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Planting Seeds for Success: An Evaluation of Agricultural Reentry Programming for Formerly Incarcerated Individuals

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN URBAN & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

by

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Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

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Abstract

Black and brown communities are over-incarcerated and are much more likely than their white counterparts to be involved with the criminal justice system. Hundreds of thousands of incarcerated people are released each year and they face substantial barriers to reentry such as lack of employment opportunities, difficulty securing housing, accessing education, and just simply reintegrating back into society. The criminal justice system within the United States is fueled by systemic racism and overt discrimination towards people of color, and the same can be said for the food system within the United States as well. They share a history of oppressive behavior against people of color, and both systems are built upon the foundations of white supremacy. This capstone project focuses on the role of agricultural reentry and how these types of programs empower and restore formerly incarcerated people to their communities. In this project, I argue that agricultural reentry programs attempt to restore individuals to their communities by drawing attention to and addressing both the social conditions that lead to criminality and the damaging (and often violent) effects of incarceration itself. Specifically, they foster an individual's relationship to land and food as a way to restore a sense of self and to affirm an individual's dignity and worth. Agricultural reentry programs present the opportunity to fix the very issues that lead people to incarceration in the first place.

Keywords: reentry program, racism, formerly incarcerated people, agriculture

Introduction

Each year, over 600,000 Americans are released from state and federal correctional institutions (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2018). At some point in their lives, nearly all incarcerated men and women will eventually end up back in their communities. Most of these folks, who have been incarcerated anywhere from a year to over thirty years, exit the steel gates of correctional facilities with nothing more than the clothes on their backs. No guidance is given. No roadmap for success and stability is offered. No help or advice on how to succeed in life after imprisonment is shared. Research done by The Marshall Project, a nonprofit journalism organization, shows that, "roughly 90% of state correctional departments have some formal policy to provide funding, commonly called 'gate money', to cover transportation, housing, or food costs for prisoners after their release" (Armstrong and Lewis 2019). However, the total amount of gate money that is provided is insufficient and when that money runs out, newly released citizens are often left helpless unless they have an established support system. With the limited amount of funds that people receive, they are forced to make an impossible choice between items necessary for survival such as food and shelter, and items that can help aid their transition back into society such as a cell phone or money for transportation.

Those who are fortunate enough to have the support of family, friends, and/or community stand a better chance at reintegration. Those who do not, are often left with limited options. Oftentimes, newly returned citizens end up getting re-involved in activities that led to their initial incarceration. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, "67.8 percent of over 400,000 prisoners released in 2005 in 30 states were arrested within three years of release, and 76.6 percent were arrested within five years" (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2018).

Life after incarceration is not easy and numerous barriers exist that make one's simple existence a difficult task. Housing, employment, education, healthcare, food security, transportation, mental health services, and personal financial literacy are all items that exist as barriers for formerly incarcerated people. The strict barriers to reentry as well as the alarming rates of recidivism within the United States are cause for serious concern, and both of these issues are a direct result of the way that the U.S. handles and views incarceration.

Among large, industrialized nations, the United States has one of the highest rates of incarceration in the world. The need to punish and imprison citizens has prolonged within American society for decades; the prison population within the United States stands at over two million. According to The Prison Policy Initiative, "Less than 5% of the world's population is in the United States, but 20% of the world's incarcerated people are right here. The United States currently incarcerates 698 per 100,000 people" (Wagner and Bertram 2020). The Correctional system's continuous failure to "correct" incarcerated people increases the likelihood that upon release, these individuals will return to prison for either violating terms of their parole or for reengaging in criminal behaviors. In the way incarceration currently works, most imprisoned people leave with the same problems they had when they entered prison. More often, imprisonment tends to exacerbate the issues that led them to the point of incarceration in the first place. As Haney (2012) notes, "Most prisons expose prisoners to severe levels of deprivation, degradation, and danger" (3). Being incarcerated is a traumatic and stressful experience that we are told serves as a deterrent to criminal behavior, but the stark rates of recidivism throughout the country paint a completely different picture. Rather than teaching new behaviors and preparing incarcerated people to be socially responsible and civically engaged members of society, prisons in the United States are more focused on dehumanizing methods of punishment and stripping

dignity away from incarcerated individuals. The philosophy and goals of imprisonment within the United States underwent a tremendous shift during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Phelps (2011) highlights that distrust with models of rehabilitation came into fruition due to increasing crime, distrust of welfare policies among citizens, and a general fear of felons (37). Instead of exhibiting care and concern for these individuals, the public sentiment turned towards one of fear, labeling those who were incarcerated as others, and general feelings of hostility towards prisoners grew substantially (Phelps 2011).

The idea of using prison to help reform and rehabilitate offenders has been replaced by the practice of using prison as a means of harsh punishment. Unfortunately, the mindset of punishment rather than rehabilitation seems to only intensify criminality which thus leads to imprisoned people maintaining a social and emotional status quo as well as lessens the likelihood of reformation. There are certainly attempts at rehabilitation, but imprisoned people are essentially warehoused in cramped conditions and are constantly under the watch of correctional officers who are trained to control more than anything else. Binnall (2008) notes that, "almost unanimously, the managerial regimes that operate today‘s prisons view prisoners as commodities, unworthy of rehabilitative efforts" (162). Imprisoned people are segregated from society for months to years at a time with no one to socialize with but other incarcerated individuals. In addition to the separation from the rest of society, prisons and other penal institutions such as jails and juvenile detention facilities maintain nearly complete control over every aspect of an incarcerated person's life. Incarcerated people do not have a choice in what time they get out of bed in the morning, when, what, or how much they get to eat, whether they get to go outside to get fresh air, how long they get to take a shower, or how long they get to have phone calls with their loved ones. Autonomy and any sense of individualization are taken

away because the institution itself decides things for them, controls their behavior, and exerts control on almost every aspect of life. Prisons isolate people from potential support systems and the likelihood of learning and participating in criminal activity is high. The rough conditions within prisons have the potential to intensify mental health challenges, cause people to become distrustful and skeptical of the justice system, and increase violent thoughts and behaviors (Harding et al. 2019).

It is evident that simply locking people away behind bars is not a deterrent to criminal behavior. The only thing this gives us is a system that is overburdened, costly to taxpayers, and fails to make communities any safer. A criminal justice system with a focus on rehabilitation ensures that prisons and other penal institutions prepare currently and formerly incarcerated individuals to reenter society and live productive lives. Rehabilitation programs focus on education, employment skills, and life skills aimed at changing behaviors as well as helping individuals improve their own social and emotional well-being. The goals of rehabilitation, which are to restore, repair, and alter behavior, seem to be put on the sidelines in favor of incapacitation. James Gilligan, a renowned author, and *New York Times* columnist writes that, "The only rational purpose for a prison is to restrain those who are violent, while we help them to change their behavior and return to the community" (Gilligan 2012). Ideally, people who make bad choices and commit crimes are sent to prison with the ultimate goal being to show them how to make better choices through rehabilitation, treatment programs, educational classes, recreational activities, and other opportunities that will enable them to improve themselves and be better prepared for life on the outside. But the reality of our society is that we throw people in cages and into stressful and dangerous environments and expect them to reenter into society as changed men and women or as "model citizens."

The best way to reduce the high rates of recidivism within the United States is to invest in the people leaving incarceration. This happens by designing and implementing reentry programs that assist incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals with a successful transition to their community before and after they are released. Reentry programs offer job training, mental and emotional support, mentoring, skill development, hope, and belief that a good life is attainable after completing a sentence. At its core, reentry programming is supposed to help men and women prepare for life outside of incarceration. "Reentry programs provide services in a variety of areas, including education, employment, housing, mental health, substance abuse, anger management, and peer support" (Mizel and Abrams 2020, 659). Reentry programs benefit not only the formerly incarcerated, but they also benefit entire communities. Our communities benefit when formerly incarcerated individuals achieve their independence and lead healthy, responsible, crime-free lives. Life after incarceration can be extremely difficult, but a core belief in the practice of reentry is that everyone deserves a second chance - and the respect and dignity that goes along with it.

This notion of a second chance is a key pillar of the current movement to enact serious reforms to the so-called justice system. As more and more Black and brown people are gunned down by police officers and as more minorities fill up jail and prison cells across the country, it is becoming hard to ignore the inherent inequities that exist within the criminal justice system. It is impossible to deny the fact that the American criminal justice system was built upon and continues to revolve around white supremacy and class privilege. The inequitable treatment of people of color within the United States has persisted since the earliest days of America's existence. Those who were deemed to be "other" or "outsiders" such as Native Americans, black people, women, and refugees consistently faced the risk of being punished which came in the

form of incarceration. From 1850 to 1940, racial and ethnic minorities—including foreign-born and non-English speaking European immigrants— made up 40 to 50 percent of the prison population within the United States (Cahalan 1979). The systemic oppression of minorities within the United States has always been used to remind minorities of their standing within society. For example, slavery may have been abolished in 1865, but the elimination of this institution led to the birth of black codes, convict leasing, and eventually Jim Crow laws; the racial caste system within the United States continued to flourish. "After emancipation, black people, once seen as less than fully human "slaves," were seen as less than fully human "criminals" (Stevenson 2019). In the late 19th century, Southern states, where more than 90 percent of Black Americans lived, embraced criminal justice as a way to maintain power and authority over Black people. Mass incarceration is driven by structural racism and our nation's extreme rate of incarceration is fueled by the notion of white superiority. People of color have been and continue to be arrested, sentenced, and jailed at higher rates than their white counterparts. "African Americans are incarcerated in state prisons at a rate that is 5.1 times the imprisonment of whites and Latinos are imprisoned at a rate that is 1.4 times the rate of whites" (Nellis 2016). Prison populations across the United States are forced to do low-wage prison labor with zero or minimum guarantee to a minimum wage, protection by overtime laws, or even the ability to unionize or collectively bargain. This is essentially slavery by another name and in fact, it is rooted in the historic use of convict leasing and chain gangs that were used to punish African Americans after the abolition of slavery. Heather Ann Thompson (2019) suggests that, "U.S. prisons have always been more of a reflection of White desires for dominance than of those who commit harm in society" (235). Unfortunately, the U.S. criminal justice system has never been just due to the very fact that race has often driven and determined the outcomes.

Communities of color often bear the brunt of the criminal justice system and in response to the negative impacts the system has had, there have been community-led efforts to establish reentry councils and reentry programs aimed at supporting and uplifting formerly incarcerated people. Local communities have had to step forward in the absence of institutional measures to create reentry programs that bridge the gap between the community and the prison. Restorative reentry refers to programming and policy aimed at repairing the harm an offense has caused a community and allowing a returning offender the chance to reintegrate or earn back the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship (Bazemore and Maruna 2009). Young, Taxman, and Byrne (2002) note that, "when the community is directly involved in the reentry process, released offenders come to understand that they have a place in the community, that they are accepted, and that others in the community will provide support to facilitate their reintegration" (11). Maruna (2006) argues that restorative reentry consists of four key elements: a community-led approach, an emphasis on repairing relationships and involvement in community service, the elimination of the stigma that is associated with being an ex-offender, and an actual fresh start accompanied by the full restoration of civil rights and liberties. Reentry is not an easy process for anyone involved. It takes work, dedication, commitment, and patience from all parties involved to help formerly incarcerated people obtain opportunities, gain independence and self-confidence, and ultimately transform themselves and their communities after their release from prison. Reentry programs within communities of color not only face the difficult task of achieving reintegration, but they also face the daunting task of overcoming racism that runs prevalent in every facet of society. Given the failures of the penal system to enact restorative and rehabilitative measures, this project will examine community-based projects that aim to return individuals to their communities.

In this project, my goal is to evaluate reentry programs and learn more about programming that is centered specifically on agriculture or horticultural practices. This type of reentry programming is not exactly new, but programs with an agricultural focus are not exactly the norm in terms of reentry programs that are offered for formerly incarcerated people. Many programs are doing great work as well as many organizations that are doing their best to support the needs of re-entering citizens, but the problem of high rates of recidivism across the country remains. Across the United States, within 3 years, 68% of released individuals are rearrested, and almost half of released offenders will end up serving another sentence in prison (Durose, Cooper, and Snyder 2014). What is clear is that not enough is being done to help formerly incarcerated people achieve success after the completion of their sentences. However, agricultural reentry programs could be a unique solution to reducing recidivism as well as a solution to some of the barriers that formerly incarcerated people face once they reenter back into society. In this Capstone Project, I am specifically aiming to learn more about how agricultural reentry programs are run, if they have the potential to be more successful than other types of reentry programing, and if these programs empower participants to become activists and leaders in their families, careers, and communities. The uniqueness of these types of programs cannot be overlooked and although it may seem bewildering at first glance, it is hard to ignore how the interconnected and industrialized food and criminal justice systems impact incarcerated people.

The U.S. criminal justice system and the U.S. agricultural system have a complex yet similar history. The agricultural landscape in the United States is shaped by our nation's history of slavery, structural racism, and white supremacy, and the same can be said for our country's criminal justice system. Both of these systems disproportionately favor corporations and profit-driven motives while simultaneously taking advantage of and negatively impacting communities

of color. These two systems are linked by a history of racism, discrimination, and inequality, and while these two systems share a disturbing past, agricultural reentry programs present the opportunity to significantly transform both of these systems and create a much different future. These programs have the ability to create a substantial impact on issues that often lead people to become involved with the criminal justice system and stuck within a cycle of incarceration. Agricultural reentry programs are so promising because they offer a different type of reentry that is not just focused on simply helping formerly incarcerated people get their lives back on track or allowing them to gain a small sense of comfortability. Instead, agricultural reentry programs equip formerly incarcerated people with the knowledge and skillset to bring forth transformational change within themselves and communities as well. These programs empower formerly incarcerated people to use food as a catalyst for change and as a mechanism to spread love, care, and liberation.

Food is a building block for creating community. Not only can it serve as a personal liberator and help individuals and communities discover a sort of newfound freedom, but it can serve as a structural liberator as well. Food is a connector to people, places, history, and culture. It brings people together and unites people. Through food, we connect, we create community, and we can strengthen communities as well as build a society and institutions that are fairer and just. The very act of growing food is a tool that can be used to help dismantle systemic oppression. Black and brown people have deep, ancestral ties to the land and despite the stories that are hidden from us, there is a lengthy history of Black and brown agrarianism. There is a history of these communities caring for the land, nurturing the land, loving the land, and allowing the land to heal communities. Agriculture offers Black and brown communities' opportunities for economic autonomy as well as agency within the food system. At the core of

this project lies the idea of reclamation. That is, empowering Black and brown people to reclaim their relationship to land and to food as well as taking back control of the narrative. Agricultural reentry programs serve as a way to help Black and brown people shift power back into their own hands by owning their land and learning the skills necessary to create a food system that is more nutritious, affordable, and sustainable. While still possible, the road to reclamation is an uphill battle that will require an acknowledgment of how American agriculture has been used to punish Black and brown people.

One cannot deny the very fact that the American agricultural system has been built on the backs of Black and brown people. Slavery, exploitation, genocide, and land dispossession have formed the foundation for the thriving industrial food and agriculture system that we see within the United States today. Throughout our nation's history, whether it be corn or cotton, people of color have done the hard labor but have rarely been given credit for their work or rewarded properly for their efforts. As Cone (2000) remarks, "for over five hundred years, through the wedding of science and technology, white people have been exploiting nature and killing people of color in every nook and cranny of the planet in the name of God and democracy" (37). Under the good intentions of exploration and discovery, European settlers disrupted and attacked Indigenous society. Their claims of ownership resulted in the forced removal of Indigenous people from their land — land which they had cared for, tended, and relied upon for generations. Indigenous people were beaten, raped, and murdered all under the veil of expansion and the belief that settlers had a responsibility to colonize native people. Ostler (2015) notes that, " Once settlers arrived, they forced Indians off their land, often squatting on Native land in advance of treaties, which eventually legalized dispossession" (6). Similarly, the exploitation of enslaved black people allowed for white citizens to reap the benefits of slave laborers. Though slavery

ended in 1865, black people continued to be exploited in systems of food production in the form of tenant farming, sharecropping, and land grabbing by white landowners. To this day, racial discrimination within agriculture has consistently plagued African Americans, and it has kept them from accessing the support, capital, and opportunities afforded to their white counterparts. "Having fewer industry connections, less access to credit, and smaller farms makes it difficult for African-American farm owners to improve machinery, modernize, or expand, all of which would generate more revenue" (Nittle 2021). The experience of Latino/Latinx farmers, as well as Asian American farmers, has also been one that has been based upon notions of racism and dispossession along with mistreatment due to their group status as "other." According to Minkoff-Zern and Sloat (2017), "Previous groups of immigrants and farmers of color have been excluded from full citizenship rights in the US due to state-sanctioned policies, which are reinforced through daily experiences of racial exclusion" (634). Intentional exclusion through the lack of farmworker benefits, language barriers, and culturally specific farming practices that differ from standardized farming practices all play a significant role in limiting the upward mobility of farmworkers and owners of color.

The only ones benefiting from how the system currently operates are a small number of corporations who have firm control not just over the American food system, but also of the global food supply as well. In almost every key sector of the food system, four firms alone control 40 percent or more of the market, which means that decisions about how and what food is produced are often left up to corporations (Howard 2016). It is important to note that as a whole, American farmers have been at a consistent disadvantage due to policies put in place that favor corporations at the expense of farmers. Between 2011 and 2018, more than 100,000 family farms across the United States shut down and more than half of all farmers have failed to make a

profit since 2013 (Semuels 2019). However, the impact of industrialized agriculture is even more burdensome for farmers, ranchers, and farmworkers of color. People of color have not been allowed the same access to the food system in our country because the capitalist food system works by concentrating power in the hands of an advantaged minority. The vast majority of agricultural decision-making, influence, and power belong to big corporations and white farm owners. These systems continue to perpetuate inequality and oppression, and people of color are deliberately excluded from the success of the very systems that they helped build. "Though the need for food unites us all, access to healthy food and the ability to fully participate in the food system is often divided along racial and ethnic lines" (Burke and Spiller 2015, 166). Our food system does not work for people who do not maintain a certain level or amount of economic power, and it has continued to function in this way for generations. Malcolm X once said, "Revolution is based on land. Land is the basis of all independence. Land is the basis of freedom, justice, and equality." Black and brown people in the United States have been systematically stripped of land to own and operate which has kept them from the health, wealth, and opportunity that comes from one's own food production.

For formerly incarcerated people, the impact of our inequitable food system is felt every single day. Food insecurity is an often-overlooked consequence of incarceration, but it cannot be separated from other barriers to successful reentry such as unemployment, lack of access to higher education, homelessness, or the lack of access to public benefits. In 2019, researchers Alexander Testa and Dylan Jackson found that 20% of formerly incarcerated people reported suffering from food insecurity — double that of the general population — with even higher rates among formerly incarcerated women and Black individuals (Testa and Jackson 2019). The high levels of food insecurity among formerly incarcerated people underscore just how difficult the

process of reentry can be as well as the life-threatening effects of incarceration. Food is an essential component of life that we all need to survive, yet many formerly incarcerated people struggle with affording food for themselves or their families. Testa and Jackson (2019) also note that, "Incarceration may serve as an event that elevates the risk of food insecurity by (a) reducing income, (b) contributing to physical disability, (c) worsening psychological well-being, and (d) disrupting social integration" (1496). Incarceration and Food Insecurity are directly interrelated and the impact this has on individuals, families, and entire communities are stark. Not being able to feed oneself own self or one's own family is an unfortunate reality that so many people in our country face. Food is our lifeline, and the vast number of inequities within the system keep formerly incarcerated people far behind with little opportunity to advance.

It is important to also recognize the role that food plays for returning citizens before they are released. Incarcerated people are at high risk of suffering from hunger and malnutrition simply because most of the food that is served within prisons is oftentimes bland, unhealthy, and borderline inedible. The food that is served is just an extension of the punishment that already exists from being imprisoned, but the reliance on and overabundance of processed, unhealthy foods has the potential to impact people well into their reentry process. "Fresh vegetables and fruit, the essence of a healthy diet rich in both nutrients and fiber, are exceedingly rare in prison. Three-fifths of the formerly incarcerated people we surveyed responded that they "rarely or never" had access to fresh vegetables in prison" (Soble, Stroud, and Weinstein 2020, 5). The food that is put into our bodies impacts both our physical and mental well-being and the standards that exist in the federal correctional system, as well as individual state correctional systems, sacrifice the health and well-being of incarcerated people all in the name of saving money. "Correctional facility menus are designed to serve nutritionally adequate meals that meet

nutrition guidelines, while also considering the budgetary constraints of the facility" (Cook et al. 2015). "Nutritionally adequate" does not equal healthy and delicious. Reports estimate that up to two-thirds of inmates in the United States suffer from at least one chronic medical condition, most commonly hypertension, diabetes mellitus, heart disease, cancer, and obesity (Wilper et al. 2009). Food is a powerful force that connects all of us and allows us to build community, foster relationships, share common values, and experience new cultures and cuisines. Unfortunately, across the United States, the quality of food served to people inside prisons is not something that should be served to any human being for purposes of consumption. The privatization and industrialization of food production within prisons has resulted in food that is hastily prepared and highly processed. What could be used as a unifier is instead being used as another method of punishment and dehumanization for incarcerated people. Michael Owens Jones (2017) points out the fact that, "food in prison is used to manipulate people, alter behavior, and force inmates to conform to the alleged needs of the system [….] in many prisons the food is—whether by design, neglect, or indifference—part of the punishment" (73). Food is something that holds so much power. It brings us together, shapes our memories, and empowers our communities. But, for imprisoned people, food is used as a tool of oppression and it is used to take advantage of, punish, and torment imprisoned populations.

However, several nonprofit organizations around the United States are addressing the issues of food insecurity and recidivism head-on by establishing reentry programs for formerly incarcerated people that incorporate environmental activism, sustainability, food justice, gardening, and horticulture. For example, Master Gardner programs within prisons in South Carolina found success in helping imprisoned individuals increase their interest in horticulture careers as well as increases in their self-worth (Polomski, Johnson, & Anderson 1997). In-prison

gardening programs have seen success in helping incarcerated people reintegrate into society with needed coping mechanisms and skills. “Gardens around prisons have a long history of improving the lives of the prisoners and offering training towards employment in the horticulture industry” (Thompson 2018, 202). The rationale behind these programs is to give formerly incarcerated people multiple opportunities to give back to communities by growing and providing food that will ultimately help increase the health and safety of said communities. In addition to community wellness, these programs also focus on personal development, self-worth, self-efficacy, and empowerment. Studies have shown that gardening is an effective therapy for managing mental illness and can aid in providing healthy food, increasing physical activity, helping to develop skills, and positively improving one’s work ethic, and impacting one’s sense of community (Ascencio 2018; Gigliotti and Jarrott 2005; Wakefield et al. 2007; Soga, Gaston, and Yamaura 2017).

Knowing that agricultural reentry programs present an opportunity for individual and community reform, I am interested in exploring two distinct questions: How do agricultural reentry programs empower and restore formerly incarcerated people to their communities? And the second part of this question asks, what are the conditions and obstacles these programs face in helping people reenter society? Within this Capstone project, I argue that agricultural reentry programs attempt to restore individuals to their communities by drawing attention to and addressing both the social conditions that lead to criminality and the damaging (and often violent) effects of incarceration itself. Specifically, they foster an individual’s relationship to land and food as a way to restore a sense of self and to affirm an individual’s dignity and worth. In so doing, these programs value the humanity of formerly incarcerated individuals, calling attention to the ways that incarceration not only separates a person from their community but

from their sense of self as well. The skill set that comes from participating in this type of programming is not meant to enable individuals to return to the community as it was before. It is meant, instead, to equip individuals with the knowledge and power to bring about transformation in their communities. Agricultural reentry programs allow Black and brown communities to reclaim their connection to land and food by emphasizing how both can be used as tools for reconnecting to oneself, one's family, one's community, and to Mother Earth. My argument is significant because it demonstrates that for reentry programs to transform social conditions rather than address their problems, we must adequately fund reentry programming and create new grants specifically for agricultural reentry programs, make environmental literacy and work readiness programs available to people before they are released from incarceration, create standards for reentry programs, increase funding in government programs, and finally force the USDA to take on a more serious role in standing up for farmers of color and farm laborers of color.

To answer my research questions, I will evaluate agricultural reentry programs that currently operate within the United States. My focus will be on existing organizations that provide formerly incarcerated people with the knowledge, skills, and support to transform our food system and to transform their lives. These organizations instruct individuals on gardening, landscaping, leadership, and much more. I am particularly interested in organizations that go for a holistic approach by creating long-term investments in individuals going through reentry. With that being said, a holistic approach is not a requirement that I am putting in place for all organizations. I think it is important to get a glimpse at the various methods and approaches being used in agricultural reentry programming. I hope that this research makes a significant

contribution to understanding the interconnected relationship between criminal justice and food justice.

To develop this argument, my Capstone proceeds in five distinct stages. First, I will review the literature on three different areas of focus: the impact of mass incarceration on communities of color, reentry programming, and racism in American agriculture, and the fight for food justice. Following the literature review, I will then present my methodology. After that, I will give a brief history of agricultural reentry programs within the United States as well as provide details on my position as a researcher who is invested in and focused on studying agriculture and reentry programming. Following this, I will present my findings and offer an analysis of the data that I have collected. Lastly, I will offer several policy recommendations that I believe are necessary to implement. I will then conclude this capstone project by offering my final thoughts on future endeavors in agricultural reentry programming.

Literature Review

My Capstone project intervenes in existing conversations about the lingering effects of mass incarceration on BIPOC communities, how reentry programs should be structured, and the fight for food justice within communities of color. The issues that are at the core of this project--- reentry programming, mass incarceration, and food justice --- are connected by the role in which they serve in broken systems that lead individuals to criminality. To better understand the connection between these subjects, I will examine the scholarly conversation on each of these three issues. First, I will explore the disproportionate impact that mass incarceration has on people of color as well as the burdens that it places on communities of color. Second, I will explore the purpose of reentry programming, what makes for effective reentry programming, and

the barriers that exist for reentry program success. Finally, I will explore the historic presence of racism within American farming & agriculture as well as the movement towards a food system that is centered on and around food justice. The relationship between these three bodies of literature is not as explicit as I would hope; the literature fails to acknowledge the logical relationships that connect these bodies of literature. Mass incarceration, food insecurity, food apartheid, and the process of reentry are interrelated issues that exist within racist systems and institutions that aim at keeping power and agency away from people of color. Therefore, through this review of literature, my analysis will make clear that the relationship between these three bodies of literature lies within their connection to upholding systems that limit the advancement of people of color. My review of the literature will also demonstrate that mass incarceration has significantly impacted the wealth and health of BIPOC communities, that there is no agreed-upon definition of what makes an effective reentry program, and that the U.S. food system is inequitable and rooted in racial inequality. Understanding that these three bodies of literature are interconnected is vital to understanding this Capstone project. The lens through which I am constructing this project cannot view these issues as separate entities.

Mass Incarceration's Impact on BIPOC Communities

Mass incarceration is regarded as the new Jim Crow, another racial caste system, whereby the criminal justice system is used to maintain white privilege and the established racial hierarchy (Alexander 2010). "Similar to Black codes that were implemented following slavery to criminalize, incarcerate, and control freed Blacks for such minor offenses as loitering and vagrancy, mass incarceration and aggressive policing are systems of structured inequality devised to reinforce and preserve white supremacy" (Watson, Turner, and Hines 2020, 1366).

As Jeffers (2019) notes, decades of inequity have led to unequal access to services such as education and housing, and the denial of these types of services is directly linked to determining which individuals and communities are more likely to interact with law enforcement and the criminal justice system. Structural racism has negatively impacted every aspect of life for communities of color, from accessing quality health care (Feagin and Bennefield 2014; Nelson, Prasad, and Hackman 2015) and education (Leath et al. 2015; Lee et al. 2020) to qualifying for housing (Pager and Shepherd 2008; Popescu et al. 2018) to obtaining healthy food within their neighborhoods (Thibodeaux 2016; Bower et al. 2014). Mass Incarceration is a traumatizing event that impacts not only those behind bars, but their families, their communities, and the entire nation.

Low-income communities and communities of color experience traumatizing events and conditions that lead to disproportionate levels of stress which results in the breakdown of social and family networks. The prevalence of trauma and PTSD are particularly elevated in urban, low-income communities, with nearly one in four adults in these types of neighborhoods experiencing PTSD; these same individuals have a higher likelihood of experiencing trauma due to involvement with the criminal justice system (Goldmann et al. 2011). The damaging effects of mass incarceration impact the mental, physical, and emotional health, economic stability, and social networks and relationships of children, and entire family structures. Parental incarceration increases, sometimes dramatically, family instability, unemployment, and socioeconomic disadvantages (Wakefield and Uggen 2010). Hagan and Dinovitzer (1999) add that, “The trauma experienced by the children, as well as the corresponding loss resulting from the incarcerated parent’s physical and emotional absence, may hinder children’s behavioral and cognitive development” (125). The literature on the impact of incarceration on children and families makes

clear that children of imprisoned people have worse cognitive and noncognitive outcomes than children with similar socioeconomic and demographic characteristics whose parents have not experienced incarceration. In her research, Turney (2014) found that children with incarcerated parents are 33 percent more likely to have speech or language problems—like stuttering or stammering—than otherwise similar children whose fathers have not been incarcerated. As a noncognitive result of parental incarceration, Lee, Fang, and Luo (2013) found in their research that children of incarcerated fathers are 51 percent more likely to suffer from anxiety, 43 percent more likely to suffer from depression, and 72 percent more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (1188). In most conversations surrounding incarceration, children come into play as a mere afterthought, but there is a significant amount of research that shows the negative impacts having an incarcerated parent can have, and of course, race only enhances these negative impacts. In their report for Childs Trends, a national nonprofit, Murphey and Cooper (2015) found that one in nine black children has had a parent in prison and that children in poor families are three times more likely to confront this situation than kids in high-income families.

Incarceration does not just impact the individual who committed a crime and was sentenced to imprisonment; it affects entire families and communities. Crutchfield and Weeks (2015) highlight that, "with incarceration, there is collateral damage to those locked up, as well as to those who they are connected to partners, children, extended family, and any positive friendship networks they had" (48). Entire communities are impacted when members of said communities are plucked away and shipped elsewhere. They may have committed crimes, but they also had some role to play within their community. Maybe they were a parent or a sibling or an aunt or uncle? They were a neighbor, maybe even a friend or co-worker. Removing people from communities can be disruptive and can oftentimes have negative criminogenic effects on

communities (Crutchfield and Weeks 2015). The negative psychological and social consequences of mass incarceration on communities of color are stark. Western and Pettit (2010) remark that, "the social inequality produced by mass incarceration is sizable and enduring for three main reasons: it is invisible, it is cumulative, and it is intergenerational" (8). Whether it be by tearing families apart or by creating significant economic hardship, mass incarceration is a detriment to the upward social and economic mobility of people of color. Mauer (2011) notes that, "family stress and dissolution, neighborhoods experiencing high mobility of residents cycling in and out of prison, and growing numbers of people with limited employment prospects are all collateral effects of incarceration that disproportionately impact communities of color" (96). The impact of incarceration on families and communities creates significant repercussions for all involved, but the existing literature also shows that simply being incarcerated can have a tremendous impact on the socioeconomic status and economic potential of imprisoned people.

Incarcerated people are removed from society only to be forced into a system that views and treats them as less than which ultimately harms their emotional well-being. Several researchers have noted the negative impact imprisonment has on physical and mental health whether that be by exposure to infectious diseases (Massoglia 2008), the development of chronic illnesses (Udo 2019), or struggles with mental illnesses (Turney, Wildeman, and Schnittker 2012). Brinkley-Rubinstein (2013) specifies that the abysmal level of health of formerly incarcerated people is an often-ignored factor that influences the outcomes of reentry as well as future criminality. This is relevant because it contributes to the many hardships that formerly incarcerated people face once released. The number of negative social, emotional, and economical consequences that arise from being an ex-offender is almost too many to comprehend, but the impact incarceration has on personal wealth and socioeconomic status can

be debilitating. Formerly incarcerated people face several barriers to attaining a comfortable financial situation including securing employment, housing, and getting access to loans (Travis and Visher 2011). As Sykes and Maroto (2016) note, “given the overrepresentation of young black and Hispanic men in the criminal justice system, incarceration's effects on wealth also factor into broader wealth disparities (133). Wealth and race are intricately linked, and several researchers have pointed out how the racial wealth gap is connected to the over-incarceration of people of color. For example, Hamilton et al. (2020) found that Black people have only 10% and Latinx people only 12% of the wealth of white people and that debt from incarceration hinders any effort to rebuild a financial future and social relationships. Zaw, Hamilton, and Darity (2016) state that, “during incarceration, being unable to make payments on mortgages or other debts can lead to an accumulation of interest obligations and penalties as well as a grossly diminished credit status” (104). Having a low credit score, of course, impacts one’s ability to do things such as purchase a vehicle or obtain employment. A low credit score also impacts one’s ability to get approved for loans or rental applications and there is potential to suffer from higher interest rates. Aneja & Avenancio-Leon (2019) found that people who have been incarcerated have a 69% drop in credit scores, resulting from both pre- and post-incarceration debts. The economic impacts of incarceration are quite clear: people who experience incarceration maintain lower levels of wealth throughout their lifetime compared to individuals who are never incarcerated. The Brennan Center for Justice found that white people with a prison record have increased earnings, while formerly imprisoned Black and Latino people experience a relatively flat earnings trajectory. In the same report, it was found that “formerly imprisoned Black and Latino people suffer greater lifetime earnings losses — $358,900 and $511,500, respectively — than their white counterparts, whose losses amount to $267,000” (Craigie, Grawert, and Kimble

2020). The literature shows that involvement with the criminal justice system leads to clear socioeconomic disadvantages. Being imprisoned sets up people who are already at an economic disadvantage for severe economic instability, a significant loss of wealth, and limited avenues to upward mobility. In addition to having an impact on economic opportunities and socioeconomic status, incarceration also has shown to impact individuals in a myriad of negative ways, one of which is the way it creates a lack of social status.

Tyler and Brockmann (2018) note that, "the "collateral consequences" of a criminal record refer to the penalties and disabilities that occur automatically as a result of conviction, apart from the sentence itself (550). After one completes their sentence, they oftentimes have an extremely difficult time trying to get their lives back on track. There are many barriers in place for formerly incarcerated people, and it can be very difficult to find affordable assistance. "These (collateral consequences) include a whole host of disadvantages: disenfranchisement; ineligibility for public benefits, housing, scholarships, and student loans; loss of occupational licenses, employment and child custody; and felon registration requirements" (Taylor and Brockmann 2018, 550). When it comes to securing employment, formerly incarcerated people are at a major disadvantage due to their time in confinement keeping them out of the labor force. Job assignments while incarcerated are an available option, but the depleted work experience of incarcerated people keeps them at a disadvantage especially when it comes to finding employment after reentry. According to Western and Pettit (2010), "The stigma of a criminal conviction may also repel employers who prefer job applicants with clean records. Employers, fearing legal liability or even just unreliability, are extremely reluctant to hire workers with criminal convictions" (14). Research done by the Prison Policy Initiative found that over 90 percent of formerly incarcerated people between the ages of 25 and 44 are actively looking for

employment compared to just over 80 percent of their peers in the general population (Couloute and Kopf 2018). The authors of that report found that even though unemployment among formerly incarcerated people is five times higher than the general public, the active hunt for employment shows that formerly incarcerated want to have jobs (Couloute and Kopf 2018). The main issue here when it comes to employing formerly incarcerated people is the opinion of the public and policies in place that aim to continue the cycle of punishment. Many employers look at a criminal record as a badge of untrustworthiness which keeps them from offering up opportunities to formerly incarcerated people (Pager, Western, and Bonikowski 2007). Not being able to find employment further hinders the reentry process of formerly incarcerated people because it gives off the impression that formerly incarcerated are either unworthy or undeserving of a job. Many scholars point out how the stigma that is attached to formerly incarcerated people plays a significant role in levels of self-esteem, access to economic stability, and social and familial relationships. Within their study, Uggen, Manza, and Behrens (2004) found that formerly incarcerated interview respondents questioned if they truly belonged in society, and they felt as if their status as felons served as a "scarlet letter leaving them permanently marked or branded" (280). The stigma associated with formerly incarcerated people leaves them susceptible to being viewed as dangerous, unworthy, and cruel which, in turn, may cause people to treat them with feelings of fear and hostility (Winnick and Bodkin 2008; Moore, Tangney, and Stuewig 2016; LeBel 2012). The stigmatization and the subsequent loss of opportunity that formerly incarcerated people are forced to endure does nothing to accomplish public safety, but it does everything to stifle the progress that people with criminal records are trying to make. The stigma associated with having a criminal record is more likely to impact people of color since, as I have highlighted already, they have disproportionate involvement with the criminal justice

system and are therefore disproportionally burdened with barriers to self-sufficiency and opportunity. The literature on the impact of mass incarceration on BIPOC communities overwhelmingly shows us that having a criminal record severely impacts familial relationships, wealth and economic opportunity, mental health, and the well-being and self-esteem of formerly incarcerated individuals. To reduce all of these barriers, reentry programs are implemented on local, state, and federal levels to assist formerly incarcerated people in achieving a return to society that is filled with dignity, hope, and a true opportunity at a second chance.

Reentry Programming

As alluded to in the previous body of literature, being sentenced to prison is a lonely, painful, and difficult experience not only for the offender but also for their families and communities. However, as emotionally taxing as serving time can be, the process of coming home after completing a prison sentence is oftentimes even more arduous. The challenges that formerly incarcerated people face as they attempt to reenter society are vast. As Visher and Travis (2011) note, "men and women reentering society from prison have difficulty finding a job, a place to live, reliable transportation, and affordable health care" (103). Prisoner reentry is the process of helping formerly incarcerated people transition from prison or jail back into their communities as productive members of society (Kubrin and Stewart 2006). Seiter and Kadela (2003) note that, "post-release community supervision should have a goal of successful reentry, meaning in most cases the offender leads a productive and crime-free life" (368). Newly released ex-offenders will surely face risk, confusion, and feelings of overwhelming anxiety that, if left unaddressed, could result in them committing crimes and being involved yet again with the justice system (Jonson and Cullen 2015). To combat the overwhelming reality of reentering back

into society, reentry programs were created to help ease the transition of formerly incarcerated people by helping them navigate issues such as employment and housing. As I explore in more detail below, these programs were created out of necessity to help reduce rates of recidivism throughout the country. Reentry programs have proven to be vital tools to help formerly incarcerated people successfully achieve full reintegration though there is no true scalable measure to evaluate their success. Reentry programs have the potential to be even more transformational, especially when both the betterment of the individual and the community are placed at the forefront. I'll now turn to explore the scholarly conversations within this particular body of literature to explore all of these ideas.

Recidivism is defined in a multitude of ways throughout the literature (Koschmann and Peterson 2013; Kubrin and Stewart 2006; Morenoff and Harding 2014). At a minimum, it refers to a person's relapse into criminal behavior, oftentimes after the person has received sanctions or has undergone intervention for a previous crime. In their landmark study, Markman, Durose, Rantala, & Tiedt (2016) found that nearly 70% of ex-offenders who are released from state and federal facilities are subsequently rearrested within 5 years. A report on recidivism done by the U.S. Sentencing Commission report on recidivism was released in January 2019, and it showed that nearly 64% of prisoners who had been convicted of violent offenses were arrested within eight years compared with about 40% of those convicted of nonviolent offenses. The study was based on 25,431 federal prisoners released in 2005 and found that violent offenders had a higher arrest rate across all age categories (United States Sentencing Commission 2019). One of the main reasons why formerly incarcerated people find themselves back in confinement is because of the difficulty they face in attempting to fit back into society and back into 'normal' life. They have to rebuild relationships with family members and/or friends, in some cases return to the

high-risk communities they were taken from, and secure formal identification; they often have little work experience and now have a criminal record to deal with. Hall, Wooten, and Lundgren (2016) point out that, "individual-level risk factors for recidivism include being young, male, and a minority. Other individual-level risk factors include unemployment, homelessness, low educational attainment, limited upward mobility, prior offenses, no means of transportation, history of committing serious crimes and having mental health or substance use disorders" (59-60). There are also community-level risk factors that include poverty, poor neighborhood infrastructure, socioeconomic stagnation, racial equality, and lack of access to healthy and nutritious food (Smith 2020; Kubrin and Stewart 2006; Lucken and Fendetti 2019; Testa 2019). What is commonly agreed upon throughout the literature on recidivism is that not enough is being done to help formerly incarcerated people adjust to life after incarceration. As a result of the high rates of recidivism throughout the United States along with a push by activists, community groups, nonprofit organizations, and bipartisan policymakers, an increasing amount of attention has been given to the potential offered by reentry programs for formerly incarcerated people.

The existing literature shows us that there is an issue with ex-offenders falling back into habits of criminal behavior due to the everyday pressures one faces when readjusting to life after incarceration. "The increasing rates of imprisonment and the resulting increases in the sheer number of prisoners being released has contributed to renewed interest in coordinated reentry efforts in an attempt to reduce these inmates' chances of re-offending once released" (Bouffard and Bergeron 2006, 3). Formerly incarcerated people need guidance and understanding, and in some cases, their support needs may last up to 15 months post-release (Visher and Travis 2011). As a result of this, the literature points out the need for effective reentry programs. As noted by

Mizel and Abrams (2020), "Reentry programs provide services in a variety of areas, including education, employment, housing, mental health, substance abuse, anger management, and peer support" (659). Other researchers indicate that reentry programs exist to aid in offender rehabilitation and community reintegration as well as in helping formerly incarcerated people develop into political activists (Hall, Wooten, and Lundgren 2016; Smith 2020; Flores and Cossyleon 2016). Bouffard and Bergeron (2016) sum up the purpose of reentry programming by noting that, "prisoner reentry programs provide a connection between the prison and the community to maximize successful prisoner reintegration" (3). Most researchers on the topic agree that the goal and purpose of reentry programs are to achieve successful offender rehabilitation as well as community reintegration. With that being said, the literature on how reentry programs should be carried out and what makes for effective reentry programs varies significantly.

Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004) write that, in the process of reentry, "communities can be both a major stumbling block and a major resource for returning offenders" (14). Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004) essentially argue that formerly incarcerated people need the chance to form new identities of self and undergo a change in their self-image. The community's role in this process is to uplift, support, and motivate formerly incarcerated people. This is why strengths-based re-entry also known as restorative re-entry is becoming so widely used instead of the usual needs-based or risk-based approaches (providing housing and therapeutic services while also still treating people as criminals with restriction and monitoring) to the reintegration of formerly incarcerated people back into society. Maruna and LeBel (2015) remark that the focus of strengths-based reentry, "is less on controlling or helping ex-prisoners and instead on treating them as individuals with talents and abilities to contribute to society" (65). Smith (2019)

adds to the conversation on strengths-based reentry by noting that, "Strength-based reentry focuses on finding challenging and intriguing tasks to build upon the skills and talents of the formerly incarcerated. Moreover, it works to involve a constructive activity that contributes tangible benefits, especially to harmed communities" (3). Bazemore and Maruna (2009) also say that a primary goal of strength-based reentry is to turn people from liabilities into assets who can have positive impacts on or within their communities. The issue we see with prisons is that being incarcerated oftentimes forces people to get caught up in the process of prisonization which is when individuals adjust and assimilate into prison life as they enter and serve time in prison (Clemmer 1940). However, prisonization isn't all bad. This process can aid incarcerated people in learning how to be advocates for themselves and how to advocate for issues that they care deeply about (Martin 2018). Engaging in this type of community organizing and activism is quite common in prison settings, and this connects to empowering individuals which is a key pillar of strengths-based reentry. The strengths-based approach to resettlement comes from Bazemore and Stinchcomb and this approach is guided by the central themes of repair, reconciliation, and community partnership. Strengths-based practices treat offenders as community assets to be utilized rather than objects of as liabilities that need to be supervised. The goal of the strengths-based approach is to provide opportunities to ex-offenders that help develop their social standing and to help initiate a change within their identity. This generally comes in the form of participating in rewarding work that helps other people in the community. The strengths-based paradigm calls for opportunities for offenders to make amends, demonstrate their value and potential and make positive contributions to their communities. Characteristics of a strengths-based approach include identifying strengths and assets through assessment, working with clients to identify goals and create a treatment plan; assisting them in "giving back" to others and the

greater community; and providing opportunities to participate in activities of everyday community life. (Hunter et. al 2015, 1301). Maruna and Lebel (2015) also emphasize that strengths-based work should not be designed to be punitive. Instead, it should be something enjoyable that creates worthwhile experiences for all involved.

What the literature shows us though is that most communities that formerly incarcerated people return to are highly disadvantaged neighborhoods, with high rates of unemployment and substance abuse. To truly empower communities to play significant roles in the process of reentry, a community-based reentry model, one that combines the efforts of nonprofit organizations, churches, and community and family members must be put into place. At the same time, reinvestments must be made into entire communities to ensure the long-term success of both formerly incarcerated people and entire communities. When it comes to reentry programming, there is a consensus within the literature for what types of programs are needed. However, the same consensus does not fully exist for how to measure the true effectiveness of reentry programs. The biggest challenge for the reentry movement is to avoid coming up with ideas and programs that are ineffective. There has not been much research done to show that reentry programs have lasting success or even if these programs accomplish their overarching goal which is to reduce recidivism. Jonson and Cullen (2015) have identified four barriers to reentry effectiveness which are, "diversity of programs, lack of programs based on a credible theory of recidivism, lack of treatment fidelity in the implementations of programs, and the inability of the major reentry evaluation study to date (SVORI) to produce a clear blueprint for how best to deal with released offenders" (538). Thompkins (2010) argues that the entire prisoner reentry industry (PRI) is solely focused on profits rather than investing in formerly incarcerated people and helping them improve their lives. And his criticism has its merits.

Reentry programs are not adequately funded and the fees, lack of available programming, and strict eligibility standards that exist do more harm than good for people looking to get their lives back on track after imprisonment. Ortiz and Jackey (2019) contribute to the conversation by adding that, "the PRI system is structured to give the illusion of rehabilitation but operates using mechanisms that ensure the formerly incarcerated are unable to succeed" (498). It is widely known and agreed upon what reentry programs need to consist of to help formerly incarcerated people reintegrate into society, but as the literature shows us, there are significant discrepancies between what reentry should be and what reentry is. While questions remain on what makes up a truly effective reentry program, the literature does show us that there are other options, other models, and other ways of thinking that are available to try. A common theme throughout all the literature on reentry programming is that these types of programs are vital to the well-being of families, communities, and formerly incarcerated individuals. Gardening, green jobs, sustainability, and farming are activities/industries that may be able to utilize the untapped potential of formerly incarcerated people. Timmerman and Felix (2015) note that the need for more entry-level sustainable farmers is high to tackle climate change and other pressing environmental issues, to increase the supply and access of healthy and nutritious food as well as to reduce diet-related diseases, and to boost economic development in both urban cities and rural communities. Skills and knowledge in agriculture could certainly lead formerly incarcerated people to become the "new entry sustainable farmers" (Carlisle et al. 2019) that our society so desperately needs. However, agriculture in the United States has a stark history filled with racism and discrimination towards people of color that may make breaking into the industry quite difficult.

Racism in American Agriculture and the Fight for Food Justice

Black and brown farmers are only just a few generations removed from slavery, genocide, and land dispossession. Most farmers of color do not possess the same financial stability as their white counterparts, and this is a direct result of legislation that has been passed throughout the last 160 years; it has kept farmers of color from benefitting from generational wealth via land ownership. Systemic racism permeates our food system and our criminal justice system and acknowledging this is the first step in ripping out the racism at the roots of both systems. Just like there is a movement to reform the criminal justice system, a movement aiming to transform and radically change the U.S. food system also exists. In this section, I will discuss the themes present within the literature, including the impact of land dispossession on farmers of color, why food justice exists as a movement, and the role that food plays in helping build community.

Discriminatory practices within the agriculture and farming industries began from the earliest moments of our country's founding and continue to this very day; people of color still do not have the same access and power as their white counterparts. Scholars agree that land ownership and access to land is a major factor that keeps farmers of color at a constant disadvantage. Black Americans have been unable to capitalize on generational wealth because they have been discriminated against and cheated out of owning and maintaining land. Pennick (2011) notes that, "Between 1910 and 1969, African American landownership declined by over 60 percent, from 12,800,000 to only 6,000,000 acres" (114). Pete Daniel (2013), in his book, *Dispossession: Discrimination Against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights,* writes, "It was almost as if the earth was opening up and swallowing black farmers" (10). Today, African Americans represent only 2% of American farmers which is a stark contrast from the

14% share of black-owned farms that existed during 1920 (USDA 2019). This decline of land ownership and the disparities that continue to plague farmers of color today are rooted in the deep structural racism that continues to cloud our modern system of agriculture. The United States Department of Agriculture carries much of the responsibility for the circumstances that currently exist, and the USDA's practice of systematic discrimination has plagued farmers of color for generations. So much in fact, that the department has been taken to court several times by minority farmers to be held accountable for its actions. In 1999, over 2,000 black farmers won a class-action discrimination lawsuit against the USDA. *Pigford v. Glickman* claimed that the USDA had discriminated against black farmers because of race and had failed to investigate or properly respond to complaints in almost a decade; the federal government ended up having to pay out over $1 billion to the black farmers in the suit. Grant, Wood, and Wright (2012) mention that, "It is clear that various minority groups throughout the country have suffered from similar acts of discrimination as those faced by African-American farmers, and similarly, have responded with protest and legal strategies" (10). The federal government has proactively and intentionally discriminated against Black, Native American, Latinx, and women farmers in its lending practices, outreach & guidance, financial counseling, and other forms of support for decades. As Horst and Marion (2019) note, "The agricultural history in the United States is one of centuries of racialized and gendered capitalism" (5). This very history is why the food system within the United States remains inherently flawed and unequal, but food justice activists are trying to change the system for the better.

Our food system is a direct reflection of the love and generosity that we share for our fellow man. Food itself is more than just something we consume for nutritional benefits. As Noll (2020) notes, "food is more than just a commodity that should be fairly distributed – food is

intertwined with culture, policy, activism, identity, and place" (569). Food Justice came about as a critique of the industrialized food system and as a way to advocate for historically disenfranchised communities who had been systemically oppressed and excluded from full participation within the food system. According to Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi (2010), food justice seeks, "to achieve equity and fairness in relation to food system impacts and a different, more just, and sustainable way for food to be grown, produced, made accessible, and eaten" (223). In his definition of food justice, Rashid Hislop (2014) describes it as, "the struggle against racism, exploitation, and oppression taking place within the food system that addresses inequality's root causes both within and beyond the food chain" (24). It is important to note that activists on the ground were already using the term food justice before scholars became involved in the conversation. However, scholars and activists have continued to work together to define the parameters of what food justice is by broadening and refining this definition. And by doing so, scholars have been able to highlight several institutional and societal barriers that hold people of color back. From access to fresh and healthy food to the extreme health disparities that exist within communities of color to the ability to become a farmer or grower, race is at the epicenter of it all. According to Billings and Cabbil (2011), "People of color are the prevailing laborers working on farms and in agriculture, processing food, serving food, and cleaning restaurants and kitchens" (106). Our food system would not be able to function were it not for the people of color who play critical roles in every step of the process. But, as many researchers note, the food system is working just how it was intended to function. Holt-Giménez and Wang (2011) remark that, "The food system may be dysfunctional in that it does not serve the better interests of the environment, peasants, family farmers, or low-income people of color, but it is certainly not broken" (91). The system is set up to help corporations, not communities. Farmers and

communities of color are most negatively impacted by industrialized or corporate agriculture due to their dependence on agriculture for survival because they have fewer alternatives in a job market that still discriminates against people of color (Pennick 2011, 116). The industrial food system that we rely on so heavily thrives on exploiting underpaid farmworkers and creates a system in which access to fresh and nutritious food often depends on one's socioeconomic status. While several scholars and even the United States government refer to areas around the country that have limited access to a variety of healthy and affordable food as food deserts, a much more specific term that looks at the entirety of the food system, along with race, geography, faith, and economics has started to be used more frequently. Food apartheid makes clear that, "we have a human-created system of segregation that relegates certain groups to food opulence and prevents others from accessing life-giving nourishment" (Penniman 2018, 4). People of color represent a significant amount of human capital within the food system, yet these same individuals have less access to quality food. By focusing on the stark disparities within the food system ranging from production to consumption, food justice aims to change the entire food system and make it one that is based on racial equity and social justice. In addition to food justice, scholars also discuss the term food sovereignty. "Food sovereignty is another radical trend for food-system transformation based on the notion of entitlement and redistribution of food-producing resources" (Holt-Giménez and Wang 2011, 90). Food sovereignty, going a bit further than food justice, emphasizes autonomy and control while also making clear that a food system designed by a select group of privileged individuals is illegitimate because, "the design of our social system is not the privilege of the few, but the right of all" (Patel 2009, 667). Food sovereignty is unambiguous in its notion that we as humans have the distinct right to food, land, and water. Food justice and food sovereignty are important terms within the scholarship surrounding the

food system because they describe the need to radically transform the food system to ensure that people have access to sufficient, nutritious food, hunger is eliminated, food security is achieved, and sustainable agriculture replaces the current corporatized model. Food touches on every aspect of human life. It is a part of how we communicate with one another, and it is one of the ways we express joy and share our love for those we care about. Food is undeniably a building block for creating community as it is instrumental in shaping the lives of individuals as well as the relationships between community members (Sbicca 2012). It gives us a reason to have a conversation with a stranger, gather with our loved ones, and connect with someone we otherwise may have never reached out to.

Across the United States, urban and suburban farms, community gardens, and food and land cooperatives are all attempting to make food more localized. As O'Neill (2014) notes, "localized food systems have multiplied over the last 15 years as producers and consumers seek alternatives from mainstream globalized food chains" (82). These community food systems aim to make fresh, nutritious foods accessible to more people as well as create a sense of togetherness within communities. "They [community food systems] create a sense of community and of "living together" by building trust and social bonds, and they generate jobs and strengthen local economies because a higher share of value-added is retained by producers" (Pimbert 2015, 37). However, while localized food systems allow communities to regain autonomy and achieve food sovereignty, they face an environment that grows more and more friendly towards corporate interests. Industrialization, mass production, cash crops, and the growth of agribusiness and corporate control all have had a tremendous impact on agriculture and farming within the United States. Clapp and Purugganan (2020) point out that, "concentration in the food and agriculture sector goes beyond seeds and chemicals, as we have seen growing consolidation among the top

firms all along agrifood supply chains in recent years, from the farm equipment sector to the fertilizer industry, to commodity trading, to processing and distribution and retail" (1266-67). Changing economic conditions combined with the disconnection from local food sources led to a lack of access to fresh, locally grown produce for people in both rural and urban areas. In the past, some of these folks would have been able to grow their food or could have gone to their neighbors to ask for any surplus produce from their home gardens. In our current food system that is more garnered toward the success of corporations and large-scale farms, that is not the case; without local or community food systems these options no longer exist. Community food systems connect us directly to our food and to those who produce it, to our local area, and to other community members who belong to the same system. Gottlieb and Fisher (2000) note that community food systems set out to, "foster communities with healthier, more empowered members and a healthier, more sustainable and community-based food system" (20). We feel the greatest connection to our food when we know that it comes directly from our communities. Through food, we connect and build relationships. Through food, we create community and build trust with others. And through food, we can strengthen communities and take back control of our food system.

Conclusion

Much of the literature within the three selected bodies focused on in this project contains a robust conversation between scholars. It is clear that scholars identify and recognize the many strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the disparate impacts mass incarceration has on BIPOC communities, reentry programming, and food justice. However, my review of the literature points out the need for a more nuanced evaluation that recognizes the overlap between these three bodies of literature. Scholars have yet to describe and provide detail on how these

bodies of literature impact and influence one another. With that being said, my review of the relationship between mass incarceration, reentry programming, and food justice highlights how these bodies are connected as well as the ways they can be used together to learn more about communities and potentially play a role in creating positive change.

There has never been a moment in our society quite like the one we find ourselves in now. Activists, scholars, politicians, and community members from across political spectrums recognize the failures of mass incarceration as well as the systemic racism and inequity that persists through the food system and the criminal justice system within the United States. Leah Penniman, a farmer, activist, and the author of *Farming While Black* states, "We are in a moment where Black and Brown people are ready to reclaim our right to belong to the Earth and ready to reclaim our place and agency in the food system" (Penniman 2018, 9). Prison has failed in its role as a deterrent, and society has failed to adequately and sufficiently help people who are reintegrating into society from incarceration. Incarceration is detrimental to individuals, their families, and the communities that they come from, and food insecurity is causally linked to incarceration (Cox and Wallace 2016). The various reasons why people commit crimes are disproportionately impacted by race. When we look at communities that are food insecure, and when we look at the people who do not have job opportunities or chances at upward mobility, we see that these are all things that can be answered by race. These direct circumstances often force people to make decisions that result in crime which leads to incarceration. These community-level issues which include poverty, food insecurity, and racism push people into becoming involved with the criminal justice system.

Agricultural reentry programs provide a moment for us to think about what it means to not just simply help people get by after their incarceration. These programs create space for us to

think about how to change the conditions in which people go to prison or jail in the first place; they provide a mechanism to conquer the community-level issues by addressing those issues directly. Additionally, having more formerly incarcerated people involved on the production side of the food system could create opportunities for formerly incarcerated people to become entrepreneurs, activists, and empowered food justice advocates. For formerly incarcerated people, food represents health, wealth, employment, opportunity, and community. Community-led organizations are doing the work of restorative food justice with formerly incarcerated people throughout the country. This work is important, I believe, because agricultural reentry programs have the potential to create radical and transformational change to both the criminal justice and food systems. As Sbicca (2016) notes, "Food becomes an innovative tool in the restorative process when it links working with plants to healing individuals and building community" (1373). The literature shows us that criminal justice and food justice are connected by their common history of systemic racism and overt discrimination. However, what the existing conversations within these bodies of literature do not acknowledge is the role that both mass incarceration and the lack of access to healthy and nutritious food play in influencing criminality and incarceration. Therefore, the literature ignores the potential role that agricultural reentry programs could play in disrupting mass incarceration and the industrial food system.

Methodology

There is a clear gap within the scholarly literature of mass incarceration, food justice, and reentry programs that fails to recognize the ways in which these bodies of literature are connected and even overlap in some instances. To explore this gap within the literature and connect these various bodies of scholarly conversations, this Capstone project utilizes the

research method of semi-structured interviews. This chosen research method is the best way to gather specific data to understand the ways in which agricultural reentry programs empower and restore formerly incarcerated people to their communities and to understand the obstacles that these programs face in helping people reenter back into society. Given that my interest was in learning from those directly involved in this type of programming, semi-structured interviews emerged as the most appropriate method to utilize in order to hear the experiences of those who engage in this work.

Semi-structured interviews are a type of research method that allows researchers to collect open-ended data, explore the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs participants have about a particular topic, and to dive deeper into conversations that engage in personal and sometimes sensitive issues. Galletta and Cross (2013) note that, "semi-structured interviews incorporate both open-ended and more theoretically driven questions eliciting data grounded in the experience of the participant…" (45). The purpose of using semi-structured is to gather key information from interviewees who have personal experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs related to the topic of interest. This method distinctly allows the opportunity to not only ask questions that have been prepared in an interview protocol but to also go deeper and explore specific points made during the discussion with an interviewee. This specific method proved to work best for several reasons. A great benefit of using semi-structured interviews is that this type of interview style gathers information in a way that is much more conversational. This method allowed for the potential to gain a true understanding of the prospective of individuals who were involved with agricultural reentry programs using a format that encouraged safe discussion in which my participants felt comfortable in sharing whatever they wanted without fear of facing any backlash. Moreover, there was a particular interest on my behalf in having conversations that

elicited honesty, personal feelings, and an emotional connection to the questions that were being asked.

Through these interviews, I wanted to gain insight and understanding on how different programs operated, their core beliefs, and how these programs helped people reintegrate into society. By using semi-structured interviews, I was able to collect a vast amount of data on agricultural reentry programs and the thoughts and motivations behind how these types of programs operate. This method allowed me to learn more about the difficulties of reentry for formerly incarcerated people, the role food has in building community, and the difficulties that persist in maintaining a well-run reentry program, among other things. This project included a wide range of interviewees including academics, program directors, community volunteers, activists, and formerly incarcerated non-profit workers who worked directly in the field of reentry. I managed to get in contact with this wide range of individuals through email, social media outreach, word of mouth, and by networking at various virtual conferences that occurred during the early Spring of 2021. Snowball sampling ended up being the primary method of sampling that I used in this project. Snowball sampling is a sampling technique in which existing participants provide referrals to recruit other subjects to participate in a research study (Parker, Scott, and Geddes 2019). The snowball sampling method is purely based on referrals, and several of the interviewees in this project passed along my information to their colleagues which elicited more interest in this project. In searching the internet for other agricultural reentry programs, I also utilized purposive sampling which is a sampling method in which researchers rely on their judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in their study (Cresswell and Plano Clark 2011).

Although there were several benefits to using this research method, conducting semi-structured interviews also had its own set of limitations. All of the interviews that were conducted occurred either over the phone or via Zoom. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, no interviews were done in person. In addition to being concerned about the safety of myself and of interview participants, the policies of the University of San Francisco as well as the IRB approval that was obtained did not allow for in-person interviews to occur. The pandemic disrupted the normal way of life for all of us, and I made it a priority to not place unnecessary burdens on my interviewees. Time was also an obstacle as it took much longer than anticipated to hear back from individuals again due to the circumstances of the global pandemic. The time it took to receive a response via email accompanied by the time it took to receive consent forms proved to be challenging. Conducting virtual interviews was certainly not ideal. At times, unstable internet connections on behalf of myself and my interviewees came into play. It was very difficult to deal with an internet connection disappearing in the middle of a question or the middle of a great content-filled answer to a question. Not all of the interviewees who participated in this project were tech-savvy, so I sometimes ran into situations where I had to explain via email or by phone call how to access Zoom as well as troubleshoot Zoom issues before beginning an interview. The pandemic has certainly forced us to become much more familiar with online tools, so my lack of knowledge in available software to help transcribe interviews as well as figuring out how to set up e-signatures for my informed consent forms also served as an obstacle. There was certainly an over-reliance on technology due to everything having to be done virtually. This added on a layer of stress because technology can oftentimes be very unpredictable. Another limitation to my methodology was forcing myself to adjust to a different medium of interacting with people. Connecting with people virtually is vastly different than

having a conversation with someone in person. At times, it took much longer to establish a personal connection or to help an interviewee feel comfortable within the conversation. While on Zoom, people have the option to keep their cameras off or call in without having to use video, and in these instances, it was a bit more difficult to establish a positive relationship that was needed to engage in a conversation. While these obstacles and limitations certainly proved to be difficult, the research that was carried out was done to the highest standard and the data that was gathered was thorough and substantial.

Semi-structured interviews allowed me to better understand agricultural reentry programs and the impacts these programs have on those who run them and on those who have experience participating in them. The interview protocol that was used for this project was designed to produce responses that allowed interviewees to not only share important experiences and opinions but also share their own frustrations and challenges to various systems and institutions. Aside from gathering the data that was necessary to answer the research questions of this project, conducting semi-structured interviews also allowed me to network and develop connections with other people who maintain a level of passion for agricultural reentry programs that is similar to my own.

History & Positionality Statement

Reentry programs are not a new concept, and there is a unique history that exists for these types of programs and initiatives that attempt to rehabilitate formerly incarcerated people and assist them with reintegrating back into society. In this section, I will trace the legislative and social movement histories that provide the context for my study. First, I will provide a brief history of federal legislation known as the Second Chance Act which aimed at helping reduce

recidivism rates throughout the country by implementing reentry programs. Next, I will give a brief history on the motivations behind and the relevant forces that have shaped agricultural reentry programs. I will then discuss a brief history of how food has been used as a tool of empowerment for Black and brown people in the United States. I will conclude this section by describing my own position concerning the focus of this Capstone project. I will show that while agricultural reentry programs are not yet a mainstream solution to the reintegration of formerly incarcerated people, they have the potential to create a significant impact on recidivism rates, self-restoration, food justice, and community building.

The United States has seen a rapid expansion of programs that are intended to help formerly incarcerated individuals have a successful reentry back into society. In his 2004 State of the Union address, President Bush stated, "America is the land of second chance, and when the gates of prison open, the path ahead should lead to a better life" (Bush 2004). "Efforts led by the federal government to promote prisoner reentry programs through the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI), implemented in 2002, and the Second Chance Act of 2008, paved the way for a new era of embracing the value and ideas of a rehabilitation agenda" (Veeh, Severson, and Lee 2015, 239). These initiatives aided in the expansion of reentry programs by "providing funding to state and local governments to either establish new or enhance existing prisoner reentry programming" (Veeh, Severson, and Lee 2015, 239). In 2007, the United States Congress passed the bipartisan legislation known as the Second Chance Act which would go on to be signed into law by President George W. Bush in April of 2008. Surprisingly, not only did this legislation gain support from both sides of the political aisle, but it also had support from leaders in law enforcement, corrections, courts, and behavioral health professionals. The Second Chance Act represented the federal government's investment in strategies to reduce recidivism

and increase public safety, as well as to reduce the costs of corrections for state and local governments. The bill initially authorized up to $165 million in federal grants to state, local, and tribal government agencies and nonprofit organizations to fund initiatives and programs to address goals to reduce recidivism and invest in public safety measures.

Reentry became a major topic of discussion in the early 2000s as a result of the War on Drugs carried out by Presidents Nixon and Reagan and the tough-on-crime policies that were passed throughout state legislatures and by the federal government in the 1990s. As social scientist, Deborah Small (2001) notes, "America's enforcement of its punitive drug policy has resulted in a system of apartheid justice" (897). People of color were being arrested and convicted of crimes at such high, disproportionate rates, and prisons and jails throughout the United States started to fill up with Black and brown bodies; a phenomenon that caused carceral institutions to look more like Southern plantations at the height of slavery. This unfortunate history still maintains as true today as we know that people of color are still treated unfairly when it comes to involvement with the criminal justice system. However, as stated earlier in this Capstone project, the majority of people who are incarcerated end up being released and making their way back into society. They oftentimes end back up in communities that are still suffering from extreme disinvestment and inequities. The Second Chance Act of 2008, while good in its intentions to help formerly incarcerated people reintegrate into society, failed to directly invest into communities where societal conditions such as poverty and food insecurity ran rampant. Broadly speaking, the goals of the Second Chance Act were to, "expunge criminal records, provide services to those offenders most in need, enhance public safety while reducing costs, and offer opportunities for the empirical study of reentry and rehabilitation" (Burris and Miller 2017,

1). There was no mention of directly funding community improvement projects and the notion of enhancing public safety oftentimes meant investing more in local police departments.

The Second Chance Act was just recently reauthorized along with the passage of the First Step Act that was signed into law by President Trump in 2019. This recent reauthorization invested $100 million per year to establish and enhance state and local programs that promote successful reentry for people returning to the community after incarceration. Although there is still a lack of community investment within this legislation, the reauthorization of the Second Chance Act at least points to signs of lawmakers and the general public recognizing the value in funding reentry programs and other like-minded initiatives. Reentry programs aim to tackle a variety of different issues for formerly incarcerated people to best help them return to some sort of normalcy and be able to reenter back into society successfully. According to Koschmann and Peterson (2013), "interest in reentry efforts continues to grow as the costs of recidivism and incarceration take increasing tolls on city and state budgets, and the effects of criminal activity are felt by families and local communities" (188-189). A major shift that has only recently occurred in the scholarship on reentry programs and in the practice of reentry is exploring different ways to not just help formerly incarcerated people return to society as the same individual. Instead, there has now been a dramatic shift in how reentry programs aim to prepare formerly incarcerated people for success. Engaging in horticulture and agricultural practices is one way that reentry programs are attempting to invest in individuals and entire communities.

The idea of using agriculture as a method of reentry programming is not something new, but it remains an idea that is seen as somewhat unorthodox. A core tenet among various agricultural reentry programs is the idea of reclaiming the connection to land and empowering minority communities to take back the power and agency that has been stolen from them.

Minority communities, particularly Native American and African American communities, have a distinct and complicated relationship with land. Both of these minority groups have had their land stolen, have had their bodies brutalized and/or enslaved, and have struggled for generations to overcome the inequities that are the result of colonization and racism. Agricultural reentry programs believe in the healing aspect of farming and of being connected to the land. Josh Sbicca (2018) notes that, "for decades, social reformers, health professionals, political organizers, and social justice activists have devised horticultural strategies to ease the pain of prison and support formerly incarcerated people in reentering their communities" (50). These types of programs have a positive track record of intervening to reduce recidivism rates as well as encourage activism and organizing through food, economic, and racial justice. Agricultural reentry programs have deep ties to prison gardens which have been used in numerous correctional facilities across the United States and across the world as a form of employment and leisure for imprisoned people. Prison gardens have been found to have a significant impact on the mental health of imprisoned people as well as helping develop the skills, mindset, and confidence necessary to successfully reintegrate within the community. Feldbaum et al. (2011) state that, "Helping prisoners connect to causes greater than themselves, such as animal care and environmental preservation, may create a consistent pattern of violence reduction and better behavior during incarceration" (28). The same principle can then be transitioned to reentry as programming centered around agriculture and/or horticulture continues to promote giving back to the community as well as self-development and self-fulfillment. Timler, Brown, and Varcoe (2019) concluded in their study that, "prison gardens provide opportunities for men to improve their dietary and mental health and wellbeing, to find pride and tranquility amongst the chaos and stress of incarceration, and to give back, increase their self-esteem and self-worth, and begin to

imagine a meaningful future post-release" (458-459). Connecting to the land and healing through the land has a profound impact on imprisoned people during their time of incarceration, and agricultural reentry programs expand on those outcomes as formerly incarcerated people transition back into society. There is a growing movement among scholars, nonprofit organizations, and governmental entities to invest in agricultural reentry programs because the benefit of this type of programming is hard to ignore. Several organizations are now coming together to explore the intersection of societal and ecological solutions to reduce recidivism and to promote food justice as well as to encourage formerly incarcerated people to become involved in what is sure to be a green jobs revolution that persists within the next decade.

This spring, I had the chance to attend a multi-day conference that was co-convened by Boston College and the Yale School of the Environment. The virtual conference on Social and Ecological Infrastructure for Recidivism Reduction was filled with researchers, practitioners, community leaders, and policy makers who work at the intersection of correctional programs, community-based interventions, and ecological sustainability. Conferences like these that encourage discussions about preparing for jobs in the green economy to conversations on aquaponics and hydroponics to discussions about food in prison show that others see the advantages to empowering currently and formerly incarcerated people to become involved in agriculture and ecological sustainability. It solidifies the fact that other people see the true value in this type of programming as well as the connections between criminal justice and food justice and how these issues are not separate from one another. Not only do others see the value that exists, but they also believe that agricultural reentry programs have promise and potential to be transformative. This is so important because it acknowledges that there is a growing population within the United States that recognizes that agricultural reentry programs can be a solution to

food insecurity, poverty, unemployment, crime, and fractured communities. This is particularly important for communities of color and low-income communities that have been ignored and left behind. Hungry communities do not have the time nor energy to focus on organizing or activism. However, when people are fed, people who have been shut out and shut down can envision a world in which they have gained the freedom and power that they have earned. Food can be a direct tool of political action, and it has always been a source of empowerment, liberation, and freedom for Black and brown people.

The Atlantic slave trade and slavery removed Africans from their ancestral farmlands and into new and unfamiliar circumstances. However, enslaved African Americans still managed to draw on the knowledge and experiences from their homeland as well as knowledge gained during their forced migration to grow native African crops once they arrived at the shores of America. "Enslaved African Americans drew on the knowledge and techniques that were cultivated during slavery to create foodways that were unique, intersectional and functional" (Richards-Greaves 2020, 69). Similar to the history of enslaved Africans, Native Americans relied on foods that were indigenous to North America. "Although other plants such as potatoes, tomatoes, and peppers were cultivated, the *three sisters (corn, beans, and squash)* gardens were the backbone of North American Indian agriculture and provided the primary dietary staples of many tribes" (Park, Hongu, and Daily 2016, 174). History tells us a story of Black and brown involvement within agriculture as one that consists of pain, genocide, enslavement, and despair. However, that is not the whole story. Contrary to the stories that are told, Black and brown people fought for their rights to own and control land, grow food, and maintain their livelihoods and identities as farmers. Their land was their home, it was their livelihood, and it was instrumental in fortifying familial bonds and community relationships (White 2018). For these

communities, farming is an act of resistance and reclamation; the land and farming have always been considered the basis for Black and brown autonomy. Food has always been an integral part of the Black and brown experience with the United States, and it has always been political especially for Black and brown people. For generations, Black and brown communities have used food to sustain and support protests and social movements. Food has brought comfort and strength to Black and brown people who have constantly been subject to abuse, discrimination, and misunderstanding.

One of the most well-known examples of food being used as a tool of resistance and empowerment comes from the Black Panther Party. The Party implemented its first survival programs out of a desire to meet the needs of Black urban communities. "Panther co-founders Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale situated the Party's food programs and later community service work as necessary measures to ensure the physical survival of poor communities, particularly in black urban neighborhoods" (Potorti 2017, 86). The most popular survival program put forth by the Panthers was Free Breakfast for School Children. The Party recognized that many Black children (and even some adults) did not eat or had never had breakfast before school. Knowing this, the Panthers began to provide free meals for all students within their communities. "For the Panthers, food was a medium to politicize Black communities about the limits and failures of capitalism and the merit and praxis of revolution" (Hassberg 2020, 88). Panther free food programs empowered people physically and politically but also created awareness and brought a serious challenge to systems and power structures in place that aimed to exploit and diminish Black people. The Panthers saw a need and they collectively banded together to improve the lives of poor Black people in urban communities. "In urging poor black Americans, young and old, to demand their daily bread, to participate in political protest, and to

vocally and actively resist white supremacy and the socio-economic status quo, Panther food programs encouraged beneficiaries to be active participants in the struggle for their lives" (Potorti 2017, 108). These efforts by the Black Panthers served as the model for federally funded school food programs for all children. In addition to that, providing food and groceries to low-income families allowed the Black Panthers to reframe food as something more of a right than just a simple commodity. The Panthers sought to dismantle racism within the food system and interrupt the system entirely by bringing food under local, self-sufficient control. They reclaimed food and fed thousands of children while simultaneously used food as a lens to expose racism, inequality, the failures of capitalism, and the potential for something transformational.

Black and brown people have always been connected to land and have used the land both individually and collectively to take a stand against racism, exploitation, and white supremacy. Agricultural reentry programs could very well be the next chapter in this story of resistance, reclamation, and independence. They stand to allow Black and brown communities to reconnect with history and power while also reclaim the agricultural expertise and history that belonged to their ancestors.

My position concerning this topic is a direct result of the experiences I have had in my own life. When I was a kid, I would go pick peaches, strawberries, and scuppernongs every summer. I loved being connected to the earth as well as appreciating the effort and care that went into producing these crops. However, I do not remember seeing many farmers of color when I look back on those days. During the final year of my undergraduate studies, I began a pen pal relationship with a currently incarcerated person that gave me new insight into what life inside a prison was like. S, my pen pal, would always write about how food within his prison was of low quality and oftentimes inedible. Both of these experiences not only helped me recognize the

power and importance of food, but also the value that comes with learning skills that can ultimately be used to gain employment, generate wealth, and offer some sort of stability in life.

I have always had a passion for gardening, food, and the culinary arts. As a child, I would create some of the strangest concoctions, but as a teenager, I learned the foundational methods and techniques necessary to thrive in a professional kitchen. My paternal grandmother was key in helping me realize my passion for food. She was also key in helping me recognize the atrocities that incarcerated people face. Up until she retired in 2008, she was a Counselor for incarcerated men at a state prison in Georgia. We had countless talks about her job and the men she was helping every day. She influenced me in both subject areas. My passion and belief that everyone truly deserves a second chance no matter the mistakes they may have made in life shapes my lens on this project. My desire for a just and equitable food system as well as my identity as a Black man in a country that incarcerates people of color far more than their white counterparts have shaped my personal beliefs. I believe that currently and formerly incarcerated people deserve to be treated with dignity and humanity and that they should be given ample opportunities to reclaim their lives after imprisonment. I also believe in building a food system and agricultural industry rooted in racial equity and fairness that is inclusive, empowering, and capable of making healthy food more sustainable and accessible. Recognizing that this is my position concerning this project, I intentionally did not let my own beliefs and preconceived notions prevent me from being open to ideas or opinions I had not previously considered.

Data Analysis

The questions that I initially set out to explore were: How do agricultural reentry programs empower and restore formerly incarcerated people to their communities? And what are

the conditions and obstacles these programs face in helping people reenter society? What was made clear to me in each of the conversations that I had was that at the heart of agricultural reentry programs is the idea that a strong self leads to a stronger family unit which then leads to a stronger, more united community. Agricultural reentry programs attempt to restore individuals to their communities by drawing attention to and addressing both the social conditions that lead to criminality and the damaging (and often violent) effects of incarceration itself. Three main themes became discernible through the data that coincide along with the argument being offered in this Capstone project. Those three themes are as follows: first, incarceration impacts families and communities and separates individuals from their own sense of self which tremendously affects future outcomes of poverty-stricken communities. Second, agricultural reentry programs help foster a relationship with land and food while at the same time helps restores a sense of self for formerly incarcerated people. Finally, participants who engage in agricultural reentry programs develop a skillset that empowers them to develop the knowledge and power necessary to drastically impact both the food and criminal justice systems as well as bring about transformation within their communities.

Throughout this data analysis section of my Capstone project, I will explore the data that led me to the previously mentioned trio of themes. I will explore the implications of my findings on reentry programming, systemic change, food as a restorative tool, and individual and community empowerment. Following this data analysis, I will conclude this Capstone project by describing the future I see for agricultural reentry programs as well as describe potential steps for further research on this topic. That will be followed by two sets of policy recommendations, one that is more centered on legislative solutions and strategies and another that outlines specific

steps that currently existing and future agricultural reentry programs should take to be the most successful.

The impact of Incarceration on families, communities, and individual's sense of self

The reality of incarceration is that it has a tremendous impact on the well-being of families and communities as well as on the sense of self of those who have been convicted of crimes. The social injustices that are a result of mass incarceration often hurt in low-income, racially marginalized communities. People in these communities often find themselves trapped in cycles of poverty and inequality that impact their lives and oftentimes lead them to engage in criminal activity. Several participants discussed how imprisonment takes a toll on family and community relationships by separating those who have been found guilty of crimes. Participant A questioned the very purpose of sending someone to prison by asking, "what is the purpose of incarceration? Is it to make us safer? If it's to make us safer, is putting people in environments that cause more harm and actually can cause more trauma upon exit good for community safety?" Participant A continued on to say, "If someone steals your bike, is them going to prison going to get your bike back? Alternatives could include them being held to account to replace your bike, community accountability, and maybe just trying to figure out why they did that action in the first place." Participant A essentially put forth the idea that sending people straight to prison or jail and removing them from their communities should not be the automatic response to criminal behavior. Instead, the focus should be on attempting to understand the behavior that led someone to commit a crime and then helping them correct said behavior. This is a significant alternative because it interrupts the practice of punishment and diminishes the likelihood of

individuals getting caught up within systems that would likely keep them impoverished and at risk of further involvement with the criminal justice system.

The practice of punishment is one that several interviewees outwardly opposed due to the fact that healing and restoration cannot happen when punishment is the only goal; these concepts are not mutually exclusive. The restoration and rehabilitation of those who have committed crimes is a necessary component of incarceration. Participant H noted that, "when wrongdoing happens, it means that healing has to happen to make things right again to heal relationships. We have to look at people who have harmed as people who need healing, rather than as people who need locking up." Participant H is describing restorative justice which is a concept that is most recognized as bringing together perpetrators of crime and victims of crime to develop empathy, make amends, and strengthen ties to the community. "While the types of processes identified as restorative justice vary widely, they shift the focus from an adversarial binary of victim and perpetrator to one that acknowledges the impact of harm not only on individuals but on broader communities" (Kim 2018, 225). Crime and incarceration affect community infrastructures which include the relationships among community members as well as the quality of life and public safety within communities (Clear 2008). Community members can be quite unforgiving when it comes to reaccepting newly returned citizens back into the community. Even when an individual has completed their sentence, the community that they may have even once been a part of no longer wants to welcome them back with open arms. As Participant H stated, "the attitude of community members makes it hard to reenter. It is so hard to shake that stigma." Participant L simply asked, "Where's the forgiveness after all these years? Why is it so hard for someone who is formerly incarcerated to be accepted and loved?" Implementing restorative justice practices within communities can certainly be a useful practice to repair the broken relationship between

an offender and the community. The connections that we make with our family and community members are oftentimes some of the strongest relationships that we maintain and by removing someone from their community, more harm ends up being done to individuals rather than any good at all. Participant R stated, "We all crave the need to connect, to feel love, and to feel an emotional connection with other people. Therefore, our relationships with family and community members are so important; they contribute to our humanity and help us maintain love and care for one another." These interviews demonstrate that separating imprisoned people from those they are closest to only creates division and ultimately ends up harming the already established relationships that imprisoned people have with their family and community members. For returning citizens to be successful in their reentry process, there must be a focus on strengthening relationships with family and community members. Keeping imprisoned people connected to their communities allows for a reentry process that ultimately serves the individual and the community better. As Participant X remarked, "people make mistakes and what we need to do is help people right their wrongs, teach them how to ask for forgiveness, and empower them to make a difference within the communities they caused harm within."

Incarceration does not just affect an individual by separating them from their community or family. It also has a significant impact on an individuals' sense of self. Incarceration actively strips away any sense of self from imprisoned people. It forces them to adapt to a system that oftentimes pays zero attention to dignity, respect, and humanity. During imprisonment, there is always someone to give instructions or tell incarcerated people what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. The emotional toll that incarceration takes on those who are imprisoned can be a lot to cope with. Regaining their freedom and their ability to make their own decisions again can be very difficult, and it requires a certain level of confidence that is not easy to maintain. Participant

Y said, “Personally, I've been in and out the system. I know that a lot of times, they're so focused on what you do, as opposed to what led you down that path. Sometimes people make bad decisions, but I don’t think that I am a bad person.” What people fail to sometimes understand is that incarcerated people are still people. Prison is not an easy place to exist in, and a lot of the things that we take for granted are things that formerly incarcerated people must re-learn once they are granted release. Navigating the outside world after incarceration is challenging and most people have a hard time adjusting and coping with their newly gained freedom.

Participant A gave an example of a client they worked with who was adjusting to life after release. They stated, “After 27 years inside, one of our participants set a goal to walk to the barn and back by herself in her first two weeks of freedom. She could but she also couldn't; she was really scared. And that was big for her you know? It was a tangible goal, but like, the bigger goal, was learning how to exist in the world again as an independent adult.” This example by Participant A demonstrates how trauma endured during incarceration complicates the reentry process. Freedom is a luxury that, of course, is not afforded to people who are incarcerated. At every waking moment, someone has a watchful eye over them and over every move they make. There is always constant supervision, and there are barely any opportunities for any autonomous decision making which does not bode well for people once they exit incarceration. The lack of personal choice and of making one’s own decisions does not prepare imprisoned people for success once they reenter society. It adds more stress which helps diminish the self-confidence that is needed to succeed in reintegrating back into society. Participant A also brought up another great example in which they stated, “Some of our people set a goal of navigating a grocery store on their own. Not having an anxiety attack in the aisle or not feeling overwhelmed and unable to shop for their groceries after they get out is a big deal. There is so much freedom and choice.”

The first hours, days, and weeks post-incarceration can be filled with excitement and glee, but as Participant A described in their example, those first hours, days, and weeks can also be filled with anxiety, stress, and loneliness. Fear and feelings of overwhelming anxiety and pressure are unfortunate realities of reentry. What is deemed as everyday tasks become obstacles and milestones for formerly incarcerated people; even just simply existing can be difficult. Participant R mentioned that formerly incarcerated people are, "traumatized by being incarcerated. And then they have to deal with those traumas. But those years and months of trauma can only be reflected upon once they are released."

In tandem with learning to be a member of society again, newly returned citizens also have to deal with the baggage that comes along with being incarcerated. As difficult as those feelings and emotions may be, the psychological toll that incarceration has on people makes dealing with trauma all the more difficult and intense. "Adjustment during reentry after incarceration may also be complicated due to histories of trauma and diagnoses of PTSD for both men and women" (Wallace, Conner, and Dass-Brailsford 2011, 332). Participant L mentioned that, "I just refuse to go back to prison. Like, I'm not…I can't go back." The trauma that Participant L and others mentioned to me highlighted the difficulty of maintaining one's self-worth and dignity during and after incarceration. When society has labeled you as a criminal and when you've gone through hell and back during your sentence, the ability to stay steadfast in the belief in oneself is impressive. Prison is not about building people up and helping rehabilitate them and helping them maintain a high sense of self-worth. No, in fact, it seems to be the mere opposite. Prison is about control and dehumanization and punishment. Participant G said it best when they stated that, "By the time someone ends up in a correctional environment, they're just disconnected from everything because they don't see anything. It's just more of the same shit,

right? Then when they get out, now they have a felony on top of everything else. You got to explain that little piece, and every explanation ends up being a defense of character."

Incarceration, at every corner, reminds imprisoned people that their sense of worth is minuscule. Whether it be by referring to them by an identification number or by the strict standard of control or by how individualization is stripped away, incarceration causes damage to one's self-esteem and one's sense of self. In a sample of formerly incarcerated people, the perception of being stigmatized due to having the label of ex-offender or ex-con was found to be a strong predictor of low self-esteem and of having less satisfaction with life and the potential for future success (LeBel 2007). Participant J summed it up well when they said, "Because if you're treating people like garbage while they are inside and then you spit them out on the street when they finish their time, how can you possibly expect them to be reformed or changed? How can you expect them to want to do anything positive? How can you expect them to view themselves in a positive light?" Treating people as if they do not matter and as if they have no intrinsic value results in an entire subset of people who feel less than and who feel less connected to society. Formerly incarcerated people need to be reassured that they will not continue to be judged by the mistakes of their past. Reentry programs must help establish self-confidence within formerly incarcerated people and must help navigate the process of acceptance and forgiveness on behalf of family and community members. Agricultural reentry programs recognize that reentry must be a mutual process between formerly incarcerated people and communities. Not only do these programs aim to help formerly incarcerated people improve their own lives, but they also seek to show formerly incarcerated people the positive and profound impacts they can have on communities. These programs are attempting to mitigate the impacts of incarceration by

empowering participants to value and reconnect with themselves, their, families, and their communities and build a positive relationship with land and food.

Agricultural reentry programs help foster a relationship with land and food and restores a sense of self for formerly incarcerated people

Throughout the interviews, several participants noted how we as a society are becoming more and more removed and disconnected from our food system. There seemed to be a clear acceptance of the perception that most Americans do not have any clue as to how our food makes its way from the field, into the grocery store, and onto our plates. The situation surrounding food for imprisoned people, in particular, is quite dire. Not only are they unaware of where their food comes from, but oftentimes they are not even sure what they are being served to eat. Participant L, who leads programming for young offenders within a jail, notes that, “I don't even know what they are putting on plates now. I can't describe nothing they have ever served them. I don't know what the in the world they're feeding them.” Participant Y described their experience with food while incarcerated in this manner: “Not only is the food not good, but they don't give you much. I feel like the state sometimes uses any opportunity they can to give you less. And then even with things like commissary, you know, what's a pack of noodles out here on the streets? Like 10 cents, right? In some jails, a pack of noodles is $1.” The food that imprisoned people are forced to eat does not taste good nor is it good nutritionally. Food is supposed to function as fuel for our bodies, but the meals that imprisoned people are forced to endure are unappetizing and hardly meet minimal nutritional needs. In their research, Soble, Stroud, and Weinstein (2020) found that only three-fifths of the formerly incarcerated people that they surveyed rarely or never had access to fresh vegetables; only one in six formerly incarcerated survey respondents said they always or often had access to fresh fruit. Similar

sentiments about food in prison were shared throughout the interviews for this project. Participant E shared that, “the food that is served is filled with sweeteners, and it's often very bland or very over-salted; It's very under nourishing,” they continued, “I think the important thing is that many people who have been incarcerated end up eating food that is of lower quality, and it wreaks havoc on their health, both physically and mentally.” Diets that consist of healthy fats, fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and good protein allow us to maintain a high level of health. Unfortunately, imprisoned people face poor nutritional options which often leads to their lives post-incarceration and into reintegration and diminishes their relationship with food.

One of the most empowering notions behind agricultural reentry programs is establishing a positive connection to food and land for participants. Participant R mentioned to me that food in prison is used as a tool of punishment for imprisoned people and that the relationship imprisoned people have with food is one that is often built on trauma. Participant R continued by saying, “it takes time to build it back where people understand like that the food is so powerful, and it can be powerful for them in their healing process, or their interpersonal process, or in their kind of rehabilitation process.” I tend to think of food as being a force that is so much more than just something that we eat. Food is the DNA of who we are as people. Food can and does change the world, and that is what gives it such unbelievable power and such deep symbolic meaning (McMichael 2000). Agricultural reentry programs recognize the power of food and promote the use of food as a tool of liberation. Participant R, once again, offered great insight by adding that, “if you grow your own food, or if you buy your food from people in your community and not from the system, you know, if you extract yourself from big AG, from processed food, from corporate food, or from just like, being a sheeple and eating the same food that everyone else does, then that is liberation.” By giving formerly incarcerated people the knowledge and skills to

plant and harvest food, agricultural reentry programs not only provide individuals with a new set of skills but also empower individuals to value the land as well as allow them to have a hand in their own food. For Black and brown people, especially, this connection to land is so important because of the history that people of color have with agriculture and with being stewards of the land. Participant O mentioned, "African women hid rice, okra, and other seeds in their hair because they knew that these seeds would be their most important legacy. Our ancestors were more than slaves. They were agricultural revolutionaries." Working the land can be filled with lots of complex and complicated emotions for Black and brown people, but the sense of empowerment that agricultural reentry programs offer frames working in agriculture as a way to reclaim something that was stolen. Participant X notes that, "for Black and brown people, being connected to land and, learning how to grow your own food, and even cook your own food are powerful things. These are things they beat us and shamed us and killed us for. Doing this work is the way to get our power back." By acknowledging the agricultural genius of Black and brown ancestors and how they managed to cultivate the land, agricultural reentry programs are helping to re-establish a positive relationship with land and food by combatting white supremacist narratives of agriculture.

The reconnection to land and food that agricultural reentry programs offer also comes with another significant benefit. By teaching individuals how to grow and harvest food, these programs also restore a sense of self and help restore dignity and worth to formerly incarcerated people that might have been lost during incarceration. The structural barriers to reentry such as finding employment or housing or gaining access to education are widely known and talked about, but the emotional barriers are just as important. Multiple interviewees talked about the role in which restorative justice must play in helping formerly incarcerated people conqueror

some of their emotional barriers. Participant K noted that, "the restorative component in these programs is so important because it forces people to look at themselves as individuals, as people, and think about the things they've done and the person they want to be moving forward." Finally, on the idea of restorative justice, Participant J mentioned, "I believe in restorative justice. You take the person in; you restore them to a healthy level mentally, physically, and spiritually. You have to do that." My interviewees highlighted the value in rebuilding the self-worth and dignity of formerly incarcerated people by utilizing a restorative justice framework. Due to past trauma that may have occurred within their lives or due to traumatic experiences that may have happened during incarceration, the notion of self-worth and even identity are diminished for formerly incarcerated people. However, Participant E felt as though participation in agricultural reentry programs served as a way to combat those feelings of negativity. They stated that, "I just think this is such a powerful way to help people realize that you have worth, and you have purpose. And you can create change, not just for yourself, and for your community, but for the world." A criminal record should not keep someone from achieving success, and agricultural reentry programs help formerly incarcerated individuals recognize that although they have a past, they are more than the actions that led them to incarceration. Participant A mentioned to me that they believe prison, in part, is designed to help shatter people's confidence. In the agricultural reentry program that they run, Participant A stressed the importance of helping people regain their confidence and empowering them to view themselves as people worthy of dignity and respect. Participant D shared that, "At the core of this type of programming is restoring humanity. Incarceration strips that away from people, and it's our job to make people step back and realize that they do not deserve to be punished forever. They have worth." What became clear to me throughout all of my interviews was the need for society to recognize that

every human being has worth and that people who have committed crimes deserve a chance to succeed in life. Prison is the punishment. Being confined in a concrete box is the punishment. Formerly incarcerated people should not have to suffer once they are released, and agricultural reentry programs help them understand that they have a role to play as leaders and changemakers within their communities.

By recognizing the humanity of formerly incarcerated people, agricultural reentry programs attempt to fix and/or address past traumas that may have occurred before or during incarceration. Participant E gave great context by highlighting the fact that all communities are not created equally and that certain groups of people are more likely to grow up in highly traumatizing and chaotic situations. They stated, “The unjust justice system, which ensures that if you don't have a great attorney, then everything's against you. And if you are a particular race or ethnicity, everything is going to be against you.” As I’ve highlighted throughout this project, people of color are disproportionately incarcerated compared to their white counterparts. Participant R added on this thought by stating that, “Our system is institutionally structured to target people of color or people living in poverty.” Agricultural reentry programs cannot fix the racial bias or discrimination that people of color continue to face day in and day out. However, the goals of these programs are not to convince people that people of color are non-threatening or that everyone should just increase their tolerance of folks who do not look like them. Instead, these programs, in a way, aim to dismantle the very systems that lead people to become incarcerated in the first place. By equipping formerly incarcerated people with the knowledge, skills, and power to transform communities, agricultural reentry programs are aiming to create widespread change. These programs are working to show that farming and agriculture can serve as a space to fight against systemic racism and economic and political oppression. As Participant

A so eloquently noted, “Sure, they are a person with a conviction, but you know, I know that they're a mom or they're a carpenter or they are a gifted bowler. They are so much more than their criminal record.” Participant Y mentioned, “These systems are working exactly how they were designed to work, and I think one thing I’ve noticed about the program I help run is that people who have experienced incarceration are damn sure motivated to dismantle this messed up system.” The skillset that agricultural reentry programs provide prepares individuals to have a significant role within transforming communities while also addressing root causes of incarceration rather than just the symptoms.

The skills participants learn in agricultural reentry programs prepare them to impact systems and to transform communities

Agricultural reentry programs instill in participants the idea that there is value in taking care of the land and value in giving back to and caring about the communities in which they live. One of the best ways to care about the community is to feed the community. Through these interviews, it became clear that gardening was a skill set that could transform communities. Gardens benefit communities in a multitude of ways that include offering educational opportunities and vocational skills for youth, improving access to food, promoting social health, and strengthening community bonds. Gardening also allows people who may not have a lot of skills or education to see success quickly in their work which brings a boost in confidence and self-esteem. Participant I further elaborated on the skills that agricultural reentry programs offer by noting that, “I think it can be impactful to plant something from a seed and nurture it, water it, and harvest it, and then it ends up on your table. There is so much power in teaching people to grow food, to value food, and to value themselves.” Participant J mentioned to me that it is not enough to just equip people with skills. They felt as if formerly incarcerated people need to be

equipped with skills that they can then use to make a difference in their lives and the lives of others. They said, “it’s not enough to just teach people how to make a PowerPoint or how to answer a telephone. No, what we are doing in these programs is teaching people life skills that they can then use to create positive change.” Regarding the skills that participants learn in the program they help run, Participant A noted that, “folks might be able to leave with tangible skills, like growing their own food, or how to do it on a budget or how to build compost. How to do the math for this, like for measuring out raise beds, or how to build raised beds.” Agricultural reentry programs are teaching program participants skills that encourage them to transfer the knowledge and application of those skills to fellow community members. In addition to teaching participants transferrable skills, some agricultural reentry programs also include curriculums that focus on environmental education, education on nutrition and the role food plays in our health, environmental racism, and social justice movements to name a few.

These programs also help reiterate the fact that the actions we take impact society as a whole. We are all connected, and we are all connected to the environment in which we live and breathe in. It is important to note that the role of community in the process of reintegration came up in several interviews. Participant O commented the following: “There was a lack of food access in this community. So, we built ourselves around again, food, health, and jobs.” Participant O also mentioned how the program itself became an instrumental part of the community. The program served as a place where community members could go to retrieve fresh produce. If they needed gardening tips or more specific guidance, then they could stop by and speak with someone from the program. Participant O remarked that, “having a space like this, and feeling good that it's in your neighborhood is a sense of change.” As important as these agricultural reentry programs are to individuals, they are just as important to the communities in

which they reside and operate. Participant H commented that, “It starts with community. They are the foundation of it all, and part of our role in this program is to build sustainable communities. Those [sustainable communities] are communities with food justice, racial justice, basic survival needs, and legal justice.” While it may seem overarching to some, Participant H is commenting directly on the power that agricultural reentry programs have in addressing the root causes of incarceration. The communities that are most directly impacted by mass incarceration do not have these things due to how systems on every level currently operate. Again, this leads us back to the idea that agricultural reentry programs are transformational not just for individuals and communities, but for entire systems as well. Participant X shared a personal story with me about their father’s involvement with the criminal justice system in which they mentioned that their father had robbed individuals in his neighborhood. They followed that statement up by saying, “But the reason he did that was because the system was stacked against him. And he needed some extra money so his family could eat. Is that so wrong? Or is that on the on the part of the government or on the state to do better?” Participant X raised a great point because to me, this is a prime example of broken systems. Instead of turning to commit crime, what if the father of Participant X instead had somewhere to go for help? What if there were resources within that neighborhood to help their father find employment? Those are the root issues that agricultural reentry programs are directly targeting. In communities where local, state, and federal policymakers have failed, these programs are picking up the slack to say that there is another way.

In the midst of broken systems built upon foundations of white supremacy, there is a way to dismantle those systems and end cycles of poverty, incarceration, and struggle. It starts with food and gardening and establishing a positive relationship with the environment. There is

nothing more powerful than teaching someone how to grow their own food and take care of their community. However, the exploitation of Black and brown farmers has persisted for generations and has led to a host of problems, one of them being a lack of access to food that is grown and produced by members of those specific communities. If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it is that our food supply and overall food system are not as strong as people once thought. This is because the food system is much more corporatized rather than locally sourced. Agricultural reentry programs also show participants the value in knowing where your food comes from as well as helping instill the fact that producing and cultivating something with your own two hands is an extremely powerful act. Within the literature review, I touched on strengths-based reentry and the advantages it has over risk-based reentry. Agricultural reentry programs are a great example of strengths-based reentry because they treat program participants as people who have unlimited potential to do great things for themselves and their communities. If the food system is broken, agricultural reentry programs provide participants with the knowledge and skills they need to grow beyond the system. These programs are one of the best examples of turning people into assets rather than liabilities which is a core tenet of strengths-based reentry.

Agricultural reentry programs, as evidenced by the data collected, are at the forefront of creating positive, lasting change for individuals and communities. These programs equip participants with the knowledge and skillset to bring forth necessary change within communities as well as with the power to spread love and care through food. These programs empower formerly incarcerated participants to be changemakers and to move on from any negative labels that might have been placed on them while incarcerated. As Participant I noted so well, “These programs show the power that we have as individuals to make a difference, not just for ourselves, but for our communities and even the world.” At the core of these programs is the idea

that we each have an inherent right to access land as well as have dignity and agency with our food system. For Black and brown people specifically, the connection to land should no longer be rooted in oppression. Instead, it should be rooted in hope, reclamation, empowerment, and opportunity.

Barriers to reentry for returning citizens will continue to exist especially due to the stigma that still surrounds formerly incarcerated people, but agricultural reentry programs offer a means of sidestepping at least a few barriers. By no means is agriculture an easy industry to get into. Working fields and planting and harvesting all take hard, rigorous work. But there is no sweeter reward than caring for, cultivating, and harvesting something you nurtured and watched over. Cooking for someone and sharing a meal with others is one of the sincerest acts of love and kindness. These programs are revolutionary in how they can transform people and communities and entire systems. There are several takeaways from the interviews I conducted, but one, in particular, is this: we need these programs to exist in both urban and rural communities. These programs are vital to offering a pathway to success, employment, food security, empowerment, and so much more. Agricultural reentry programs have great potential to completely overhaul our food system as well as offer significant opportunities to formerly incarcerated people.

Conclusion

Using the methodology of semi-structured interviews, this Capstone project evaluated agricultural reentry programs to learn how they empower and restore formerly incarcerated people to their communities as well as sought out to understand the obstacles that these programs face in helping individuals return from incarceration. The analysis of the collected data coalesced

into three main themes: incarceration negatively impacts families, communities, and an individual's sense of self, agricultural reentry programs help foster a positive relationship with land and food and restores a sense of self for formerly incarcerated people, and the skills that participants learn in agricultural reentry programs prepare formerly incarcerated people to impact systems and to transform communities.

No other country in the world incarcerates its people at the rate which we do here in America. After people complete their sentences and then reenter back into everyday life, they are met with several social, emotional, and psychological barriers. Instead of making it easy for returning citizens to get reacclimated to life, they are oftentimes left to their own devices on how to figure out how to navigate the world. Formerly incarcerated people deserve dignity and respect, and reentry programs are such a vital component to ensure that these individuals are truly able to reintegrate into society successfully and that they ultimately remain free and avoid re-incarceration. The high rates of recidivism are a direct reflection of the lack of investment in reentry programming and of reentry services that are available to formerly incarcerated people. Reentry must be a process that centers on the transformation of individuals as well as the well-being of the community. These two ideas are not mutually exclusive. As shown by the data that was collected in this Capstone project, agricultural reentry programs are doing just that. They are focused on strengthening communities and helping formerly incarcerated people become caring, civically engaged change agents with communities.

At the heart of agricultural reentry programs is the idea that a strong self leads to a stronger family unit which then leads to a stronger, more united community. Incarceration actively strips away any sense of self from imprisoned people. It forces them to adapt to a system that oftentimes pays zero attention to dignity, respect, and humanity. There is so much power in

agricultural reentry programs because these programs are designed to not only help formerly incarcerated individuals reconnect with the Earth and with food but there is also a strong emphasis on the importance of reconnecting with one's own self. These programs truly are designed to restore humanity, dignity, and purpose to individuals who have been told that they are undeserving…that they have no value… and that they are worthless. By participating in these types of programs, formerly incarcerated people are given the opportunity to learn a new skill set, develop a new sense of self, and ultimately gain knowledge and power that can then be used to have a profound, transformational impact on communities.

Throughout this Capstone project, I have highlighted how people of color have been sidelined, taken advantage of, abused, and discriminated against by the criminal justice and food systems. The impact of this research lies in the fact that agricultural reentry programs can be used as an avenue to completely transform these systems as well as improve the livelihoods of communities and formerly incarcerated people. These programs do more than serve as a reentry checklist. By this I mean that these programs do more than approach reentry as a sort of checklist. The focus turns from menial tasks such as resume building workshops and employability skills training to allow formerly incarcerated people to become more proximate with nature and to develop a deep, sincere connection to the Earth. Of course, great skills are gained and there is great individual growth as a result of participating in these programs. But, on a more soulful and spiritual level, working within nature allows for restoration, self-reflection, and the return of light to the body that was stolen by the concrete walls of imprisonment. These programs promote the concept of Black and brown environmentalism that history has lied to us about for generations. Black and brown environmentalism extends back to the very first indigenous Americans, to enslaved Africans to farming cooperatives, labor rights, civil rights,

and the modern movement for food justice. Agricultural reentry programs directly attack the whitewashing of history. What they do is give Black and brown people the opportunity to continue the distinguished legacy of their ancestors by growing food, growing community, and caring for the land. Land that was stolen. Land that generations of Black and brown Americans worked on, bled on and died on. Agricultural reentry programs allow for Black and brown people to reclaim what was stolen from them and transform what was once a dark history into a thriving future. The data gathered through the interviews in this project show that agricultural reentry programs understand the connection between racism and the degradation of our environment. They aim to try and create the next generation of farmers of color and Black and brown environmentalists. White people within the United States may own more land but the land does not solely belong to them. Reclaiming what was stolen via agricultural reentry programs is revolutionary and while some systems may not be changing as quickly as some would hope, the data in this project shows us that these programs are working and that they are bringing new opportunities for success.

What I've found in all of this research is that a good reentry program can change the entire trajectory of a person's life. Encouraging people to learn new skills, empowering them to make a difference within their communities, and establishing a connection to food and land all can truly transform the lives of program participants. Agricultural reentry programs present themselves as a true opportunity for formerly incarcerated people to succeed in their lives post-release. For me, the most exciting prospect that these programs offer is their ability to help formerly incarcerated people become entrepreneurs and advocates for their communities. The results from my interviews show that agricultural reentry programs place a significant amount of value on establishing a sense of self but also on giving back to the community and passing

forward the knowledge that has been gained. These programs also involve helping program participants get access to other services as needed such as housing, substance abuse treatment, healthcare, etc. What the interviews show is that, rather than treating people as objects or as tools to use and take advantage of, agricultural reentry programs are more interested in how individuals can be empowered to have positive impacts on themselves and others around them. It seems as if agricultural reentry programs rely heavily on the theoretical framework of strengths-based reentry which says that formerly incarcerated people should be viewed as people full of potential and promise rather than objects or tolls to use and throw around as one pleases. I have no direct criticism of strengths-based reentry because, at its core, the framework focuses on the humanity of formerly incarcerated people. It recognizes that all people have a purpose and that every human being has value and is worthy of kindness, care, and compassion. By centering this framework, agricultural reentry programs make it clear that they value one's entire personhood no matter what someone may have done in the past. In all the conversations I had with my interviewees, I never once heard anyone speak negatively about formerly incarcerated people. There was not one mention of turning someone away because of the color of their skin or due to their gender or gender identity or due to the crime in which they may have been convicted of. These programs are inclusive, compassionate, and truly dedicated to helping formerly incarcerated people become the best individuals and community members that they can be.

One of the most significant conclusions I have made after completing this project is that agricultural reentry programs have the potential to make a significant impact on our food system. These programs offer people of color who have been negatively impacted by one system the opportunity to dismantle another system. Food is vital to our lives, and I strongly believe that equipping program participants with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to create change will

have a lasting impact. I believe that we are at a moment in our society where there is no better time than the present to make a change. People around the country are starting to notice how racial inequality runs rampant in almost every arena of American life, and it finally feels like people have had enough. These feelings of frustration must translate to our food system if anything is going to change. We must elect leaders and policymakers who recognize how food insecurity, health disparities, mass incarceration, and criminal behavior are all tied to food. Everything leads back to the food we eat. To quote Chef José Andrés, "Food used the right way can end hunger. Food used the right way can help fight obesity and malnutrition. Food when prepared the right way can help improve the environment. Food can be the answer." With this in mind, I am proud to put forth the following policy recommendations that I think will lead to significant improvements in reentry, agriculture, and criminal justice.

Policy Recommendation #1

In 2008, the U.S. Congress passed a piece of legislation known as the Second Chance Act. This legislation authorized a federal investment (in the form of grants) in strategies to reduce recidivism and increase public safety while reducing corrections costs for state and local governments. The Second Chance Act authorized up to $165 million in federal grants to state, local, and tribal government agencies and nonprofit organizations for the funding of initiatives and programs that assist those released from prisons and jails in addressing the needs and conditions that pose risks of reoffending. When President Trump signed the First Step Act in 2018, he also reauthorized the Second Chance Act. However, the funding that was set aside for reentry programming and reentry initiatives was inadequate. Congress should pass legislation to increase the $100 million per year allocation that was passed in 2018 to $250 million. Congress needs to do its job and adequately fund and invest in these programs that would tremendously

impact communities and individuals across the country. In addition to the increase of funds, there also needs to be reform in how these grants are handled and allocated. The grant applications should be scaled down and simplified, and each grant that comes from the federal government that focuses on reentry should last a minimum of three years to help maintain the consistency of and investment in grantees.

Policy Recommendation #2

In President Biden's FY 2022 budget request for the Justice Department, the President and Attorney General Garland are asking for $1.2 billion (an increase of $304 million) to support community-oriented policing and addressing systemic inequities. The federal government should no longer fund mass incarceration or support policies that continue to perpetuate a broken criminal justice system. While community-oriented policing is necessary to improving relationships between community members and police, the money the Biden administration is asking for would be much better served if it were funneled toward reentry efforts. Instead of investing that $1.2 billion in community-oriented policing and whatever the administration identifies as systemic inequities, I am recommending that the entire amount be fully invested in reentry programming efforts. $600 million would be made available in the form of grant programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice, the Office of Justice Programs, and the Bureau of Justice Assistance. $100 million would be spread across the 50 states evenly. To receive these funds, states would need to put forth a plan in which they propose to use their $2 million specifically for non-punitive reentry efforts. These plans would be subject to DOJ approval. The final remaining $500 million should be allocated in the following ways: $250 million should specifically be set aside for reentry programming initiatives that are aimed at getting formerly incarcerated people involved in agriculture careers or activities. Working

alongside the Department of Agriculture, DOJ officials will determine the organizations that are awarded these funds. An application process will be required, but the distribution of these funds is totally up to a team made of DOJ and USDA officials. The final $250 should be used to establish a National Reentry Council that aims to reduce recidivism by increasing collaboration between state, local, and community-based programs relevant to reentering the community, creating a network of individuals and organizations assisting returning individuals, and developing and monitoring nationwide goals relevant to reentry and offer recommendations to Congress. I am also proposing that some of the money meant for the National Reentry Council be used to fund research that explores the idea of creating and implementing a national reentry program.

Policy Recommendation #3

I am recommending that state departments of corrections, as well as the Federal Bureau of Prisons, implement Roots of Success programming in at least 20% of their facilities. Instructors are trained on how to implement the Roots of Success curriculum for a one-time fee of $500. Anyone can be an instructor and go through the training and the curriculum materials are available for purchase online. By implementing this environmental literacy and work readiness program, I hope that correctional departments and the BOP recognize that reentry must start before people are released. The reintegration process must start while individuals are incarcerated. It is also my hope that implementing this curriculum pushes states and the BOP to operate gardens in at least 25% of their facilities.

Dr. Raquel Pinderhughes, a professor at San Francisco State University, is responsible for creating the Roots of Success program. Roots of Success is an empowering environmental literacy and job readiness curriculum that helps education and workforce programs prepare youth and adults with barriers to employment access for environmental jobs and career pathways in multiple sectors of the economy. The curriculum is heavily influenced by the experience and knowledge of Dr. Pinderhughes who is an expert on the green economy and green workforce training. This curriculum was specifically designed for youth and adults who come from communities heavily impacted by poverty, unemployment, and environmental injustice. The current curriculum has 10 modules within it and those are: Fundamentals of Environmental Lit., Water, Waster, Transportation, Energy, Building, Health, Food & Agriculture, Community Organizing & Leadership, Financial Literacy & Social Entrepreneurship, and Application & Practice.

Policy Recommendation #4

I am recommending that The United States Congress passes the Justice For Black Farmers Act. This legislation introduced by U.S. Senators Cory Booker, Tina Smith, Elizabeth Warren, Patrick Leahy, Kirsten Gillibrand, and Reverend Raphael Warnock is a comprehensive and ambitious legislative proposal aimed at finally correcting generations of wrongs towards Black farmers. This legislation would do the following:

- End Discrimination within the USDA
- Protect Remaining Black Farmers from Land Loss
- Restore the Land Base Lost by Black Farmers
- Create a Farm Conservation Corps

- Empower HBCUs and Advocates for Black farmers
- Assist All Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers
- Enact System Reforms to Help All Farmers and Ranchers

Under the legislation, an independent board would review appeals of civil rights complaints filed against the USDA, investigate complaints of discrimination within the department, and oversee the farmer-elected county committees that guide operations at local USDA offices. It also would increase funding for a USDA program to resolve the "heirs property" issue of land passed from one generation of a family to another without a clear title. A new Equitable Land Access Service would issue land grants of 160 acres apiece to up to 20,000 experienced Black farmers annually through 2030.

Link to text of the bill:
https://www.booker.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2%20Justice%20for%20Black%20Farmers%20Act%20of%202021.pdf

Policy Recommendation #5

The 1990 Farm Bill established the 2501 Program which is also known as the USDA Socially Disadvantaged Farmers Grant. The program was initially designed to provide outreach and technical assistance for underserved farmers, ranchers, and foresters, in owning and operating sustainable farms and ranches while increasing their participation in USDA programs and services. Disappointingly, this program has only awarded 533 grants totaling more than $138 million since 1994. To me, that seems abysmal. The purpose of this program is to assure that farmers of color and military veterans have opportunities to successfully acquire, own, operate, and retain farms and equitably participate in all USDA programs. However, the maximum

amount that organizations can apply for is $250,000 per year for a 3-year grant project. I am recommending that this program be made more accessible by increasing funding by placing a special sustainable agriculture tax on companies and corporations that are contributing significantly to climate change as well as companies that have a documented role in perpetuating environmental racism on communities of color.

Policy Recommendation #6

I am proposing that a new agency within the USDA that focuses strictly on the advancement of success of minority groups within the U.S. food system and agricultural industry be formed. This agency, the National Institute of Food & Justice will implement an agricultural policy aimed at lifting communities of color, will be responsible for increasing the visibility of Black led narratives and recruiting Black people interested in entering this work as well as providing them with the resources to do so, will prioritize the recruitment of women and people of color from underrepresented communities, will provide scholarships to young people to encourage them to get involved in farming, and will invest in minority-led community farming programs and initiatives. This agency will have a transformative role in making sure that black farmers as well as other minority farmers finally receive equal access and opportunity to become vital assets in the United States food system and agriculture industry. This agency will help redefine our food system and empower communities of color to reimagine and redefine what it means to be involved in the production and consumption of food in the United States. It will no longer be acceptable to continue advancing the current system that is based on notions of white supremacy and black and brown inferiority. NIFJ (the National Institute of Food and Justice) will be committed to food justice and food sovereignty for communities of color throughout the United States. This would mean that a current agency within the USDA, the Farm Service

Agency, would have to release some of their responsibilities regarding minority communities. Both agencies could continue to work together on the overall improvement of and investment in minority farmers and relevant programming, but NIFJ will solely be dedicated to the goals and objectives listed above.

Policy Recommendation #7

My final legislative recommendation is that the United States Congress should pass the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act. This legislation would establish a commission that would examine slavery and discrimination in the colonies and the United States from 1619 to the present and recommend appropriate remedies. The idea of the commission itself is an appropriate step to take for the United States, and it closely resembles the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was assembled in South Africa after apartheid. However, while I do think this commission is necessary, I would also urge the federal government to pass a federal reparations package for Black Americans. Throughout history, other minority groups within the United States and other countries have received some sort of restitution for atrocities committed against them, but the United States has failed to adequately compensate Black Americans for 400 years of oppression and exclusion. Within this federal reparations package, I am recommending the following proposals:

1) Individual payments for descendants of enslaved Black Americans.

2) The restoration of voting rights for **all** formerly incarcerated people.

3) The creation of federal grants that would create entrepreneurial and business development opportunities as well as community investment projects in communities most impacted by mass incarceration.

4) Free college tuition to public colleges and universities for the descendants of enslaved Black Americans, retroactive student loan forgiveness for **all** Black people, and adequate funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities which are instrumental in producing African American scholars.

5) Implement a national educational curriculum for K-12 students that critically examines the political, economic, and social impacts of colonialism and slavery and eliminates the whitewashing of U.S. history.

6) A formal apology on behalf of the United States government for its role in the genocide of Native Americans, the Atlantic slave trade, and for the enslavement of forced African migrants.

7) An investment of funds in organizations that are led by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color that are working to alleviate environmental racism and injustices within communities.

8) The selling or leasing of federal land (of which there is more than 20%) descendants of enslaved Black Americans.

After generations of land theft, discrimination, and oppression, reparations are the only answer to fully combat the systemic racism faced by African Americans in the United States. In his 'I Have A Dream' speech, Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked insufficient funds. But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt." It

is past time for the United States to grant African Americans the checks and justice that they deserve.

Recommendations for Agricultural Reentry Programs

The following recommendations are specific steps that currently existing and future agricultural reentry programs should take to be the most successful.

- Incorporate education and integration with programming. Integration refers to providing a formerly incarcerated individual with all of the tools they need to get through life day in and day out while education refers to helping formerly incarcerated people understand why the world works the way it does.
- Create true leadership opportunities for formerly incarcerated people. These leadership positions should be more than titles. They should allow formerly incarcerated people to have organizational leadership and authority.
- If able, commit to implementing culinary and food industry training. The restaurant industry is a prime lifeline for formerly incarcerated people. Pairing the knowledge that is gained through gardening and horticultural practices with culinary training has the potential to launch formerly incarcerated into the restaurant industry where they have the potential to find long-term employment success.
- Participants must be informed of how Black and brown people have historically been ardent agricultural revolutionaries. Learning this history is vital to creating a culture of empowerment for program participants, and it lays the foundation of the principle of reclamation.

- The principle of reclamation should be at the heart of the program. Reclaiming self, reclaiming autonomy, reclaiming food, and reclaiming a connection to Earth should all be pillars of agricultural reentry programs. This is one of the main ways in which these programs transform individuals and communities because the idea of reclamation leads to the belief that our current systems do not have to function as they do currently. They are not working as they are and the way to dismantle these systems is for people to believe in new solutions and new ways of thinking.

As a final thought on this Capstone project, I turn to the words of Chairman Fred Hampton who once said, “Everything would be alright if everything was put back in the hands of the people, and we're going to have to put it back in the hands of the people.” I hope that agricultural reentry programs serve as a way for people to take back control of the food system, provide formerly incarcerated people the opportunities they deserve to flourish, help foster the idea that returning citizens are worthy and deserving of a second chance, and build stronger, more connected communities.

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