires a revolution, a great turning over. And it has already begun.

This revolution is not, however, a revolt against the global industrial food system. It is a spontaneous uprising, a coming together to build something new in the face of nearly impossible odds. We do not have the time or the resources to change the global industrial food system. Nor is this necessary. For now, what we most need to do is create an independent and parallel system.

Localizing our food supply is a radical and subversive effort that is rapidly growing from the ground up. We are forging a new pathway into the future. The project is both inspiring and daunting—and more than a little dangerous. The stakes are high.

The Unholy Alliance says that we must feed the world and that we must rely on large-scale industrial agriculture to do so. But we're not going to feed the world. Instead, the people of the world are going to learn to feed themselves. That's what the local food revolution is all about.

THE ROOTS OF REVOLUTION

When we, as a people, find ourselves embedded in systems that are beyond redemption, when we can no longer countenance our own complicity, we begin to resist. We rebel. We distance ourselves. We speak out. We begin to cobble together alternatives. Soon, especially if the existing system reacts with even greater destructiveness (which it almost always will), *something will ignite a revolution.*

A revolution is a relatively abrupt shift in social order. Tocqueville said that revolutions are sweeping transformations of the entire society that often take several generations to bring about. But once in a great while, something entirely different happens—a kind of spontaneous awakening, arising from the bottom, which rapidly changes everything: how we see the world, what we value, how we define progress and organize ourselves, and perhaps, eventually, even how our institutions operate.

One of the founders of the local food revolution is Fred Kirschenmann at the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, who, a few years ago, somewhat presciently declared, "A food revolution is definitely underway ... evidence that the era of passive food 'consumers' is over and a new era of engaged food 'citizens' is rapidly emerging."⁴

We recently heard these very words quoted by a nutritionist at Natural Grocers, a Colorado-based food retailer now opening a new store every three weeks, fueled by an IPO designed to enable them to grow to 1,500 stores over the next several years. The leaders of this company may well be revolutionaries.

Those involved in the grocery industry celebrate the steady growth of organics over the last few decades, mostly averaging a 10 to 12 percent annual growth rate. In 2014, organics brought in \$39 billion. But

in that same year, the local food segment—at least the part that could be roughly measured—reached nearly \$12 billion. It is now growing at rates perhaps two to three times that of the organic segment and will likely eclipse organics in the next few years. Local food is a completely eater-driven industry segment, and that's something new. It's revolutionary.

ANSWERING THE CALL

Because of the stakes and the urgency, many of us are called to join and accelerate this local food revolution—which, first of all, means uncompromisingly extracting ourselves from participation in the global industrial food system. We are called to take responsibility for feeding ourselves and to assist our neighbors in learning to feed themselves. We are called to decolonize ourselves and to cease being consumers. We are called to be revolutionaries, not merely advocates or activists.

In answering this call, we are inspired to follow the example of the early American revolutionaries and commit our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor to building truly local food economies. We understand that we will be opposed and misunderstood, but we will persist.

What we're engaged in is building restorative, regenerative local food economies that are completely independent. We're shifting away from a global system that is killing us—declaring our independence from that extractive, exploitive system. And we're building exactly what we know is most needed—regional foodsheds that are life giving, restoring health, land, economies, and souls. We understand that this is the only real path to food security, food justice, and food sovereignty. We understand that this is radical, revolutionary.

THE VISION

The vision of this revolution is to restore food to its rightful place in our society, to bring it home again, so that it is grown on farms close to where we live, by people whom we know and trust and love; joyfully prepared in our own kitchens; gratefully shared with neighbors, friends,

and family; and received into our lives in ways that nourish body, mind, and soul—so that food once again becomes sacred, sacramental, central to our communities.

Localizing our food supply is right at the heart of a vast and spontaneous bottom-up effort to bring healing, restoration, and regeneration to our troubled world, to begin to reverse the widespread destruction caused by the industrial growth society—including by sequestering carbon and mitigating the impacts of climate change. Since food is what catalyzed human civilization in the first place, it is only appropriate that our efforts to begin healing and regeneration should also begin with food. There is no issue or human activity more fundamental than the way we feed ourselves.

What is most profoundly needed in our predicament is a systemic, collaborative approach to localizing our food supply to the greatest extent possible in the briefest possible time. This requires, in Jack Kloppenburg's poignant terminology, *thinking like a foodshed*—a new and greatly needed skill set in our society.

If we are to feed our own populations to any significant degree—our *local* populations, that is—and if we are to assist people in other nations in feeding themselves sustainably, we must find ways to convert a significant amount of our current commodity-crop production and export-oriented agriculture to sustainably growing food for local consumption. This is a profound reversal of a paradigm that is deeply rooted in an economy of extraction and consumption, with no regard for the costs to the ecosystem or the negative impacts on human health. This is the agricultural paradigm that our federal government explicitly supports through the USDA and the Farm Bill. In this paradigm, they do not want us to localize our food supply, for that runs counter to their values.

But we have an opportunity to build regional foodsheds that are economically robust, environmentally sustainable, resilient, and self-reliant; that ensure food security, food sovereignty, and food justice for all our citizens; that contribute to the health and well-being of our communities; that rediscover and cultivate a sense of place; and that strengthen our local economies.

Such is the vision of the local food revolution.

CAVEATS

While all this sounds hopeful and inspiring, we must also recognize that the local food revolution faces serious challenges and obstacles.

First, let us acknowledge that the situation is urgent. More than anything else, global warming will drive us to the brink regarding food. Climate change—along with soil depletion, drought, and loss of farmland (often to “development”)—is likely to result in a dramatic reduction of global food production, by as much as 20 to 30 percent, in the next two or three decades. Unless we find ways to radically increase local food production in spite of these challenges, mass starvation could be widespread—and even the United States may not be spared.

Meanwhile, the human population is, of course, expected to increase, creating 14 percent more demand for food each decade. This is a global disaster in the making.

The Unholy Alliance cynically seeks to exploit this emerging global food crisis by convincing farmers, entrepreneurs, and investors that the solutions for “feeding the world” are primarily technological—through genetic modification, application of more powerful chemicals, use of better drugs, and even the creation of artificial food.

Not only are these technological strategies unnecessary, but also, as a matter of unintended consequences, they will greatly exacerbate the global food crisis. Along the way, they will increase humanity’s dependence on the industrial food system and further diminish our capacity to feed ourselves. The result could be a catastrophic reduction in human population over the next few decades.

While perhaps not agreeing on details or timelines, many of those in the forefront of the local food revolution share a common understanding and orientation: they comprehend the fundamental nature of our human predicament and are quietly doing what is in their power, often in the face of overwhelming obstacles. They are, in fact, doing the daunting work of revolutionaries, though few of them would identify themselves as such.

Meanwhile, we would do well to remember that the so-called Green Revolution⁵ was not a revolution at all. A brilliant public-relations

move obscured the reality that the Green Revolution was an industrial-development strategy designed by transnational agrochemical corporations to create an ever-growing market—to increase their own profits—while making much of humanity increasingly dependent on industrial methods of agriculture and food production: reliance on fossil fuels, chemical pesticides, herbicides, and genetic modification. It is no coincidence that the system of land-grant universities remains at the forefront of this development.

Indeed, the meme of “feeding the world” is essentially an exploitive and manipulative marketing strategy. It is a mantra still mindlessly and ritually chanted by nearly everyone in the industrial food supply chain—an article of near-religious faith.

In such an environment, it is not possible even to suggest that this very dependency keeps humanity shackled and enslaved solely in the name of economic growth and corporate profitability.

Real revolutions come from the bottom up, starting at the grassroots, responding to the real needs of the people. The Green Revolution was more of a coup, in that it came from the top down, from the halls of industry and academia, supported by the heavy hand of government and international banks. As a result, we have almost completely lost our capacity to meet our essential food needs locally. We have lost our food sovereignty and our food security.

We come to these realizations with great pain and humility, for we have all been complicit in this loss.



How do we end our complicity? How do we contribute to this great and urgent cause? How do we ourselves become revolutionaries?

There are myriad ways to participate, of course. And there are countless courageous and innovative efforts already underway that we can join.

But perhaps we can begin with a simple declaration.