

Contents

Acknowledgments xi

Introduction

Practice and Place in Remaking the Food System I
C. Clare Hinrichs

Part I

What's Wrong with the Food System?

Orienting Frameworks for Change

1. Civic Agriculture and the
North American Food System 19
Thomas A. Lyson
2. Warrior, Builder, and Weaver Work
Strategies for Changing the Food System 33
G. W. Stevenson, Kathryn Ruhf,
Sharon Lezberg, and Kate Clancy

Part II

Institutions and Practices to Remake the Food System

3. Farmers' Markets as Keystones in
Rebuilding Local and Regional Food Systems. 65
Gilbert Gillespie, Duncan L. Hilchey,
C. Clare Hinrichs, and Gail Feenstra
4. Practical Research Methods to
Enhance Farmers' Markets 84
Larry Lev, Garry Stephenson,
and Linda Brewer

5. Community Supported Agriculture as an Agent of Change
Is It Working? 99
Marcia Ruth Ostrom
6. Food Policy Councils
Past, Present, and Future 121
Kate Clancy, Janet Hammer, and Debra Lippoldt
7. The “Red Label” Poultry System in France
*Lessons for Renewing an Agriculture-of-the-Middle
in the United States* 144
G. W. Stevenson and Holly Born
8. Eating Right Here
*The Role of Dietary Guidance in Remaking
Community-Based Food Systems* 163
Jennifer Wilkins
9. Community-Initiated Dialogue
*Strengthening the Community through
the Local Food System* 183
Joan S. Thomson, Audrey N. Maretzki,
and Alison H. Harmon

Part III

The Importance of Place and Region in Remaking the Food System

10. Retail Concentration, Food Deserts,
and Food-Disadvantaged Communities
in Rural America 201
Troy C. Blanchard and Todd L. Matthews
11. Localization in a Global Context
*Invigorating Local Communities in Michigan
through the Food System* 216
Michael W. Hamm

12. Assessing the Significance of Direct Farmer-Consumer Linkages as a Change Strategy in Washington State <i>Civic or Opportunistic?</i>	235
Marcia Ruth Ostrom and Raymond A. Jussaume, Jr.	
13. Emerging Farmers' Markets and the Globalization of Food Retailing <i>A Perspective from Puerto Rico</i>	260
Viviana Carro-Figueroa and Amy Gupstill	
14. The Lamb That Roared <i>Origin-Labeled Products as Place-Making Strategy in Charlevoix, Quebec</i>	277
Elizabeth Barham	
15. Be Careful What You Wish For <i>Democratic Challenges and Political Opportunities for the Michigan Organic Community</i>	298
Laura B. DeLind and Jim Bingen	
16. The Social Foundation of Sustainable Agriculture in Southeastern Vermont	315
Matthew Hoffman	
17. Community Food Projects and Food System Sustainability	332
Audrey N. Maretzki and Elizabeth Tuckermanty	
Conclusion A Full Plate Challenges and Opportunities in <i>Remaking the Food System</i>	345
C. Clare Hinrichs and Elizabeth Barham	
List of Contributors	357
Index	363

Introduction

Practice and Place in Remaking the Food System

C. Clare Hinrichs

We live in a time when food attracts growing scrutiny. Long taken for granted, food now gives many people pause. They ask where it comes from, how it is grown and prepared, and what implications it has for our health and the environment. A dairy cow found to have mad cow disease unleashes troubling questions about an international system of industrialized meat production, processing, and distribution. Lawsuits brought by obese teens against fast food companies that offer super-sized fare and parental campaigns to take the “junk” out of school lunches and vending machines highlight questionable commercial influences on food choices. Rural regions awash in a sea of commodity agriculture but without groceries or markets selling fresh or nutritious food suggest the sad ironies of our current agricultural “abundance.” And the visual perfection but disappointing taste of a Delicious apple prompts yearning for the irregular shapes and in-season novelty of regional and old varieties—those that may not pack well, travel far, or keep but that bloom with distinctive flavor.

Having both material presence and symbolic charge, food now figures prominently in struggles for power, negotiations about policy, possibilities for partnership, and new and renewed expressions of pleasure and identity. Consequently, food provides a unique analytical and experiential nexus, drawing together and crystallizing many urgent, complicated problems facing society. No longer taken for granted or viewed in isolation, food can and should be connected to community vitality, cultural survival, economic development, social justice, environmental quality, ecological integrity, and human health.

This book explores the widening circles of connection emanating from food by examining the diverse efforts now underway to remake

the North American food system. Such circles link food to agricultural and nonagricultural uses of the land on the one hand and to human bodies and spirits, individual lives, and community experiences on the other (Friedman 1999). The broader systemic nature of agriculture, food, and nutrition is a compelling, but not widely considered, view (Feenstra 1997; Sobal 1999). Farms operate within production systems that include families, nearby communities, and the surrounding environment. Furthermore, farms are linked to upstream suppliers of tools, equipment, seed, and knowledge and to downstream brokers, buyers, processors, distributors, and retailers, who in turn link the products of those farms to their end consumers. The influences, pressures, questions, and responses move up and down the chain and circulate through the system. Components of the food system can be analyzed in isolation, but they do not exist in isolation from other levels and stages (Jackson and Jackson 2002).

It is a formidable and perhaps impossible task to describe the food system in its entirety. It is possible, however, and also necessary to describe and analyze facets of the food system from a perspective that considers links and relationships and how the parts combine in particular configurations. This book takes such a systemic view in surveying the landscape of efforts now occurring in North America to craft food system alternatives that are designed to improve social, economic, environmental, and health outcomes. Although the book focuses primarily on U.S. examples, it offers a broader North American perspective attuned to globalizing tendencies at the level of markets and governance, as well as looking at how these factors intersect with experience in specific localities.

Remaking the North American Food System emerges from a collaborative research initiative begun in the late 1990s by a group of social and nutritional scientists and practitioners based primarily, but not exclusively, at U.S. land-grant universities. Working in their respective regions, members of the group sought to document and analyze the emergence of so-called local food systems within a wider context of globalization. They paid particular attention to the diversity of local strategies, practices, initiatives, and outcomes. From their differing academic and practitio-

ner orientations, the contributors to this book share reservations about the homogenizing and industrializing course of the dominant food system with its growing evidence of social and economic vulnerabilities and harmful environmental effects. At the same time, some are discomfited by occasionally glib enthusiasm and uncritical endorsements of seeming alternatives to that dominant system. Although contributors are committed to a transition to a more sustainable agriculture and more just and equitable patterns of development, they suggest that viable alternatives can best take root and flourish through a process of careful description, empirical evaluation, monitoring, and critical appraisal. A culture of continual shared learning is necessary if we hope to remake the food system in substantial or sustainable ways.

This book then has several aims. It puts forward concepts and frameworks that can help us better understand the similarities and differences between diverse activities now taking place that arguably contribute to remaking the food system. It charts in detail some of the opportunities and barriers facing new community-based food system institutions. Such information can guide new research and inform practice. It shifts the discourse on food system alternatives from simple boosterism to constructive assessment by critically evaluating the outcomes of certain initiatives. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, the book speaks to multiple audiences, including students, practitioners, and policy makers, out of the conviction that the challenges facing the food and agricultural system are more than academic and cannot be resolved in isolated conversations.

Remaking the North American Food System is divided into three sections. In the first, “What’s Wrong with the Food System? Orienting Frameworks for Change,” two chapters lay out fundamental patterns in the conventional food system along with key concepts and frameworks for understanding how and why individuals and communities are challenging that system. These chapters set up the argument for remaking the food system and offer some guidance as to how we might think about that process and its goals.

The second section, “Institutions and Practice to Remake the Food System,” critically examines specific organizational forms and practices, some of which are seen as hallmarks of more local, community-

based food systems. The chapters in this section draw on both empirical research and program assessments in order to chart the outcomes of such initiatives and to explore strategies for their enhancement. This section also explores how policies at the local and national levels can facilitate a turn toward more sustainable local and regional food systems.

The third section, “The Importance of Place and Region in Remaking the Food System,” looks further at important institutions and practices that work to change the food system in more sustainable directions while asking how these elements are brought to bear in particular places and regions. This section’s chapters pay attention to how the distinctive socioeconomic and geographic configurations of places and regions shape both the opportunities and obstacles people encounter as they seek to remake the food system. They underscore that context filters the flow of possibilities and remind us that general solutions must be thoughtfully tailored in response to the particularities of place and region.

Remaking the Food System

The broad idea of remaking the food system organizes this book. With a nod perhaps to *homo faber*, the contributors generally see human beings as crafters, inventors, shapers, and experimenters. Although people are constrained by the history that precedes them and the geography in which they find themselves, they are not entirely bound by either. People harbor independent and changing desires and motivations. Some will act on these alone, while some will join together with others. As they identify shared interests and concerns, more people are engaging more forthrightly with the food system. Many are responding to disenchanting and even disturbing encounters with the food system by attempting to change some aspect of what they have experienced. The social location and resource endowments of different individuals and groups certainly afford different skills and opportunities for such work and, indeed, different understandings of what exactly the work should be. Overall, remaking first involves deliberate, sometimes dogged efforts simply to grasp what currently exists, and it requires second a refashioning of some of the institutions and practices of agriculture and food

in more desirable ways. The process is dialectical in that changing the food system generally proceeds from the starting point of openings or vulnerabilities associated with the dominant conventional food system (Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002), and in that it occurs in continual dialogue with that conventional food system.

Some critiques of the dominant, industrial food system have questioned the transformative potential of grassroots efforts to launch local and sustainable food system alternatives (Magdoff, Foster, and Buttel 2000). In this view such alternatives are populist attempts to ameliorate the shortcomings of the dominant system but fail to address root causes and logics of that system. Many alternative food system initiatives center more on local consumer education and farmer entrepreneurship than on social justice issues or needed and challenging policy reforms (Allen et al. 2003). However, others argue that a pragmatic politics consisting of incremental steps may be the best and perhaps the only realistic route to “food democracy” (Hassanein 2003). In this view alternative food system initiatives—of whatever scale and scope—reflect what is currently possible in an overwhelming situation and should not be dismissed when they lack coherence or consistency or fail to correspond perfectly to movement ideals. In any case, definitive judgments about the transformative nature of efforts to change the food system are problematic in the short term, given uncertainties and disagreements about how to assess the achievement of sustainability.

Remaking the food system then suggests neither a revolutionary break nor a radical transformation but rather deliberate, sometimes unglamorous multipronged efforts in areas where openings exist to do things differently. Supporting a farmers’ market may never shut down the local big box supermarket, but it does divert consumer dollars to local food producers, consequently helping them stay in business and providing some consumers with fresher, local foods. Such activities quietly and modestly remake parts of the food system. Whether pursued by individuals, by groups, or by communities, such remaking is not a linear or foreordained process that possesses some clear, known endpoint. It is instead movement in what is hoped to be a more promising direction. Remaking shifts us from a paralyzing focus on what is worrying, wrong, destructive, and oppressive about our current food

system to a wide-angle view that takes in the broader landscape, whose troubling contours, we begin to notice, are punctuated by encouraging signs of change. Seen together, these initially isolated and spontaneous efforts to remake the food system begin to link and form a platform from which people might continue to work, step by step, toward a more sustainable food system.

The burgeoning literature on alternative and local food systems tends to frame change following one of two main approaches—one emphasizing civic renewal and redemocratization and the other stressing resistance and social mobilization. Although by no means incompatible, these two approaches have different legacies, inflections, and implications. A civic approach, highlighted in the chapter by Thomas Lyson, finds its heirs in mid-twentieth-century research on farming communities and on small business by social scientists Walter Goldschmidt and C. Wright Mills. It also draws on more recent scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s on economic restructuring and social capital. With its strong rural roots, Lyson's notion of civic agriculture links alternative food initiatives to local economic development, capacity building, and community problem solving. Although civic agriculture has a populist flavor, it also stresses the importance of ensuring a rooted, stable small business class that will act out of enlightened self-interest. As it reconsiders the links from land to economy and from food to health, civic agriculture provides a democratic counterweight to the excesses of an industrialized, corporately controlled food system. Accordingly, it informs an approach to change and suggests development of particular types of initiatives. Civic agriculture represents an encouraging alternative model, but as Lyson notes, it has thus far operated *beside* rather than in place of the conventional food system.

A social mobilization approach, as highlighted in the chapter by G. W. Stevenson and colleagues, is framed more in terms of social resistance to industrializing and globalizing trends in the food system and represents a potentially more combative stance than what is offered in Lyson's chapter. Based on their close observation of activities taking place across North America, Stevenson and colleagues develop a comprehensive typology of strategies for changing the food system. This includes warrior work that explicitly challenges the harms and excesses

of the industrialized, corporately controlled food system; builder work that designs and constructs more promising ways of producing, marketing, and experiencing food; and weaver work that creates and nurtures linkages across activities, sectors, and groups. This social mobilization framework has different points of reference than a civic agriculture framework. It draws more directly on the social movements literature, much of which is more urban than rural in focus, and it often implies a translocal rather than locality-specific orientation.

Both chapters in part I offer frameworks that help orient our thinking about remaking the food system. Our idea of remaking the food system rides on a current of cautious optimism, fueled by evidence gathered in this book from investigations in different parts of North America. Nor is the evidence limited to North America. Indeed, diverse forms of sustainable farming and food systems are now emerging worldwide, many of them led by people on the margins of society and showing preliminary evidence of positive agroecological and socioeconomic impacts (Pretty 2002). While negative trends in the food system remain undeniable, there is currently a clear and urgent basis for hope when one considers the growing density and diversity of initiatives undertaken by ordinary people to reconstruct the relations between land, agriculture, and food (Lappé and Lappé 2002). This book documents such initiatives across North America, particularly in the United States, while emphasizing the importance of practice and place.

Practice

Related to the notion of remaking, the idea of practice underlies many of the contributions to this book. Practice is relevant, as both a philosophical and a political stance. “Thoughtful practice,” for example, is a concept rooted in the work of John Dewey that can help us describe and understand emerging strategies and activities by agricultural producers and food consumers (Heldke 1992). Western philosophical and educational tradition has long distinguished “knowing” activities, such as science and art, from other “doing” activities involving practical, manual labor. The former, presumed to deal with fixed, eternal truths, have always been more valued than the latter, which are seen as transient and repetitive activities, subject to flux, growth, and decay.