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Commodifying the Commons: American Individualism and Corporate Agriculture

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Abstract

An individualistic ideology strongly defines the American value system, shaping the economic and political landscape of the country. It encourages a competitive, free-market economy with little government restriction, prioritizing short term economic growth over environmental and social sustainability. This paper addresses how American individualism fuels the commodification of food and corporately controlled agriculture. The egocentric ideology opens the door for unfettered corporate control of farming, meant to maximize profit and control resources, despite its effects on food insecurity and small farms. Consolidated agriculture, corporate contracts, and farm subsidies are meant to expand the pockets of corporations, though leaving low income communities with little access to healthy food. The modern food system is incompatible with a more collective ideology necessary to treat food as a commons, for sustainable access to all. Chapter 1 utilizes quantitative sources such as USDA reports to outline the evolution of American agriculture alongside increasing industrialization, while highlighting the prevalence of food insecurity. Chapter 2 delves into some history of American individualism, and how the ideology supports privatization and social inequalities. Chapter 3 specifically unfolds the economic incentives for agribusiness monopolies and privatized food. Chapter 4 employs the ethics of food and environmental justice to emphasize the importance of creating food as a commons. Finally, chapter 5 argues that a collectivist ideology would be more compatible with sustainable forms of cooperative farming to better distribute wealth and resources.

Keywords: collectivism, commodification, commons, cooperatives, corporate capitalism, food desert, food security, ideology, individualism

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Introduction: The Injustice of Food Politics

We all know that food is necessary for survival. More than just surviving though, food shapes cultures, food connects us with nature, food brings safety and security to our lives. Should we not expect the food system to ensure an equitable distribution of resources if food is so intrinsic to health and happiness? In America, we produce enough food, even an overproduction, to feed every single mouth. Yet, 13.7 million households were food insecure in 2019.[1] The food in our grocery stores is less nutritious than ever, with more than one quarter of items in an average supermarket containing some form of processed corn.[2] There are communities across the country, disproportionately low income communities of color, with even no access to a supermarket, just fast food retailers. It is obvious we have a serious problem with our food system, failing to ensure environmental and social justice. How has this become possible? Unfortunately, corporations and political interests determine the food available to us, rather than our needs as human beings. Our most basic human rights have been privatized and commodified. Under corporate capitalism, farms are economically incentivized to reduce labor costs with technology, and consolidate to generate as much output as possible, reducing healthy competition in agriculture. Small farmers across America are struggling to make a living competing against agribusiness, who collect billions of dollars in annual profit, lobbying for tax and subsidy policies that benefit them only. The corporatization of the food system has allowed for the exploitation of natural resources, concentration of food markets, and creation of food deserts across the country. What permits the commodification of basic human rights is the extreme individualistic ideologies dominant in America that perpetuate inequality.

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[1] "Key Statistics & Graphs," USDA Economic Research Service, last modified September, 2020, https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/.

[2] Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006) 19.

Americans are largely defined by individualism, emphasizing self-reliance and personal responsibility for success. The American dream tells us that in times of hardship, we can pull ourselves out of it through hard work, regardless of external circumstance. This moral stance is incompatible with networks of community support or collectively owned resources that make mutual flourishing a priority. This means our economic system has been created on a foundation of inequality; with privatization and corporatization, there are structures in place serving to maintain a divide between those with power and those without. Government regulation is seen as a threat to American prosperity, while corporations are representative of the ability of Americans to succeed in a free market economy. When individual financial success and unfettered economic growth are key components to a political and economic system, collective values that promote equality are pushed to the side. Consequently, our food landscape is shaped by the interests of a few wealthy companies; some 80% of food products are under the control of corporate contracts.[3] Everybody deserves to have equal access to healthy food and water. Basic human rights should not be dependent on our living wages or corporate profitability goals. We must address this unethical system where the power in America lies in the hands of the rich.

The goal of this paper is to illustrate why the corporatization of our food system is harmful, along with the benefits of an ideological shift towards collectivism rather than individualism. Chapter 1 will lay out advancements in American agriculture throughout the years alongside industrialization and consolidation. Chapter 2 will then move into how individualism has manifested in American political and economic structures. Chapter 3 will outline economics of corporate agriculture and its influence on the food landscape. Next, chapter 4 will delve into food justice, or why food and land should be transformed into the commons. Finally, chapter 5 will argue for a shift towards collective ideologies in order for community based organizing of

[3] John Ikerd, "Corporatization of the American Food System," *Small Farm Today Magazine* (2015).

land and food distribution. It will propose more sustainable forms of farming, like cooperative agriculture, ultimately aimed at uprooting the individualistic, capitalist system in place that fuels social and environmental injustice.

Chapter 1: Evolution of American Agriculture

Once, subsistence farming made up the very fabric of American culture. Prior to industrialization, families had to work with the natural land, tend it, care for it, in order to survive. A significant amount of time and energy was placed into tilling and harvesting, therefore defining early American life. And before colonization up until this day, Indigenous populations maintained a rich biodiversity of crops and farming practices. However, colonization and industrialization changed the course of agriculture forever. Twentieth century innovations replaced labor with technology, and exploited natural resources, effectively reducing the number of small, healthy farming communities. These developments were quite profitable for the economy, although food insecurity began to grow. Any social capital that a healthy food system once brought to the country was diminished. This chapter will explore specific technological developments in American agriculture, alongside new twentieth century farm policies.

The Millenium Ecosystem Assessment aims to link the conditions for human well-being to ecosystem services, or what people derive from ecosystems. These include provisioning services like food and water, regulating services that impact climate or water quality, and cultural services that benefit humans spiritually, recreationally, or aesthetically. Last but not least, supporting services include basic processes like nutrient or water cycling.[4] The level at which these services are fulfilled within a society impacts security, social relations, health, and the basic resources for a good life. There are drivers of change as well that can be either positive or negative, related to human advancements such as technology and economic markets.[5] Agriculture and food fall under the provisioning service, tightly linked to the basic materials for achieving a healthy life. Sustainable agriculture and equal access to healthy food would be

[4] "Ecosystems and Human Well-Being: General Synthesis," *United Nations Millennium Ecosystem Assessment* (2005) v, https://www.millenniumassessment.org/en/Synthesis.html.
[5] Ibid., vii.

necessary to avoid injustice and exploiting natural capital. Yet, much of the world has failed to achieve a fair balance, often as a result of economic, political or ideological drivers of change. In 2010, it was estimated that 1 billion people globally were malnourished or undernourished.[6] In America specifically, the individualistic system of corporate capitalism constitutes these exploitative drivers of change.

Agriculture can have a positive impact on economies, yet a disastrous effect on natural resources. According to the Millenium Ecosystem Assessment, $324 billion in subsidies was paid annually to agricultural sectors in countries within the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, including the U.S. Food production contributes to economic growth globally, as the agricultural labor force makes up 22% of the world's population, and 24% of developing countries' GDP.[7] As the population grows and economies around the world grow with it, as do the incentives to expand agriculture. However, the exploitation of natural resources is a glaring externality to industrialization. The overuse of pesticides and fertilizers is encouraged to increase industrialized food production.[8] 70% of water worldwide is used for agriculture. 40% of all land supplies our food. In America, out of all the energy used in the country, agriculture takes up 20%, heavily dependent on fossil fuels. It therefore accounts for 25% of global greenhouse gas emissions. On the social side, these high yields of food have not prevented food insecurity across the globe. Although the amount of food produced is enough to feed everybody, global poverty makes it impossible for households to access healthy food: around half of the world's population lives on $2.25 a day.[9] While subsistence agricultural societies increase biodiversity through polyculture and encourage the flourishing of local

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[6] Tyler G. Miller, and Scott Spoolman, *Living in the Environment: Principles, Connections, and Solutions*, 17th ed. (Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 2011) ch. 12.
[7] Ibid., 6.
[8] "Ecosystems and Human Well-Being: General Synthesis," 21.
[9] Miller and Spoolman, *Living in the Environment: Principles, Connections, and Solutions*, ch. 12.

farmers, industrial agriculture is designed to exploit resources and increase yield as much as possible.

Before we speak on ideologies, we must explore how agriculture has evolved with industrialization, technological innovations, and environmental exploitation. In his book *American Agriculture in the Twentieth Century: How it Flourished and What it Cost,* Bruce Gardner outlines how developments in technology allowed for agricultural outputs to increase dramatically; population growth and westward expansion were characteristic of the early twentieth century, therefore demand for food was increasing. Technology, or "what the inputs do or have done to them in order to generate output", constituted not only new machinery like the mechanical cotton picker and tractor, but also diet supplements for animals or genetically modified crops.[10] It was in the 1920s when gasoline powered tractors became commercially available to farmers, spurring an agricultural system largely dependent on fossil fuels.[11] New widespread use of electricity on farms in the mid twentieth century, aided by FDR's New Deal federal subsidies, brought advancements like milking machines and refrigeration. Mechanization meant farms were less dependent on human and animal labor, thereby lowering costs and increasing efficiency.[12] It used to take 147 hours to produce 100 bushels of corn in the 1900s with labor intensive practices. In the industrialized 1980s, there was a fiftyfold increase in labor productivity, reduced to only 3 hours of production. Technological developments are often incentivized by the profit associated with increasing output, regardless of the negative impacts on farm workers: the cotton picker reduced the labor force by 90% in 1940.[13] Innovation and specialization allow for fixed technological costs in the production process. Diet supplements,

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[10] Bruce L. Gardner, *American Agriculture in the Twentieth Century: How it Flourished and What it Cost* (United States: Harvard University Press, 2009) 8.
[11] Ibid., 12.
[12] Ibid., 15.
[13] Ibid., 18.

GMOs, antibiotics, and machines are reliable, assured to quickly pump out animals and crops. The variable costs of labor, and sustainable agricultural practices that took more time and effort, was losing their place in American agriculture.

The use of pesticides and fertilizers began to define American agriculture in the twentieth century as well. By 1930, farms used on average around 2 tons of chemical fertilizers, while the rate increased by 4.5% every year after World War II, until 1980.[14] Figure 1 below displays this sharp increase over the 40 year period.

Figure 1. Farm use of commercial fertilizers

There was a surplus of ammonium nitrate after World War II, and "serious thought was given to spraying America's forests with the surplus chemical, to help out the timber industry. But agronomists in the Department of Agriculture had a better idea: Spread the ammonium nitrate on farmland as fertilizer."[15] Similarly, chemical pesticides increased after World War II as well: 95% of corn in 1982 was treated with herbicides.[16] The prices for chemicals were falling throughout the twentieth century, so it made sense for farmers to use them to increase their crop yield. As a

[14] Ibid., 22.
[15] Ibid., 41.
[16] Ibid., 24.

result, productivity grew almost 2% annually between 1948 and 1999.[17] However, pesticides and fertilizers have proven to have a detrimental effect on the health of humans and nature. DDT was a synthetic pesticide banned in the US in the 1970s after Rachel Carson brought attention to it in *Silent Spring;* it was the main reason why the bald eagle population declined in America, as its runoff polluted aquatic ecosystems. Water and soil contamination by chemical runoff kills wildlife, upsets the balance of surrounding environments, and can pollute drinking water. Recent organic food movements are aimed at supporting natural rather than synthetic inputs, yet the appeal of cheap chemicals to ensure high yields is still economically incentivized.

Developments in biotechnology, monoculture, and synthetic hormones worked alongside chemical fertilizers to increase agricultural yields. To understand how crops were being biologically manipulated, we have to look at corn. In *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, Michael Pollan labels corn as the perfect capitalist plant. Prior to colonization, corn provided sustenance for Native populations because of its versatility. Now, it constitutes a lot of our food chain as it feeds livestock, and lends itself as an additive to various food items; if farmers can produce a lot of corn, they can produce a lot of profit. The development of hybrid corn was vital for market control of production. Corn breeders in the early twentieth century found a way to biologically patent their favorable seeds: crossing two specific corn breeds resulted in a new seed that when next bred, the generation yields dropped.[18] Farmers could not breed their own corn now, but became reliant on other producers of seeds every new season. Genetically engineered seeds were also bred to be resistant to certain pests. Hybrid corn also responded extremely well to nitrogen fertilizers. Monoculture, undermining the once rich biodiversity of farms, disrupted natural cycles of nature and allowed corn to be grown

[17] Carolyn Dimitri, Anne Effland, and Neilson Conklin, "The 20th Century Transformation of U.S Agriculture and Farm Policy," USDA Economic Research Service (2005): 9.
[18] Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals,* 31.

at any time of year.[19] High yields drove down prices, resulting in the Nixon administration implementing economic subsidies to support corn, rather than farmers themselves.[20] Ever since, the federal government provides billions of dollars in corn subsidies, since it is at the "bottom rung of the industrial food chain."[21]

As industrialized and mechanized processes began to reign in American agriculture, small farmers could no longer afford to live off of their limited output. According to USDA reports from the Economic Research Service, the amount of farms has decreased by 63% since 1900, and existing farms now produce on average one commodity, compared to five in 1900. 70% of farmers used to work only on their farm for a majority of the year. In 2002, 93% of households earned off-farm income. Only about 500,000 farms receive direct income support.[22] Ultimately this has led to the mass consolidation of farms in the United States. The share of cropland in America operated by large scale farms has risen to 41% in 2017, compared to 15% in 1987. And while the number of large croplands have risen, the number of mid-size croplands has decreased. Large scale farms are defined by the USDA by having 2,000 or more acres in crops.[23] Out of the 2.1 million farms in the U.S., 51% of the total value of agricultural production came from 65,300 farms with sales of at least $1 million. The small farms, with sales less than $10,000, were only 1% of production.

[19] Ibid., 44.
[20] Ibid., 48.
[21] Ibid., 55
[22] Ibid., 3.
[23] James M. MacDonald, Robert A. Hoppe, and Doris Newton, "Three Decades of Consolidation in U.S. Agriculture," USDA Economic Research Service (2018): 8.

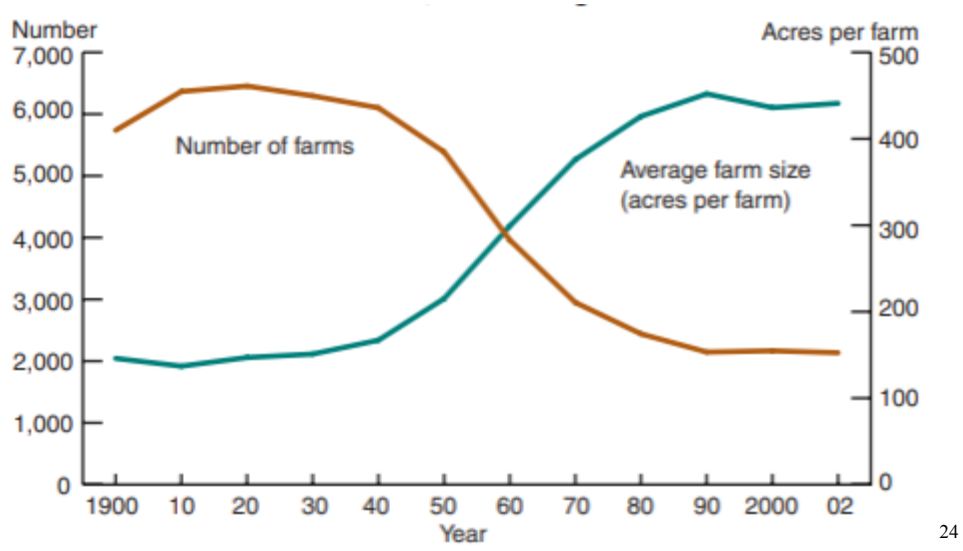

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Figure 2. Farms decline as farm size increases

As figure 2 illustrates, there has been a 63% decline in the number of farms, with a 67% increase in average farm size from 1900 to 2002. So although there is still a significant amount of small farms in America, the crops and livestock that make up our food system originate from these larger farms. Consolidating farms into larger production units has proven to generate higher rates of return.[25]

Alongside consolidation, agriculture has changed significantly in who controls the production process of food commodities. Corporate contracts became more popular throughout the years, especially in the livestock industry, now accounting for almost 80% of agricultural commodities produced. Contract farming is defined by the USDA as a legal agreement "between a farm operator (contractee) and another person or firm (contractor) to produce a specific type, quantity, and quality of agricultural commodity." A production contract means the contractor owns the commodity throughout the production process, while a marketing contract means the farmer owns the production process yet allows the commodity's price to be set by the

[24] Dimitri, Effland, and Conklin, "The 20th Century Transformation of U.S Agriculture and Farm Policy," 5.
[25] Ibid., 24.

contractor.[26] Perdue, for example, provides production contracts to farmers where they give the young chicks and feed to the farmers to raise with their own labor and facilities. Contracts distribute significant power over the market to corporations. "As of 2007, four corporations controlled 84% of the beef packer market [...] Once these firms have a large percentage of their raw material needs under contract, they are in a position to manipulate the remaining open markets to their advantage."[27] Farmers engage in these contracts because owning and operating land can be costly. Contracts ensure efficiency, income stability, and access to capital. On the other hand, farmers may not want this binding agreement because corporations tend to encourage environmentally harmful practices to increase yield, and it concentrates the decision making into the hands of a few powerful companies. Ultimately, large farms engage more in contract farming to ensure steady production and financial support, threatening the number of small family farms that can survive in competition.

Government influence in agriculture increased in the twentieth century, significantly in the form of farm credits and loans, and market regulation. Supply management by the federal government first largely began in the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, part of Roosevelt's New Deal. Farmers received payments to boost their income, and maintain the market prices of commodities. Although deregulation in the 80s reduced these management policies, total payments to farmers from the government in 2000 still reached $23 billion.[28] Government subsidies also began to grow to protect farmers from market fluctuations and maintain commodity prices. We will see more specifically in chapter 3 where subsidies go, and how they maintain low prices for non nutritious foods. Ultimately, despite the potential of subsidies to

[26] "Contracting," *USDA Economic Research Service,* last modified January 6, 2021, https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-structure-and-organization/contracting/.
[27] Ikerd, "Corporatization of the American Food System."
[28] Ibid., 220.

support local farmers and healthy food, they mainly funnel into large farm operations to support the main crops in billion dollar industries. Regulations are necessary to check the power of agribusiness, which can harm small farmers and dominate with their market power. Yet, Gardner makes the point that perhaps "corruption of the political process is too complete." The Clinton administration's commissions on agriculture's economic problems, for example, focused little on increased regulation of corporations or antitrust action.[29] So although there has historically been government support of small farmers, the decisions are put in the hands of government agencies, weakening the political power of the actual farming communities.

The history of American agriculture cannot be explored without delving into hunger and food insecurity. The two are inextricably linked as the amount of food produced in the United States today is enough to feed every person. In fact, the benchmark for food adequacy is 2,200 kcal per capita, per day. In 1996, it was estimated that the U.S. produced 3,800 kcals for each person.[30] Conclusion: not only is there enough to feed everybody, but even an overproduction. Yet in 2019, about 35 million people lived in food insecure households, including 5.3 million children. The USDA defines food insecurity as improper access to "enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members."[31] On the other hand, hunger is a physiological condition resulting from lack of nutrition. In 1995, a survey from the USDA and Census Bureau found that 3.3 million households experienced hunger.[32] The ethics of hunger will be discussed in later chapters, along with further delving into the political ideologies that have driven such a violation of human rights. For now, we will look into the history of food assistance programs, which have existed throughout the country in the twentieth century up to now.

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[29] Ibid., 248.
[30] Marion Nestle, "Hunger in America: A Matter of Policy," *Social Research* 66, no. 1 (1999): 259, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40971313.
[31] "Key Statistics & Graphs."
[32] Nestle, "Hunger in America: A Matter of Policy," 262.

A significant turning point in American history was the Great Depression, when it was clear that federal involvement in providing food relief was necessary in addition to state efforts. In 1936 to 1939, $40 million was provided to the USDA as a part of the New Deal, to buy and distribute surplus commodities to those in need. An advancement in food assistance programs came in 1961, when JFK launched a food stamp program, resulting in the Food Stamp Act of 1964.[33] Food assistance has consistently been linked to welfare politics, which is ideologically driven by beliefs in individual success and morality. From 1969 to 1977, Nixon declared a "War on Hunger", and assistance went from $1.2 billion, to $8.3. However, the 80s and 90s saw stronger restrictions to who qualifies for welfare and food assistance. Presidents like Reagan and Clinton made it harder for people to become eligible for assistance, effectively reducing federal spending.[34] Hunger is of course linked to poverty, and affected by fluctuations in economic health, employment, and federal aid. In 2018, SNAP was the country's largest food assistance program, with $60.9 billion issued in benefits annually. It is proven that with these benefits, the depth and severity of poverty for families is significantly reduced.[35]

As we are beginning to see, the American agricultural system has been defined throughout the twentieth century by not only advancements in technology, but stronger influence of policy, government, and corporations. With small farmers being negatively affected, large scale farms have taken over the agricultural production of the country; farming is rarely the only source of income for households anymore. As a result, the subsidies placed on certain crops, tax policy favoring large yields, and prevalence of contracts, all determine the food accessible to Americans. Our right to basic needs like food is entirely dependent on our income. The

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[33] Gardner, *American Agriculture in the Twentieth Century,* 229.
[34] Nestle, "Hunger in America: A Matter of Policy," 274.
[35] Victor Oliveira, Laura Tiehen, and Michele Ver Ploeg, "USDA's Food Assistance Programs: Legacies of the War on Poverty," *Economic Research Service (*2014*),* https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2014/january-february/usda-s-food-assistance-programs-legacies-of-the-war-on-poverty/.

following chapter will discuss what we touched briefly upon: the political ideologies dominant in America that control policy and economics. Specifically, American individualism that has defined American culture. Ideally, an agricultural system would work in tandem with the government and local communities to ensure equal food access to all. Yet, an individualistic ideology has allowed for the dominance of corporations, with reduced government intervention in welfare. It has shaped an American morality that commodifies food, and treats the high levels of food insecurity in this country as a simple consequence of the free market system.

Chapter 2: A History of Individualism

Cultures across the world have unique ideologies that govern the organization of society. In America, this ideology has long been individualism. From the beginning when the country was colonized, white settlers brought a notion of individual liberty and freedom that underpinned the construction of an exploitative political and economic order. Under capitalism, individualism promotes the American dream, often indicating success in life through wealth, and the accumulation of goods. Privatization and commodification, two necessary elements to economic liberalism, now include rights like healthcare, shelter, and sustenance. The history of American individualism also reveals a pattern of ideological denunciation of government power. In this chapter, we will go through elements of America's political systems that are fueled by individualism and which made the corporatization of the food system ideal under capitalism.

Looking at the political history of a country reveals what the dominant ideology is and how it functions. Ideology has multiple definitions, although the most common elements note some sort of system or organization of beliefs that explain the political order, and "man's attitude towards life and his existence in society."[36] Individuals act in accordance with specific ideologies

[36] John Gerring, "Ideology: A Definitional Analysis," *Political Research Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (1997): 958 doi:10.2307/448995.

to maintain coherence and consistency in life; otherwise, alienation would take over. Political agendas are driven by people acting in accordance with their morals, "both to get things and to be someone."[37] For one to advocate for specific policies or reform, one must have to believe in the cause or otherwise face an internal break of self. Ideology functions as a means of communication, motivation, and linking a society through norms. Marx and Engels mainly attribute the dissemination of ideology through the dominant social class who maintain social control.[38] In America, this dominant class is wealthy white people, who hold most of the capital. Looking at the United States, white politicians have repeatedly championed individualism and neoliberalism.

Individualism is an ideology defined by self reliance, competition, and freedom. It underlies political and economic theories like liberalism, providing a common system of morals for people to believe in. In its definition, individualism is distinguished from self-interest. French political scientist Alexis de Toqueville in 1840 coined the term, originating from the French *individualisme,* which held a negative connotation of selfishness. Toqueville saw it from a slightly different lens, writing that while it may lead to self absorption, individualism also creates new and exciting opportunities if it works together with democracy.[39] Individualism can take on different extremes; as Toqueville noticed, it can easily lead to an extreme lack of concern for others in partnership with undemocratic power relations. American individualism has evolved throughout the years to manifest in systems still based in structural racism and traditional beliefs in the role of the government. As we will see, social welfare policies spark an incredible amount of debate, with those loudest voices being white people with the most capital and privilege.

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[37] Robert Higgs, "The Complex Course of Ideological Change," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 67, no. 4 (2008) 550.
[38] Ibid., 970.
[39] David Davenport and Gordon Lloyd, *Rugged Individualism: Dead or Alive? (*Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2017) 21.

Individual beliefs in tradition are opposed to radical change. Corporations, which have grown too big, are somehow still allowed such freedom because they represent the hardworking nature of Americans, while wealth inequality grows.

Privatization has been an instrumental element to American capitalism since colonization. Privatization is necessary for capitalism, dating back to the enclosure of land in Europe in the eighteenth century, transforming nature into property. With this, individuals could become private owners of land, also creating private markets for products. Intellectuals such as John Locke believed that private ownership of property incentivized hard work, and increased wealth for people when their property was managed well. Therefore, privatization would be necessary for efficient production and the success of the market. On the other hand, Marx says that privatization produces scarcity; while it benefits the owners, it disconnects others from the products, further commodifying things and creating unequal social relations.[40] In the nineteenth century, Locke's ideas prevailed, as American expansionism sought to dispossess Native Americans of their land, and allocate it to white farmers, with the manifest destiny motivation to control territory. These beginnings of privatization in America were sparking the individualism ingrained in modern American society. Individual freedom defined private ownership, allowing the owner to do as they please with their property. When this logic is applied to the vast power private corporations wield today, we see the problems of environmental degradation and food inequality arise. Now, we can look specifically at how privatization has been justified not only through economic theory, but through political ideology in American history.

Private ownership and subsequent commodification of natural resources were championed throughout the twentieth century as government power was painted as a threat to

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[40] *Privatization: Property and the Remaking of Nature-Society Relations.* Becky Mansfield, ed. (Germany: Wiley, 2009) 6.

individual liberty. The first way this was done was by equating private businesses to the well-being of individual citizens. No matter how big companies get, they are, in the end, composed of people seeking the pursuit of success. This is what defines America. Therefore, government regulation is anti-consumer and anti-American. The Reagan administration is a perfect example of how privatization evolved past economic theory and into ideology. He ran on a platform aimed at cutting taxes, deregulation, and defunding government programs. On his agenda included the sale of "federally owned park and wilderness lands, National Weather Service satellites, Conrail and AMTRAK, and a major petroleum reserve."[41] David Davenport and Gordon Lloyd, authors of *Rugged Individualism: Dead or Alive?*, say Reagan's policies once again centered the purpose of individualism. In their book, they believe the American character is defined by individualism, equating moral freedom to the free market. Therefore, Reagan upheld individualistic values by prioritizing private businesses, state power, and defunding welfare. When we look at what he did for food assistance programs as well, we see how privatization and reduced government control strip certain communities of benefits. First, his administration increased the eligibility requirement for qualifying for food assistance programs, effectively reducing participation by 20%.[42] They also wanted to decentralize the programs, aiming to give control over distribution to states. This would however create "major differences in eligibility rules and benefit levels among the states."[43] The proposal did not go through, yet its suggestion displays the prioritization of state benefits over the social good.

The perpetuation of social inequalities alongside reduced government intervention is another externality of extreme individualism. Neoliberal ideologies steer away from social and

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[41] Jeffrey R. Henig, "Privatization in the United States: Theory and Practice," *Political Science Quarterly* 104, no. 4 (1989): 661. doi:10.2307/2151103.
[42] Fred J. Giertz, and Dennis H. Sullivan, "Food Assistance Programs in the Reagan Administration," *Publius* 16, no. 1 (1986): 140. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3330180.
[43] Ibid., 144.

environmental justice policies, keeping power and wealth concentrated in the hands of the white elite. Even in extreme examples like the Great Depression, welfare policies aimed to help the poor were seen as a threat to individualist freedom. Republican party platforms likened New Deal programs to "'the communistic or the fascist technique' and contrasted with 'American methods' for solving problems that were predicated on promoting capitalism and the 'competitive system . . . [that] is the mainspring of material well-being and political freedom'."[44] In addition, the Great Society programs from Lyndon Johnson also garnered heavy opposition, specifically through racially coded language; framing the programs as a way to address racial injustice pitted a growing number of 'undeserving' poor black recipients against hard working white Americans."[45] The systemic dispossession of and discrimination against Black Americans was blatant in the twentieth century up until this day. The USDA for example has a long history of discrimination against Black farmers, distributing significantly less loans to them than to white people. Even now, 98% of American farmland is owned by white farmers.[46] Overall, the government has consistently failed to implement social safety nets to ensure protections for BIPOC over the years. White politicians, even those like FDR who attempted social programs, did little to address systemic racism because after all, liberal individualism is the cornerstone of traditional politics built on America's racist history. Economic growth is always placed over radical change and the collective well-being of society.

The history of corporate America accents the role of individualism in the success of the rich, and subsequent perpetuation of poverty. The imbalance between corporate social responsibility and corporate financial power has led to significant influence within federal

[44] Scott Appelrouth, *Envisioning America and the American Self: Republican and Democratic Party Platforms, 1840-2016* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019) 57.
[45] Ibid., 62.
[46] "Agrarian Commons," *Agrarian Trust.* https://agrariantrust.org/agrariancommons/.

government and politics. America led in the sheer number of corporations since the early nineteenth century. As corporations began to get larger, presidents like Theodore Roosevelt passed antitrust laws to externally check the new concentration of wealth. It was after World War II when corporations really began to thrive, and the prosperity of the country became linked to the prosperity of these large businesses.[47] The success of corporations in America was seen to advance the economy: the number one goal was to produce adequate products and maximize profit, rather than focus on social or green responsibility. An emphasis on shareholder value rather than stakeholder value in the Reagan era further concentrated wealth. When success is solely measured by shareholder return, a corporation is incentivized to grow regardless of negative externalities.[48] The corporatization of the American food system displays this phenomenon. For example, agribusiness contributed $65 million to the 2008 election cycle, mainly from corporations dependent on government programs those politicians vote on. Now, there are little antitrust cases actually won in the United States given the legal power of large corporations. The corporate world has become an amoral entity supposedly bolstering individual freedom and success, yet perpetuating monopolies and inequality.

While corporate America thrives, consumerism and commodification is advanced by individualism as well. We briefly mentioned that Marx says privatization of land disconnects people from the production process, commodifying objects as they are brought into the market. The American individualist values personal achievement measured through consumption and wealth. Labor, consumption and productivity have come to define self worth. The American dream is even defined through one's ability to collect commodities. Perhaps consumerism is so high in America because individualism fails to support a just society where collective identity is

[47] Ralph Gomory and Richard Sylla, "The American Corporation," *Daedalus* 142, no. 2 (2013): 105. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43297237.
[48] Ibid., 108.

strong. Therefore, "buying things has thus become the fetish form in which the exploitative class relation between labor and capital is hidden."[49] People consume more and more to chase a sense of happiness, especially when they are being exploited at work. Human rights, food, water, healthcare, etc., have all been commodified because under capitalism, everything is exploited to extract some economic value. Consequently, workers are subjected to a system where their basic human rights must be earned through their income. Therefore, although individual overconsumption contributes to pollution, the real burden does not lay on the shoulders of consumers. Rather, it is the corporations and entire social structure that need radical change. Individualism and consumerism are so ingrained in American society, where rejecting these economic and social dynamics would suggest an upheaval of capitalism.

Food is ideology. There has to be a set of beliefs that govern our attitudes towards food, its production, and distribution. The American history of individualism is therefore inextricably linked to the attitudes surrounding food, as these ideologies have to meet. Food is vital to our everyday lives, and is not just something we consume for energy. We have created cultures around it, letting it define societies and ethics. As we have established, the underlying ideology behind colonization, exploitation, and commodification of food is extreme individualism. When this is mixed with the construction of a food system, the result is our current corporately controlled agriculture. Even though individualism is meant to prioritize success and innovation, capitalism works to disconnect us from the commodities that are available. We never actually interact with anything we produce, or know how our food is made. Rather, our "community disintegrates", as "the individual character loses the sense of a responsible involvement in these relations."[50] The history of American individualism reveals how reduced government power,

[49] Maria N. Ivanova. "Consumerism and the Crisis: Wither 'the American Dream'?" *Critical Sociology* 37, no. 3 (2011): 336.
[50] Ibid., 21.

privatization, and consumerism are incompatible with an equitable food system. As we further explore the economics of agriculture, it becomes clear that control must be given back to farmers and communities.

Chapter 3: The Food Economy: How Corporations Reign

The food system is no longer regulated by the true demand of consumers. In reality, corporations are backed by political influence and have grown so big as to dominate the market, serving their own interests. Companies have undergone vertical integration and acquired other businesses to expand their power, now influencing every step of the food chain. Ultimately, power over our food is concentrated in the hands of a few corporations, which pulls us in the direction away from equity and food justice. If we were defining success through the individualistic notion of economic prosperity despite social well-being, we would say the American food system is thriving. In this chapter, we will take a look at specific examples of communities where large retailers, like Whole Foods, have pushed out small businesses and created food deserts. We will also explore the economic incentives of companies to consolidate, as well as why unhealthy foods are so cheap.

The majority of food in America is controlled by a small number of companies, even at every step of the system: agriculture, processing, distribution, and retail. Take butter, for example. You look at the grocery store shelf and may see multiple different brands. However, a company like Unilever owns various smaller brands, and actually accounts for 51.2% of margarine sales in the U.S.; there is an illusion that competition is still ripe, yet in reality, concentrated corporations dominate the food market.[51] It is important to understand the chain of the food system and where we get our food from. We know from chapter 1 that there are still

[51] Philip H. Howard, *Concentration and Power in the Food System: Who Controls What We Eat?* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016) ch. 1.

millions of family farms across America, albeit growing in size. To begin, farms often buy their inputs from seed firms or chemical companies who have patents on the products; corn seeds are uniquely bred for farmers to depend on new sales every season. Monsanto, an agrochemical corporation, holds 26% of the seed and pesticide market share, and takes aggressive legal action against any farmer suspected of saving their patented seeds.[52] After the production process, food goes through the stage of manufacturing and processing. Grain and livestock processors have gained power over the years as they exert control over farmers through contracts. Mergers and acquisitions also concentrate power: ADM, Bunge, Cargill and Louis Dreyfus are four processing companies that control up to 90% of global grain trade.[53] Corporations like these have significant abilities to avoid taxes and manipulate market prices. And with manufacturing, we know brand recognition and advertising keep huge companies like Coca-Cola alive. Next, large distributors like Sysco can negotiate lower prices more easily than small businesses, and big retailers depend on them more. Finally, in the last step of the food system, retail is what connects us with food. Supermarkets have gained an incredible amount of power through buying out smaller stores across the country. We will look further into Walmart later in the chapter, but other stores like Kroger and Safeway also maintain lower prices and low wages by demanding low prices from their suppliers, who have become dependent on their business.[54]

Treating food as a private good subjects it to the unpredictable market structure, fluctuations and controls under capitalism. In economics, a private good is one in which a supplier can control its consumption, and one person can consume the good at a time. Private goods are of course vital to the American economy, as private property rights lay the foundation for capitalism; it allows for competition between businesses and strips commodities of any value

[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., ch. 5.
[54] Ibid., ch. 2.

other than their economic one. Ideally, agriculture and food would be a common resource; in pure economic terms, a common resource, like rivers and forests, are nonexcludable while still rivaling in consumption, meaning anyone can enjoy its benefits but it can still be overexploited. This way, common resources could be collectively owned and cared for by a specific group of people, motivated by community ethics. Chapter 5 will discuss how collectively owned agriculture, rather than privatized, corporately controlled, is more likely to prevent exploitation, and is beneficial to local economies. For this chapter we have to keep in mind how, as a private good, food is easily manipulated for the profit of corporations.

Achieving large economies of scale incentivizes corporations to concentrate the food market. Economies of scale are defined by a decreased cost of any additional output after an increase in production, or input. Basically, specialization and industrialization reduced the cost of labor and standardized practices in agriculture so farms started achieving larger economies of scale, increasing production while maintaining fixed costs. Ways to achieve this include expanding into different markets as well, developing new technologies, or merging with other companies. Mergers and acquisitions have become increasingly common for corporations in all sectors. Economies of scale "must exist for corporate farming to make sense."[55] Small farms have small economies of scale, because they have a smaller output in comparison to their inputs, and less of an economic base to ensure a constant flow of product. Ideally, the optimal plant size for food production is large. For example, "pork slaughtering facilities today require annually about 2 million hogs to operate most efficiently."[56] Economies of scale can also affect the barriers to entry of a market, which determine the time it would take for a new company to

[55] Nathan Wittmaack, "Should Corporate Farming be Limited in the United States? An Economic Perspective," *Major Themes in Economics* 8, (April 2006): 52, https://scholarworks.uni.edu/mtie/vol8/iss1/6/.
[56] Chester O. McCorkler Jr., *Economics of Food Processing in the United States* (United Kingdom: Elsevier Science, 2012) 133.

achieve sufficient sales. High economies of scale make it more difficult for new entrants, as it is hard to compete with established firms that dominate the market share. Vertical integration, where corporations buy different stages of production, are common under large economies of scale.

Market power and vertical integration lead to high profits for corporations as they have the ability to control the price of a good. Food companies have increasingly concentrated and integrated over the years: about half of food products are controlled by tight oligopolies. If current trends continue, "another 25% of food manufacturing will move toward the near-monopoly group."[57] Much of the market and bargaining power now lies in the hands of manufacturers and distributors, rather than the producers of raw materials. Producers often have little bargaining power. In the broiler industry, almost all chicken producers are engaged in tight coordination contracts with processors, who give the money for feed and management practices. From the farm, to the hatchery, slaughter house, processing facilities, to the consumer, companies like Tyson own the process. Companies choose to vertically integrate for reasons already stated: to increase economies of scale, increase market share, and to reduce risk. Larger businesses are more likely than small farmers to increase "capital investments associated with modernizing a production facility."[58] Further, concentration in the grocery industry has given more bargaining power to distributors, while manufacturers are also gaining power through unique advertising and product differentiation.[59]

Walmart is a perfect example of a grocer with large economies of scale, creating a monopoly in the food retail industry. Across America, Walmart receives $1 for every $4 spent on groceries.

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[57] Ibid., 9.
[58] McCorkler, *Economics of Food Processing in the United States,* 8.
[59] Ibid., 14.

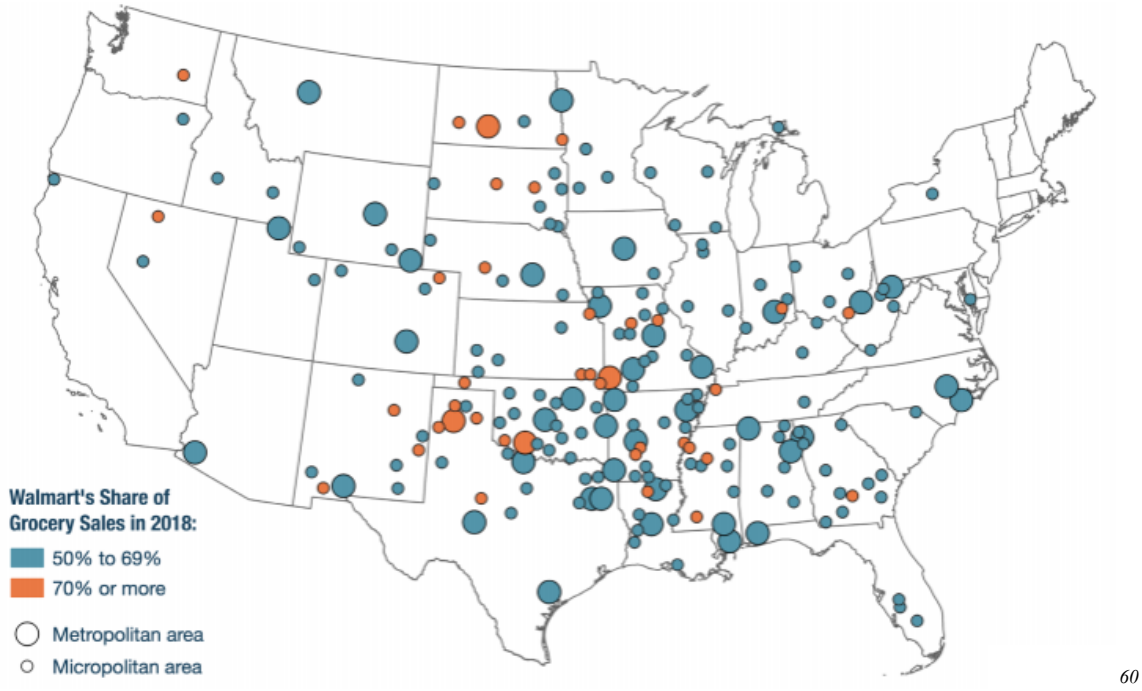

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Figure 3. Walmart's share of grocery sales in 2018

Figure 3 displays 43 metropolitan areas and 160 smaller markets. On average, the retail giant gets at least 50% of their grocery sales. In 38 of these markets, Walmart gets at least 70% of the share. It is safe to say that Walmart holds a monopoly on many grocery markets across the country. "No other corporation in history has ever amassed this degree of control over the U.S. food system."[61] Why was this allowed to happen? The answer lies in politics and law. As mentioned in chapter 2, Reagan in the 1980s aimed to reduce government intervention, resulting in a change in the enforcement of antitrust laws, giving more leeway for mergers and concentration. Walmart was allowed more flexibility to leverage its growth and reduce prices from suppliers, while small grocers were hurt by the subsequent rising supply prices. Walmart also engaged in predatory pricing, or lowering the prices of their goods to drive out other

[60] Stacy Mitchell, "Walmart's Monopolization of Local Grocery Markets," *Institute for Local Self Reliance (*June 2019): 1.
[61] Ibid., 3.

competition.[62] Small grocers cannot compete with such low prices. This increases food deserts around the country, as conglomerates reduce the variety of food sources available to communities, while destroying any competition between businesses.

Processed and unhealthy food items are demanded most in America, due to their accessibility and low prices, especially for low income families. Engel's Law says that as income increases, the proportion of income spent on food actually decreases; poorer families spend more of their income on food than wealthy families. Unhealthy food items have a negative income elasticity, making them inferior goods: their demand goes up when income goes down. Fruits and vegetables have a much higher income elasticity; income elasticity refers to whether or not demand increases or decreases in relation to income fluctuations.[63] Actually, prices for fruits, vegetables and dairy have stayed relatively constant from 1990 to 2007, while prices for fast food and soda have decreased by 12% and 33% respectively.[64] Fast food companies dominate and prey on low income neighborhoods, who are also more vulnerable to any price changes in agricultural outputs. While access to fresh food is necessary for increased health and longevity of life, it is entirely dependent on income. And like every other private good out there, people buy what they can afford. Currently, the affordable options are processed foods at the grocery store or fast food retailers, contributing to the increase in obesity, hunger, and food deserts.

So why are processed foods cheaper? There are multiple supply and demand factors that play a role. Yes, processed foods have a higher demand nowadays because of their low price. There are also multiple lifestyle habits that facilitate the demand for these foods, the biggest one being time. Processed, frozen foods are convenient, and dense in calories for those with little

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[62] Ibid., 4.
[63] McCorkler, *Economics of Food Processing in the United States,* 61.
[64] *The Public Health Effects of Food Deserts.* Janet Mulligan, Paula Tarnapol Whitacre, Peggy Tsai, eds. (Washington D.C: The National Academies Press, 2009) 14.

time and energy to prepare more nutritious food. Corporatization and political finance then take advantage of these demand factors to subsidize certain crops. Corporate actors fund political campaigns, and in turn, their policies, like support for certain tax breaks, protect the interests of the corporation. Monsanto spent $9 million in 2009 towards lobbying. More than $65 million was contributed to the 2008 election cycle from agribusiness, with the top contributors dependent on government farm programs. From 1995 to 2002, "74% of total government payments go to the largest 10% of recipients, in general, to those with the largest farming operations." These operations mainly produce one or two crops, namely corn, wheat, soybeans, rice or cotton.[65] The total production of these crops have significantly increased in the past decades because of these price supports. At the same time, daily calorie consumption has increased by 21% between 1980 and 2004, aided by corn sweeteners and soybean oil. These corporations, who have a responsibility to their shareholders to grow as much as possible, depend on subsidies and political support, while politicians happily accept contributions from agricultural lobbying groups. How nutritious food is in the grocery store and how it impacts American health is not as important.

Agribusiness disproportionately threatens the health of communities of color. Redlining, food gentrification and the creation of food deserts have become common practices for corporations to increase profit. Redlining is a process systemically classifying predominantly Black neighborhoods as "high-risk", making them unable to obtain housing loans.[66] This has served to segregate communities of color, leaving them financially disadvantaged, often living in largely deindustrialized areas or concentrated in cities. Gentrification is then the process where capital investments and public policies raise housing costs of an area, attracting outside

[65] Ikerd, "Corporatization of the American Food System."
[66] Dorceta Taylor, *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility.* (New York: New York University Press, 2014) 236.

businesses to generate profit for the state. Low income families are then forced to move, while upper class, often white families move in. Food gentrification occurs when large food retailers enter a city's economy, perhaps displacing smaller grocers, raising the average price of groceries and limiting access to diverse food options. On the opposite side, food deserts are areas with little access to nutritious, affordable food. Not only could this mean a neighborhood physically distant from grocery stores, but also a neighborhood with an abundance of fast food restaurants. Food deserts mainly impact the public health of Black Americans. In a study done on urban areas in Chicago, around 500,000 people, majority African Americans, were much closer to food stores like gas stations and convenience shops than supermarkets. These areas also had higher BMIs compared to communities with access to grocery stores. And in Detroit, of all the food stores that accept food stamps, only 8%, or less than 100 locations, are supermarkets. Rural areas experience the same inconvenience as well; in most Texas rural counties, there are no food places within a mile.[67] This can be a challenge for families without a car or time to travel. The lack of funding for community grocery stores and the encroachment of fast food into low income neighborhoods are disproportionately felt by communities of color who have historically been dispossessed.

The harmful effects of food gentrification are seen in the example of Oklahoma City, and the entrance of a new Whole Foods. While Walmart keeps prices low and dominates the grocery market of a city, Whole Foods dominates yet maintains high prices for their food. They pride themselves on providing high quality, organic, locally sourced products. The entrance of an expensive supermarket gentrifies an area by increasing surrounding property value and community reputation, while hurting small local growers. The local food movement revitalized the urban economy of Oklahoma City in the early 2000s. Boosting small producers and

[67] *The Public Health Effects of Food Deserts,* 15-18.

community growth served to boost their economy: direct food sales increased between 2002 and 2007.[68] Then, the entrance of Whole Foods marked a decline in sales. Why was this? One would expect Whole Foods to increase interest in local foods and partner with small farmers to increase sales all around. Being a large corporation however, the retailer takes advantage of economies of scale as usual, preferring to source from producers with larger outputs. A small farmer interviewed in the city says of the retailer, "They have really wrecked my business a whole bunch."[69] Small farmers who typically have higher prices for speciality items cannot keep up.

The Whole Foods in Jamaica Plain, Boston, is a further case study to illustrate the food gentrification by corporate retailers. Jamaica Plain, Boston, is a multiracial area, with a large Latino population. The 1970s saw deindustrialization and abandoned infrastructure in the neighborhood, before gentrification starting in the 80s sparked a flow of white people into the area looking for cheap housing near downtown Boston.[70] The 2011 US census reported a 10% decline in Latino residents, 14.6% decline for African Americans, and a 5.4% increase in the white population, while housing prices increased as well. There were immediate community protests against the 2011 announcement of a Whole Foods opening, as it meant the closing of a popular, local Latino market, Hi-Lo. Whole Foods prices were 39% higher than Hi-Lo's, meaning Latino residents' access to affordable food disappeared. Not only did Whole Foods increase the price of food for people, but it was culturally significant in that Hi-Lo was owned and operated by the local Latino community. The Hi-Lo manager said, "Hi-Lo was an anchor business in the community. We filled a void in the community with products from everywhere. The TV and radio would come to the store. People would write to me about new products."[71] It

[68] *A Recipe for Gentrification: Food, Power, and Resistance in the City*. Alison Hope Alkon, Joshua Sbicca, Yuki Kato, eds. (United States: NYU Press, 2020) 77.
[69] Ibid., 81.
[70] Isabelle Anguelovski, "Healthy Food Stores, Greenlining, and Food Gentrification," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* (2016): 9, doi:10.1111/1468-2427.12299.
[71] Ibid., 12.

was not just a grocery store, but enhanced the culture of the town. Whole Foods, even though perceived to be superior because of its organic options, actually physically displaced Latino families. A diverse selection of small grocery stores do not just provide food, but act to enhance the social cohesion of a community.

Corporate agriculture functions within America to work in tandem with political interests, privatizing and commodifying food to supposedly benefit the economy. While agriculture is adding more to the national GDP every year, GDP is not synonymous with the social good. Chapter 2 highlighted how deregulation has been a significant factor in corporate growth. Now in chapter 3, we see how the economic market in America incentivizes corporate concentration of power. The following chapter will expand upon why this is unethical, namely because treating food as a private good is not aligned with ensuring social and environmental justice. We will soon better understand how to treat food as a commons, weaving collectivism into sustainable systems.

Chapter 4: Food Justice: The Commonification of Food

Not only is food a human right, but the practices and knowledge surrounding food and agriculture are necessary for the health and flourishing of all. Mainstream America has become increasingly disconnected from the inherent characteristics that food possesses. Commodification ignores the cultural significance attached to food, the place food has in our identity. It also fails to realize the inherent value to our natural resources, which if used sustainably, can engage us in a healthy, reciprocal relationship with the land. Inequality is inevitable without community based organizing of agriculture, transforming food into the realm of the commons. While chapter 5 will illustrate specific steps towards ideological change and sustainable agriculture, here we will explore the concept of food justice and commonification.

First, to understand the ethics behind a just food system, we have to define environmental justice and food justice. A call for environmental justice is a response to the exploitative systems explained in previous chapters, namely corporate takeover of industries and subsequent environmental degradation. Not only does extractive capitalism exploit the land, but low income communities of color experience the brunt of the effects. Climate change cannot be addressed without addressing structural inequalities and environmental racism. The violence of stealing land from Native Americans laid the foundation for modern injustices rooted in colonialism. Environmental racism is defined as "an expression of conflicts that distribute environmental risks (exposure) and rewards (amenities) in a socially stratified way (via race and class)."[72] Environmental justice movements therefore have a goal of "imagining and enacting solidarity, radical hope, anti-consumerism, and anti-capitalism."[73] This can be done in a myriad of ways, most notably through community organizing, uplifting the voices, beauty and art of BIPOC, to subvert the current corporate system of violence, exploitation and inequity. Food justice is a branch of environmental justice to promote the equitable distribution of food, realizing that the food system itself is influenced by the structures of race and class in America. Individualism creates a barrier to achieving justice, putting the blame of food insecurity or poverty on the shoulders of those experiencing it. The very neoliberal system that promotes individual success and unlimited economic growth cannot fracture itself by recognizing the injustices it perpetuates. This is how we come to understand that collectivism promotes the understanding of food as a cultural product rather than a market good, and a human right, therefore must be ensured for all.

The basis for achieving food justice is realizing that food is a human right, necessary for the long term health of humans. We understand human rights as fundamental to human existence,

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[72] Julie Sze, *Environmental Justice in a Moment of Danger* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020) 10.
[73] Ibid., 14.

"so fundamental that their denial puts human dignity itself at risk."[74] They are basic to guaranteeing freedom, dignity and agency. Food is necessary for survival, and healthy food is necessary for longevity of life and increased happiness. Therefore, everyone deserves access to a healthy diet. All of this is not to say that fast food restaurants, and indulgent food like chocolate can no longer be available to us. However, this is to say that healthy food is a human right, and the knowledge of what goes into our food, how it is made and where, is also a right. Therefore, there should be no hunger or food insecurity where people have no choice but to choose fast food. There should be no system where corporations exploit the market structure to increase profits, while preying on vulnerable communities. Rather, the system should be more locally based to account for the specific needs of communities, making healthy food affordable. Constructing an ethical idea of health is necessary for creating a sustainable food system. Health is not what one might think. It is not the absence of disease, or the simple caloric intake consumed on a daily basis. No, health is spiritual wholeness. Our bodies "are not distinct from the bodies of plants and animals, with which we are involved in the cycles of feeding and in the intricate companionships of ecological systems and of the spirit."[75] Corporations are void of any humanistic aspects. This is the problem. The market does not account for what actually makes people happy and whole. Individualism undermines the concept of spiritual wholeness. The idea of the commons and justice must integrate these concepts of wholeness to properly fulfil the rights of humans.

Food is a product of nature, and requires an ethical treatment of the environment to ensure its equitable distribution. The wholeness of an individual is achieved through the realization that, again, our bodies are not distinct from the Earth. Robin Wall Kimmerer in her

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[74] Des Gasper, "Needs and Human Rights," *The Essentials of Human Rights* (2004) 1.
[75] Ibid., 103.

beautiful book *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, says that gratitude and reciprocity is essential for human happiness, and in thanking the land for everything it gives us. In America, the corporate food system disconnects us from nature, as we manipulate and exploit the natural world for our own overconsumption. A just food system would use sustainable agricultural techniques, along with smaller, local gardens and farms to tailor food production to our needs. This way, we would be recreating a relationship filled with respect and love for the Earth. Whatever it gives us, we give the same respect back. This connection is impossible under extreme consumerism and commodification: "Everybody knows you can't buy love." Kimmerer continues, "Something essential happens in a vegetable garden. It's a place where if you can't say "I love you" out loud, you can say it in seeds. And the land will reciprocate, in beans."[76] The only way we can create a food system that honors the gifts given to us by nature is by collective ethics promoting interdependence, generosity and nurturing. This way, we know the system will be sustainable and regenerative, opposite of the system in place today. In the end, food is a product of nature. And nature is a gift to humans; everyone deserves to live in a healthy environment that protects them while we protect it.

Beyond recognizing food as a right and natural product, we must also realize its cultural significance. Culture is transmitted through food, beginning with the farm, ending with the consumer. When the farm culture is rich, buyers across the country feel the rich effects, connecting us further with our environment. The environment is not something that just "surrounds" us. Rather, we live amongst it, and depend on it. In chapter 1, we saw how industrialized agriculture destroyed farming communities, making them reliant on off farm income and technology in order to compete in the market. However, technology has no past,

[76] Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Canada: Milkweed Editions, 2013) 151-152.

learned experiences like communities do. A healthy farm culture "nourishes and safeguards a human intelligence of the earth that no amount of technology can satisfactorily replace."[77] The reliance on GMOs, harmful chemicals, and factory farms rips away the knowledge gained from sustainable agriculture. Food, after all, is "a cultural product: it cannot be produced by technology alone."[78] When farms and local communities can distribute the food themselves without corporate control, they are distributing a type of knowledge and culture felt by consumers. We become more closely connected with nature, understanding what we put into our bodies, and feeling whole by maintaining a healthy relationship with the land. Not only this, but we form better relationships with other humans, collectively ensuring the well-being of one another. Individualism prizes competition, yet for cultures to last, relationships must be cooperative.[79] To place corporate profit over the quality of food is to corrupt the natural interdependence between humans.

The American history of an exploitative mind, and the specialization of our society manufactures an unjust food system. In the Western perspective, land is empty, something to be filled. This has spurred the stealing of land from Native Americans across the centuries; Native Americans do not see land as empty, but rather full and having attributes of personhood that animate nature. So, "When we tell them that the tree is not a *who*, but an *it*, we make that maple an object; we put a barrier between us, absolving ourselves of moral responsibility and opening the door to exploitation."[80] The land is an *it* in America. Western philosophies place humans outside of the land, connected to religious and other spiritual justifications for controlling nature. The exploitative mind values profit, while those who see the Earth as a *who* values health and

[77] Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture* (United States: Counterpoint Press, 2015) 22.
[78] Ibid., 43.
[79] Ibid., 47.
[80] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass,* 75.

community. In Wendell Berry's *The Unsettling of America*, he also notes how specialization reduces community values. In capitalist societies, specialization is designed to allocate specific duties to specialists, like doctors, teachers, and lawyers. While this most definitely increases knowledge and research put into different disciplines, it can cause a "calamitous disintegration and scattering-out of the various functions of character: workmanship, care, conscience, responsibility."[81] In our food system, once a farmer produces the crop for sale, they often let it go into the next stages of production, distribution and then consumption, without any other power in the chain. Especially if they are engaged in a corporate contract, they may not even own their own means of production. This makes it easier for the exploitative mind of corporate actors to increase their own profits along the way. In community based agriculture, local gardens, and community grocery stores, the beginning and end of the food chain can be traced, producing this rich culture surrounding food that values the recipients and their health. Like we have established, the land is best managed by those who respect it, and who respect the path food takes from the Earth to our bodies.

The path to food justice is inherently political, as food deserts across the country are created by the corporate and government influence on food access. Food deserts exist where communities have little access to healthy and affordable food. Food apartheids is a more specific term, implying that food deserts are not random, but exist as a result of structural racism, concentrated in communities of color. Seen in chapter 3, redlining and other racist policies deprive many communities of color of political and social power. Flint, Michigan is a perfect example. Water, like food, is a human right. Yet, Flint, a majority Black city with high poverty rates, were exposed to high levels of lead in their water supply. After redlining and deindustrialization, Flint was vulnerable, and they were switched to another water source to save

[81] Berry, *The Unsettling of America,* 19.

money, determined by the emergency manager and not the citizens themselves. The residents were ignored and belittled by the state for a year.[82] These horrific conditions were allowed because of privatization, but especially racism allowing for the violence enacted upon Black people. Food deserts exist for the same reason. In the first half of the twentieth century, Deanwood, a majority Black neighborhood in Washington, D.C., had ample land to grow their own food. Individuals were able to support themselves through community buying of local food, some owning their own small grocery stores. "The political power, social networks, and skills that were shared were invaluable in terms of creating a thriving neighborhood."[83] Later in the twentieth century however, large supermarkets popping up in more suburban areas put these local workers out of business. So while white, affluent neighborhoods got the positive benefits from affordable supermarkets in their area, Black neighborhoods were destabilized. Now, for 80,000 residents, there are only 2 grocery stores in Deanwood.[84] Once, community organizing of food and land created a self sustaining neighborhood, before racial zoning and increased concentration of markets led to food injustice.

Now that we understand food justice and what principles a just food system takes into account, we can look at the process of treating food as a commons. What is a commons, exactly? There are various definitions of commons that determine its role in governance. We previously defined private and common goods, having to do with excludability and rivalry. Public and common goods have basically the same characteristics, yet the term public good is used more often in the realm of economics. Common good carries a more ethical connotation, with the good believed to be beneficial for society as a whole. Privatization often occurs because of the belief

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[82] Sze, *Environmental Justice in a Moment of Danger,* 65.
[83] Ashante Reese, "The History of Deanwood's Local Foodscape," *DC Policy Center,* last modified May 20, 2019, https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/black-food-geographies/.
[84] Sasha-Ann Simons, "New Ward 8 Grocery Store Breaks Ground — And Barriers — To Fresh Food," *American University Radio,* last modified January 3, 2019, https://wamu.org/story/19/01/03/new-ward-8-grocery-store-breaks-ground-and-barriers-to-fresh-food/.

in the “tragedy of the commons”, a concept where shared resources become exploited as everyone acts in their own self interest. We see this with the pollution of air and water across the globe. This assumes that everyone will act with their personal interests as top priority. One interpretation of the commons says the solution for this tragedy is government regulation and policy change. A more transformative idea of the commons is necessary to spark further structural and moral realizations. This is where commoning as a form of governance comes into play. Here, “commons are self-regulated social arrangements to govern material and immaterial resources deemed essential for all [..].”[85] Ultimately, people are not born selfish, and will not always place their interests above those of others. Rather, community values have been natural to societies for centuries, and have simply been deteriorated over the years by ideologies like individualism. Commoning cannot coexist with corporate capitalism emphasizing individual achievement. It is rather “value-based”, allowing a community to control and deliberate what resources are necessary for their flourishing. Therefore, commoning the food system will effectively undermine the corporate players and provide political and social power to communities.

If commoning is the distribution of political and social power to communities, we must examine how communities will then locally structure their food system. Strengthening social capital is integral to this. Social capital consists of shared relationships, identity, values and norms. Solid connections with nature and each other will ultimately guide the belief in equal access to food and healthy environmental practices. Small-scale fishing industries are a perfect example of embracing shared resource practices and thereby increasing community health. The *Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food*

[85] *Routledge Handbook of Food as a Commons*. Jose Luis Vivero-Pol, Tomaso Ferrando, Olivier De Schutter and Ugo Mattei, eds. (London & New York: Taylor & Francis, 2018) 8.

Security and Poverty Eradication are guidelines created by the FAO to ensure small-scale ethical fishing practices. They say fishers require proper tenure rights so they can best manage the land in accordance with their culture. States must also support fishers in their sustainable practices, workers rights, and the allocation of resources to communities who need it most. The guidelines are focused on how to implement these practices through recognizing the importance of diversity and equality.[86] Studies have shown that communities with co-management practices with the state "demonstrated how local communities have often been able to develop legitimate institutions of self-governance and establish sustainable approaches to managing fishing intensity and ecosystems impacts."[87] The role of the community in commonification is all about strengthening community relationships, leadership, and cooperation. This way, members have a duty to each other to ensure basic rights, working collectively to manage shared resources.

The role of the state in commonification is to allocate and regulate capital. The government will play a significant role in the transformation towards collective agricultural practices, as it can be responsible for the redistribution of wealth, land and policy shifts. A "partner state" would enable and empower commonification, which is ultimately up to community organizing.[88] Their duties would go against everything natural in American politics right now, such as privatization and viewing economic growth as an indicator of health. Aside from the government, of course the private sector largely controls not only the resources we consume, but the knowledge and social norms that dominate. Along with the state, this too will need to undergo an ideological change to support collective action and the common good. This includes changing its entire purpose of existence. The private sector "will operate primarily to

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[86] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication* (Rome, 2015) http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4356en.pdf

[87] *Routledge Handbook of Food as a Commons*, 383.

[88] Ibid., 387.

satisfy the food needs unmet by collective actions and state guarantees."[89] Ideally, the state provides the tools for communities to govern resources communally and ensure equal distribution of food. Communities have significant potential to band together, pool resources and spark structural change. Capitalism "has a fantastic mimetic power", presenting itself as necessary for human prosperity and economic development.[90] The way to diffuse this mimetic power is to distribute knowledge. Constructing systems of governing common resources spurs this distribution.

An ideological shift towards collectivism will recognize food as a human right, product of nature and culture, and therefore ensure a just food system. Food deserts and apartheids existing in America are unacceptable especially when we look at the overproduction of food in the country. We make enough food to satisfy every single person. However, the exploitative nature of corporations and the corporate food system allow for the emphasis of profit over health. Collectivism, which is incompatible with corporate agriculture, equates to better sharing resources, and stronger cultural and social relationships. The commonification of food promotes an equitable distribution of resources, reducing the impact of food deserts felt by millions of Americans. A future is possible where we engage in a reciprocal relationship with the land, utilizing sustainable techniques to feed us all. The following chapter will detail the path towards an ideological shift to collectivism, and what these sustainable techniques are.

Chapter 5: Towards Collectivism and Cooperative Agriculture

Ideological change is necessary to provide the foundation for collective social health, and sustainable agriculture. Cooperative agriculture and sustainable farming practices will reduce food insecurity across the country while increasing environmental stewardship. By shifting the

[89] Ibid., 383.
[90] Ibid., 390.

dominant values towards collectivism, America would more effectively reverse structural injustices existing in the food system and restructure our political organization. To be clear, no society can be either entirely individualistic or collectivist. America is dominated by an individualistic ideology, yet collectivism reigns in certain social arenas like worker unions. The question lies in how can ideologies change, how can we get more people to accept a radical shift in governance? This is difficult, and takes plenty of time. The clock is running out for the Earth however, therefore this shift is becoming more and more urgent.

What is collectivism? We have defined individualism, we understand now how it manifests in American politics and economics. So what are collective values, and how would they spur widespread change? Collective societies "stress 'we' consciousness, [...] help each other, share scarce resources, tolerate each other's view, and minimize conflict."[91] A perfect example is hunter-gatherer societies, like those that still exist to this day in places like Tanzania. There is an immense amount of cooperation and sharing needed to sustain everybody in these societies, as people divide labor and collectively share the resources they gather. This is how humans once lived, disproving the assumption that we are naturally selfish beings. Collectivism, rather, is more natural to us, bringing harmony and solidarity. The onset of industrialization and subsequent class inequality spurring from the eighteenth century broke up cooperative lifestyles that once existed in agrarian society. The ruling class gained power to exploit the labor of those beneath them for their own profit, creating a relationship void of trust or respect. And the working class had no choice but to prioritize their own survival and participate in the exploitative system; ideology is formed through the elite, and disseminated to those with less power. Embracing collectivism will naturally diminish individualism and encourage more communal

[91] Uichol Kim, *Individualism and Collectivism : A Psychological, Cultural and Ecological Analysis.* (Copenhagen S, Denmark: NIAS Press, 1995) 4.

values and sharing of our precious resources like food. Not only will resources be better distributed, but collectivism fosters a stronger sense of self-identity, as we define ourselves through the well-being of others and the deeper relationships we form with the environment. We already have examples of this in America, such as worker unions and those who advocate for social policies like universal healthcare or a universal basic income. These are collectivist ideas, and they are based on the belief that we must ensure each other's basic rights to safety and security. Redistributing resources will undermine the current ruling class, giving communities the tools to take back power. If we are to prioritize equality, which we ought to do, the dominant cultural values in America must shift.

Ideological Change. Ideological change takes time, as people define who they are based on their actions in accordance with specific morals and beliefs; ideology does not change after reading one paper. There are not only multiple theories on how ideologies are formed, but how they change as well. Marx formulated that ideology is determined by modes of production, i.e labor and technology, therefore going back to serve the interests of those in power. Oppositely, Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises disagreed, saying that the organization of society is a result of ideology, not the other way around. In any case, scholars agree that ideology and social structure enact force upon each other, changing based on personal experience and significant events.[92] Most people can understand how if someone loses their job, or is affected by political change, their worldview may shift. What can also shift ideologies is to pray on "ideological competition".[93] Multiple ideologies exist within a culture. If a group consistently expresses the minority ideology over years and years, they will win those that are weakly committed, and plant the seed in the heads of others. Collective ideologies exist in America, as we have said. The seed

[92] Higgs, "The Complex Course of Ideological Change," 555.
[93] Ibid., 557.

for collectivism is planted; as many as half of adults under 30 in America have positive views on socialism.[94] "In this light, we see the importance of the "softening up" phase, when hopeful ideologues cultivate public opinion and prepare it to receive and germinate their brand of seed when the season is propitious."[95] This will be helpful in times of crisis, like war or economic depression, which are proven to cause an ideological change. Take the Great Depression for example; discussed in chapter 2, the New Deal came about because classic laissez-faire economics was not working for the American people anymore. The amount of people living in hunger, obesity, and food insecurity in this country is a crisis that necessitates an ideological shift. What must happen now is continued promotion of collective ideologies and specific actions towards a change in governance, before more massive crises hit.

Land Redistribution. Land redistribution is key to giving more power to local communities and small farmers. Large scale farms dominate American agriculture, and land is mostly owned by the wealthy. Billionaires Bill Gates, John Malone, and Jeff Bezos own significant amounts of private land across the country, as land has become a valuable asset for businessmen.[96] Redistribution aims to reduce poverty for small farmers, as well as encourage environmental and social sustainability that corporations lack. The process for determining to whom and how land will be distributed is complicated, and can involve legal and procedural steps from the government. Countries like South Africa and Brazil have undergone state driven distribution of land, with beneficiaries being determined through cash or loan contributions, even small as not to exclude poor farmers. In Brazil specifically, to gather the land to be distributed, the federal government led the charge in buying land from owners willing to sell, or

[94] "New documentary explores why a growing number of Americans are turning to socialism." *CBS News,* September 17, 2020, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/socialism-in-america-2020-cbsn-originals/.
[95] Higgs, "The Complex Course of Ideological Change," 559.
[96] Samuel Stebbins, "Who owns the most land in America? Jeff Bezos and John Malone are among them," *USA Today,* November 25, 2019, https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2019/11/25/these-people-own-the-most-land-in-america/40649951/.

compensating them to legally expropriate the land. It took decades for the country to be able to go through a relatively quick judicial process of expropriation, and even today it is costly and complex to enforce.[97] There are limitations to what the government can do for land reform, and change must occur outside of the limitations of market capitalism and traditional private property rights.

NGOs, unions, and other community activists have to be involved in redistribution, seeing as they know local communities best, and corruption by the elite is then less likely. This will also ensure farmers who need it most, like Black and Indigenous communities who have historically been discriminated against in agriculture, receive the economic security they deserve. Agrarian Trust is a perfect example of an NGO that works with local communities to distribute land. Agrarian Trust recognizes the economic barrier to buying new land for small farmers, and the unsustainability of short term corporate contracts. Their mission is to buy and hold land and establish long term tenure agreements with farmers across the country. Land is transferred to what they call Agrarian Commons, a subsidiary of the company, where local governance boards are established. In their agreements, farmers, participating in the decision making processes as well, receive equity and therefore have ownership of their own land.[98] Communities reap economic and social benefits from increased capital gain and cooperative decision making. These sorts of initiatives address the concentration of farmland and wealth inequality in America. Community based land reform is driven by cooperation, new forms of collective land ownership, and therefore subverts the commodification of food by commoning resources. The next step to encourage a secure food system is through more farming cooperatives.

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[97] *Agricultural Land Redistribution: Toward Greater Consensus.* Hans P. Binswanger-Mkhize, Camille Bourguignon, Rogier van den Brink, eds. (Washington, D.C: The World Bank, 2009) 26.
[98] "Agrarian Commons." *Agrarian Trust.* https://agrariantrust.org/agrariancommons/.

Farming Cooperatives. American collectivism and the redistribution of agricultural land will support more local farming cooperatives. Cooperative farming is a farm owned and run collectively by its members, who share the profits, with no outside shareholder gain. What are some benefits to cooperatives? First, the economies of scale are larger than individually run farms, meaning farms can buy bigger inputs, increase volume, and therefore generate more income when pooling resources. Producers can more easily negotiate with each other, exchange knowledge, and pool their capital for stronger investments. Quality of life also tends to be better, as members of a cooperative share responsibilities without being overworked.[99] Cooperatives, while used to self sustain small communities, can also control larger processes of distribution and marketing goods to outside sources. This way, broad American demands for food can be fulfilled. For example, multi-farm CSAs (community-supported agriculture) are groups of similar producers "that pool and distribute their products to a broader customer base, or groups of farms with entirely different products, seeking to provide consumers with many of their food needs."[100]

Farm cooperatives, where members live and work on the land together, are important for reviving the rich culture revolving around food. Acorn, a 30 member community in Virginia, sustains itself through collective ownership of Southern Exposure Seed Exchange. Their food, living expenses, and health insurance are provided in exchange for community labor, where they also control business decisions. Although on a small scale, this is a perfect example of how cooperatives balance power and the voices of each member, better promoting equality.[101] Ultimately, the goal is for farmers to have ownership over their land, and cooperatives are an economically viable alternative to privatized land and corporate vertical integration. Another

[99] Faith Gilbert, *Cooperative Farming: Frameworks for Framing Together (*The Greenhorns, 2014) 5.
[100] Ibid., 8.
[101] Ibid., 16.

beneficial community based program are community grocery stores, which are owned and operated by locals. They have the goal of changing the landscape of food deserts, providing affordable and healthy food options to the community, while locally circulating the profits. The Rural Grocery Store Initiative at Kansas State University for example provides research models and funding for community stores.[102] If collective values are to be amplified in the future, wealth redistribution will naturally fund cooperatives across the country and better distribute economic security while ensuring sustainable food options.

Cooperative Governance. The governance of cooperatives is vastly different from the modern corporate governance in America. Corporate governance typically claims they take into account stakeholder desires, but often act with one goal in mind: increasing profit for investors. For cooperatives, the voices of the group are involved in decision making to ensure collective goals are met and trust is kept. Members of a community can have their specialities and therefore can lead discussions and distribute knowledge in that particular area. A clear business structure naturally increases communication, and reduces levels of conflict; the most vital aspect of cooperatives is this communication. A cooperative form of governance will redefine American institutions, changing the purpose of the government and private sector. Of course the global market for food and the high demands of American citizens necessitate a lot of food to be produced. The private sector will have a role in the food system to maintain the transition to commoning land and resources, so sustainable business has to be implemented in the meantime. Environmental degradation and labor exploitation are trademarks of large corporations; this can change with a focus on humanistic management practices, placing the well-being of workers and consumers as a priority. IKEA for example established guidelines and partnered with NGOs to source their wood sustainably, and their business is still thriving. All of this said, collective

[102] "Rural Grocery Initiative." *Kansas State University,* last modified April 15, 2021, https://www.ruralgrocery.org/.

values and commoning natural resources will subvert any extreme power the private sector has, completely shifting the political landscape of the country. In the end, the power falls in the hands of community organizations to redistribute social and political influence.

Regenerative Agriculture. Sustainable farming practices must be implemented to address climate change. The industrial food system uses pesticides, fertilizers, and massive inputs of water and grain to sustain itself. Sustainable agriculture exists within planetary boundaries and better understands ecosystem services. It recognizes the natural processes of the environment, and utilizes methods to tend to nature in a reciprocal relationship. Regenerative agricultural practices include cover cropping and crop rotation to improve the quality of soil and add natural nutrients without extra fertilizer. The majority of farms now produce one or two cash crops, but expanding this through polyculture will increase diversity and resilience to pests, weather, and disease. The food system is also currently dependent on non-renewable resources, especially within the distribution process. Therefore, a global shift towards renewable energy infrastructures, like more solar and wind investment in America, will reduce harmful emissions. Boosting urban agriculture will also better local economies; locally produced food in areas with high populations is good for reducing transportation costs and waste.[103] Regenerative agriculture is not only meant to restore health to the environment, but health to humans as well. Our environmental stewardship must be rewarded through better funding, investment and research into sustainable agricultural practices. The distribution of knowledge on sustainability is important as well, which will come about through farmer networks. Cooperative farming fosters these networks by creating cohesive, interdependent communities. Living and depending on each other promotes the feeling of responsibility, which is more sustainable in the long run than

[103] Leo Horrigan, Robert S. Lawrence, and Polly Walker, "How Sustainable Agriculture Can Address the Environmental and Human Health Harms of Industrial Agriculture," *Center for a Livable Future* 110, no. 5 (May 2002) 452.

individualistic gains. “Within the ethics of care, responsibility is not seen as a burden or obligation, but rather as a recognition of the relational nature of human life.”[104] Regenerative agriculture is sustainable if collective ideologies guide the feeling of responsibility and care for others.

Symbiotic Food Systems. Creating a symbiotic food system means reducing current food inequalities. A symbiotic food system is “one organized around how people live their lives and without direct corporate, state, or development organization interventions.”[105] The primary goal is to feed people, rather than increase returns on capital. A major way to reduce food insecurity is to reduce food waste. We produce much more food than actual people in this country, and therefore we know we have the resources to feed everybody. In a symbiotic food system, waste is reduced through redistribution and trade. Strengthening community ties makes it easier to transport excess food to whoever needs it. In addition, the food market will have more equally distributed power between farmers, contrasting the monopolies in food industries today; this system will mimic the goal of an egalitarian society. “The primary driver of progress is people acting to meet their needs, rather than capital mobilized for higher returns, and growth happens through replication rather than scaling up.”[106] Replication refers to the dynamic nature of human relations, which are changing through various experiences and constantly being taught and learned. A symbiotic food system embeds itself into social structures to reflect the intrinsic needs of people. It recognizes not only our nutritional needs, but the psychological benefits of living in a healthy, pure environment where our community listens to one another.

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[104] *Routledge Handbook of Sustainable and Regenerative Food Systems.* Michael Carolan, Jessica Duncan, and Johannes S.C Wiskerke, eds. (London & New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2021) 128.
[105] Ibid., 188.
[106] Ibid., 194.

Ultimately, market based solutions to food insecurity are useless in addressing the root problems. The problem is not a question of the American dream, or people simply pulling themselves out of poverty. The problem is not a growing population, since we know we have enough resources for everybody. The problem is not simple policy changes. No, the real problem is the individualistic ideology we have built American capitalism on today. It is the ideology dominating morality that governs who we think deserves basic rights like food and water. It is the ideology that dictates our priority as monetary success, rather than living in harmony with our natural surroundings. Agriculture and the food system are not places for corporate interests; they are integral to the health of human beings. We must embrace a culture of collectivism, mutual respect, and care for each other to spark change. This way, we can create food as a commons instead of a commodity, recognizing its value to nature and our health. Food insecurity is traumatizing. Food insecurity is living dependently on food stamps, controlled by a government without our best interests at heart. It is living without knowing where your next meal is coming from. We cannot accept this anymore; we must dismantle the way we commodify essential items in this country. Market based solutions alienate us further from food. Community based ownership will restructure our food system. Collectivism and sustainable agriculture must exist outside the current system, rebuilding the intrinsic connection we have with the environment, while promoting social justice.

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