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Katharine Bradley[a] & Ryan E. Galt[a]
[a] Geography Graduate Group, UC Davis, One Shields Ave, Hunt Hall, Davis CA, 95616, USA
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# Practicing food justice at Dig Deep Farms & Produce, East Bay Area, California: self-determination as a guiding value and intersections with foodie logics

Katharine Bradley* and Ryan E. Galt

*Geography Graduate Group, UC Davis, One Shields Ave, Hunt Hall, Davis CA, 95616, USA*



This article describes Dig Deep Farms & Produce, a food justice organisation and urban farm working to stimulate local economic development, create jobs, and improve the quality and accessibility of food in Ashland and Cherryland in California's Bay Area. Their practices are based on self-determined values although they take a flexible, anti-essentialist approach to foodie logics, which are prominent and problematic in the Bay Area. The case study then examines specific practices and strategies, as well as intersections with foodie logics, in three arenas – values determination, strategic partnerships, and foodways – that help to cultivate food justice and highlights key characteristics of food justice work: emphasising self-determination and working to fundamentally change the economic and social conditions of food apartheid.

**Keywords:** food justice; self-determination; Dig Deep Farms & Produce; foodie logics; California

## Introduction

Critiques of the industrial agri-food system are feeding a rising food movement. Much of the food movement frames participation in terms of individual economic decisions, such as "voting with your fork" to promote various forms of "ethical eating" (Guthman 2003, p. 46), and as such does not question the prominent role of markets in defining the food system, nor market's roles in structuring inequalities. Parts of the food movement focused on individual economic actions hold up fresh, local, and usually organic foods produced by small-scale farms as *the* alternative to the industrial food system and its environmental ills (Alkon and Agyeman 2011). These practices and mindsets are what we refer to here as foodie logics, and as critics point out, white people in the food movement too often fail to recognise foodie logics' exclusionary aspects (Guthman 2008, Slocum 2008, Alkon and Agyeman 2011, Harper 2011).

Because of these exclusionary aspects, particularly foodie logics' blindness to race and inequalities, the food movement does not commonly address pressing, racialised problems around food, especially limited food access among low-income populations and the scarce availability of healthy and affordable foods in low-income communities. These problems in low-income communities are commonly described by the concept of food deserts, which the United States Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service defines as areas "with limited access to affordable and nutritious food, particularly such an area composed of predominantly lower income neighborhoods and communities" (McClintock 2011, p. 89).

*Corresponding author. Email: kbradley@ucdavis.edu

We find the label "food apartheid"[1] to be more appropriate because of the racially exclusionary practices that have brought the situation into being. Although many authors do not use this term, the structural characteristics of food apartheid are fairly well accepted (Eisenhauer 2001, Guthman 2008, Alkon and McCullen 2010, McClintock 2011, Morales 2011). The most promising response to food apartheid exists in the *food justice movement*, which critiques the industrial agri-food system's undermining of the environment and society that the food movement also targets (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010) *and* emphasises racial and economic justice along the lines of the civil rights and environmental justice movements (Alkon and Agyeman 2011, McClintock 2011, Morales 2011, White 2011).

While the distinction between the mainstream food movement and the food justice movement is not always discrete in practice, it is necessary to explain some of the ideological distinctions. These distinctions reside in (1) problem definitions and envisioned solutions, and (2) normative attitudes about food and foodways.

Regarding the first distinction, much work in the food movement operates under a framework that views food deserts, rather than food apartheid, as the central problem. Addressing food apartheid is not as simple as opening grocery stores, introducing farmers' markets, and making school food more nutritious, which is why efforts to change consumption patterns in low-income areas sometimes merit critiques levelled by Guthman (2011) that they can reproduce systems of oppression. Instead, addressing food apartheid means cultivating food justice, which is a state in which all people have access to sufficient, affordable, healthy, culturally appropriate food, and – very importantly – respect and self-determination in all phases of food production, exchange, and consumption. Food justice efforts are constrained by demarcated devaluation, "McDonaldization", powerful corporate advertising, and deeply entrenched, structural racial and socioeconomic inequity (McClintock 2011). Thus, facilitating food justice is very difficult work, but work that many organisations, new and old, are increasingly doing.

Regarding the second distinction, the mainstream food movement and food justice movement employ very different approaches to foodways, defines as

> cultural and geographical differences in what is recognized as edible, most obviously due to: culturally specific food taboos; locally distinctive recipes and ingredients; and variations in the ways foods are organized into meal occasions, through local conventions of order, combination and social participation. (Cloke 2000, p. 274)

As people participate in culturally defined foodways, they perform their own identities and group memberships. Yet, while food is extremely important to culture, the relationship between culture and food is not at all deterministic. There is no essentialist link between particular foods and identities, racial or otherwise. For example, Wit (2004, p. 260 cited in Alkon and Agyeman 2011, p. 11) documents how the Black Panther Party "valorized soul food as an expression of pride in the cultural forms created out of and articulated through a history of Black oppression", while Black Muslims saw such cooking as "the diet of a slave mentality, an unclean, unhealthy practice of racial genocide". These food-identity connections demonstrate contested notions of Black identity in the USA, and all groups have a similarly non-essentialist relationship with food.

The mainstream food movement tends to employ a simplistic approach to foodways by marking "a particular set of foodways (organic, local, and slow foods) as right and proper, and condemning what Michael Pollan calls 'industrial eaters' as less worthy others" (Alkon and Agyeman 2011, p. 12). In this way, some in the food movement use foodways – sometimes unintentionally – to exclude and mark others. By contrast, food justice activists and

scholars arguably have a more open and anti-essentialist take on foodways, although this, too, varies considerably. For example, Alkon and Agyeman note that food justice activists have argued that the intersection of institutional racism and economic inequality has "stripped communities of color of their local food sovereignty, preventing many of them from eating in the way the food movement describes as proper" (Alkon and Agyeman 2011, p. 12) – i.e. local, organic, non-processed – and, more importantly, the ways community members would describe as proper. This leads to an important critique of food justice work: that it often follows the mainstream food movement's lead, promoting certain ways of eating, usually centred around fresh and organic produce, in ways that are exclusionary and that impede self-determination (Guthman 2011) rather than restoring or valorising local foodways that are still-present but overshadowed by McDonaldisation.

In contrast to promoting exclusionary dietary recommendations, food justice can and should promote self-determination through foodways practices. For example, White (2011) documents D-Town farmers' efforts to bring nutritious Southern cooking back to Detroit. D-Town farmers "use the farm (a) as a community center, (b) as a vehicle to articulate culturally relevant language about healthy food and healthy life-styles, and (c) as a tangible model of collective work, self-reliance, and political agency" (2011, p. 412). Thus, in this instance, healthy eating is part of self-determination and resistance. While Guthman's (2008) warnings about the unbearable whiteness of local foods need to be taken to heart by those who seek to impart foodie logics on others who are supposedly ignorant, Slocum (2006), making a similar argument, risks implying an incorrect essentialisation that organic, fresh, and/or local produce is somehow inherently, and exclusively, white.

To understand what food system self-determination looks like in food justice practice given real constraints and opportunities presented by the local environment, we examine the work of Dig Deep Farms & Produce (hereinafter "Dig Deep") and the values, institutional relationships, and foodways associated with Dig Deep's food justice practice. Dig Deep is an urban farm working to stimulate local economic development, create jobs, and improve the quality and accessibility of food in the unincorporated communities of Ashland and Cherryland, California. In this paper, we answer the following research questions: what does food justice practice look like at Dig Deep? More specifically, what philosophies and circumstances shape and inform its practice? And, how does this practice articulate with (1) elements of the mainstream food movement, including foodie logics, in the Bay Area and (2) local foodways in the communities it serves? Through an ethnographic case study of Dig Deep, we identify practices and strategies in three arenas – values determination, strategic partnerships, and foodways – that help to cultivate food justice.

## Study site: Dig Deep Farms and Produce in Ashland and Cherryland

Alameda County, which sits on the eastern shore of California's San Francisco Bay, contains many cities and suburbs. Ashland and Cherryland, unincorporated "census-designated places", are surrounded by several large incorporated cites – San Leandro and Oakland to the north and Hayward to the south. Each occupies approximately one square mile and together have a diverse population of 36,470 people (Witt *et al*. 2010).

In Ashland and Cherryland, like the East Bay generally, urbanisation and suburbanisation starting in the 1960s produced great disparities of income, wealth, and opportunity, usually along racial and ethnic lines. The processes that shaped urban and regional development – deed covenants, redlining, suburbanisation, and county contracts to locate low-income housing in the unincorporated areas – created a plethora of problems for the area:

concentrated poverty, unemployment, criminal and gang activity, and hostile relationships between residents and police (Self 2003, Witt *et al*. 2010). According to the 2000 census,[2] most metrics for wealth and wellbeing in Ashland and Cherryland are much lower than the county averages.

In terms of food retail outlets, there are no supermarkets[3] in Ashland and Cherryland, mirroring the trends in food availability in low-income communities discussed above. There are six small grocery stores that carry produce, meat, dairy, and canned and packaged goods; one discount chain store that carries produce and other groceries, numerous corner stores without fresh produce, and many inexpensive restaurants, including fast food. Several of the six small food outlets carry a wide range of ingredients common in Latin American cuisines, though freshness is sometimes questionable. The situation is similar to the Oakland flatlands to the north, where most residents have to leave their neighbourhoods for affordable, healthy food (Herrera *et al*. 2009, Treuhaft *et al*. 2009).

Dig Deep was formed within this context. Marty Neideffer, a white Alameda County Sheriff's Office (ACSO) Sergeant who grew up and works in Ashland, started the Deputy Sheriff's Activity League (DSAL), a 501(c)(3) within ACSO, in 2004 to create opportunities for youth to participate in free extracurricular activities through funded sports leagues and performance arts programmes. By 2009, spurred in part by Van Jones' *Green Collar Economy* (2008) – specifically, according to Sergeant Neideffer, "the need to get beyond the upper middle class, white environmentalist, and the inner-city African American suspicions… and the mistrust that exists between the two camps" M. Neideffer (personal communication, 3 Nov 2010) – and the recession, the creation of jobs and community economic development became a priority. The project brought together Sergeant Neideffer; Hank Herrera, a veteran food justice activist and person of colour, as the general manager; African-American area residents looking for work; and a white farm manager. Hereinafter, "managers" refers to Sergeant Neideffer, Herrera, and farm manager because their leadership and responsibility spanned all or nearly all aspects of the organisation's operations, and "the crew" refers to rest of the employees, including several crew members who eventually took on leadership and responsibilities in specific aspects of the organisation, such as farming, logistics, or customer relations.

When DSAL began Dig Deep in the spring of 2010, its founders saw urban agriculture as a means of achieving DSAL's goal of crime prevention and job creation and food justice goals of improved food availability and access for area residents and ownership of the means of production and exchange in a local food system. In Herrera's words, the convergence is serendipitous. Economic self-sufficiency based on local sales, rather than dependence on grants and outside funding, was seen as a critical strategy to achieve these goals. Since, hiring local residents was a priority of Dig Deep's for local economic development and funding sources stipulated that new hires have low incomes and a child, the crew generally lacked business and farming experience.

The crew worked part-time and developed competencies including business skills and tacit understandings of their land, the crops they cultivated, and organic production methods. In terms of the farm and its sales, they began farming three main farm sites ranging from $^{1}/_{2}$ acre to $^{3}/_{4}$ acre, and what they did not grow they purchased from Veritable Vegetable, a mid-size distributor in San Francisco specialising in local and organic produce.[4] They began by selling their produce in weekly shares as a "farm-linked aggregator box CSA" (Galt *et al*. 2011) with the goal of accessing more land and becoming a "single-farm box CSA". The rest of this paper discusses Dig Deep's accomplishments and challenges during this two-year startup phase, and relevant lessons and insights about food justice.

## Methods

The empirical data used below are from participant observation, informal interviews, and one formal interview at Dig Deep, as well as observations and collection of food prices at a variety of retail food outlets in and near Ashland and Cherryland conducted by Bradley, a white graduate student. Over 200 hours of intensive fieldwork were conducted from July to December 2010, entailing farm, office, and community outreach work. An additional 50 hours of follow-up research – conversations and site visits – were conducted in 2011 that allowed for adjustment and confirmation of findings.

Participant observation – in the form of interactions with the crew and regular meeting attendance – was the most valuable form of data collection. Much of the information gathered emerged from casual, but occasionally very serious, conversations with employees of Dig Deep who worked there for most or all of the duration of the fieldwork. In all, about 100 casual conversations with Dig Deep's General Manager, crew, and farm manager substantially contributed to Bradley's understanding of the area's food environment, the crews' foodways and perceptions of foodways, and Dig Deep's approach to food justice. However, countless additional conversations helped Bradley to build relationships with the crew and managers of Dig Deep and DSAL[5] that proved foundational and rewarding.

Bradley employed a grounded theory approach to studying food justice work and foodways at Dig Deep and a commitment to respecting informants as whole human beings. Thus, observations included a wide range of food- and locale-related subjects: what the Crew said about working at Dig Deep; what people said about Ashland and Cherryland and nearby areas; what they said about why selling food is so hard for Dig Deep; what customers said about the food Dig Deep sold; how pedestrians interacted with the farm sites and crew; what the crew ate; what they said that they ate, or not, and when and where; what the crew said about what Bradley ate; and what food the crew took home. A range of perspectives is thus represented in the data from the crew members and managers, customers, and passers-by. All conversations and observations were documented in Bradley's field notes at the end of each day. This documentation rarely allows for direct quotations, and where field notes are referenced in this paper, informants' comments are paraphrased. Finally, in the analysis below, we mention the way all people discussed identify racially, if they self-identify, or how they appear if they never explicitly self-identified. We do this because racial inclusion and exclusion in food justice and mainstream food movements is a critical and volatile issue and we aim to be explicit about who is represented in various roles rather than to gloss this over.

## Self-determination and respect in food justice values

Food justice embraces a variety of ways of valuing food system work, including self-improvement and community improvement, and need not, though may, include learning about nutrition, health, and local or organic food (cf. White 2011). Self-determination – at the organisational and individual levels – and respect for others are crucial to food justice practice at Dig Deep. As a guiding principle, respecting individuals' autonomous development of values is very important at Dig Deep. Iris Marion Young's definition of respect is appropriate here: she writes, "To treat people with respect is to be prepared to listen to what they have to say or do what they request because they have some authority, expertise, or influence" (2011, p. 57). Respect, in this sense, and regarding the values of employees, allows Dig Deep to escape ideology-imposing practices that might jeopardise self-determination.

In the food justice context, we understand self-determination as control of the means of production in a local food system and influence in the social arrangements shaping production and exchange. Self-determination manifests at the organisational level in the central role of job creation at Dig Deep and in selective engagement with foodie logics. However, this level of self-determination depends on some degree of respect from outside organisations and people and on self-respect and the courage it may yield among individuals within the organisation. Self-determination also manifests in employees in the learning and valuation they do about food, farming, and one's self. Through these processes, Dig Deep models a path to meaningful representation of and leadership by people of colour in the food justice movement.

Dig Deep values the wisdom and knowledge individual crew members have gained through working with food in various ways. For example, at a meeting in the spring of 2011, the farm manager asked each crew member to describe the soil, light, and what has grown well in Dig Deep's plots. Drawing a grid on a whiteboard, he set up a framework to document the knowledge crew members had about farming, and then stepped back. Crew members contributed from their memories of what they had grown and learned. They then used this information to plan summer crops (Field Notes, 23 March 2011).

Crew members also value their own self-improvement. One crew member earned high-school elective credits by working at Dig Deep and told Bradley how much more he liked working at Dig Deep than finishing many of his traditional assignments (Field Notes, 23 March 2011). Dig Deep supported his pursuit of knowledge and self-determination in his education by providing meaningful learning opportunities. The General Manager, Herrera, has also told these stories to illustrate that Dig Deep successfully foments the development of its crew as farmers and as individuals.

Crew members at Dig Deep frequently expressed the significance of crime prevention in terms of self-improvement, thus relating individual to organisational values. Driving through a neighbourhood near Dig Deep on a way to a presentation to potential customers, one crew member told Bradley about a fight he was in, as part of a gang retaliation nearby. At the end of his presentation, he emphasised the importance of the job creation element of Dig Deep. He said that people like him do not have to sell crack, join gangs, and commit crimes when they have well-paying jobs. For him, a mentor to other youth, having a job where he is respected, appropriately challenged, and can grow is powerful evidence showing that gangs and crime are unnecessary (Field Notes, 11 September 2010). Another crew member explained to Bradley how he understands DSAL's crime prevention goals. What matters to him is the context in which previous criminal activity occurred. He stressed the importance of understanding where a person is coming from and how impressive it is that crew members are no longer involved in crime. "Those things" were in the past and crew members can point to employment and activities at Dig Deep as important accomplishments. Another crew member stressed that just because he did things in the past of which he is not proud does not mean that he is not a good person. They want to do right by what their work, and the things that they experienced in the past are part of what make their stories now so powerful (Field Notes, 23March / 2011).

A DSAL staff member not directly involved in Dig Deep told Bradley that Dig Deep is the most important DSAL project because it is meeting so many of their goals simultaneously. From her perspective, crime is not just about protecting potential victims, but also potential perpetrators. For this reason, the jobs at Dig Deep are also about empowering people and generating skills (Field Notes, 6 August 2010).

We observe, in the example of Dig Deep, important characteristics of food justice, the most fundamental being individuals' autonomy in determining how their work is valued.

The crew often experiences and explains the DSAL's crime prevention mission through self-improvement. Dig Deep's practices, then, are consistent with its goals, which are not to foment ethical eating among its crew, but rather to further their development as fellow humans, starting from where they are, and taking their experiences and values seriously. As such, learning about food and growing it is often an avenue to self- and community-improvement but is an emergent property of the organisation rather than its reason for being.

### Strategic partnerships for food justice

At the organisational level, an important aspect of self-determination for Dig Deep entailed carefully engaging with marketing channels governed by foodie logics while upholding its own social justice values. Although Dig Deep avoids imposing values about food on its crew members, it engages with the foodie logics and organisations that stress the connection between diet and health to develop a feasible business model that depends on revenue generation through secure markets to ensure positive employment opportunities for its crew. It also became a strategy for overcoming internal conflicts, building trust, and further promoting self-determination at the individual level.

In the first six months of Dig Deep's sales, from July to December 2010, constant challenges – including the need to increase local sales and raise funds for payroll and overhead costs, steep learning curves for everyone involved, recidivism, violence, conflicts with police, and homelessness – contributed to a tense environment at Dig Deep. The crew's unfamiliarity with many aspects of the work, the management's lack of full transparency about administration and finances, and hardships in the crew's backgrounds, including the reality that most crew members previously had negative experiences with or perceptions of the police, contributed to unmet sales goals and mistrust within the organisation.

Crew members expressed this mistrust to Bradley when working at one of the smaller farm sites on an October day in 2010. Five crew members were talking about how impossible it was to be tasked with finding 600 customers, as they recently were. They all agreed that they were not given enough support to achieve this. They said that they had gone door to door, which is how they together signed up their initial customers. They did not believe another door-to-door effort would work and thought that Dig Deep needed advertising or another strategy. Ultimately, they did not know how to find more customers. As a result, one crew member expressed frustration with not knowing how much money the organisation had or how long his job would last, which made him hesitant to invest in the job but willing to ride it out as long as he had it (Field Notes, 15 October 2010).

In response to these tensions, Dig Deep management began holding all-team meetings to increase transparency, trust, and cooperation. Early in these meetings, managers recognised the necessity of sharing financial information, evaluating its sales strategies, and seeking new ways to expand its customer base. Following the first all-team meeting, crew members felt that their frustrations were respected – managers acted on crew members' requests for greater transparency and sought institutional partners as described below – and the crew returned to the task of recruiting customers with new energy. For instance, crew members subsequently asked for rides to parts of the community they could not reach by walking in order to do outreach work, expressed interested in building relationships with customers, and conducting focus groups with former customers (Field Notes, December 20).

Managers also respected and responded to crew members' frustrations about recruiting customers by seeking partnerships with other organisations in Alameda County aligned

with food justice values as well as groups more aligned with the mainstream food movement. Within the former group, partners included (1) Alameda County General Services Agency, which selected Dig Deep as the community support agriculture (CSA) provider for a county-wide employee wellness programme, (2) Tiburcio Vasquez Health Center, Inc., a non-profit social service provider that contracts with Dig Deep to provide weekly shares of produce to its pregnant clients, who are generally low-income Latinas from the unincorporated areas, and (3) the West Oakland-based food justice organisation People's Grocery, that, among other projects, delivers produce bags to local, low-income customers.

These three partnerships have helped Dig Deep in a number of ways. They helped to grow Dig Deep's customer base, increase gross sales, deepen ties with other local social service providers and low-income populations, and establish Dig Deep's credibility with local officials, which also helped it secure additional funding. New revenue streams relieved some of the pressures on the crew to increase sales within the unincorporated area in the short term. The partnerships also showed the crew that managers were working towards increasing sales, which helped to build trust and a sense of cooperation within the organisation. They also marked stronger relationships with other food justice projects in the region and external legitimacy, which, improved internal legitimacy and generated pride among the crew, especially as these partnerships became accounts that crew members oversaw and managed. This, in turn, contributed to the development of competencies and initiative-taking among the crew.

Dig Deep also developed relationships with Bay Area restaurants that operate in some ways on foodie logics. Dig Deep began to use its proximity to high-end restaurants and its social justice orientation to negotiate high prices for spring salad mix, squash blossoms, tomatoes, and other valuable crops. This is only somewhat like the fetishised salad mix Guthman (2003) describes as central to foodie-ism. It is not just the high quality of Dig Deep's salad mix that appeals to chefs and restaurant-goers, but also the social mission of Dig Deep – Dig Deep's name appears on most of the restaurants' menus – and the personal connections developed between the crew and the chefs that give their produce the advantage in a relatively saturated market. In these relationships, Dig Deep asks for and receives prices that exceed those from their locally focused CSA, and Dig Deep maintains the flexibility of deciding when and what quantities to supply to restaurants. Additionally, as with the partnerships discussed above, landing and managing accounts from high-end restaurants is a source of pride for the crew. This market channel in particular demonstrates Dig Deep's minimal, though strategic, articulation with foodie markets to support its own goals.

Condemning such engagements with high-end markets and foodie logics as succumbing to the neoliberal zeitgeist – a dreaded "slippage into market-based strategies" (Alkon and Agyeman 2011, p. 341) – would be too dismissive. Dig Deep's selective engagement with the foodie logics supports food justice goals and internal practices based on the values of self-determination and autonomy. As others emphasise (McClintock 2011, Patel 2011), decent jobs are fundamental components of larger scale structural changes central to the food justice vision. Dig Deep is not waiting for a corporation or government to bring these jobs, but is instead trying to grow them itself, in part by accumulating capital from sales in high-end markets. It is a temporary strategy given the structure of funding and the established distribution and flows of capital. Ultimately, such an integration of strategies demonstrates the importance of non-essentialist and flexible practices in food justice. However, these internal strategies and external partnerships do not demonstrate the full scope of non-essentialist and flexible practices of food justice. To understand this, it is necessary to examine the ways local foodways structure the sales challenges described above. We now turn to this analysis.

**Food justice and foodways in Ashland and Cherryland**

As described in the introduction, food industry advertising, debilitated food environments, and consumers' low incomes limit food choices in substantial ways, meaning that households are not always able to partake of food in the ways they deem culturally appropriate. It is within this context that food justice organisations like Dig Deep with a product to sell – usually fresh, local, organic produce – must, on the one hand, understand, respect, and conform to local foodways, and, on the other, try to shape them if they do not strongly incorporate the specific product being produced.

Since advertising has long shaped foodways in the industrial economies along the interests of the food industry (Freidberg 2009), and food advice has generally been from the perspectives of the upper and middle classes (DuPuis 2007), using these same strategies can seem deceitful to many in the food justice movement because they reinforce market interests that oppress low-income people of colour. Dig Deep began not by trying to shape consumption, but by instead wanting to research local foodways rather than base their efforts on faulty assumptions, an approach often used by purveyors of food advice (DuPuis 2007, Boulé 2012). This respect for foodways and shopping practices regardless of how they align with those promoted through foodie logics is an important part of Dig Deep's food justice practice that sets it apart from the mainstream food movement and from the food justice practices that Guthman (2011) critiques. Yet, the disconnection between local foodways and Dig Deep's goal of increased local CSA sales remains unresolved.

Below, we draw on the crew's knowledge and Bradley's (2011) research to point to three relevant characteristics of foodways among African-Americans and low-income people that shape Dig Deep's intention to expand its CSA membership in Ashland and Cherryland.[6] First, cultural practices around food and cooking tend to involve women and soul food traditions. Second, among young people, there is generally low demand for fruits and vegetables. And, third, the low price of produce generally matters more to local residents than the qualities of local and/or organic. If Dig Deep is to foster self-determination and economic development, respecting and continuing to strive to understand such diversity of practices and values are necessary.

The foodways of the crew are used here as a partial representation of the foodways of an important part of Dig Deep's target market, and are suggestive of the appropriateness and the disconnections between Dig Deep's CSA model and the foodways of the local communities. Glimpses into the food preferences of the crew emerged through Bradley's interactions as part of the crew, including many informal, shared eating situations and discussions about food and cooking.

Crew members occasionally spoke about soul food in relation to special occasions, but most of the crew at Dig Deep noted that they do not cook. Crew members frequently took home collards, onions, and potatoes with which family members would cook. Crew members acknowledged, with smiles, their mothers, grandmothers, and aunties as the primary cooks and bearers of food knowledge. This excerpt from Bradley's field notes (6 August 2010) highlights the role of soul food in family-based foodways:

> One crew member picked a pumpkin and I remembered a conversation we had a week or two ago. He said he didn't like pumpkin pie. He likes sweet potato pie. So, being reminded of this I asked if he could get a sweet potato pie recipe. Sure, he said. I asked where and he said he'd Google it. I said that I could do that, where would he get one? He then said he could ask an auntie. Another crew member was listening and she said, "Oooh, you want a *soul* sweet potato pie".

Despite expressions of fondness around the mention of soul food, Bradley rarely observed crew members bringing home-prepared food to work, suggesting that soul food traditions and social relations surrounding consumption are family- and home-based.

The stories told about soul food as traditional African-American food and about food preparation as a nurturing act always alluded to a demographic not present in the crew at Dig Deep – an older generation of women. This is important to note because it is a different demographic group than who is represented by employees at Dig Deep. Moreover, the traditions and practices are home-based, thus more private, and harder for Dig Deep to engage with in marketing efforts.

Several recent demographic shifts and social trends impact family structure and likely affect how these foodways are carried out and participated in by different generations. Teenage birth rates (which are higher in the unincorporated areas than the rest of the county), imprisonment and probation rates (also high in the unincorporated areas), and single parenthood impact household income and constrain residents' time and ability to prepare food at home (Witt *et al*. 2010).[7] Several crew members are challenged with feeding children of different ages around work and school schedules. One person explained that this is a primary motivation for purchasing pre-made TV dinners, adding that when the weather is hot, and there is no air-conditioning, cooking is not appealing (Field Notes, 29 October 2010).

Another important connection between youth and foodways – relatively low demand for fruits and vegetables among young adults and youth – affects Dig Deep's sales. Since traditional foodways still exist but are not widely practiced by younger African-American residents of the area because of constraints on time and money, they rely on, at least partially if not entirely, fast and pre-packaged food. In a July 2010 marketing meeting, one member of the crew, referring to his peers and friends who are mostly African-American teens, asked how it is possible to convince people who do not eat fruits and vegetables that they need them (Field Notes, 16 July 2010). Months later, the issue persisted; in another group meeting, the general manager asked the crew what was intimidating about selling CSA shares. A different crew member of about the same age responded, saying, "what's scary is selling fruits and vegetables in the ghetto and not knowing how to do that" (Field Notes, 16 November 2010).

Following up with these crew members, they explained foodways of their generation (late-teens) in terms of food industry advertising and influence through pop culture. A number of crew members told Bradley that local kids and youth do not want to eat healthy food – they instead want to eat fast food and sodas – because they have internalised these preferences as "cool" things. A younger crew member told a story that represents the tension between structural conditions and personal agency. Talking about the distaste for fresh food and prevalence of liquor stores, he said, paraphrasing, "if kids just hear rappers singing about drinking and see it all over MTV and BET, when they walk down the street constantly seeing places to buy it, they're going to try it". He went on to explain kids' preferences for chips and hamburgers as shaped by the built environment (Field Notes, 24 November 2010). Others at Dig Deep have observed that trendy and sexy promotion does not exist for fruits and vegetables. This observation resonates with critiques of the food industries' influence over youth and the ways the food industry takes advantage of structural poverty and shapes the built environment (Nestle 2002, Winne 2008). For these reasons, managers at Dig Deep often wondered aloud about how to make fruits and vegetables cool. However, this is not the only barrier to increasing sales.

The foodways of youth are also shaped by economic realities that transcend any single racial or age group and that affect Dig Deep's sales: the importance of the cost of produce

over how (organically, sustainably, or otherwise) and where (locally or elsewhere) produce is grown. Crew members frequently emphasised that residents typically do not care or know about the differences between the produce in the store and the organic produce they grow at Dig Deep. For example, only one crew member's family buys a CSA share. All new customers since the small initial group of friends and family of crew members are a result of the partnerships with nearby organisations and institutions.[8]

While it is clear that fresh produce is a prominent part of local African-American foodways, residents can get it more cheaply at the 99¢ Only store. The local 99¢ Only store is a popular place to purchase vegetables, fruit, dairy, meat, and processed foods, as its products are significantly cheaper than those offered by other stores in the area. For $15, the cost of a share of Dig Deep Produce, one can get 20% more produce, by weight, at 99¢ Only. Although Dig Deep's goal is not to have the cheapest food around, their prices are competitive, and Dig Deep's sales support local jobs, which is a pillar of their mission. Dig Deep also provides culturally appropriate food items and recipes in its CSA shares and accepts Electronic Benefit Transfer payments. But while these are important in making the CSA more relevant and accessible to the community, there are factors – most prominently, low incomes – that affect the food choices and preferences of Ashland and Cherryland residents.

The lack of resonance between the crew's foodways and the foodie logics was also evident by individual crew members' responses to food Bradley ate in their presence. The peanut butter and jelly sandwiches she often ate received comments on the whole wheat bread, or on how it was prepared at home. The food she brought from home was described as weird or organic on a number of different occasions, but she never discussed whether or not her food was actually organic (Field Notes, 29 October 2010). In contrast, her eating foods like chips, soda, or Mexican bread purchased near the farm did not evoke comments. Characterisations of Bradley's food as different further suggest that organic foods and whole grain ingredients are not part of the foodways of the crew, despite their regular consumption of fresh, organic fruit on the job. Similarly, the crew at Dig Deep did not immediately identify with the food they produced but slowly grew to gain that identification.

All of this is to say that foodways and their connections to industrial food and foodie logics are complex. Crew members enjoy processed foods, cherish food prepared at home by family members, and frame their work in terms of self-improvement and justice – all at the same time. These complexities are similar for us as authors (enjoying both industrial foods and home-cooked foods), and, we suspect, for most other people in industrial societies, as eating cannot and should not be reduced to a simple binary of acceptable and unacceptable. Similarly, the discussions from The HOPE Collaborative's (Herrera *et al*. 2009) study conducted in West Oakland shows that many residents are dissatisfied with the lack of availability of quality fruits and vegetables, while others "are so used to 'fast food, fast food, fast food' that it becomes fast food which they always want". Similarly, speaking about Native American youth in Oklahoma, Ben Yahola noted,

> Now the youth are affected by the dominant society's corporate influences promoting unhealthy foods and lifestyles. At times we feel powerless, but I found new ways of changing our internalized oppression into physical action, ways that awaken the spirit to do something positive to improve our health. (Morales 2011, p. 163)

The issue of Dig Deep increasing local food sales as it relates to the local residents' foodways raise important questions about autonomy and food system self-determination for food justice work and the possible imposition of foodie logics. Dig Deep has not

resolved this tension between understanding and respecting local foodways and trying to promote its CSA, but its experience suggests that food justice practice must be based, as a starting principle, on individual and collective reflexivity. This reflexivity depends on deliberation among the people involved in food justice projects – at Dig Deep, every member of the team has had to reflect on what employment means on an individual level, what it means to be growing a community resource, and the aspects of the community that are necessary to understand so that the overall project can better engage it.

## Conclusions

The ways Dig Deep has developed as an organisation – by building legitimacy internally with the crew and externally with funders and community organisations – indicate Dig Deep's commitment to food justice practices. First, by creating a safe space for empowerment and deliberation for employees to value their work in individually meaningful ways, Dig Deep shirks not only foodie logics but also shows that models of food justice practices are not one-size-fits-all. Next, as an organisation, by all employees sharing in the task of recruiting customers, Dig Deep not only built trust, support, and pride within the organisation, but also demonstrated the usefulness of diverse market channels, including restaurants influenced by foodie logics, and more importantly, the necessity of having flexible priorities. Finally, ensuring a selective and minimal articulation with foodie logics, rather than imposing them internally with its employees and upon its local community, requires a thorough and genuine appreciation for local foodways which may not be easily accessible to Dig Deep managers and crew. A core lesson from Dig Deep's successes in food justice practice is the importance of taking local context and values seriously. Doing so in Ashland and Cherryland highlights two important tensions – primarily revolving around sales – Dig Deep experienced and that are likely characteristic of food justice elsewhere.

First, skills and capacity of food justice workers (the crew in this case) are potentially very different from managers' skills and capacities. This initially appears as a deficit of practical knowledge that hindered farming operations and sales expansion, but this deficit cannot be confused with a lack of capacity to gain the needed knowledge. Moreover, eliminating such a deficit through training is not a barrier or a hurdle to food justice work, but a necessary component, especially as crew members become more able to identify gaps in their own knowledge and take the initiative for gaining the skills necessary for accomplishing their jobs and becoming leaders. At the same time, crew members possess important assets and knowledge: participation in Ashland and Cherryland, and a deep understanding of local conditions and cultures. In the case of Dig Deep, crew members hold potentially very significant roles in overcoming the challenge of increasing local sales. Managers also possess important knowledge that is different from, but complementary to, what crew members bring to the table. In addition to challenges that revolve around sales, Dig Deep acknowledges and works through tensions that stem from racialised experiences of crew members and managers in ways that foster self-determination and self-improvement and ultimately support people from historically oppressed backgrounds in leading the food justice movement.

Second, the tensions experienced around the need to increase sales stem from disconnections between Dig Deep's CSA model and the foodways of Dig Deep's target market. The foodways of the entire target community are not fully understood, but important progress has been made and more will be made as Dig Deep is able to make this research a higher priority. The foodways of crew members and their friends and families discussed above are important not just because they are a subset of Dig Deep's broader target

market, but also because the crew is the interface between the target community and Dig Deep. What the crew eats and values about food, and how crew members respond to aggressive marketing campaigns from the food industry, affect how Dig Deep's product is branded, marketed to, and perceived in Ashland and Cherryland.

Not only will Dig Deep's understanding of local foodways likely shift, but such a shift would likely be influenced by the crew's development of their own ways of valuing local and organic produce that align with, but do not entirely overlap with, foodie logics. Allowing crew members to adopt, or not, some foodie logics in independent ways makes it possible for Dig Deep to meaningfully engage with and combat the effects of racist and classist values and historical processes that both undergird the foodie logics and led to some of the injustices residents of Ashland and Cherryland face. Although crew members may not ascribe to foodie values, foodie values are not inherently contradictory to crew members' foodways.

The tensions, challenges, and successes discussed above reflect the short-time period in which research was conducted. In Dig Deep's first year and a half, only the most urgent needs were highly prioritised, showing that food justice work that moves towards self-determination – increased independence from the industrial food system and from a colonising foodie logics – is in part about individual and collective identity (re)formation that happens gradually. To succeed, this cannot be imposed by outsiders, but can be done in dialogue with insiders and outsiders who are supportive of the democratic and emancipatory endeavour. This collective reflexivity together with efforts to fundamentally change the economic reality underlying food apartheid are essential elements of authentic food justice work. By encouraging workers to reflect on their employment and to understand local foodways, Dig Deep models an important component of food justice: starting *and embracing* where people are. Dig Deep shows that food justice, therefore, cannot be evaluated merely by its products, but also by the assumptions on which the work is based and the processes through which goals are established and achieved.



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**Notes**

1. This term can be traced to Los Angeles city's effort to limit fast food restaurants through restrictive zoning (Vick 2008). The authors appreciate Hank Herrera for introducing us to this term.

2. Census data from 2010 are not available for these characteristics of the unincorporated areas, even though it is available for surrounding cities.
3. Reardon *et al*. (2004) define supermarkets to refer to "all large-format modern retail (supermarkets, hypermarkets, discount and club stores)".
4. In the first year, Dig Deep relied on Veritable Vegetable to supplement its own produce. This provided a buffer as they learned new farming skills and management strategies, and it ensured that they had enough products to meet customer orders while they pursued access to enough lands to grow it independently.
5. Bradley also became familiar with issues that residents face by interacting with 13 families as a volunteer coach in DSAL's youth soccer league from April to August 2011. Galt is Bradley's academic advisor and helped with various aspects of her project but was not involved directly in fieldwork other than visiting the site a couple of times.
6. We focus here on African-American foodways in the area because the crew is predominantly African-American and their outreach efforts have mainly been to their families and friends, but we should note that Dig Deep aims to understand and support a plurality of foodways as they expand their customer base.
7. Teenage pregnancy, imprisonment, and probation rates all connect to the lack of opportunities for area residents, especially for young people, that DSAL is trying to change.
8. To what extent similar barriers exist among residents of other races or ethnicities remains to be seen, since Dig Deep has not been successful in enrolling them as customers. One crew member explained that white residents were unlikely to listen to Black crew members' sales pitches during their initial canvassing (Field Notes, 15 November 2010).



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