Liberalism and the Two Directions of the Local Food Movement

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Abstract

The local food movement is, increasingly, becoming a part of the modern American landscape. However, while it appears that the local food movement is gaining momentum, one could question whether or not this trend is, in fact, politically and socially sustainable. Is local food just another trend that will fade away or is it here to stay? One way to begin addressing this question is to ascertain whether or not it is compatible with liberalism, a set of influential political theories that have shaped and continue to shape our political system. In this paper, I argue that the local food movement is partially compatible with forms of liberalism that accept the limited application of the principle of neutrality, as there are two directions or trends within local food: 1) The systems based direction and 2) the individual focused direction. The systems based direction is not compatible while the individual focused movement is largely compatible with liberalism. I go on to argue that the two directions form a dialectic that increases the political and social sustainability of the movement as a whole. Conceiving of the individual focused and the systems focused directions as in opposition to one another is, itself, a mistake.

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A Place at the Table: Liberalism and the Two Directions of the Local Food Movement

It appears that the local food movement is, increasingly, becoming a part of the modern American landscape (DeLind 2011; Dale 2008; Feagan 2007; Lyson 2004).[1] For example, according to the USDA, numbers of local farmers markets have increased steadily since 1994.[2] In addition, community gardens and community supported agriculture projects (or CSAs) are on the rise (Kirkpatrick 2009; McCormack 2010; Smith and Morton 2009) and popular authors, such as Pollan (2011) and Kingsolver et al. (2008), have saturated the public with bestselling books outlining ways that we can eat a local diet. However, while it appears that the local food movement is gaining momentum, one could question whether or not this trend is, in fact, politically and socially sustainable, especially in light of recent developments explained below.[3] Is local food just another trend that will eventually fall away or is it here to stay? One way to begin addressing this question is to ascertain whether or not the local food movement is compatible with liberalism, as this theoretical tradition has shaped and continues to shape American political and social systems (Donohue 2003; Wolin 2006).

In this paper, I utilize the work of liberal theorists to argue that the local food movement is partially compatible with forms of liberalism that accept the principle of neutrality (both "liberalism" and "the principle of neutrality" will be defined below). I say "partially compatible" here because I use DeLind's (2011) work to illustrate that there are at least two directions or trends within local food: 1) The systems based direction and 2) the individual focused direction. While the systems based direction is not compatible, as it includes within it communitarian critiques of liberalism, the individual focused movement is largely compatible with liberalism, as it conceives of citizens as individuals living out their vision of the good life. I finish by arguing that the two directions form a dialectic that increases the political and social sustainability and the influence of the movement as a whole. Conceiving of the individual focused and the systems focused directions as always in opposition to one another is, itself, a mistake. Before making this argument, however, I first define my terms.

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1 While our understanding of "local food" will be more fully developed throughout this paper, initially, the term should be understood as signifying a sustained collaborative effort to create more locally based food systems that are sustainable and where consumption is integrated in such as way that social, environmental, and economic health of regions are enhanced (Feenstra 2002).

2 For more information see the USDA website at http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateS&leftNav=WholesaleandFarmersMarkets&page=WFMFarmersMarketGrowth&description=Farmers%20Market%20Growth&acct=frmrdirmkt (accessed December 19, 2012)

3 While there are many definitions of the term "sustainable" (including those focusing on social, political, economic, environmental, technological, and/or other forms), within this paper I use "sustainable" to signify a movement or action that can be *politically and socially* sustained for a prolonged period of time. As this paper largely focuses on the political dimensions of local food, the above conception of sustainability is my primary focus.

Liberalism & Limited Neutrality

As Ryan (2012, 2007) argues, when attempting to give a short definition of "liberalism," one is immediately faced with the problem of deciding between the many different liberalisms that make up this specific political philosophy. Giving a full definition of this theoretical tradition is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is important to note that liberals, roughly, hold that personal liberty is the attribute of primary political value (Cranston 1967) and, as such, it is often understood to be "normatively basic" (Gaus 1996). Thus the central question for liberalism is deciding whether or not law and political authority are justified in limiting citizen's personal liberty (Gaus and Courtland 2011).

I argue that it is particularly important to ascertain whether or not local food is compatible with this theoretical tradition as liberalism has been highly influential throughout the political formation of the United States. Fundamental rights such as free trade, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and private property rights are generally supported by liberal ideals (Donohue 2003; Wolin 2006). If this is the case, then determining if local food movements are compatible with liberalism may help us to ascertain if such initiatives are politically and socially sustainable because it could enable us to more easily determine whether or not initiatives stemming from this movement (such as policy changes, changes in common law, trade agreements etc.) can be easily integrated into the larger social/political structure of the United States. In addition, it may provide insights into how such initiatives can be more efficiently integrated. While the project of analyzing the integration of such initiatives into the political structure is too large for the scope of this paper, my goal is to lay the foundation for such analyses.

It is important to note here that, while there are several forms of liberalism, this paper primarily focuses on whether or not local food movements are compatible with forms of liberalism that accept a limited application of the principle of neutrality and not on a smaller subset of liberalism, called neoliberalism, that promotes the use of a largely unregulated market system to distribute goods, as there is already extensive work in this area (see DeLind 2011; Guthman 2008; Vandermeer and Perfecto 2005). Roughly, the principle of neutrality mandates that justice, be it distributive or another form, must be independent or separate from any conception of what it means to live a good life (Dworkin 1979).

While not all liberal philosophers conceive of this principle as primary, several highly influential theorists, such as Ackerman (1980), Dworkin (1979), and Rawls (2001), recognize the neutrality principle as foundational for a liberal state, as it limits the arguments that are acceptable when discussing questions of power and protects citizens from mandates that may not be compatible with their conception of the good life (Thigpen and Downing 1983). For this reason, providing an analysis of this larger set of liberal theories (i.e. liberal theories that accept this principle) will greatly add to the literature on both local food and liberalism. So is the local food movement compatible with such approaches? The next section of this paper attempts to answer this question utilizing a history of work in environmental philosophy.

Liberalism, Environmental Philosophy, and Local Food

While there is a lack of scholarly work directly focusing on the compatibility of liberalism (in contrast to neoliberalism) and local food movements, philosophers have spent over twenty years debating the question of whether liberalism and environmental philosophy are compatible.[4] I argue that two influential scholars working in this area, Kymlicka (1989) and Michael (2000),[5] can provide useful information regarding whether or not the local food movement is compatible, especially when one conceives of agriculture as under the umbrella of environmental philosophy.[6]

For example, Kymlicka (1989) argues that even environmentalists need resources to realize their vision of what it means to live a good life and thus need a liberal state. Within this argument, Kymlicka conceives of environmental philosophies as differing ways that people can choose to live their lives. John can live his life as an environmentalist, using his resources to buy land that will be conserved, and Joanna can live her life chopping down all the trees on her land and selling them to the paper mill. Both conceptions of the good life are acceptable within liberalism. If environmental philosophies are, indeed, conceptions of the good life, then even radical forms of environmentalism (such as deep ecology) that call for non-materialistic and non-individualistic relationships with the non-human world could be considered compatible with the this theoretical tradition.

While Kymlicka (1989) did not specifically write about local food, the same argument could hold for such movements.[7] People who desire to know their farmer, to work in community supported agriculture projects, or to eat locally grown produce, for example, are justified in using

4 Here it is important to note that "environmental philosophy" can signify many fields of thought. Specifically, in this paper the term signifies the rich Western philosophical tradition that focuses on better understanding human's relationship towards the earth and outlines possible ethics used to guide our interactions with nonhuman others and the environment. According to Warren (2000), such work can be broken into four categories: reformist positions, mixed radical and reformed positions, radical positions, and house positions. House positions are built upon the foundation of traditional philosophical arguments, such as utilitarianism or rights theory. Reformed positions add new components to house theories in hopes that they can better address current ethical problems. Radical positions introduce radical new ideas into the environmental philosophy dialog. Finally, mixed radical and reform positions are environmental philosophies that use aspects of reformed theories and also introduce new radical ideas.

5 Also see diZerega's (1996) essay "Deep Ecology and Liberalism: The Greener Implications of Evolutionary Liberal Theory" published in *The Review of Politics* for another account of how liberalism and environmental theory are compatible. I did not use this particular essay within this paper because diZerega's depiction of liberalism would not be accepted by many liberals, as his conception of liberalism is one that is compatible with communitarianism and is separated from current forms such as that of Rawls.

6 Thompson (1995) argues that environmental ethicists should also take up questions of production that are especially illustrated by agriculture; thus moving agriculture into the scope of environmental ethics. In addition, Jackson (2002) argues that agricultural regions, such as parts of the Midwest, are accepted as "sacrifice areas" and treated like industrial zones (2002). She goes on to call for a re-conception of farming areas as natural habitat. Finally, Leopold's (1966) land ethic included farming as part of tending to the natural habitat. For this reason, one could argue that agriculture ethics can be understood as a form of environmental ethics.

their personal resources to try to live this conception of the good life, while others who desire cheap, processed food or food grown across the globe (such as bananas) are also justified in using their resources to live this other conception of the good life. A liberal state that accepts the principle of neutrality does not discriminate between different conceptions of what it means to live a good life and is thus compatible with both. Similarly, the work of the liberal theorist Michael (2000) could also be applied to the local food movement.

In "Liberalism, Environmentalism, and the Principle of Neutrality," Michael (2000) argues against Sagoff's (1994) claim that environmental philosophy and liberal theory are incompatible because environmentalists cannot adhere to the principle of neutrality. Michael claims that we if accept a limited scope of neutrality where it only applies to constitutional essentials, as Rawls (1971, 2001) and Barry (1995) argue, then environmentalism is compatible with liberalism. Environmentalists will be able to appeal to claims of intrinsic value and particular conceptions of the good life in order to justify stricter legislation or policies regarding environmental issues, such as pollution, for example.

Michael (2000) also argues that liberalism is built upon the basic moral claim that persons should be treated with equal respect or that we should treat others as ends in themselves and not means. Thus, for Michael, "if the only reasons one can give for establishing some law or policy appeal to a contested notion of the good that not all persons accept, then those people are being forced to comply and… are not being shown equal respect for persons" (p.45). One could argue that this may make several forms of environmentalism incompatible with liberalism, as only human interests are being taken into consideration. However, Michael argues that, within the liberal framework, questions regarding what would or would not count as a resource are prior to questions of just distribution. In addition, as these questions are prior to liberalism's focus on distribution, they lie outside of the realm of the principle of neutrality. It follows from this that environmentalists are justified in using intrinsic value claims and personal conceptions of a good life when arguing that nature or nonhuman others should not be considered resources. Therefore, for Michael, environmentalism is compatible with forms of neutralist liberalism.

If we apply Michael's (2000) argument to the local food movement, then it would follow that, under a liberal state, people could both live their lives according to their personal visions of what it means to live a good life, as Kymlicka (1989) argues, and also use arguments appealing to intrinsic value claims when arguing for particular legislation/laws/policies. People involved in the local food movements can live their lives and spend their money according to their particular good life *and* use this vision to argue for increased legislation or the creation of policies that would make this life easier to live. They could also use the same justifications to argue that some areas, such as marsh areas around farms that provide ecosystem services, should not be categorized as a resource. Thus one could argue that the local food movement is largely

7 While there are more recent views on liberalism and environmental philosophy, I specifically decided to use Kymlicka's (1989) essay as it captures some of the foundational aspects of liberal theory and thus, as will be illustrated in the essay, provides interesting insights regarding local food. In addition, several later essays, such as diZerega's (1996) and Sagoff's (1994), specifically deal with countering and revising previous positions, such as Kymlicka's.

compatible with forms of neutralist liberalism, such as Rawls' (2011), that espouse a limited scope of neutrality.

However, if we are correct in this assessment, then this leads to the following questions: Is the local food movement simply an "interest" group made up of like minded people, such as gardening associations or stamp collecting clubs, or does it serve another purpose? In addition, are the philosophies that influence the local food movement compatible with liberalism or are they critiques of it? Next, I briefly give an overview of the local food movement and outline the two directions or trends within it: 1) The systems based direction and 2) the individual focused direction. The aim of next section is to problematize the simplistic analysis of the compatibility of local food and liberalism presented above before I offer a more in depth critique.

The Two Directions of the Local Food Movement

While many in the public assume that the local food movement is relatively new, arguably, it was first started in the mid 20th century by Balfour (2006) and Howard (2011).[8] Their work subsequently influenced American farmers such as J.I. Rodale who founded the Rodale Institute in 1947.[9] More recently, the work of systems scientists[10] and, specifically, Dahlberg's (1993) essay on food systems, greatly influenced the further development of this movement (DeLind 2011). Specifically, within this essay, Dahlberg (1993) argues for a broad analysis of food systems, where they are understood as existing on numerous levels and distances. According to DeLind (2011), Dahlberg's argument is meant to remind us that the food system is both dynamic (i.e. connected to ecology, politics, and history) and place based. As the food system is a "system," it is built upon a web of interconnections between different levels of society such as the individual, household, regional, and global levels. Flexibility is found at the local levels and this helps to stabilize the larger, more abstract levels. It follows from this that a uniform approach to agriculture (i.e. industrial agricultural models) will not work in local contexts. In addition, for Dahlberg (1993), the guiding principles of a "regenerative food system" are equity, ecology, and ethics. Thus, as consumers and/or producers, we are charged with recognizing our place in the larger ecosystem, restoring that ecosystem, and fairly distributing goods such as resources and power (DeLind 2011). Historically, members of the local food movement actively worked to live their lives according to this philosophy and/or to make this vision a reality (DeLind 2002; DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Kloppenburg et al. 1996).

More recently, the local food movement developed into a response of local communities to the growing trend of the economic consolation of agriculture and as a strategy to revitalize rural areas, especially in the American Northeast (Feenestra 2002; Lyson 2004; Star 2003). Arguably, this more recent development has remained true to its systems based roots, as it still

8 See Lady Eve Balfour's (1943) book *The Living Soil* and Albert Howard's (1940) book *An Agricultural Testament*.

9 See http://www.rodaleinstitute.org/about_us (accessed May 4, 2012).

10 See Mollison's (1994) *Introduction to Permaculture* and Bawden and Packham's (1998) "Systemic praxis in the education of the agricultural systems practitioner" in *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*.

preferences the place based, value oriented approach to agriculture, as outlined by Dahlberg (1993).[11] For the purposes of this paper, the above form of localism will be known as the systems focused direction. However, as DeLind (2011) argues, there are three trends happening today that threaten to move this movement away from its context based roots.[12]

According to DeLind (2011), these trends are as follows: 1) The locavore trend, 2) the Wal-mart trend, and 3) the Pollan trend. The locavore trend is one where people try to eat only local foods and aspire to live the local lifestyle. The Wal-mart trend is when "local" becomes just another commodity attribute used by large multinational companies to sell more products. Finally, the Pollan trend can be described as the management of the local food movement by experts and heroes. When taken together, DeLind (2011) argues that these trends move away from Dahlberg's (1993) guiding principles of equity, ecology, and ethics and instead shift the focus towards market based economics and production. They also shift the focus of the local food movement to self-interest and away from the place based and community building aspect of the systems based direction. For this reason, I call these three trends (when taken together) the "Individual focused direction," as they are fundamentally different in character from the systems based approach in that they focus on the individual rather than the various levels of a system. The next section of this paper focuses on answering the question of whether or not these two directions in the local food movement are compatible with liberalism.

Liberalism and the Individual Focused Local Food Movement

So is the local food movement in fact compatible with liberalism as initially argued above? In this paper, I argue that the local food movement is partially compatible with forms of liberalism that accept the principle of limited neutrality. Specifically, the individual focused trend is compatible but the systems focused direction is not. The individual focused direction is compatible because the three trends outlined above by DeLind (2011) are built upon an understanding of local food as a particular vision of the good life. For example, let us look at two imaginary citizens, named Joe and Mary, that have decided to live their lives eating only locally produced foods. First, both Joe and Mary read one of Pollan's (2009; 2011) bestselling books that outlines the reasons why it is important to eat locally and to not eat food produced through industrial agriculture. They then follow the guidelines and suggestions of this author when pursing this good life.This is compatible with DeLind's outline of the Pollan trend (DeLind

11 For more information on this trend see Lyson (2004). According to Lyson, the current local food movement has the following six distinctive features: 1) it supplies local markets and consumers; 2) agriculture is understood as a part of communities and not simply the production of commodities; 3) farmers focus on quality over quantity; 4) farming is more labor intensive and less capital and land intensive; 5) site specific and local knowledge is important; and 6) there are direct ties to farmers and their customers. These line up well with Dahlberg's (1993) conception of the local food movement.

12 While there is a large amount of literature on local food, this paper makes extensive use of Delind's 2011 article, as it provides key insights regarding current trends that are pivotal for my argument; key insights largely absent in earlier literature. In addition, Delind's local food trends illuminate compatibilities and tensions between local food and liberalism that are particularly important for my argument.

2011). Next, Joe and Mary begin to make choices regarding how they should use their resources, such as purchases at the grocery store, which reflect this new conception of the good life. This is the locavore trend. Finally, companies, like Wal-mart see an opportunity to cater to this market and begin selling products that these locally focused customers will want to use their resources to buy. This is the Wal-mart trend. Each of these trends, and the individual actions of people like Joe and Mary, is compatible with forms of liberalism that accept a limited conception of neutrality because these forms of liberalism allow each citizen to utilize their resources in order to live their own conception of the good life.

Thus, if the local food movement is, or promotes, a particular conception of the good life, and the arguments of Michael (2000) and Kymlicka (1989) are correct, then it follows that the individual focused trend is compatible with forms of neutralist liberalism, such as Rawls'(2001, 1971). Conversely, in the next section, I argue that the systems focused trend is not compatible with forms of liberalism that include the principle of neutrality because the systems focused direction contains within it communitarian critiques of liberal theory. For this reason the philosophies at the heart of local food cannot be reduced to a particular vision of the good life.

Liberalism and the Systems Focused Local Food Movement

According to Bell (2005), communitarian critiques of liberalism claim that this political theory devalues or undermines community. In addition, these critics, roughly, put forth three lines of reasoning to argue this point. While I will not go into detail, as a large portion of this essay is not applicable to the aim of this paper, the two lines of reasoning that are pivotal to my argument are as follows: 1) That liberalism is too universalistic and 2) that liberalism is too individualistic. I argue that the systems focused direction implicitly accepts these two critiques and offers another conception of the person and life that is different from the liberal vision.

As argued above, historically, the local food movement focused on creating regenerative food systems, where the food system is seen as dynamic and connected to ecology, politics, and place (Dahlberg 1993; DeLind 2002; DuPuis and Goodman 2005). This direction is markedly different from the individualistic trend above which appears to lack the systems focus. In fact, DeLind (2011) argues that the trends within the individualistic direction move the local food movement away from its systems roots. I feel that her critique of the locavore trend and the Wal-mart trend can be helpful in illustrating how the systems focused direction contains critiques of liberalism. Thus her analyses will be given before I make my argument.

First, DeLind (2011) argues that the locavore trend is problematic because it privileges the individual and suggests that personal choices cause global issues, such as loss of habitat, and thus displaces responsibility. It is also problematic because it assumes that an individual's primary function or responsibility is to consume. She goes on to argue that this is a reductionist conception of a person that fosters a sense of "me rather than a sense of we" and ignores the local food movement's focus on place and community (p.276). Finally, the locavore trend reduces the person to an individual consumer whose identity is primarily mediated through the market. This starves political and social activism. Within this trend, individual choice is equated with individual freedom and market participation is equated with community participation.

DeLind (2011) finds the Wal-mart trend just as problematic as the locavore trend. Today large chains such as Wal-mart sell what they call local produce. According to DeLind, this "pairs rhetoric with some of the very conditions the movement was designed to overcome" and causes the following negative effects: 1) local food loses its economic advantage, meaning that around half of the money spent locally stays in the community; 2) "local" turns into one of many "commodity attributes" which trivializes the term and opens it up to the possibility of being usurped by corporate interests; and 3) corporations can now define or dictate what "local" means (p.277). Is local 100 miles away or 200 miles away? Thus the local food movement can be seen as being "co-opted by capitalist interests; the very interests that localism attempts to undermine (DeLind 2002; DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Kloppenburg et al. 1996).[13] Next, I outline how using insights gained by theorists critical of liberalism can help illustrate the incompatibility of systems focused localism and liberalism.

Are Liberalism and the Local Food Movement Compatible?

Specifically, I argue that DeLind's (2011) critique of the Wal-mart trend and the locavore trend include two common threads: 1) The charge that the local food movement is increasingly focusing on the individual rather than on community and 2) the implicit critique that local food is becoming universal or no longer connected to place. This maps on well with individualistic critiques of liberalism. For example, Jaggar (1983) argues that because liberalism takes the primary unit of society to be the individual, it treats individual people as prior to and independent of society. Thus a person's interests, needs, wants, and capabilities are not seen as connected to or dependent upon his/her social context. Other philosophers such as Pateman (1979), Sandel (1998), and McIntyre (1981) make similar arguments centering on the critique that liberalism is too individualistic in that it does not focus on community or structural factors.[14] If this is the case, and liberalism conceives of people as individuals prior to society, then this goes against a systems focused local food movement that is sensitive to ties between people and the many layers of the political, social, and natural systems in which they live. Thus while such local food

13 Interestingly, Guthman (2004) and DuPuis and Goodman (2005) argued that such corporate cooptation was possible and now it appears to becoming a reality. In addition, DeLind's (2011) argument could be seen as a potential critique of the increasingly common argument in academic literature that local food production needs to "scale-up" and engage larger consumers and producers (Mount 2012; Born and Purcell 2006; Friedmann 2007.)

14 One could counter this argument in two ways. First, regarding the charge that the systems focused direction is incompatible with liberal individualism, as Nussbaum (1999) argues in "the Feminist Critique of Liberalism," this impoverished conception of humanity goes against key liberal thinkers, such as Rawls and Kant. Second, one could argue, as Nussbaum, Michael (2000) and Kymlicka (1989) do, that the philosopher giving the critique misunderstands liberalism. However, as Bell (2005) argues, communitarian critiques will always resurface because they encapsulate basic problems with liberalism in praxis. Thus they are a part and parcel of liberal theory, as a crease is in a particular pair of pants. I tend to agree with Bell, although, counter arguments against these critiques are not important for this paper. What is important is that the systems focused direction includes such critiques and this places it in opposition to or distinguishes it from liberalism.

movements may be compatible with the principle of neutrality, they are not compatible with the individualism at the heart of liberalism.

Second, as stated above, the local food movement recently developed into a response to the growing trend of global integration and as a strategy to revitalize rural areas (Feenestra 2002; Lyson 2004; Star 2003). However, if corporations gain the majority of the profit from selling local goods, then this money does not go back into the community. In addition, companies can also dictate what is meant by "local" (DeLind 2011). 200 miles away may be local for Wal-mart, but in actuality, the goods are being sold in a different community or even a different state. If the Wal-mart trend transforms the term "local" into a commodity attribute that is utilized by large multinational companies, then, in essence, the term "local" loses its meaning and connection to a particular place. Thus, through universalizing, the local food movement may no longer support the local community and this could go against the systems focused direction.

Finally, in contrast to environmental philosophies built upon traditional philosophical arguments (such as that of Kant or Mill, for example), radical philosophies are those that introduce new considerations and issues into the ethical dialog (Warren 2000). I argue that the systems focused local food movement is a form of radical philosophy because it developed largely out of and promotes an ecological or systems focused conception of food systems (Dahlberg 1993; DeLind 2011; Feenestra 2002; Lyson 2004). As such, this local food direction brings new considerations and a new conception of the food system into ethical dialog. As Cuomo (1994) argues, radical philosophies are "radical" specifically because they focus on bringing about revolutionary change, either in the world or to the way people understand and interact with non-human others and the environment. As argued above, the systems based local food movement is not only a particular conception of the good life but also a movement that is simultaneously a critique of the industrial agriculture system, which is dependent upon the market, and an outline of a new food system built upon a fundamentally new relationship with nature where the ecosystems in which humans live are as important as the human economic and political systems (Dahlberg 1993; DeLind 2011). To reduce it to one of many conceptions of the good life is to misrepresent it. Thus, for the reasons above, while the individual focused local food movement is largely compatible with liberalism, this more radical form is not.

So, again, we are back at the question of whether or not the local food movement compatible with liberalism. The answer appears to be yes and no. If local food is understood as the individual focused direction, then the answer is yes but if local food is understood as the systems focused direction, then the answer is no. It appears that DeLind (2011) is correct when she argues that the individual focused direction is moving local food away from its place based and regenerative roots. She goes on to argue that "as a result (of the current trends), we seem to have forgotten… that local food, as part of a regenerative agrifood system, is also about restoring 'a public culture of democracy' and engaging in the continual creation, negotiation, and recreation of identity, memory, and meaning" (p.279). It's about forming and protecting the commons and helping people to assume their share of public responsibility. Thus the systems focused direction is about community and civics as much as it is about food. So does this mean that the current individualistic trends are "bad" and take away from this aspect of the local food movement?

Both Local Food Directions Have a Place at the Table

I argue that both directions have a place in the larger system and serve different purposes. While they may appear to be at odds with each other, this is not necessarily the case. For example, as argued above by DeLind (2011), the systems focused direction aims at forming and restoring community, restoring local democracy, and connecting people to each other and to the ecosystems around them. Arguably, the movement aims to change the way people understand and interact with the world, including other people and the environment. Thus it could follow from this that the systems based direction works towards the radical aim of bringing about revolutionary change (Cuomo 1994).

In contrast, the individual focused direction can be understood to have three benefits: First, it works within the system to cultivate an awareness of the problems of industrial agriculture and to educate people about the benefits of local agrifood systems. Second, it helps influence people to make better food choices and to support local legislation/laws/policies that make a local food system possible. Third, "locavors" and other consumers dedicated to cultivating a local food system influence national/international companies to buy some products from "relatively" local sources. This brings some money into local communities and enables the large purchasing power of these companies to support more humane and/or ecologically/socially friendly agriculture practices (even if this may go against or not be compatible with the systems based direction).

Thus I argue that the individual focused direction helps to bring about change within larger political and social structures, while the systems focused direction brings to the table deeper critiques of the larger structure and our basic relationship with the land, ecosystems, and each other. In addition, the individual focused movement, through fostering interest in the local lifestyle, increases the market for local products. While some of this demand may be satisfied by large national and multinational companies, such as Wal-mart, a percentage of it is fulfilled locally through local community supported agriculture projects and farmers markets. As Kymlicka (1989) argued, even deep ecologists need resources to live their particular conception of the good life. Finally, embracing the locavore lifestyle opens people up to the possibility of gaining experiential knowledge that might gradually alter their relationship with the natural world and their particular community. As Alcoff and Dalmiya (1993) argue, there is a difference between propositional knowledge, or A knows p, and experiential knowledge, or A knows how to do p. Both the logical reasons given by local food figureheads, such as Pollan (2011) and Kingsolver et al. (2008), and the practical experience gained by trying to live this particular lifestyle could lead to greater numbers of people embracing the more revolutionary aspects of the systems focused direction. Therefore, both of these directions within local food increase the social and political sustainability of the movement as a whole.

Conclusion

In this paper, I utilized the work of liberal theorists, such as Kymlicka (1989) and Michael (2000), critics of liberalism, such as Bell (2005) and Jaggar (1983), and local food scholars, such as Dahlberg (1993), DeLind (2011), and Lyson (2004), to argue that the local food

movement is partially compatible with forms of liberalism that ascribe to the principle of limited neutrality. While the systems based direction is not compatible, as it includes within it communitarian critiques of liberalism, the individual focused movement is largely compatible with liberalism, as it conceives of citizens/consumers as individuals living out their own conceptions of the good life. I went on to argue that the two directions form a dialectic that increases the social and political sustainability of the movement as a whole. Though they are largely mutually exclusive, conceiving of the individual focused and the systems focused directions as always in opposition to one another is, itself, a mistake.

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