The practice, policies, and debate associated with U.S.-based community food security (CFS) reflect the historical development of food rights and food security at the international and US national, state, and local community scales. First, CFS in the U.S. has multiple and conflicting definitions that are locally defined within a context of entitlement rights and global trade. Second, the political economy that generates conditions of local food insecurity is increasingly countered within a framework of international economic and political rights. Third, the capability to claim economic rights may require the cross-sectoral efforts of activists, public officials, entrepreneurs, and academics. In this paper, we provide a short history of international food rights and food security and a background on the diversity of CFS perspectives and practice in the United States. We identify some of the many entry points for CFS activities to portray the need for a system-wide strategy to address food security.

The practice, policies, and debate associated with U.S.-based community food security (CFS) reflect the historical development of food rights and food security at the international and US national, state, and local community scales. Today, CFS is a national issue that is largely locally defined and diverse in its meanings. It represents cross-sectoral efforts of activists, public officials, entrepreneurs, and academics from multiple disciplines. In general terms, CFS activities address public health, residential well being and community sustainability. A successful engagement in this field of study and action requires, we argue, both an understanding of the history behind contemporary food security debates, as well as, of the controversies in daily CFS practice that are rooted both in history and in the political economies of local and national scale. Many CFS activities and actors

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identify with, and are rejuvenated by, the international interpretations of human rights and food security. In this paper, we provide a short history of food rights and food security as well as a background on the diversity of CFS perspectives and practice in the U.S. We then identify strategies, or entry points, for CFS activities at the local level.

A SHORT HISTORY OF FOOD RIGHTS AND FOOD SECURITY

The Human Right to Food

After World War II, the atrocities that grew both from historical and escalating trade conflicts, and from genocide together with a disavowal of basic human rights, received a heightened level of attention at the international scale. Part of the argument to establish the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was to enhance trade and development as a strategy to secure peace through economic improvement. Concurrently, the newly incorporated United Nations (UN) attempted to charter universally recognized basic human rights. As one integral component of human rights, the right to food was contextualized as an economic right in the nonbinding 1948 UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Article 25 (1) reads,

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services . . .

Article 25 (1) represents the moral legitimacy of the socialist political economy at the beginning of the Cold War. Its inclusion balanced a nominal quid pro quo with the West's sponsorship of civil and political rights promoting, e.g., voting, free assembly, and free speech. Both sets of rights were expanded upon and institutionalized in legally binding but difficult to enforce 1966 international covenants. The right to food is addressed in Article 11 of the UN Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. The U.S. also participated in the negotiation of the 1966 Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, signed it in 1977, but has never ratified it in Congress. Neither document holds legal legitimacy in the U.S., the former because it carries no legal authority, the latter because it has not been ratified. As shall be discussed, they do inspire social action on behalf of food and economic rights generally. Finally, although the right to food has been elaborated in political and civil rights. It was a tragic disservice of the Cold War that political and economic rights were conceptually and ideologically separated.

An international declaration represents language that has been negotiated between national states. It can have the power of establishing standards, but it does not, even theoretically, carry the weight of law. A covenant, convention, or treaty (the terms are used interchangeably) is achieved through negotiated language at the international level that then must be ratified at the national state level before any state accedes to the treaty. The U.S. actively negotiated and signed the 1948 UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights. The U.S. actively negotiated and signed the 1948 UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights. The U.S. participated in the negotiation of the 1966 Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, signed it in 1977, but has never ratified it in Congress. Neither document holds legal legitimacy in the U.S., the former because it carries no legal authority, the latter because it has not been ratified. As shall be discussed, they do inspire social action on behalf of food and economic rights generally. Finally, although the right to food has been elaborated in

1Article 11 of the 1966 UN Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights:

(1) The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent;

(2) The States Parties to the present Covenant, recognizing the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, shall take, individually and through international co-operation, the measures, including specific programmes, which are needed: (a) To improve methods of production, conservation and distribution of food by making full use of technical and scientific knowledge, by disseminating knowledge of the principles of nutrition and by developing or reforming agrarian systems in such a way as to achieve the most efficient development and utilization of natural resources; (b) Taking into account the problems of both food importing and food exporting countries, to ensure an equitable distribution of world food supplies in relation to need.

2See especially, Articles 19 (1), right to hold opinions without interference; 19(2), freedom of expression; 19(3), the duty to respect related rights of others; 21, right to peaceful assembly; 22, freedom of association; 25, public participation in political life and civil society. Ratified in the U.S., June 1992.

3It is an irony of the Cold War that as they crusaded for human rights at the UN, the leader of the West, the U.S., was immersed in its own civil rights battles and the leader of the East, the U.S.S.R., was guilty of using food shortages, and even starvation, to control political dissent on a regional scale.
various declarations and treaties since 1948, no treaty has been initiated that focuses on or significantly expands the meanings of a legal right to food (Riches 1997, 1999; Buckingham 1998; Power 1999; Van Esterik 1999; Mittal and Rosset 1999; Eide, A. et al. 1984; Bellows, Forthcoming).

The legal availability of an economic right to food is usually insufficient to assure food security. Therefore, rights should be understood, we argue, in terms of legal and organizational tools as opposed to reliable social assurances that are not always or universally available. Achieving food security, whether inside or outside a legal framework of economic rights requires political capacity. In the early 1980s, Amartya Sen claimed that food shortages were caused neither by a lack of legal rights, nor a shortage of food, but rather by the inability to claim entitlement to those rights. Using 19th and 20th century examples of mass hunger, Sen demonstrated that populations starve in countries that register net exports of agricultural products when individuals and groups cannot wield the political agency to realize those basic rights. He concluded that political capability—the ability to assert and claim one’s needs in society—is a more critical measure of economic autonomy and security than of international human rights treaties alone (Sen 1981, 1982, 1985).

**Food Security: Evolving and Conflicting Interpretations**

As mentioned earlier, in the post-World War II era, economic stability was defined in the context of both human rights and free trade. In the 1960s and 1970s, international food security became a way to describe and measure the United Nations’ mandate to safeguard the human right to food as well as to promote world trade. The 1974 World Food Conference, for example, focused on the location and portability of food stockpiles (e.g., cereal grains), the fluidity of which served as an indicator of global food security. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, goals and strategies began to decentralize to regions, states, localities, and then households (Maxwell and Frankenberger 1992). In other words, over time the goal of food security was determined to be “successful” based not only on the movement of grain from country ‘A’ to country ‘B’, but also if it reached cities ‘x’, ‘y’, and ‘z’ and further, by all houses in neighborhoods ‘1’, ‘2’, and ‘3.’ To illustrate further, with the 1979 United Nations Plan of Action for World Food Security, member states participated more directly in establishing their food security goals and strategies, reflecting a greater recognition of individual country needs, realities, and experience. This change reduced reliance on the management analyses of ‘international food experts’ (UN Centre for Human Rights (UNCHR) 1989: IV/3/123 p. 25). Local and regional wisdom and experience began to question trade dependency on international food stocks and called for increased food production autonomy (cf. Smillie 2001; Clay and Stokke 2000; Escobar 1995). In 1982 and 1983 respectively, the World Food Council and the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recognized the importance of securing access to food “at country and at household level[s]” (FAO 1983, quoted in the UN Centre for Human Rights 1989: IV/3/122-124. pp. 25-26; our emphasis). In two reports from the Institute for Nutrition Research in Oslo, Eide, et. al. developed a normative framework for household food security (Eide et al. 1985 and 1986, quoted in UN Centre for Human Rights 1989: IV/3/132-135, p. 27).

By the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, NGOs had refined the definition of household food security in terms of availability, stability and access. Among other points, they advocated for the inclusion of productive resources like land for household food production and domestic use.

Food security is defined as a situation in which all households have both physical and economic access to adequate food for all members and where households are not at risk of losing such access. There are three dimensions implicit in this definition:

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*Recent United Nations summits have produced declarations that address human rights to food, including, the Food and Agriculture Conference (Rome 1997), conferences on Women (Beijing 1995; New York City 2000), and on Human Habitats (Istanbul 1996, Berlin 2000). Relatively recent treaties, for example the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), neither of which have been ratified by the United States, have addressed food and land access and related economic autonomy issues.*

*The trend toward a decentralization of interpreting food and hunger problems was spurred on and intensified by international conferences begun in the 1970s that addressed the needs of some of the world’s marginalized populations: women (UN Decade for Women, 1975-1985), the underemployed (World Conference on Employment, Growth and Basic Needs), and rural populations (World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, WCARRD 1979).*
availability, stability and access. Adequate food availability means that, on average, sufficient food supplies should be available to meet consumption needs. Stability refers to minimizing the probability that, in difficult years or seasons, food consumption might fall below consumption requirements. Access draws attention to the fact that, even with bountiful supplies, many people still go hungry because they are too poor to produce or purchase the food they need. In addition if food needs are met through exploiting non-renewable resources or degrading the environment there is no guarantee of food security in the longer-term (FAO. 1996. “Food and International Trade.” WFS 96/TECH/8, provisional, April. p. 5. para 3.1., quoted in Lang 1996:46).

This definition was further remarkable for its inclusion of environmental sustainability as integral to the concept of food security. It highlights the work of NGOs’ lobbying, negotiating, and cooperating with national governments to broaden the meaning of “security” to include long term, future-generational, and environmental safety components. This elaboration essentially heralded the nascent development of “community” and of “systemic” understandings of food security today.

Corresponding inversely to the decentralization in food policy development has been the centralization of the international regulation of food and agricultural trade. Post World War II international trade agreements, known as successive rounds of General Agreement(s) on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) were designed to diffuse international trade conflicts. It has been argued that the most recent round of GATT has eroded the already weak legal identity of food as a human right (e.g. Lang 1996; WEDO 1995; Nader et al.1993; Shiva 1993). Before 1994, countries had broad authority to control food imports through such means as quotas and tariffs to protect their own agricultural base. National public authorities could subsidize farmers and farm output, as well as their food exporters, as they saw fit. When GATT was most recently renegotiated in Uruguay in 1994, agricultural products became reconfigured for the first time in “free trade” terms _en par_ with spark plugs and refrigerators. Reminiscent of the 1974 World Food Conference, free trade increasingly means that if international trade delivers food to local retail stores, the local population is food secure (cf. Lang 1996:45-50). The World Trade Organization (WTO) was established in 1995 to adjudicate national grievances with regard to GATT rules. In 1996, the European Commission (among others) charged that food security policy and practice are challenged by an incompatibility with the rules of the WTO (Gabas 2001:323-330). It has also been argued that international protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) are initiated at least in part because the rulings and related process are not transparent or democratic (Danaher 2001; Bello 2001). This effectively disconnects food from public health scrutiny and broad economic security goals as measured at the scale of the individual, household, or community.

Interpretations of food security thus vary according to the scale it is defined at, the sector that defines it (private, private non-profit, and public), and the scale and sector that creates and delivers it. Today we see food security defined across a wide field of players that include, on the one hand, the trans-national agro-food industry and international trade regimes, and on the other hand, human rights and entitlement agendas defined at the community level. International trade rules principally represent the for-profit private sector. They are not transparent about their activities, nor do they employ democratic governance with their customers, although they may respond to national law that was created through democratic processes. Community rights-based agendas in the U.S. most often operate through a moral and often spiritual allegiance to the common good rather than with enforceable tools of law or the economic power of private industry. For these reasons, community groups rely on cooperation, although groups differ dramatically and vociferously according to their membership, philosophies, and experiences. National governments maintain a middle ground operating in response to lobbying from industry, activists, and local officials while, theoretically, both maintaining agricultural production and food markets _and_ protecting universal basic needs.

As previously mentioned, the language of food security is grounded in the political capability to define and thereby to claim and construct food access (cf. Sen 1985, 1982, 1981). The democratic latitude to define food security broadens the claim and augments

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6Gabas (2001:325; 323-330) writes with reference to the challenges faced by the European Commission’s effort, begun in 1996, to support food aid and food security projects in 71 countries.
the social inclusivity of the claimants. In other words, a definitional flexibility that encourages multiple interpretations of food security creates a more complete, but also a more complex picture of food needs.

COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY IN THE U.S.

Why Community?

Community food security (CFS) exists when all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice (Hamm and Bellows, proposed definition, Forthcoming).

Community food security (CFS) provides a context to address food security at a local scale where groups organize to effect social change and operate as conduits of knowledge and experience between more local and more global food security actors. Local groups benefit from building a degree of political capability (per Sen, 1985) and economic autonomy, especially given the international-scale turmoil over food security. We traditionally think of communities as housing spatially rigid populations, bounded inside census quadrants, voting districts, or geographical regions like islands or valleys. More critically, a community can be constituted “through material social practices” (Harvey 1993:16), i.e., identity, actions, and noncontiguous spaces. “[P]olitical recognition of social identity—class, race, national origin, environmental vulnerability” (Smith 1993:106) might define the community as might a “cultural narrative” in the form of art, language, (Dunn and Leeson 1993:144), and culinary traditions (Bell and Valentine 1997). “Communities of affiliation” refer to common identity and/or political practices across diverse spaces (Brown and Mussell 1984:11); they represent diverse social groups that coalesce through a shared spatial consciousness and collective determination to protect lived environments (Soja 1999:277). In writing about “consuming geographies,” Bell and Valentine (1997) describe community in terms of an effort “to challenge agribusiness and transnational corporations” practices in countries across the globe through what the people themselves put on their dinner plates (Valentine 1999:54; Bell and Valentine 1997; cf. Bird et al. 1993). Thus “community food security” means more than a specific space and scale wherein food security is monitored, as has been the case with the aforementioned meanings of national food security or household food security. CFS infers the activity of the community that employs a variety of efforts to meet the needs of its members.

It is not surprising that these factors correspond to international language on food security or that the concept of merging economic and political rights might be best realized at the local level. Some CFS activists and researchers in the U.S. conduct food program and policy activities within “communities of affiliation” that have global members and international agendas. For example, the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) cooperates with labor unions to address the poisoning of farm workers and their families throughout the U.S. and through international fora, like the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (The Pesticides Trust 1996). Such local-global actors provide up-to-date information for domestic organizations on food security developments at the international scale. Likewise they carry their local, regional, and national experience to the international platform of activities. Such fluid activity enriches information resources, expands partnerships, and builds a group’s authority because it is both versed in international events and grounded in specific local experiences. The unfixed global-local “location” of cooperating community actors augments their combined political capability to negotiate food security against a backdrop of the contradictory international trends of decentralizing and re-centralizing food security definitions and policies.

Diversity Versus Framing Commonality

Definitions of community food security (CFS) develop from the grassroots “up” instead of from national governments and private trade organizations “down.” They are characterized in the U.S. by a diversity of groups with very different motivations and objectives. If they can be brought together despite their different experiences with discrimination and other social injustices, they create a composite representation of local food-related needs that far more accurately portrays reality than any one interpretation alone. Beyond their local differences, however, CFS groups commonly reflect the evolution of efforts to meet the needs of its members.

Organizational members of the Community Food Security Coalition that engage in local and global food security efforts include, for example, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (www.iatp.org/foodsec/), National Catholic Rural Life Center (www.ncrlc.com), Humane Society of the U.S. (www.hsus.org), and the Pesticide Action Network (www.panna.org/panna/).
of international debates on food rights and security. First, CFS identifies with the decentralized community scale of reference. This perspective emphasizes local problem identification, analysis, and problem solving primarily, though not exclusively, through the efforts of local populations. Second, CFS is defined broadly and systemically. In other words, local food security is influenced by social systems of education, employment, civil rights, labor relations, retail and housing infrastructure, land use, public transportation, etc. Third, CFS definitions typically include a long-term concept of food security based upon the sustainability of human and natural environments for future generations.

CFS organizations in the U.S. usually focus on local projects that meet local needs. Centering action only on the “local” and on the community, however, can be a vulnerability as well as a strength. Political capability (leadership, volunteers, vision, expertise, money, etc.) is not distributed evenly across the landscape. A solely local-based approach for change would result in a piecemeal impact on the food systems that would dot the landscape with a “patchwork” of initiatives and successes or failures. Relying only on local resources would hobble a nascent CFS movement because it could not incorporate common ideas or share strengths. Organizations like the national NGO, Food First and the community-based Welfare Rights Unions (WRU) simultaneously organize and lobby for universal human rights and for national welfare support nets (Gilbert, 2001; Bello 2001; Mittal and Rosset 1999), as well as, for locally specific needs. In the end, an integration of the two geographic approaches to food security—local, particular, and disparate together with global, general, and homogenous—may provide a more effective strategy for change. This amalgamation further connects the U.S.-based CFS efforts with the international linked concepts of food security and food rights.

When and why can it be useful to have an understanding of CFS in common? When a disparate group of organizations seeks to influence large-scale public policy, they benefit from having a representative umbrella organization and a common profile. Sharon Lezberg describes this need in terms of “framing” CFS. A “frame” must achieve three ends: diagnostic, i.e., problem identification; prognostic, i.e., proposing strategies for solution; and motivational, i.e., directing action on problems. The value of framing the concept of CFS lies in the possibilities of organizing for tangible changes in public policy and local infrastructure that effect food security (e.g., shopping facilities, farmland preservation, etc.). Framing is a process and never a finished product. It needs to be flexible in order to accommodate internal (local and community) differences and external (non-local, macro political-economy) changes. New member groups may join; old member groups may feel unfairly presented. The longevity of an umbrella organization depends upon its ability to anticipate and juggle the changing needs of its adherents and to respond to political and economic developments.

**Development and Definitions:**

**The Community Food Security Coalition**

In the early 1990s, a group of community food activists formed a lobbying effort to have “community food security” legislation—programs and funding authorization—attached to the 1995 U.S. Farm Bill. This effort drove the institutionalization of existing but unconnected local efforts that were addressing food security and agricultural concerns ad hoc across the country. The Community Food Security Coalition (hereafter, “Coalition”) organized its first annual meeting in August of 1995 and began the process of defining a common position among a diverse group of activists, community-based organizers, and academics. Extrapolating from international development literature (Gottlieb and Fisher 1996a:196), community food security was defined succinctly as,

> all persons obtaining, at all times, a culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through local, non-emergency sources (Fisher and Gottlieb 1995:2).

This definition unites production, distribution, and consumption issues in a *food systems* approach. It is, however, quite general. It does not overcome the need for an explicit “underlying consensus about [the] meaning and purposes” of CFS or a prescription for the range of activities encompassed by CFS in order to ensure two fundamental objectives. The first objective is to develop a broad and representative membership in the Coalition’s public policy efforts and its publicly sponsored program development work. The second objective is to build consensus within the membership to make lobbying efforts more efficient.

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This “search for a more rigorous conceptual framework” forms the center of the Coalition’s work as it develops its identity and propels its associated mission into public policy (Fisher 1999a:1).

How can so broad a Coalition find consensus? Fisher (1999b:3) identifies six basic principles. First, both Coalition and non-Coalition groups focus on low income populations’ food needs. Second, CFS encompasses broad goals reflecting the understanding that food security is a product of wide social issues and policies including, for example, community development and the environmental management of urban sprawl and farmland protection. Third, CFS has a community focus that attempts to maximize the relationship between local food consumption and locally grown food. Fourth, emphasis is placed on community self-reliance and empowerment derived from strategies that do not depend upon emergency and charity food relief, but rather on a more autonomous food security based on combinations of employment security, available food retail outlets, transportation, and local food production possibilities. Fifth, the base for “a democratic, community-responsive food system” lies in a stable local agriculture that incorporates fair farm labor wages, job security, training and support for new farmers, farmland preservation, and better knowledge and appreciation by consumers of their food sources. Sixth, the “systems-oriented” character of CFS means that attaining it requires the talents and participation of diverse peoples in the community: different ages, cultures and races, job and economic security status, genders, citizenship, and so on.

Consensus, however, has been difficult to attain. Real and perceived differences have, until recently, challenged cooperation between long established anti-hunger organizations and the more recent community food security groups. Nevertheless, the diverse groups are beginning to understand that they share more in common than not (Hamm 1999:11). Recently, activists from a variety of backgrounds outlined individual and organizational approaches to understanding CFS in the context of their own work (Community Food Security Newsletter, Summer 1999). The intent was to produce a hybrid concept that might originate from different disciplines and from various fields of activity (Fisher 1999a:1, 5). In another example, strategic CFS projects, sometimes called food policy councils, have sought to provide structured opportunities for diverse community voices (e.g., activists, entrepreneurs, and government representatives) to meet and hammer out ideas to promote food secure local communities (Lyson 2000; Winne et al. 2000; Winne 1999; Dahlberg 1994; Koc and Dahlberg 1999; Allen 1991; Toronto Food Policy Council 1994).9

In 1997, Winne et al. first released Community Food Security: A Guide to Concept, Design, and Implementation (subsequently published, 2000) with the goal of introducing CFS as an analytical tool and methodology as well as a goal. The authors sought to summarize

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<td>Sustain food resources</td>
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Winne et al. 2000, p. 5. (Originally released in 1997.)

9See also the Food Circles Networking Project (www.ibiblio.org/farming-connection/localcon/groups/foodcirc.htm) and the Toronto Food Policy Council (www.city.toronto.on.ca/health/tfpc_index.htm).
differences between CFS and anti-hunger work, as shown in Table 1.

Although Table 1 might be modified today, it does serve as a useful tool for discussion and demonstrates that, very roughly outlined, predominantly anti-hunger organizations respond to immediate needs in neighborhoods while the CFS organizations seek to build capacity at the local level in response to systemic economic trauma and food insecurity. Clearly, both are needed, with a goal of phasing out the need for most emergency response mechanisms and another goal of promoting more self-sustaining, comprehensive, and systemic approaches to food security (cf. Poppendieck 1998). The greatest challenge, however, is not to simply combine them, but to address their common roots in broad social and economic inequality that perpetuates the trauma of food insecurity.

Formulating a “broader construction of economic justice,” as Lezberg suggests above, is a formidable task that naturally panics researchers, organizers, educators, and project coordinators who are accustomed to operating toward achievable goals. It contributes to a painful understanding of why good people work so hard yet witness steady increases in food bank demand. As many have written, it is hard if not impossible to address local problems or “fragmented” issues like CFS outside of an analysis of systemic injustice (Consider again, Food First and the Welfare Rights Unions; Allen 1999; Mittal and Rosset 1999). Typically, analyses of food issues remain too narrow to formulate a construction of social justice. Community actions, however valuable the contributions, remain measured against the vast systemic roots of food insecurity that no series of isolated local programs alone can counteract. In this conundrum lies the current frustration and challenge faced by all who work in the CFS field.

**Measuring Food Security in the U.S.**

Measuring “food security” should provide baseline data with which to measure the impact of food and agricultural policies and practices on public health. Until recently, most food security data in the U.S. has been gathered at the household scale, that aggregated, gives a sense of household welfare in a state, a region, or across the nation. The advantage of this measurement scheme is that the variables (e.g. household size, household income, food frequency intake and variety, etc.) are discrete and relatively easy to assemble for analysis. However, this process elides the impact of the broader food system in describing the social, economic, political, and environmental conditions that structure the possibilities and constraints of food security. It collapses unique aspects of local communities’ capability to address food insecurity. At this writing, including aspects of the food system in the analysis of food security is in its trial stages.

In nutritional sciences, a field that traditionally studies food security, Keenan et al. (2000) offer a review of research tools and methods that measure food security status at the individual, the household, and the community scale. Critically, the review expands the frame of food security data beyond dietary quality and food safety, to include: e.g., shopping opportunities, urban infrastructure like public transportation, changes in political administrations, and management of the physical environment that might affect exercise or local food cultivation possibilities. The authors state that these food security research “tools can be valuable in monitoring [nutritional status], in community needs assessment, and in planning”\(^\text{11}\) because the methods are found reliable in population-based surveys, because they have been evaluated in administration to ethnically and racially diverse populations,\(^\text{12}\) and because they are associated with nutrient intake. Yet to date, tools and methods have been validated only for research on household-scale food security.

Interdisciplinary research groups are also engaging in establishing new methods for assessing food systems and community health as a strategy to understand

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9Lezberg op. cit at no. 8.

10Lezberg op. cit at no. 8.

11Lezberg op. cit at no. 8.

12Lezberg op. cit at no. 8.
CFS.\textsuperscript{13} For example, an analysis of the U.S. agricultural sector reveals that it disproportionately emphasizes the production of sugars (especially from corn and sugar beet), oils, and meat, precisely those food groups that should be consumed sparingly according to standard dietary guidelines for health (Young and Kantor 1999; O’Brien 1995; cf., Hamm and Baron 1999; Friedmann 1990). Additionally, those products are typically grown and raised under monoculture conditions at great distance from most consumers. An alternate measure of food security, and in particular of community food security, might analyze consumer demand for more fresh, seasonal, and local farm production as an indicator of healthy and sustainable local food systems (cf. Wilkens 1995, Gussow 1999).

The CFSC (Pothukvchi et al. 2002) and USDA (Cohen 2002) have both developed resources that outline adaptable CFS assessment tools,\textsuperscript{14} the strength of which lie in the inclusive and systems-based research methodologies. However, neither of these efforts attempts to establish a consistent tool or set of critical research variables that can adapt diverse locational studies to a large, or even national-scale, CFS assessment. The ramification of this uneven research approach is the failure of an analysis that might otherwise support and influence food policy development at regional and national levels.

THE PRACTICE OF U.S.-BASED COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY

Above we sketched the dilemmas and debates inside the widespread efforts on behalf of community food security in the U.S. The broad scale and systemic nature of food insecurity can overwhelm local efforts dedicated to inaugurating change. It entreats expertise and collaboration from diverse social sectors. Table 2 outlines points of entry for CFS engagement and lists related activities as well as specific examples in each category. In all cases we have tried to incorporate examples accessible via the web (see appended list). A discussion of the various points of entry ensues, with an emphasis on how the local activities refer back to international and national scales of food rights and food security debates.

We have foregrounded education and research as points of entry for CFS activities. Teaching, activism, and advocacy intersect in the education activities and examples listed. Research both informs and learns from education. Teaching venues embrace children and adults. They function in both institutional settings like schools and informal ones like street fairs or scouting clubs. Activism might take the form of “civic agriculture” wherein growers and consumers meet to revitalize local economies of food, farming, and public health (Lyson 2000) or volunteering in emergency food outlets. Advocacy might include discussing school curriculum amendments to address food, agriculture, and the environment or educating politicians about community food needs and proposing relevant strategies. Teaching, activism, and advocacy help researchers define key issues and model inquiry endeavors in ways that better reflect community scale food security.

CFS assessment is an example of where education and research come together. The value of assessment lies in building a database to influence public policy and form well-targeted CFS programs. At the same time, the sheer breadth of what an assessment can include triggers confusion about, e.g., what data to prioritize, when to stop collecting data, what the data should seek to establish, and for whom the data should be developed. Communities need to develop assessment strategies that are feasible in terms of expertise, useable in terms of accomplishing a policy goal, and affordable. Many community groups rely on outside institutional resources like university staff and extension officers for data collection. Those resources, however, are often viewed as having independent agendas and limited availability.\textsuperscript{15}

The third point addresses public policy. Gottlieb and Fisher have argued that CFS and anti-hunger interests can be united and strengthened in the context of working for new government legislation. They note that cooperative lobbying on the 1995 U.S. Farm Bill led to public sector support for the promotion of community food production, direct marketing, community development, and community food planning (Gottlieb and Fisher 1996b:23). At the state and local level, little or no public sector planning

\textsuperscript{13}Lezberg op. cit at no. 8.

\textsuperscript{14}See, e.g., USDA Regional Research Project NE-185, Commodities, Consumers, and Communities: Local Food Systems in a Globalizing Environment (www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/sociology/ne185/).


\textsuperscript{15}Notes from the Community Food Assessment Workshop, Philadelphia, PA, 22 June 2000. Held by the Community Food Security Coalition.
### Table 2. Points of Entry for Engagement in CFS Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points of Entry</th>
<th>Selected Activities</th>
<th>Selected Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>• Nutrition education for low income populations</td>
<td>• FS-NEP, EFNEP, (USDA) country-wide&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Food and agriculture-related job training</td>
<td>• Capital Area Food Bank, Washington, DC&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• School-based food education</td>
<td>• Elijah’s Promise Soup Kitchen, New Brunswick, NJ</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Gardening training</td>
<td>• Master Urban Gardener programs (e.g., Isles, Inc.<em>, Trenton, NJ; American Community Gardening Association</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Research</strong></td>
<td>• CFS assessment</td>
<td>• CFS Initiative (USDA)&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Effective nutritional education strategies</td>
<td>• NE 185 Food systems research project&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Community-based, organization-driven research of various types</td>
<td>• Community Food Security Coalition&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Outcome-based program evaluation</td>
<td>• Just Food, New York City&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Public policy development at different political levels</td>
<td>• Cornell Cooperative Extension&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Community development related to food</td>
<td>• Food Research &amp; Action Center (FRAC)&lt;sup&gt;‡&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Nutrition and learning, functioning, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Policy</strong></td>
<td>• Development</td>
<td>• Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)&lt;sup&gt;‡&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Advocacy</td>
<td>• National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture&lt;sup&gt;‡&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Implementations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community-Based Projects and Programs&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</strong></td>
<td>• Emergency feeding</td>
<td>• Second Harvest&lt;sup&gt;‡&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Food recovery and gleaning</td>
<td>• New Jersey Produce Recovery Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Developing connections with other components of resource deficits (e.g., housing, medical care, heat, transportation)</td>
<td>• American Community Gardening Association&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Food Rights</strong></td>
<td>• Work with labor unions</td>
<td>• Kensington Welfare Rights Union&lt;sup&gt;‡&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Advocacy</td>
<td>• Food First&lt;sup&gt;‡&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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</table>

<sup>a</sup>Web sites appended at end of article.

<sup>1</sup> FS-NEP (Food Stamp-Nutrition Education Program); EFNEP (Expanded Food Nutrition Education Program).

<sup>2</sup> The USDA NE-185 Program, “Commodities, Consumers, and Communities: Local Food Systems in a Globalizing Environment” represents efforts undertaken through land grant institutions to conduct research related to revitalizing localized food systems interactions among local farmers, retailers, processors and consumers.

<sup>3</sup> For extensive listing of CFS projects and programs around the country, see web sites (listed at end of article) for the USDA Community Food Projects Program and the Community Food Security Coalition.

Attention is given specifically to food security and nutritional health at the community scale (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 1999). CFS assessment can be used by community based organizations (CBOs) to strengthen their efforts to make local and state governments more aware, involved, and accountable to CFS welfare. The CFS Coalition has organized training sessions around the country for the last several years to help CBO members to develop assessment strategies.

The fourth point incorporates community-based projects and programs. CFS projects and programs are as diverse as the communities that need them and the experience of the individuals and organizations who design and sponsor them, e.g:
• Gleaning for homeless shelters, food pantries, and soup kitchens after farmers conduct their last commercial harvests;
• Recruiting volunteers to take meals to house-bound elderly citizens;
• Teaching basic cooking skills to persons of all ages to increase their options vis-à-vis restaurants, highly processed and expensive “convenient” foods;
• Improving transportation services for those without licenses and/or cars;
• Building market opportunities between local farmers and local institutions like schools, hospitals, and workplace cafeterias;
• Monitoring local rent control laws, job security, and utility price increases to safeguard adequate income for household food security.

The projects can succeed or they can fail, and regardless, they consume tremendous energy and resources. CFS assessment helps both in planning for and carrying out well-targeted ventures.

The fifth point is food rights. In light of the systemic problems associated with food insecurity, some researchers and activists are concentrating on economic rights (Harvey 2000; Mittal and Rosset 1999). Here the international “frame” of food rights serves as a critical model to propel a social justice campaign. Even if the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights carries no legal authority and U.S. ratification of the Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights is not achievable in the short run, both operate as tools to inspire thinking about how big a vision food justice can and should be. The human rights framework has the advantage of not separating food, nutrition, and agriculture from other basic needs such as housing, clean water, education, and adequate employment that pays a living wage. In other words, many of the structural problems that complicate CFS work are knit together in a human rights framework that integrates multiple aspects of human welfare. Community-based activists and academics sometimes struggle to organize for local food security autonomy and for national public welfare accountability. Allen, for example, acknowledges the benefits of CFS and Farm Bill-type community projects, but finds them limited. First, they usually operate without a critique of the endemic and pervasive class-based structure of food insecurity. Second, community-based projects, by definition, provide a geographically piecemeal response to systemic problems and rarely attempt to connect their efforts to national organizing for basic economic security. Third, community projects and programs usually rely on short-term “soft” money that generally will not ensure long term and sustainable outcomes. In stipulating the need for food rights protection, Allen calls for government guarantees of food and economic security that provide a basic and universal (i.e. not geographically dispersed) level of protection (Allen 1999). Obviously, the US has a rudimentary social security net that includes food stamps, welfare benefits, and WIC support among others. A CFS social security net can, on the one hand, include direct government supports like food stamps and indirect support like secure housing access, job training, and adequate public transportation. The CFS social security net can also include public-private joint ventures like emergency feeding facilities, job training, and food recovery and gleaning programs.

Given the diversity of local circumstances, activist strategies like anti-hunger and CFS movements seem less polarized opposites than complementary and simultaneously operating responses to community-based food needs. Hamm has discussed the concept of a continuum of CFS activities that span and include traditional anti-hunger activism with its attention to both social transfers and emergency relief and the community self-reliance focus characteristic of contemporary CFS Coalition-emphasized work (Hamm 1999). He points out that the roots of food insecurity lie in the dearth of “economic justice, livable wages and social equity” and locates common CFS ground in “insuring that all people have sufficient [and] nutritious food obtained in a dignified manner.”

SUMMARY

Political, social, environmental, and economic landscapes shape local scale needs and affect how individual CFS projects are addressed. In each place, groups differently experience everything from regional employment rates and food income, to local climate effects on crops, to more and less access to money and member expertise. Against unique geographies, CFS groups build consensus through their consistent focus on low-income populations, their recognition


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of the systemic origins of economic insecurity, and their intentions to develop sustainable, non-emergency, and socially inclusive mechanisms to enhance local food security. Balancing local distinctiveness against commonalities among groups augments political capability and grounds a coalition strategy that can better lobby non-local public and private interests.

Even as CFS projects are conceived and enacted locally, the work has a foundation in global debates over food security and rights. They reflect the tension between conflicting trends to decentralize food security work and policy to more local scales and, to centralize—or globalize—the economic markets that manipulate food access specifically and employment generally. Bolstered by a framework of international economic and political rights, CFS increasingly counters the political economy that frames the circumstances of security and insecurity at the local level. Re-conceptualizing the constraints of local practice within the enhanced capabilities of a CFS Coalition and the idealism of international rights buoys prospects for cooperative action and for rich, hybrid visions for social change.

WEB SITES

- America’s Second Harvest  
  www.secondharvest.org
- American Community Gardening Association  
  www.communitygarden.org
- Capitol Area Food Bank  
  yp.washingtonpost.com/yp/foodbank
- Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC)  
  www.foodsecurity.org
- Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE)  
  www.cce.cornell.edu
- Institute for Food and Development Policy, also known as “Food First”  
  www.foodfirst.org
- Food Circles Networking Project  
  www.ibiblio.org/farming-connection/localcon/groups/foodcirc.htm
- Food, Research and Action Center (FRAC)  
  www.frac.org
- Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)  
  www.hsus.org
- Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP)  
  www.iatp.org
  www.agobservatory.org/ (IATP Food Security Web Site)
- Isles, Inc. – Trenton, New Jersey  
  www.isles.org
- Just Food  
  www.justfood.org
- Kensington Welfare Rights Union  
  www.kwnn.org
- National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture  
  www.sustainableagriculture.net
- National Catholic Rural Life Center (NCRLC)  
  www.ncrlc.com
- Pesticide Action Network (PANNA)  
  panna.nyc.org/
- Toronto Food Policy Council  
  www.city.toronto.on.ca/health/tfpc_index.htm
- USDA Community Food Security (CFS) Initiative  
  www.reusda.gov/food_security/foodshp.htm
- USDA Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services (FNCS)  
  www.fns.usda.gov/fncs/
- USDA Food Systems Research Project (NE 185)  
  www.ncsu.edu/depts/sociology/ne185

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