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**Alliance Building in the Food Sovereignty Movement:
Perspectives from Activists Advocating for Farmworker Justice and Agrarian Justice**

Sarah Ruszkowski

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of San Francisco
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Migration Studies

The College of Arts and Sciences

May 2021

**Alliance Building in the Food Sovereignty Movement:
Perspectives from Activists Advocating for Farmworker Justice
and Agrarian Justice**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
MASTER IN MIGRATION STUDIES

by **Sarah Ruszkowski**
May 2021

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

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May 14, 2021

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Abstract

The food sovereignty movement has come to encompass a wide-range of constituent groups, all with unique perspectives and interests. While some of these groups' goals align naturally, others present priorities differently, namely organizations that advocate for farmworker justice and those that advocate for agrarian justice. Because of the power imbalance embedded in this relationship as well as the racist, patriarchal, and neoliberal nature of agrarian capitalism, it can be challenging to navigate an equitable path forward. In this thesis, I examine whether and how food sovereignty as a broader umbrella movement is generative towards building ties between advocates for farmworker justice and agrarian justice. I embark on a study that seeks to learn how activists articulate, forge common cause, and surmount tensions under a food sovereignty framework. Interviews with activists reveal that there is a common recognition of the organizing power and history of success of farmworker organizations as well as the oppressive grip of agricultural corporations. There is also a demonstrated desire to build solidarity networks with groups across the food system and beyond. Still, activists' visions differ; some hope to reimagine the agricultural system, while others work within the confines of capitalism to ensure all workers' needs are met. The paper concludes with perspectives on solidarity efforts to move towards a just food system.

Keywords: Food sovereignty, Social movements, Farmworker justice, Agrarian justice

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On a more personal note, I am grateful to my nieces and nephews, Drew, Evie, Grace, Jack and Luke, who inspire me to leave the world a better place than I found it, by treading more lightly on the earth and caring more radically for those who reside there. And finally, to my partner, Forrest, for the post-class fresh baked blueberry scones and bucatini pomodoro to fuel me, the late-night jumping jacks and walks around the block to refocus my mind, and most of all for your unwavering belief in me and your constant reminder to keep finding myself.

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Introduction

My fondest family memories have been made in a small town in central Wisconsin called Wisconsin Rapids. My family and I spend much of our time together at Nepco Lake, swimming and fishing in the summer, and ice skating and playing hockey in the winter. During one visit, I ventured to the downtown block and noticed the main streets were filled with pink, cow-shaped signs that read, “NO CAFO.” I wondered what sparked the outrage. I soon learned that CAFO stood for “Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations” and the town was fighting an industrial farming project that would convert acres of wooded area to irrigated fields in order to grow enough feed for cows. The community was very concerned that this irrigation, pumping and additional manure would impact the water quality so they decided to go to court. Unfortunately, the community members did not win the Wisconsin Supreme Court case and the large industrial complex began construction. I tell this story because it was in this town, five years later, when I returned to conduct an interview for this project, that I began to see more clearly the connection between agriculture, migration, labor exploitation, and the dangerous grip of the transnational agribusiness regime.

In the United States, eighty-five percent of the meat consumed is produced by four corporations: Tyson, Smithfield, Cargill, and JBS (Farmers, Workers, and Rural Communities, 2019). These same four corporate giants are the perpetrators of forced displacement across the globe. In Guatemala, for example, the palm oil fields planted by Cargill suppliers have uprooted entire communities and in Nicaragua this colonization has disrupted Indigenous lands (Robinson, 2019). When communities are displaced and forced to find work elsewhere, it is often the same corporations that play a role in exploitative labor practices.

To combat these forces, many organizations in the US are powerfully mobilizing constituents to enact change. Specifically, within agriculture, these activists include those fighting for the rights of the environment, growers, farmworkers, food chain workers, consumers and food justice everywhere. The convergence of these activists can be located within the concept of food sovereignty, which is where my research has been grounded.

In what follows, I unpack the concept of food sovereignty, a critical alternative to food security, and focus on two constituent groups that are part of this movement: growers and farmworkers. Specifically, I focus on tensions and alliances between organizations that advocate for the rights of growers by way of agrarian justice and the rights of farmworkers by way of farmworker justice. My research question asks what opportunities and challenges exist in building stronger partnerships between organizations advocating for farmworker justice and those advocating for agrarian justice. I explore the hypothesis that the food sovereignty movement can produce greater impact, creating a political path forward through alliance building between these two types of organizations.

This thesis aims: 1) to explore US based organizations rooted in food sovereignty that advocate for the rights of farmworkers and the rights of growers; 2) to understand the challenges and opportunities that exist in coalition building between these two constituencies within the food sovereignty movement. In order to center the voices and struggles of activists fighting for farmworker justice and agrarian justice, this qualitative study employs a narrative design. By exploring coalition building in the food sovereignty movement, my hope is that my findings will inform solidarity efforts for groups united in a food sovereignty framework.

Methodology

This section of my thesis sets out to provide a conceptual framing for alliance building in food movements and to unpack my position as a researcher and how that relates to my work. The starting point of my work has been my growing understanding of how capitalism, racism, patriarchy and colonialism have been foundational features to the transformation of agriculture and rural spaces in the US. The US food system was built upon the occupation and genocide of indigenous people and their lands, followed by the enslavement of people from Africa, and today the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) continues to be entrenched racism and patriarchy. Hence, I believe that structural considerations must be addressed in order for a just food system to exist. Therefore, I am interested in the food sovereignty movement and I seek to find ways that a just path forward that dismantles concentrations of power within the food system can be achieved. In addition, I believe that understanding the dynamics of power, class and race is critical in order to determine the best path forward to restore, rebuild and heal collectively.

As a Master's student of Migration Studies, I apply Wallerstein's world-systems theory to understand and assess how neoliberal agricultural policies have impacted communities and lead to their forced migration (Wallerstein, 1987). Additionally, I identify as a woman, which guides my feminist perspective on an approach to agriculture, which has historically and continues to perpetuate patriarchy. Finally, my white identity as the great grandchild of Polish and Italian immigrants, positions me as a co-conspirator in solidarity, with the goal of supporting movements led by immigrants and people of color in the US.

All of the identities codify my positionality, which informs my methodological approach of centering the voices of activists in food movements, therefore I ground my research in a narrative format. In what follows, I highlight the voices of activists and worker-led organizations because I believe, as Arundhati Roy (2011) states below, the answers to multifaceted problems our world faces lie within the people who go to battle every day to protect their communities.

If there's any hope for the world at all, it does not live in climate change conference rooms or in cities with tall buildings, it lives low-down on the ground with its arms around the people who go to battle every day to protect their forests, their mountains and their rivers. Because they know the forests, the mountains and the rivers protect *them* (Arundhati Roy, 2011, as cited in Klein, 2015).

Methods

The main objective of my research is to understand the challenges and opportunities for coalition building between farmworker justice and agrarian justice focused organizations within the food sovereignty movement. I explore this emerging topic in search of ways to produce greater political impact and move towards a just food system. Due to the racist, patriarchal, and capitalist nature of agrarian capitalism – that between grower and farmworker – advancing the goals of both of these groups in an equitable way has proven challenging.

This research is needed because the US agricultural landscape is still dominated by agribusinesses who continue to infiltrate and extract capital in order to best serve their shareholders (Perfecto, 2009). In an effort to dismantle the current power structure in the food system, scholars and activists have mobilized by way of food sovereignty however, there is a need to further unite constituent groups in this movement in order to return power in the food

system to producers and consumers. Mobilizing agrarian justice and farmworker justice advocates around common goals could be a powerful step that impacts political advancement.

Using grounded theory, which moves fluidly between data collection and analysis processes (Glaser, 2017), I conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives from organizations that advocated for agrarian justice and farmworker justice. This conversation and dialogue is captured within my findings in a narrative format in an effort to center the voices of the communities doing on-the-ground work.

The first step in my research process was to construct lists of farmworker justice and agrarian justice focused organizations in the US that were also rooted in the ideals of food sovereignty. In order to identify these types of organizations, my first step was to review the United States Food Sovereignty Alliance (USFSA) member organizations listed on their website. I reviewed each member organization's description and determined if their mission incorporated farmworker justice or agrarian justice. In this process, their USFSA membership would demonstrate their affiliation with food sovereignty and their mission statement would confirm if they were situated in agrarian justice or farmworker justice. The original list I prepared contained nine organizations, listed in Figure 1. This list also includes the organization's location and their focus on farmworker justice (coded "FW") or agrarian justice (coded "A").

USFSA Members Focused on Farmworker or Agrarian Justice

Organization	Location	Focus
Agrarian Trust	New York	A
Community Alliance for Global Justice (CAGJ)	Seattle, WA	A
Family Farm Defenders	Madison, Wisconsin	A
Farmworker Support Committee	New Jersey/Pennsylvania	FW
Farmworkers Association of Florida	Apopka, FL	FW
Food Chain Workers Alliance	Los Angeles, CA	FW
Mississippi Association of Cooperatives	Mississippi	A
National Family Farmers Coalition	Washington, D.C.	A
Rural Coalition	Washington, D.C.	A/FW

Figure 1

After identifying these nine organizations, I also began networking with my professors during my courses and other activists during online webinars in search of referrals to organizations that might be interested in participating in this research project. As I started to obtain contact information, I began sending introductory emails to see if groups were open to participating. Additionally, when I began conducting interviews, I asked interviewees if there were any other organizations they would recommend researching. In the end, there were twenty-seven organizations on my list. These organizations are listed in Figure 1. This list also includes: 1) the organization's location in the US; 2) their membership in USFSA; 3) their focus on farmworker justice (coded "FW") or agrarian justice (coded "A"); 4) if I sent them an introductory inquiry via email; and 5) if I conducted an interview with a representative at the organization.

Food Movement Orientated Organizations and Interviews

Organization	Location	USFSA	Focus	Email	Interview
A Growing Culture	Asheville, NC		A	X	
Agrarian Trust	New York	X	A	X	
Community Alliance for Global Justice (CAGJ)	Seattle, WA	X	A	X	X
Coalition of Immokalee Workers	Florida		FW	X	X
Community to Community Development (C2C)	Bellingham, WA		FW	X	X
David Bacon	California		FW	X	X
Familias Unidas por la Justicia	Bellingham, WA		FW	X	X
Family Farm Defenders	Madison, Wisconsin	X	A		
Farm Aid	Cambridge, Massachusetts		A	X	
Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC)	North Carolina		FW		
Farmworker Justice	Washington, D.C.		FW		
Farmworker Support Committee	New Jersey, Pennsylvania	X	FW		
Farmworkers Association of Florida	Apopka, FL	X	FW	X	
Food Chain Workers Alliance	Los Angeles, CA	X	FW		
Land Loss Prevention Project	Durham, NC		A		
Laura Minkoff-Zern	New York		N/A	X	
Migrant Justice	Burlington, VT		FW	X	X
Mississippi Association of Cooperatives	Mississippi	X	A		
National Black Farmers Association	Baskerville, VA		A		
National Family Farmers Coalition	Washington, D.C.	X	A	X	X
National Farmers Union	Washington, D.C.		A		
National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association	Washington, D.C.		A		
Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste	Oregon		FW		
Rural Advancement Foundation International	Pittsboro, NC		A	X	X
Rural Coalition	Washington, D.C.	X	A/FW	X	
Southeastern African-American Farmers Organic Network (SAAFON)	Atlanta, GA		A		
United Farm Workers (UFW)	Keene, CA		FW	X	

Figure 2

The second step in my research was to reach out to contacts to gauge their interest in participation and to conduct interviews. I was able to reach out to fifteen organizations and conduct eight semi-structured interviews. I conducted three interviews with organizations that focused on farmworker justice located in Florida, Vermont and Washington; three organizations focused on agrarian justice located in North Carolina, Washington and Wisconsin; and activists/scholars located in California and New York. Of the six organizations, three were listed as member organizations of the USFSA. The roles of my interviewees ranged from Program Coordinators and Program Managers to Professors to Executive Directors and Presidents. These participants were speaking on behalf of the organization and are listed within the findings as “representatives” from an organization. Within the semi-structured interviews, I asked the questions listed in Figure 3. These questions were broken into categories of topics including: introduction, food sovereignty, movement building and conclusion.

Coalition Building in the Food Sovereignty Movement, Interview Questions

Topic	Question
Introduction	Tell me about your occupation and its relationship to the food system.
Food Sovereignty	How would you define the term food sovereignty? In what ways have you participated in the food sovereignty movement?
	Do you think there have been “wins” within the movement? If so, please elaborate. In what areas do you think there is room for growth?
Movement Building	Who do you consider allies in the movement? Who or what is the opposition? How do you think you can more successfully build allies?
	What overlap (if any) do you see in the goals of farmers and farmworkers in the vision of food sovereignty?
	What opportunities do you think exist to build more productive partnerships between farmworkers and farmers? Are there any barriers? If so, what challenges exist?
Conclusion	How do you envision a just regional food system? How do you envision a just domestic food system?

Figure 3

I conducted one interview in person, four via Zoom video conference, and three via phone. I recorded the audio of the in-person interview using Voice Memo and transcribed it manually. For the Zoom interviews, the transcriptions were automatically generated and I cleaned and formatted the text. Finally, for the phone interviews, I conducted the calls using speaker phone, and used Zoom as a recording tool that would then transcribe the text. After completing the transcriptions, I reviewed the texts and coded the interviews for themes of opportunities and challenges to alliance building, industrial and small-scale farming, solidarity networks and worker-led movements.

I observed the protection of human subjects and engaged participants in the process of informed consent by providing a written consent form and discussing the confidentiality of records and identity with participants (using pseudonyms where necessary). I identified and

discussed with participants the potential benefits specific to each organization, such as publicity or best practices for coalition building. I offered to share my findings with each participant.

These data will be used to understand if and how the food sovereignty movement can act as an avenue in which agrarian justice and farmworker justice advocates collaborate to produce greater political impact in order to move towards a just transition in the food system. It will examine the challenges and opportunities that exist for alliance building between agrarian justice and farmworker justice advocates with the lens of critical food studies.

The greatest limitation to my research was the amount of time allotted to the project. With more time I would have liked to conduct additional interviews with the long list of US organizations doing critical work around food justice and food sovereignty. In a similar vein, with each interview I was limited to one representative and just one hour of time. In order to conduct more in-depth qualitative research, I would have liked to work more closely with an organization and engage in participant observation and speak with multiple representatives to have a more comprehensive understanding of the organization.

Literature Review

Food Security, Food Sovereignty and Food Justice

Food Security as a Global Discourse

In order to understand the emergence of the food sovereignty movement, we must first unpack the evolution of “food security” as a concept to understand why it has been an organizing anchor for global intervention. The earliest definition of food security was shared in 1975 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). This definition states that food security is, “the availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices.” (United Nations 1975 cited in FAO 2003). Through the use of the terminology “production and prices,” this definition clearly points to a system built on neoliberal policies and international food production. In 1996, the definition of food security evolved declaring, “food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for a healthy and active life” (Pinstrup-Andersen, 2009). Note that in this definition the state purposefully fails to acknowledge who has social control of the systems and how food security is obtained, relieving themselves of any responsibility.

In 2003, FAO authored a new definition of food security citing, “food and nutrition security exists when all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to food, which is consumed in sufficient quantity and quality to meet their dietary needs and food preferences, and is supported by an environment of adequate sanitation, health services and care, allowing for a healthy and active life” (FAO, 2003). This new definition reflected a movement

towards “nutrition security” and included important elements like social and economic access to food. All of these elements came to shape the pillars of food security: availability, access, utilization and stability (Committee on World Food Security, 2014).

These elements of food security were critiqued extensively by activists and scholars who argued that food security does not matter unless people have more power in the food systems, rather than large corporations. For example, in his book, *Beginning to End Hunger*, M. Jahi Chappell details a case study in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, where he examines the successful Zero Hunger program that implemented holistic approaches to food security like policy changes in tandem with rural livelihoods and healthy ecosystems (Chappell, 2018). This began to reflect a broader understanding amongst the community that led to the change in pillars, which now morphed into availability, accessibility, adequacy, acceptability and agency (Chappell, 2018). Note the addition of the term “agency,” which refers to the policies and processes that enable the achievement of food security. This was in large part due to the community of activists and scholars. According to the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security (HLPE), agency refers to “the capacity of individuals or groups to make their own decisions about what foods they eat, what foods they produce, how that food is produced, processed and distributed within food systems, and their ability to engage in processes that shape food system policies and governance” (High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, 2020). The conversation about agency and power in the food system brings the discussion to the origins of the food sovereignty movement, which will be explored in what follows.

A Global Alternative: La Vía Campesina and Food Sovereignty

As the discussion around power in the food system evolved, the concept of food sovereignty, which originated in South and Central America, gradually reached the global level in large part due to the peasant farmer movement, La Vía Campesina (LVC) (Clendenning et. al, 2016). Instead of food security, La Vía Campesina advocated for “food sovereignty.” LVC is a coalition of organizations that advocate for sustainable agriculture and family-based farms. They argued that discussing policy and power was crucial to debating food security. In 1993, LVC coined the term food sovereignty which holds that food is a human right, rather than a commodity. This idea meant that local peoples – producers and consumers – had the right to determine their own foodways and exercise control over food practice and policy (La Vía Campesina, 2010). The organization’s definition of food sovereignty claims, “in order to protect livelihoods, jobs, people’s food security, and health, as well as the environment, food production has to remain in the hands of small-scale sustainable farmers and cannot be left under the control of large agribusiness companies or supermarket chains” (La Vía Campesina, 2010). Today, there are 182 member organizations of LVC in over 81 countries around the world (La Vía Campesina, 2010). This movement continues to gain momentum on the international stage and has proven successful in forging solidarity among groups on opposite ends of the globe.

Since its inception, scholars have analyzed inconsistencies in the broad definition of food sovereignty and grappled with the difficulties in translating rights within the food system into practical solutions. As sociologist and food scholar Raj Patel states, simply naming rights, as food sovereignty does, cannot avoid tough questions around the priority of those rights (Patel, 2009). In an effort to prioritize rights, Patel advocates for a “radical moral universalism” that challenges deep inequalities of power. He says, “If we talk about food sovereignty, we talk about

rights, and if we do that, we must talk about ways to ensure that those rights are met, across a range of geographies, by everyone, in substantive and meaningful ways” (Patel, 2009, p. 671).

Beyond the rights-based discussions, scholars have more recently urged that the food sovereignty movement shift from a “state-led” movement to one in which food governance starts from below, by way of participatory action. In his research, anthropologist Matthew Canfield reveals the success in forming networks bound by related struggle and “norm-setting”; for example, privileging the needs of the most marginalized groups (Canfield, 2020). He introduces the language “constituents” instead of “stakeholders,” arguing that the term stakeholder suggests that all parties are formally equal and “constituents” suggest that those who were most dependent on the food system should be at the center of decision-making processes (Canfield, 2020). Ideally, these constituents would form networks that participate in food governance and advance the needs of the most marginalized community.

The Birth of Food Justice in the United States

In recent years, the concept of food sovereignty has begun to grow in popularity in the United States. In 2009, the US Food Sovereignty Alliance (USFSA) was officially founded and became a member organization of LVC (US Food Sovereignty Alliance). Today, there are 56 member organizations of USFSA (US Food Sovereignty Alliance). The growing scholarship and activism related to food sovereignty in the United States has led to critical discussion specific to the US context. While food sovereignty calls for a more radical political structure and equal, democratized food systems, the concept of food justice emerged as a demand that the social movement address racial injustice and social inequities, which was missing in the US discourse. Scholar Jessica Clendenning (2016) describes the food justice movement’s birth in both Oakland

and New Orleans where it “grew out of racial inequalities, and was initially designed to promote food access, leading to more distributive food movements, such as the Black Panthers’ Free Breakfast Program” (p. 170). Food justice speaks to “the multiple ways that racial and economic inequalities are embedded within the production, distribution, and consumption of food” (Alkon & Mares, 2012). Some of their other critiques have concluded that these types of food movements should not only respond to ecological concerns, but also to racial and economic disparities (Alkon, 2014). Geographer Rasheed Hislop describes food justice 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” (Hislop, 2014, p. 19). Others have advocated for ways to “mobilize [activists] at the grassroots level to dismantle the classist and racist structural inequalities that are manifest in the consumption, production, and distribution of food” (Mares & Alkon 2011, p. 75).

However, as the idea of food justice became more popular in the US setting, activists and scholars began to see that the critical political language began to dissipate and there was a weakened association between the state and food production (Clendenning, 2016). For example, Alison Hope Alkon and anthropologist Teresa Marie Mares’ point out that movements in the US have often failed to challenge the systemic conditions that produce inequity and instead shift state responsibilities to individuals and market mechanisms (Alkon & Mares, 2012). Further, Alkon and Mares propose that the state and civil society be the “locus of reform,” rather than the market (Alkon & Mares, 2012). Clendenning (2016) adds, “Ideally, both movements could build upon one another: food justice spurring short-term action and rights in domestic contexts, while food sovereignty movements support longer-term national, regional and international networks and political action” (p. 175). Food justice, founded to fight structural racism and access to

resources, focused on the distribution of food within low-income communities and did not challenge the larger politics of food production (Clendenning, 2016).

As these movements were emerging and evolving, there were simultaneous efforts happening in the United States that coincided with the changing dynamics of food and agriculture. Next, I will discuss two constituent groups in these food movements and how their histories have led to their particular priorities and movement building.

Agrarian Justice

Agrarian Capitalist Transformation

Following World War II, the capitalization of agriculture expanded exponentially in the United States (Perfecto, 2009). Soon after, industrialized farming made its debut, with the goal of increasing food security by way of increased yields through larger plots sizes, additional technology and more pesticides (Perfecto, 2009). Substitutions like fertilizer for compost and manure, tractors for animal power, and pesticides for biological processes (Perfecto, 2009) reduced the value added within the farm itself and increased the need for inputs from outside companies (Perfecto, 2009). The increased reliance on off-farm inputs shifted the power from family growers to agribusinesses and left family growers vulnerable to the outside market, and many displaced from their livelihoods, relocating in search of work (Perfecto, 2009). The continued monopolization in agriculture has allowed very few corporations to continue to dominate the market, leaving producers with only a fraction of the final market price of their goods (Clapp, 2016).

Consolidation of US Farmland

In light of the conglomeration of the agricultural sector, scholars have debated why family farmers have not been completely replaced by corporate farms. Perfecto (2009) points out that, “Farming is the process of turning seeds into harvestable crops with the use of labor, energy and other resources, like land and water. Agriculture is not just farming, but also the production of agricultural inputs, and the processing, packaging, transportation, and marketing of the outputs” (p. 75). In other words, farming is the risky and unpredictable aspect of the work and agribusinesses infiltrate the “scale-able”, profitable side of the business. This intervention leaves growers vulnerable to variable harvests and unpredictable weather patterns and without a sufficient profit margin, making only about 10 percent of what consumers pay for food at the supermarket (Perfecto, 2009). For these reasons, scholars study agrarian change, which examines how agriculture has changed over time and how capitalist forces have driven that change.

Emergence of Agrarian Justice

In response to these powerful capitalist forces, strong opposition emerged from activists, scholars and growers, and several organizations formed with the goal of advocating for the rights of growers. In the United States, agrarian justice has gravitated towards the conservation of small family farming, in direct opposition to agribusiness and industrial farming. Specifically, US organizations that advocate for small family farmers include the National Farmers Union (NFU) and National Family Farmer Coalition (NFFC), National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association (NLFRTA), among others. Many of these organizations propose fair crop prices, sound environmental farming practices, and programs to address loss of land ownership in order to arrive at a more just food system. While this powerful grassroots organizing has led to many

significant successes, large and very large family farms still produce over 63 percent of the value of all products sold, and non-family farms produce approximately 21 percent (National Institute of Food and Agriculture). The continual growth in size of farms and the decline in the number of small family farms has translated to less family members working on farms and an increase in commercial agriculture and therefore more hired farm labor (Wiggins, 2020). This changing dynamic further capitalizes agriculture and reveals blatant failures and injustices in the food system for farmworkers.

Farmworker Justice

New Deal Labor Laws and Agriculture

The United States' food system has historically relied and continues to rely on severely exploited labor (Brent, Schiavoni, & Alonso-Fradejas, 2015). As Brent, Schiavoni, & Alonso-Fradejas (2015) state, "from slaves to sharecroppers to immigrant food and farmworkers, structural racism has served to dehumanize and criminalize those who are most marginalized in the food system" (p. 629). In the 1930s, the New Deal federal labor laws made significant changes to regulations and rights for industrial laborers, including the National Labor Relations Act, which governs worker organizing and collective bargaining, and the Fair Labor Standards Act, which ensures minimum wage, overtime provisions, and child labor laws (Wiggins, 2020). Of note, farmworkers were intentionally omitted from these standards (Wiggins, 2020). This exception, as well as that of domestic workers, originated because legislators and other powerful figures did not want the 65% of African Americans working in these two industries to receive the same treatment as their white counterparts (Triplett, 2004). In response to this omission, in the 1940s, African American farmworkers began organizing for higher wages and better working conditions (Wiggins, 2020).

Bracero Program and Guest Worker Visa Program

While African American farmworkers were organizing, growers were lobbying with government officials to replace organized workers with new unorganized labor through a temporary guest-worker visa program (Wiggins, 2020). As such, in 1942, the United States and Mexico formalized a temporary documented Mexican labor force called the Bracero Program (Hing, 2012). This program was preferable for government lobbyists and growers as labor on the move did not enable growth of a strong union (Bacon, 2008). In 1964, however, the Bracero Program was terminated and its failure led to the prominence of undocumented immigrants and widespread labor abuses in the United States (Hing, 2012).

Following the Bracero Program, the government implemented the H2-A visa program. The H-2A visa program is considered an extension of the Bracero Program because it was “designed to meet the needs of US growers” (Mize & Swords, p. 94) and “guaranteed the option of employing immigrant workers if citizens were not willing to work in agriculture” (Mize & Swords, p. 94). In 1983, the federal government subsequently passed the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act, regulating certain housing, employment, and transportation standards. However, H-2A visa holders were exempt from this protection (Wiggins, 2020). As a result, it has been assumed that federal regulations will never come to fruition and therefore advocates have worked to improve local laws, therefore agricultural labor laws vary drastically by state.

Emergence of Farm Worker Justice

Due to the racist omission of the New Deal labor law protections, the termination of the Bracero Program and the introduction of H-2A visa program, farmworkers have been continually exploited. Today, the number of undocumented farmworkers range from 1.5 to 2 million, about 50% to 70% of all U.S. farmworkers (Curtis et. al, 2020). The undocumented status of a large number of farmworkers leaves them at an extreme disadvantage, because the threat of deportation is very real and discourages unionization (Mize & Swords, p. 51). Although there have been and still continue to be significant challenges and barriers in organizing, power has been harnessed from grassroots farmworker justice organizations. Founded in the 1960s by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, the United Farm Workers (UFW) was the first farm worker union in the United States (Wiggins, 2020). In the 1970s, UFW had over 50,000 members and worked to negotiate contracts and lobby for legislative changes (Wiggins, 2020). This work continues today as evidenced by the formation of new unions like Familia Unidas por la Justicia (FUJ) in 2017 in Washington state. Specific farm worker-led campaigns and solidarity movements, such as the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' (CIW) Campaign for Fair Food, UFW's historical grape boycotts, and FUJ's apple strikes during the Coronavirus health pandemic, provide us with additional glimpses of this organizing success (Minkoff-Zern, 2014). Farmworkers have been a crucial agent in reimagining the food system and as evidenced by the successful campaigns of farmworker justice organizations.

Coalition Building Among Food Movements Activists

While both are constituents in the food sovereignty movement, alliances between farmworker justice organizations and agrarian justice focused organizations have not been thoroughly explored. Food scholars, Brent, Schiavoni, & Alonso-Fradejas (2015), suggest that US growers cannot successfully organize within the food sovereignty movement alone. In order to have a political impact, they claim that agrarian justice organizations like the National Family Farmers Coalition (NFFC) need to mobilize allies more broadly. They conclude that one of these opportunities for intersection is uniting with farmworkers and growers, and advancing both agendas under the umbrella of food sovereignty (Brent, Schiavoni, & Alonso-Fradejas, 2015). Dolores Huerta of the United Farm Workers agreed, arguing that, “although many small farmers are presently opposed to the farmworker’s union, it is in the long run interest of family farmers and farmworkers to join together against big growers and corporations” (Brent, Schiavoni, & Alonso-Fradejas, 2015, p. 628). With these critiques and scholarship in mind, when it comes to alliance building between growers and farmworkers, there has still been “a profound area of silence” according to Eric Holt Giménez and is “far more challenging than the authors of the definition [of food sovereignty] might hope” (Patel, 2009, p. 666).

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Can the food sovereignty movement act as an avenue in which farmworker justice advocates and agrarian justice advocates build stronger coalitions, move towards collective action and shape political impact? The answer to this question proved to be complex. Interviews with activists revealed that there was a mutual recognition of a common oppressor, agricultural corporations, and there were aspirations to move beyond this oppression. However, priorities and tactics used to reach these goals diverged as many farmworker justice organizations found more success negotiating with large industrial farming operations and corporations, which does not always align with agrarian justice organizations' visions of small family farming. This reveals one of the largest tensions. Below I will unpack the area of intersection among these activists as well as the apparent tensions at play.

The Oppressive Grip of Agricultural Corporations

Throughout the interviews, activists who organized around farmworker justice and agrarian justice both spoke about the oppressive grip of agricultural corporations. Organizations that advocate for agrarian justice pointed to the policy failures and lack of regulation within agriculture. A representative from NFFC, an agrarian justice organization, discussed the conglomeration of transnational agribusiness, the conflict of interest within local governments, and the need to listen to "real people" when it comes to new legislation. They problematized organizations like the National Corn Growers, the American Soybean Council, and the National Cattlemen's Association, citing that their interests supposedly represent commodity growers,

however their actions represent the interests of companies that manufacture chemicals, purchase corn and own meat packing plants. When asked about obstacles to coalition building, the representative from NFFC pointed to the larger system of state government and lobbyists, citing:

In state governments, it's a real obstacle to change the system of farming to something better, when politicians seem to only listen to the industry trade groups, pesticide manufacturers or the processing companies. They gear all of the legislation and regulation to cater to their needs rather than to protecting the environment and helping people farm in a way that could work very nicely and be better for the environment. I think a real obstacle is that we have to elect people that understand and are willing to listen to real people, not just lobbyists who just want to make more money. (Interview, July 12, 2020)

When discussing challenges within coalition building, a representative from farmworker justice organization, C2C, discusses this same oppressive behavior from the lens of farmworker union organization. For example, in Washington, two independent farmworker unions organized successful boycotts that put pressure on companies like Sakuma Farms and Chateau Ste.

Michelle to improve wages and working conditions. After a collective bargaining agreement was established, the companies thrived and no longer experienced worker shortages or encountered other significant issues. However, in each case, the companies refused to promote that they had a union contract or cite any beneficial aspects of the agreement. A representative from C2C shared that these companies are fearful of backlash from corporate farming groups, stating:

If they do [promote their union contract], it's going to encourage other farmers to sign collective bargaining agreements and it will inhibit the power of corporate farming. They will no longer be able to control the workforce to a quasi-slave labor force that they have

now. It discourages farmworkers from organizing and it discourages farmers from forming relationships with farmworkers and farmworker groups that have equity.

(Interview, October 20, 2020)

Even before organizers can launch campaigns, policy influencers often sabotage collaboration between farmworker justice organizers and agrarian justice organizers. The representative from C2C provides an example stating that when a farm comes close to signing a collective bargaining agreement with a farmworker union, organizations like The American Farm Bureau Federation and other political organizations try to halt the process. These groups fear that a relationship of mutual benefit and peace between grower and farmworker could generate power and lessen the corporate farming hold on the food system.

On the opposite coast of the US, when asked if they saw any overlap between the goals of farmworkers and those of small family growers, a representative from RAFI in North Carolina, discusses the oppressive nature of the poultry industry, particularly the agricultural contract system. They note that 99% of the chicken that's grown in the US is grown under contract. In this contract system, a company like Tyson Foods, Inc. will approach a grower, and offer them a contract if they build chicken houses. In order to pursue this opportunity and build the houses, the grower will take out a loan, between five hundred thousand to one million dollars. Because of the contract agreement, the grower who invested in the houses does not actually own the chickens. The grower owns the house, for which they are in debt, the waste, and the dead birds, but legally does not own the chickens. This scenario clearly depicts Perfecto's (2009) analysis of the present state of agriculture: farming is the risky and unpredictable aspect of the work, and agribusinesses (in this case Tyson Foods, Inc.) infiltrate the "scale-able", profitable side of the business, leaving growers vulnerable and without a sufficient profit margin. Growers earn only

about 10 percent of what consumers pay for food at the supermarket (Perfecto, 2009). A representative from RAFI comments on this exploitation within the poultry industry saying:

I don't want to say that it's the same type of oppression, but it's the same oppressor. I think that people often get divided because our farmworkers and our meat packing workers are often immigrants, people of color, whereas the farmers in these situations are typically older white males. So, the farmers have been taught to discriminate against the workers in a lot of ways. And I think that what we're trying to do is be part of a movement that brings these groups together and show, y'all have a common oppressor, y'all have a common enemy. You're both being stepped on by this large multinational corporation. (Interview, September 25, 2020)

The case of contract chicken farming is a prime example of one corporate food group, Tyson Foods, Inc., exploiting several groups in the food system simultaneously. However, as a representative from RAFI states, the various groups that are being exploited are not natural allies, given the nature of the employer/employee relationship and more importantly the racism and discrimination faced by people of color.

Similar data is also found in the literature. As Roman-Alcalá (2020) points out, the success of rightwing politics in rural spaces in the United States is reliant on this concept of Othering, which “pits some non-elites against ‘Othered’ groups by dehumanizing the latter” (17). In the case of farmworkers and growers, the conservative narrative employed around white supremacy, xenophobia, anticommunism, and free market idealism (Roman-Alcalá, 2020) serves two purposes: recruiting rural white folks to their party and sabotaging the formation of partnerships between these two groups (as a representative from C2C points out above). This is not to say that racism and discrimination did not exist before this infiltration of “rightwing

ideological projects.” Rather, these rural spaces were in a sense “primed” for this messaging as the US agricultural landscape was built upon ideals of white supremacy and “free market” as early as the occupation and genocide of indigenous people and their lands and followed by the enslavement of people from Africa up until present day discrimination against farmers of color within the USDA.

Representatives from these three organizations, each in different regions in the United States, all point out their common enemy, agricultural corporations. Additionally, both farmworker justice and agrarian justice activists exhibit an understanding that corporate farming groups strategically pit them against one another for their own interest. Here we see food sovereignty as an opportunity for partnership and collaboration between these two groups. As LVC states:

“Common problems unite us... but what also unites us are great aspirations... What unites us is a spirit of transformation and struggle... We aspire to a better world, a more just world, a world where real equality and social justice exist. These aspirations and solidarity in rural struggles keep us united in the *Vía Campesina* (La *Vía Campesina*, 2006)

This section has highlighted the “common struggles” between farmworker justice and agrarian justice activists, that is, the corporate control and political influence in the food system which is cited as a barrier to coalition building. However, interviews revealed that the more specific tactics around “aspirations” for these two groups differ, proving that there are challenges in moving forward. In what follows, I will explore the areas in which these two groups diverge and seek to understand if the food sovereignty framework can assist in overcoming these tensions.

Industrial Farming versus Small Scale Family Farms

Although there is a common recognition of the exploitative nature of agricultural corporations, there are significant tensions in terms of tactics and coalition building between farmworker justice and agrarian justice activists. For example, for many farmworker justice organizations, the main concern is eliminating labor abuses, obtaining good working and living conditions and establishing fair wages and immigration policies. In response to interview questions about collaborating with small family farmers, many farmworker groups stated that the size of the farm does not play a role in the presence of good or bad working conditions, even though the general public tends to think that issues are mostly encountered on large industrial farms. In fact, many small growers are often the ones fighting back against labor reforms, entering political spaces to lobby against increased wages and improved benefits for workers. In New York state, for example, when the state legislature was voting on Farm Laborers Fair Labor Practices Act in 2019, which mandated overtime pay in an effort to stop wage theft (Golden, 2020), small scale growers in New York were highly opposed and spoke publicly against these new protections. This leads many farmworkers to pursue work with larger growers. Scholar Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern finds this in her research, adding that many farmworkers prefer to work on large, industrial farms because they provide better wages and benefits. She states:

For organic farmers and small-scale farmers, we assume that they have better ethics around labor, but they usually don't. When they can't even pay for their own health insurance, they certainly can't pay for an employees' health insurance. So, a lot of farmworkers would rather work on a big farm. (Interview, October 9, 2020)

In addition to similar labor abuses on farms regardless of size, many organizations' successful organizing tactics include negotiating fair wages and working conditions with large corporations

or industrial size growers. This tactic is much more efficient because it will positively impact a much larger group of farmworkers than bargaining with one small farm at a time. A representative from Migrant Justice, a farmworker justice organization in Vermont, for example, expressed the necessity to address the problems encountered on farms on a larger platform. For example, if there is a case of wage theft on a small farm, the organization needs to work directly with a grower to resolve the issue and collect payment on behalf of the farmworker. If that effort does not succeed, Migrant Justice needs to report the case to the Department of Labor, which usually amounts to no enforcement. In this case, the farmworker typically leaves the farm and loses a week of payment due to a lack of enforcement mechanism. A representative from Migrant Justice shares a story detailing experience:

We had a worker that was really sick and hospitalized because the housing condition had rats and was terrible. The workers have been trying to organize there for months, asking the farmer for better housing. The farmer didn't have the money to build a new house. But also, the willingness to provide a dignified place for workers had not been shown. The farm is still working, still functioning. People are still drinking the milk from the farm. But a worker almost died there. (Interview, September 24, 2020)

The gravity of this testimony points to a significant challenge for farmworker justice and agrarian justice activists: oversight and enforcement of labor protections. It is much more efficient and beneficial for farmworkers to monitor and enforce labor standards on large industrial farms rather than mandating these working conditions one small farm at a time. This practice, however, runs contrary to the aspirations of agrarian justice organizations, many who advocate for small family farming and an end to corporate domination of the industry.

In addition to efficiency in organizing and standardization of labor practices, industrial growers and corporations typically are the actors with the financial means to satisfy the demands of farmworker unions and organizations. For this reason, organizations like the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), who launched the highly successful Fair Food Program in 2001, target food corporations and demand that their supply chains eliminate human rights abuses. As part of the Fair Food Program, activists at CIW organize in different communities and educate people about the problems that farmworkers are facing. Then, they put public pressure on corporations to sign agreements that eliminate labor abuses and mandate fair wages and conditions. Once a corporation signs onto the Fair Food Program, growers who are a part of that particular food chain must comply with all standards determined by CIW and the corporation or they risk losing the business. In a representative from CIW's view, this incentivizes that growers provide good working conditions for farmworkers. They cite:

It's financially reasonable for these farms to implement these protections. Because if not, they lose business with these big-time corporations. So, all of this is already a partnership. So, our contract is with the corporations and in the contracts, we demand that they abide by these terms about how farmworkers are treated within their supply chain. And then these corporations will do business with the farms. But again, the contract is between the CIW and the corporation itself. (Interview, November 13, 2020)

In the case of the Fair Food Program, a representative from CIW attests that under the Fair Food Program, farmworkers' rights are respected and they are active participants in monitoring their work conditions, educating communities about the program and collaborating with auditors on farm inspections. This model has been highly successful and has been implemented in other regions of the US, including at Migrant Justice in Vermont. It has earned several awards and

Harvard Business Review named it among the “most important social-impact success stories of the past century” (Wolf Ditzkoff & Grindle, 2019). This organization and its model were also mentioned by name in several interviews with both farmworker justice and agrarian justice organizations, many activists citing that they are a very strong ally and their model is unique and highly successful. CIW’s model also provides a model for solidarity beyond the food system within the Worker-Driver Social Responsibility (WSR) network. They state:

We're open to seeing how this model again can be adjusted and taken to other workers, be it farmworkers or any worker, so that they no longer face the abuses and problems that we were once facing. (Interview, November 13, 2020)

Perhaps in the case of the Fair Food Program, there need not be a partnership thread by way of food sovereignty between farmworker justice and agrarian justice organizations as this model is one in which farmworkers rights are advanced and growers receive increased wages. However, tension around corporate domination and ecological implications remain. Even still, almost all groups were consistent in their long-term vision and aspiration for the future: dignity and rights for workers, land reform, and a just transition. Where they diverged, though, was the steps to arrive there. One farmworker justice organization stated that these methods were more of a lifesaving method, rather than a long-term tactic. Some groups hoped to reimagine the agricultural system, while others work within the confines of capitalism to ensure all workers’ needs are met.

Building Solidarity Networks

Whether organizations lean more towards working within the system or transforming it, each organization did express interest in solidarity networks. Agrarian justice organizations

discussed their desire to work alongside the powerful work of farmworker justice organizations. There are two and a half million farmworkers in the United States (“Who Are Farmworkers”), compared to 273,000 small farms (1-9 acres) in the US (“Census of Agriculture 2017”). David Bacon, union organizer and journalist, shared that these two groups can only obtain power by taking it away from food corporations, suggesting there is significant opportunity:

The farmworker movement is able to take up the concerns of the small producers to be more powerful. And the conditions under which food is produced on the stranglehold of big corporations over the market. (Interview, September 15, 2020)

Some organizations are already leaning into ways to be creative, forming partnerships and standing in solidarity with partners. A representative from Migrant Justice adds that one of their organization’s goals is to work with allies to amplify their voices. Another organization offers a complimentary response: a representative from Washington organization Community Alliance for Global Justice (CAGJ) states,

I think our role is primarily a solidarity organization, especially being primarily white. We've positioned ourselves primarily as a solidarity organization to support the efforts of people of color and also low-income white folks that are organizing. There are different things we do to try to amplify and make people aware of all that great justice work that's going on. (Interview, September 11, 2020)

This desire to form solidarity networks is hopeful, however there remains significant tensions in terms of tactics and coalitions between farmworker justice and agrarian justice activists, industrial farming being the biggest barrier. Below I will put these tensions into dialogue and explore the ways if and how food sovereignty can unite the two groups and overcome tensions.

Discussion

Eric Holt-Giménez's (2011) call for “Food Movements to Unite” is a hopeful strategy for pushing the food system closer to a just transition in a collective way. However, for some of the groups involved in the food movement, specifically farmworker justice and agrarian justice organizations, there are significant tensions in coalition building. This data reveals that while both farmworker justice and agrarian justice advocates find common ground in the oppressive grip of agricultural corporations and hold a similar vision for a just food system, the current tactics to advance agendas and achieve goals are not always cohesive and tensions surface. The main source of tension exists within the confines of capitalism. That is, farmworker justice groups who are organizing against human rights abuses and for the dignity and rights of workers experience much more success establishing agreements with large growers and corporations, because of the number of farmworkers employed by them and also their capacity and financial means to satisfy the demands of the workers. The increased power of large corporations and industrial growers, however, runs contrary to the goals of agrarian justice organizations whose goals are to move away from corporate domination and towards smaller family farming.

Although this tension presents a significant challenge, the common ground that was named by many organizations can still serve a valuable purpose in movement building. The vision of food sovereignty is the common aspiration, and the different tactics can be guided by Patel's (2009) “radical moral universalism” that challenges deep inequalities of power. With similar goals in mind and rooted in the vision of food sovereignty, these constituents who desire to build stronger networks of solidarity, could, as Canfield (2020) states, participate in food governance together by first advancing the needs of the most marginalized community, in this case the rights of farmworkers. Therefore, calls to action should be led by farmworker justice

organizations and once these workers' rights are achieved and immigration policies amended, the movement can address concerns like land reform and wealth redistribution.

Additionally, the food sovereignty movement can be an avenue in which rural communities fortify Roman-Alcalá's (2020) idea of an "anarchist" lens, which shifts strategy away from states and towards grassroots capacity. This grassroots work takes place among diverse peoples and counters forms of Othering while building active solidarity (Roman-Alcalá, 2020). Similarly, the food sovereignty movement advocates for producers and consumers to be able to exercise control over food practice and policy (Vía Campesina, 2010). This then could counter forms of Othering and bring together two interest groups: farmworkers and growers.

In short, the principles of the food sovereignty movement can bring these two constituent groups together in their common cause, but it may not be enough to map out a clear path forward. Therefore, farmworker justice organizations, who have led successful campaigns should lead the way. The food sovereignty movement can foment a partnership due to this mutual recognition and can become a powerful organizing strategy within rural communities. A representative from agrarian justice organization, NFFC points to this role as partners in solidarity stating,

It's not just about the fact that people need to be paid fairly and have decent food, but the whole culture that allows money to dominate so that racism is acceptable; that culture has to change. I think that's maybe the next stage of movement building. We need to, as people of privilege, just shut up and say, okay how do we change this? The people who have been oppressed need to be listened to, and maybe they have a better way to figure it out than we do, because we haven't been doing too good. (Interview, July 12, 2020)

How can groups first and foremost ensure that farmworkers' rights are met and food chains are free from human rights abuses while simultaneously moving away from "living in the heart of capitalism" as one farmworker justice mentions? If growers are "price takers" and not "price makers," as one research participant stated, perhaps the success and power of farmworker justice organizations can launch both groups to the category of "price makers" and ensure just wages for all. By first finding common ground in many of the aspirations of the food sovereignty movement, farmworker justice and agrarian justice groups can strengthen solidarity networks, harnessing power together to take on these large corporations and move towards a more just food system.

Conclusion

In order to examine whether and how the food sovereignty movement could act as an avenue in which farmworker justice and agrarian justice advocates collaborate to produce greater political impact, this thesis explored the opportunities and challenges that exist in coalition building. Interviews with activists demonstrated that there was a common recognition among farmworker and agrarian justice groups of the oppressive behaviors of agricultural corporations and a common vision of a food system free from corporate domination. In addition, both groups expressed a desire to strengthen solidarity networks; agrarian justice organizations noting the success of powerful farmworker unions, and farmworker justice organizations in search for partnerships that amplify the demands of their members and center worker-led movements. In terms of achieving this vision, however, interviews revealed that tactics are not always cohesive, and sometimes in conflict. For example, farmworker justice groups have seen much more success negotiating fair wages and working conditions with large corporations and industrial size growers. That is because it is much more efficient to work with large growers, rather than one small farm at a time, and industrial growers have the financial means to satisfy the unions' demands. Although powerful and essential organizing work, it does not necessarily align with the aspiration of small family farming and an end to corporate domination of the industry. This reveals the largest tension: how to work within these limits while dismantling concentrations of power in the food system? Or rather, how can groups first and foremost ensure that farmworkers' rights are met and food chains are free from human rights abuses while simultaneously moving away from corporate domination in the food system?

Therefore, while the vision of food sovereignty brought these two constituent groups together in their common cause, it may not be enough to map out a clear path forward tactically. Future scholarship could engage in more in-depth qualitative research with a smaller number of organizations to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of organizational structure and tactics in coalition building. What this framework can do, however, is offer an avenue to strengthen solidarity networks used to mobilize around the most urgent issues. For example, farmworker justice groups have long demanded an end to the H2-A guest worker program. With a well-established solidarity network, agrarian justice organizations could express public opposition to a current piece of legislation that would increase the number of H2-A visas, the Farmworker Modernization Act. United in their common vision, food movement activists can center the most urgent demands of constituent groups in the food sovereignty movement, acting in solidarity to dismantle concentrations of power and move towards a just food system.

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