Celebration of Food: The Roles of Celebration in Community-Building at a CSA in Brantford, ON

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CELEBRATION OF FOOD:
The Roles of Celebration in Community-Building at a CSA in Brantford, ON

A Creative Major Research Project Submitted by
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In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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Introduction

We are currently in the middle of an international food crisis, coupled with a cultural crisis. The combination of the two in academics is a fairly new concept, having first been coined by Wendell Berry just over 25 years ago in The Unsettling of America (Berry, 1990), and is focused on the growing alienation between the human population and our natural food systems. This transformation has taken place over the last century and has resulted in Canada and the United States (among others) transforming from nations of predominately farmers and rural populations to a majority of urban dwellers. This shift has resulted in us losing the knowledge of where our food comes from and how it grows (Kimbrell, 2002). Not only have we distanced ourselves in terms of education, but we have also distanced ourselves physically, with much of our food traveling thousands of kilometres before it reaches the local grocery store (Halweil 2002, Besthorn 2003, Foer 2009, Ryan 2014). Prior to our current system (the industrial method of food production), many farmers grew a diverse range of crops in order to feed both their families and their communities. However, due to increasing corporatization of the food system (Kimbrell 2002, Ryan 2014), the majority of individuals around the globe depend on the industrial food system for their sustenance.

The industrial model of food production is defined as “food that depends on massive chemical and biological inputs, large monocultures (single crop farms), and factory-style farms” (Kimbrell, 2002...
This method of farming results in large corporate profits while leaving farmers with a low financial income. It was adopted and gained popularity following the Second World War—during which time the bulk of the control shifted from small-scale local farmers to increasingly consolidated, corporate controlled enterprise ensconced within an increasingly global agricultural trade system\(^1\). This was broadly seen as a technological triumph for mankind over nature, building its foundation on the claim that monoculture farming systems and industrial oriented processing of animals could effectively feed the world’s growing population (Grey, 2000). However, despite its previous and continued support by governments who are often under pressure by international agribusinesses (Foer 2009, Ryan 2014), increasing levels of opposition have been aimed at the industrial system in myriad forms of academic research, grassroots alternatives and local practices, as well as food activism (Feagan, 2007). Concerns include the unsustainable use of fossil fuels in all of their direct and derivative forms in agriculture (fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides etc.), water overuse and contamination, topsoil degradation, loss of biodiversity, large scale food insecurity, animal mistreatment and abuse, and a host of health issues in both the human and animal populations (Horrigan et al, 2002, Foer 2009, Thompson 2010, Ryan 2014).

One significant manner in which this opposition has manifested itself has been in the form of Alternative Food Systems (AFSs), a network of grassroots alternatives that have become as diverse as the concerns raised around the industrial agricultural model. Such AFS elements include: permaculture farming, organic production, seed-saver organizations, eco-labeling programs, community land trusts, farmers’ markets, home and community gardens, and community supported agriculture (CSAs) (Feagan & Henderson 2009, Blay-Palmer 2008, Constance et al 2014, Ryan 2014). These projects and methods are directly challenging the industrial model by reconnecting consumers with producers, creating and repairing bonds between community members and their food sources, producing healthy and

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\(^1\) Although there is a growing corporate control of the agricultural trade system – there are areas such as the Global South where this shift is still in the process of happening.
sustainable food, and challenging its commodification (Beckett et al 2012, Mooney et al 2014, Constance et al 2014, Long & Murray 2014). Many AFSs also contain a celebratory culture in their efforts to create food systems which are more socially, environmentally, and culturally sustainable. Harvest festivals, community celebrations and gatherings, and educational experiences are a staple of many CSAs and farmers’ markets (Sumner, Mair & Nelson 2010, Frost & Laing 2013).

Due to the immense diversity of AFS elements, there is also a large range of potential research topics. The objective of this particular research is to examine a specific AFS element – CSAs, with a focus on a case study of a Southwestern CSA share located at Devon Acres Organic Farm. This is a creative research project, which means it focuses on an alternative form of research and data collection. The project includes the hosting of a “Celebration of Food” event on the grounds of Devon Acres and will also explore share members’ perspectives on celebration and its influence on community building within the CSA. At its foundation, these ideas are inspired by the Slow Food movement for example, which promotes sustainable local practices of food production and consumption and aims to foster a deeper appreciation for both local food and the individuals growing it, a philosophy that aligns closely with that of CSAs (Tencati & Zsolnai 2012, Frost & Laing 2013). To better explore this specific alternative to the profit driven dominant system, ideas from the integration of social and environmental theory dubbed “eco-socialism” will provide the framework under which associated concepts and practices within the AFS and CSA specifically, will be drawn on as means from which to view the case study. Cloutier and Schwenkler (2011) theorize that CSAs (as well as other AFSs) are growing in popularity due to the fact that they adopt eco-socialist perspectives implicitly perhaps, where profit is not the only factor which is considered. Through exploring past literature, situating the project within the context of Brantford/Brant County, an explanation of the event, and a discussion on the findings, this project will explore the perspectives of celebration and how share members’ view it impacting the CSA community.
Literature Review

The Industrial Food System

“One of the primary results – and one of the primary needs – of industrialism is the separation of people and places and productions from their histories.” (Berry, 2002 p.7)

The industrial food system is a product of the industrial era of the last two centuries, and most closely associated with the economic restructuring in the Global North post WW2 (1940s). During this time, some of the key changes included shifts to larger farm sizes, monoculture plant production and industrial levels and methods of meat, dairy and egg production. Control and profit shifted from small-scale family run farms to corporations and large-scale industrial farming enterprises. In the late 1990s, the advent of genetically engineered (GE) foods exacerbated trends in corporate ownership of the food system at the international level, giving corporations an increasing power over food production and, in some elemental sense, over the source of life itself. Large agribusinesses such as Monsanto, which is currently the largest multinational seed company (Monsanto, 2015), bought up multiple other seed companies and drafted the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights Agreement in 1996, securing their patent on all GE seeds modified by the corporation (Shiva, 2009).

The loss of farmer seed rights, and thereby decreasing control over the food system, has taken its toll on communities in multiple ways. Along with the increasing disconnection from food and a growing corporate control came the simultaneous loss of biodiversity, smaller family run farms, and a growing concern about environmental and cultural impacts (Kimbrell, 2002). With food increasingly sourced from outside the local community (Foer 2009, Ryan 2014), accompanied by decreasing information about both food sources and who grew it, individuals end up participating in only the end stage – consumption. Little is known about the farm the product was grown on, the farmer who grew it,
what chemicals were used, or how long it had to be transported before it reached the table (Farmageddon, 2011). The production of food is increasingly taking place out of sight of the consumer, on larger monoculture farms which offer little to no interaction between the customer and the farmer. For example; in Ontario in 1921, there were over 200,000 farms across the province. As of 2011, there were an estimated 51,950 farms, the majority of them using industrial production techniques. (Blay-Palmer 2008, Kulasekera 2013).

The ownership of farmland as well as food retailing is rapidly becoming concentrated among a handful of international agribusinesses such as Monsanto, ConAgra and DuPont (Monsanto at a Glance 2014, Leading Global Agribusiness Companies 2013). These corporations often justify their operations by claiming to ‘feed the worlds’ growing population’ (Feeding the World, 2012). Despite their claims, an estimated 842 million people were labeled as food insecure (Holt-Gimenez, 2011) between 2011-2013 (17.5 million in the United States and over 4 million in Canada), even though there is enough international food production to feed a population of 12 billion, 5 billion more than the current global population (FAO 2013, Kimbrell 2002, Coleman-Jensen & Gregory 2015, Tarasuk et al 2014). The core issue then is not a lack of food, but a lack of access to food – raising the question of social injustice as many have to go without secure sources of food due to the fact that it is not profitable to ship to those areas or because they do not have the financial ability to purchase food (Holt-Gimenez, 2011).

The increased presence of corporations within the food system and their focus on the bottom line of profit, commonly at the expense of long term environmental concerns and food security, means that inequalities in food access and long-term sustainability of the system are not being addressed (Ryan, 2014). Over recent years, such corporations have been experiencing a growing level of negative coverage and resistance in the rural, indigenous, and activist communities. The annual “March against Monsanto” protests which take place globally on the same day (which shifts each year but is always in mid to late May – the beginning of planting season) is a good example of this growing resistance. The
worldwide movement had grown to include hundreds of thousands since its first year in 2013, spanning across 6 continents, 48 countries and over 420 cities. The movement has a focus on growing awareness on the use of Roundup (Monsanto’s patented brand of herbicide), GM (or genetically modified) foods, and the depletion of small scale farmers all around the globe (Meyer, 2015). We depend on our food system to provide us with the sustenance for life, yet it is becoming less dependable in many ways. This leads us to the exploration of AFS and their capabilities and promise.

Social Justice and eco-socialism

Like the diversity of AFS theories and perspectives, those pertaining to social justice are extensive and largely beyond the scope of this research. However, it is useful to point out that social justice practices and perspectives in AFS can focus on: food access, the inequality created by capitalism, and the ethically driven arguments for better treatment of migrant farm workers for instance (Robin 2010, Ryan 2014, Kovel 2014). For the purposes of this project, “social justice” will be recognized as a situation where individuals are free from oppression or inequality. Oppression can be experienced due to a multitude of factors including (but not limited to); race, gender, class, sexuality, and being able-bodied. Within agriculture, these factors also contribute to intersectional oppressions (Allen, 2014). For example, migrant and undocumented workers are more likely to hold positions of “farmhand” or “labourer” while individuals of European descent are more likely to hold positions of power such as farm operator or corporate positions (Allen, 2014). Social justice issues also exist on the consumer end of the scale as seen by the growing crisis of global food inequality. Currently, we are witnessing both record levels of hunger for the worlds’ poor and record harvests and corporate profit. This is a direct result of droughts in major agricultural countries, high oil prices, the diversion of 5% of the global cereal production for agro-fuel, and 70% diverse of grain to cattle on factory farms (Holt-Gimenez, 2011). With the increase in demand, food prices rose 83% between 2008 and 2011, hitting particularly hard the
Global South and lower income populations who already struggled to obtain food prior to the inflation. This drastic increased has become known as the “global food crisis” (Berry 1990, Holt-Gimenez 2011). This sparked international outrage and many groups such as Food First, the Community Food and Justice Coalition, the Food Chain Workers Alliance, Via Campesina and the South Central Farmers all center their advocacy on justice and equal access to food (Mares & Pena 2011, Allen 2014)

Past literature on AFSs and CSAs have also centered around social justice issues such as food inequality (Foer 2009, Ryan 2014), environmental concerns (Morris & Kirwan, 2011), citizen empowerment and engagement (Farmers Thrive 1996, Welsh & MacRae 1998, Lacy 2000, Hassanein 2003), and community building (Berry 1990, Hinrich 2003, Sumner 2010). They advocate for the same outcomes as those of the community based groups, such as the dismembering of international agribusinesses, equal access to resources, the inclusion of the customers in more than the buying process, and diversity of tactics (Lacy 2000, Hassanein 2002, Hinrich 2003, Sumner 2011). Scholar-activists have also acknowledged the economic, racial, and gender factors that play a role in food access and research. This can be seen in research around the “food deserts” across North America – areas where healthy and affordable food is difficult to obtain through the lack of markets or grocery stores. Healthy food can sometimes be upwards of an hour or two away and often is most hard hitting to racialized or lower socio-economic status neighbourhoods (A Place at the Table 2012, Ryan 2014).

As mentioned above, there are many different ways to approach social justice in terms of food: examining the inequality of food access, health issues from lack of nutritional food, or loss of local farmers. These can be examined through a health lens, a Marxist lens (calling for the control of food to be given back to the community members) or a democratic one (calling for a more neutral approach to agriculture where individuals would have more control) (Lowy 2005, Sumner 2011, Kovel 2014).

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For further information about these initiatives refer to the works of those referenced.
The specific framework I have chosen to use for this research is best described as eco-socialism. Eco-socialism is a critical, anti-oppressive theory which combines the ideology of socialism and the basic principles of ecological theory (Lowy 2005, Kovel 2014). Wall (2010) depicted eco-socialism as being grounded in the desire for an economy based on non-monetary values of social justice and ecological balance. In regards to food, an “economy of care”, as referred to by Cloutier and Schwenkler (2011), allows for an exchange based on the building of authentic human relationships and offers different ways of thinking about our sources of food and our communities as a whole. Agriculture, unlike the economic system of Capitalism, cannot solely focus on profit. There are many other aspects within the process of food production (such as the seasons, the passing of time that allows growth, the quality of the soil etc.) which cannot be ignored – at least not for any extended amount of time. The consequences of not allowing food the proper time to grow or not planting it in nutritionally rich soil will eventually impact yield. Under the economic system of capitalism, the industrial food system has attempted to detach itself from the cycles and limitations of nature (for example: creating GM crops which are drought resistant or using hormones to increase the growth of factory farmed animals more quickly) but this detachment is creating issues. Food contains more chemicals, requires more technological intervention, and harms the environment in the process (Kimber 2002, Foer 2009, Ryan 2014). Under the industrial model, corporations attempt to generate profit at an increasing rate, seemingly attempting to produce an infinite amount of product while using a finite amount of resources. This is a problematic situation as it requires the use of resources more quickly and on a larger scale than possible, inevitably leading to the self-destruction of the industrial method (Lowy 2005, Kovel 2014). Eco-socialism positions this as irrational for both ecology and socialism view the economy as being embedded in the environment (Lowy, 2005). Both concepts of ecology and socialism share the idea that if the Western levels of consumption were spread globally, the capitalist system would be unable to sustain itself, and, that protecting the earth is necessary to human and non-human life (Lowy, 2005). Eco socialism is a useful
and appropriate theoretical umbrella under which to examine the research topic of CSA at the edges of the industrial food system, in concert with the social aspects of AFSs and the aspirations to build strong local relationships and connections in our agricultural systems.

**Alternative Food Systems (AFSs)**

Reasons for pursuing and examining AFSs, as depicted in past literature, include: wanting to support local farmers, health concerns, animal welfare, environmental impact, and a belief in the integrity of growing, producing and consuming food at a community level (Sage 2003, Winter 2003, Blay-Palmer 2008). Within the AFS movement, these concerns are addressed through community land trusts, organic and small-scale production, food festivals, permaculture farming, community supported agriculture, and co-ops along with many more programs, organizations and grassroots actions (Lacy 2000, Sumner, Mair & Nelson 2010, Frost & Laing 2013). Although they are diverse and unique in their goals and workings, all AFSs share the ideas of alternative distributions of power, building relationships between consumers and producers, creating new forms of politics and cultural value around food beyond just economic ones, and empowering communities (Lacy 2000, Mooney et al 2014).

The aim is to create unique community food systems (as each should be tailored for context and its specific regional location) built on a foundation of connection rather than profit and alienation. This depicts a shift to what Kloppenburg et al (1996) refers to as a moral economy - an economy centered on an understanding of each other and the land as well as an understanding of the production of food. Such an economy would aim to restore and rebuild the experience of working and celebrating together, a societal aspect that plays little importance under the imbalanced system of industrial food production. The restoration of such attributes at the local community level is essential to the same restoration needed on a global scale (Lacy, 2000). Some key tenets of AFS include fostering a sense of community and place and building a sustainable local food system. Although a “place” or a community can be an
intersection between latitude and longitude, it also refers to an intersection between people and their environments. Ackerman-Leist (2013) describes this intersection, what he calls a “sense of place”, as being

“The culmination of sensory experience, memory and terrain [...] perhaps most easily conveyed through and contained in the combination of taste and smell, our broadest avenue to the storehouse of memories.” (Ackerman-Leist, 2013 p.8)

Ackerman-Leist (2013) describes here the senses that we use while eating (taste and smell) in order to define a sense of place. Using food as a connector, he speaks about how there is great overlap between a community and their foodshed and a connection to one is likely to foster a connection to the other. This, he argues, is due to the interwoven aspects of food and how it plays such a prominent role in the lives of every community member. He also mentions that food has long been a key cultural factor and plays a large role in the tradition of many different cultures (i.e. traditional foods, festivals, and/or methods of food production) (Ackerman-Leist, 2013).

The “foodshed” is defined by Kloppenburg et al (1996, 10) as “a socio-geographic space: human activity embedded in the natural integument of a particular place”, is a concept which is closely aligned with that of a “watershed”. Essentially, foodsheds are a hybrid of social and natural constructions (i.e. between human/animal populations and the environment) and are attached to particular communities and places (much how watersheds reattach water systems back to natural ecology) (Feagan, 2007).

Kloppenburg et al (1996) imagines foodsheds as commensal communities (defined as a shared interaction where neither harms the other for their own benefit) which builds sustainable relationships both between individuals and between people and the land. A strong foodshed would consist of sustainable and healthy local practices of growing, obtaining, and consuming food as well as healthy interactions and relationships with other community members (Ackerman-Leist, 2013). Elements, which are aligned with the AFS initiatives, include community gardens, farmers’ markets, coops, permaculture farming, and many more (Kloppenburg et al 1996, Ackerman-Leist 2013). Since foodsheds are
embedded in particular communities, a connection to the community is likely to foster a greater connection with local foodsheds and vice versa.

**Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)**

One particular AFS which has been gaining popularity both internationally and across Canada over the past three and a half decades is the CSA. The concept grew out of the “Teikei” (meaning partnership or cooperation) movement in Japan which was initiated by women concerned about providing healthy food to their families. It consisted of the development of a unique and direct exchange with local farmers (Feagan, 2014). Following this concept in 1986, Robyn Van En, a farmer and AFS advocate, is thought to have developed the first CSA on Indian Line Farm in Massachusetts, USA. Since then it has been gaining popularity across Canada and internationally, most notably in the United States, United Kingdom, France, Japan, Brazil, Holland, Denmark, Germany, Argentina, Australia, China and Romania (Feagan 2014, Feagan & Henderson 2009). As CSAs are grassroots initiatives, they often vary in size, design and technique. However, they have some core characteristics in common such as care for the environment, for their customers, and for the quality of their food (Beckett et al, 2012).

Originally, CSAs were created to align the concerns of the community – seeking fresh, healthy and sustainable food – with farms – seeking to support themselves outside of the large-scale industrial method of agriculture. They are built on an association between the consumer and a particular farmer or farm family where interested customers pay at the beginning of the growing season (usually mid-May for Ontario) for a share of the anticipated harvest. Once a regular harvest begins around, early to mid-June, individuals receive a portion of the harvest each week. Some CSAs also offer work shares where members can pay with hours worked on the particular farm (Paul & Stephens, 2015).

This system of producing and distributing food depends on a working relation between the land, the farmers and the community members. Through these relationships, connections with both the
environmental and social ecologies can be reassembled and strengthened in order to create a system where the risks and benefits of agriculture are shared in their entirety. Under the industrial model, if a particular farmer experiences a poor yield, the risks (i.e. loss of income) are experienced solely by them. Their food is not paid for until after it is produced. Under the CSA model, the community members share the risks of an unpredictable yield by paying for their share up front – prior to the harvest season. Therefore if there is a low return (due to weather conditions, poor growing conditions, pest infestation etc.) the risk is borne by the community of shareholders instead of the farmer. This also means that the benefits are shared as well. If there is a high yield, the farmer can give more produce to their consumers than previously expected (Paul & Stephens 2013). Accountability from both parties (the consumers and the farmers) is required as both depend on the other for their well-being, which supports the notion of commensal community brought forward by Kloppenburg et al (1996).

Ideally, CSAs facilitate communal relationships between consumers and producers, sharing and supporting each other in a sustainable manner (Feagan & Henderson 2009, Brown & Miller 2008, Feagan 2014). While they are still dependant on some type of value construction, profit is not considered the only significant factor (which is in contrast with the capitalist system). Attention is also given to agricultural, health, cultural and social benefits. This allows customers more facets for connection, instead of only participating at the end of the process as a passive consumer. The focus is expanded past the narrow economic lens which has become the norm within the industrial food system (Feagan & Morris 2009, Ackerman-Leist 2013). They are more “embedded” systems, integrated deeper into the networks of life beyond just the act of buying and focus on broader concepts than the narrow economic model that has become the norm (Feagan & Morris 2009, Ackerman-Leist 2013).

The concept of embeddedness has its roots in the work of Karl Polanyi (1957) who wrote that “the human economy ….is embedded and enmeshed in institutions, economic and non-economic [and] the inclusion of the non-economic is vital” (Hinrichs, 2000 p. 296). At its core, its emphasis is on the
importance of social relationships within all economic transactions. Embedded systems describe a connection at the place where food production and consumption overlap, an experience which is mostly unavailable to both consumers and producers who deal with large superstores or wholesale grocery markets. By broadening its scope and focusing on the multitude of non-economic factors associated with food and consumption, embedded systems such as the CSA aim to de-commodify food sources (Hinrichs, 2000). Within the industrial food system, it matters little if a certain product is nutritionally valuable or local; it only matters if it makes a profit. The idea behind de-commodification is to shift this narrowly focused perspective so that profit does not outweigh other beneficial aspects such as positive relationships and a connection to one’s community (Sayer, 2003).

It is also important however, to recognize the issues that can sometimes arise with initiatives such as CSAs. Some academics have focused on how race and class can affect a population’s ability to participate in CSAs as well as other AFSs. This can be due to lack of financial ability, lack of initiatives in their area (particularly in food deserts in North America), or a lack of the necessary transportation to get to CSA locations (Lowy 2005, Cloutier and Schwenkler 2011, Kovel 2014, Ryan 2014). These issues are beyond the scope of this particular research project, however they are acknowledged as being important for future research.

Although CSAs are but one factor under the large umbrella of AFS, their actions can create many positive changes for the customers and farmers alike (Brown & Miller, 2008). As with AFSs in general, there are many attributes of a CSA which could be explored at a deeper level. However, this project focuses specifically on the social and cultural benefits of CSA – that is, benefits to relationships, communities, local traditions, etc., that may be associated with the hosting of a “Celebration of Food” event on Devon Acres Organic Farm for the shareholders and families.

Celebration
A key aspect of both AFSs generally, and this project specifically, is the idea of celebrating local food. The connection between food and celebration is quite common within the dominant cultural experiences of North America. Family meals, birthday celebrations, wedding banquets, business lunches, potlucks, and holiday dinners are all centered around a shared meal and a shared experience. This act of coming together in groups opens up a space for conversation and storytelling, bringing out the potential for group bonding and relationship building (Thompson, 2010). Communities can have many overlapping points which create bonding such as political ideals or shared cultural traditions, but Thompson (2010) theorizes that, at least within North American culture, the meal is a birthing place for those shared aspects, creating a space where they can spread and take hold. When individuals take the time to gather and enjoy a meal together, conversation takes place and the spreading of ideas, stories, and experiences can happen on a larger scale. Thompson (2010) notes that though his views are hypothetical, many traditional communities were built around such gatherings, and it is evident that they contributed to the creation of larger conversations or group interactions within the community.

However, since the 1940s North American communities (and likely international communities as well) have been shifting away from the communal aspect of food and its consumption outside of special occasions such as holidays. For example, even the family meal is disappearing. This is likely due to such things as access to and affordability of convenience foods, the increase of women in the work force, and to time constraints associated with industrial society generally (Casotti 2005, Food Matters 2008, Food Inc. 2008, A Place at the Table 2012). This shift to a more individualized manner of food consumption (i.e. less shared meals and more eating on the run or while at work, etc.) has been shown to raise some concern amongst research participants. Casotti’s (2005) study, which included 29 women from Brazil and focused on their perspectives on how eating out impacted their family dynamics, showed both a concern and a dislike for the loss of family and shared meals. The fact of more people eating alone and/or putting in less preparation time for their food (i.e. eating food prepared elsewhere) is commonly
tied to the larger socio-economic and cultural shifts of industrialized society. This of course impacts different groups of individuals in different ways. Racialized groups in North America could be pressed into fast food consumption through the lack of access to healthy and fresh food in their communities (A Place at the Table, 2014), households with a lower income have to cater to their financial restraints (resulting in more processed and cheaper foods), and long work hours and/or addictive potentials of certain products result in less decision making abilities (Food Matter 2008, Food Inc. 2008, Alkon & Agyeman 2011, A Place at the Table 2014).

Attempts to counteract the above shifts and consequences of the industrial food system can be seen within the Slow Food movement originating with Carlo Petrini in 1986 in Italy. This movement’s aim is to rebuild the lost connections between people and food, and to do so in a celebratory manner (i.e. celebrating local food). This is done through building connections between producers and consumers, focusing on local food sources, and by incorporating knowledge of local community and traditions into meal preparation (Petrini 2007, Tencati & Zsolnai 2012, Frost & Laing 2013). Petrini’s motivations were to combine the joy of food and wine with an understanding of local traditions, producers and quality, along with a political desire to defend food and cultural heritage (Petrini, 2007). In his 2007 book “Slow Food Nation: Why Our Food Should Be Good, Clean and Fair” Petrini argues that food is “more than a simple product to be consumed: it is happiness, identity, culture, pleasure, conviviality, nutrition, local economy, survival” (Petrini 2007, p.166). He builds his debate around the concepts of “good”, “clean” and “fair”. His personal definitions outline “good” food as tasty and diverse products which maximize flavour and prioritize geographical and cultural location, “clean” food as being sustainable and benefiting the environment rather than harming it, and “fair” food as being socially just and resulting is fair wages and fair prices (Petrini, 2007). The movement quickly spread and by the early 1990s it had grown to have supporters in 153 different countries who advocate for an appreciation of local food and culture.
The slow food movement is a social and political philosophy which developed in part as a response to the growing industrial food system and its manner of disconnecting us from our food and our enjoyment of it. Glazer (2015) describes how fast food methods of production have adopted assembly-line principles which divide cooking up into small tasks and the belief that faster and cheaper is better. She states that “fast food” culture should be replaced with “slow food” culture and that priority should be put on the taste and the experience rather than on convenience or the speed at which one can obtain a meal. Many other events and groups in Canada are attempting to create a sense of joy and celebration around food as well. Examples of such events include the annual Feast of Fields in Southern Ontario, the Savour Food and Wine Festival in Nova Scotia, the Warkworth Maple Syrup Festival in Ontario, the Rocky Mountain Wine and Food Festival in Banff, the Potato Festival in New Brunswick, and the Humber Valley Strawberry Festival in Newfoundland (Feast of Fields 2014, Travel to Wellness 2015).

The research and academic field has also been recognizing the concept of celebration within AFS as well. For example, Sumner et al (2010) conducted a research project on a Guelph ON CSA and stated that celebration is the clearest expression of culture as evidenced by the ceremonial and festive life of the community. Another article also focusing on a Southwestern Ontario CSA share recorded that ‘pick up days’ were “festive” in spirit (Farmers Thrive, 1996). Others have talked about community celebrations more generally and their ability to build stronger communities (Frost and Laing, 2013). And Tencati and Zsolnai (2012) turn the conversation to the celebration “Terra Madre” (Mother Earth, an international event held in different communities around the globe every year), which focuses on food combined with education about local cultures and fostering sustainable ways of production.

Control over and connection to our source of food can be an empowering and enjoyable experience. As AFSs move forward with establishing and legitimizing alternative methods of production and consumption, I believe it is important to understand what the connection to celebration can mean
and how it can affect communities. It is noted that such perspectives of celebration are situated within the cultural context of North America, where food centered celebrations such as birthdays, weddings and religious holidays like Christmas and Easter are common. Though celebration of food is likely to differ from culture to culture, this research project focuses solely on the context of a Brantford ON CSA share and the share members ideas as they relate to food celebration in their daily lives, their specific CSA membership, and their opinions on how food and celebration influence community building.

Methodology

Research Question/Objective

This research project consists of a qualitative case study of a local CSA (Devon Acres Organic Farm) in the Brantford area of Southwestern Ontario. The objective of this research is to examine one specific AFS element – CSAs, with a focus on the particular CSA at Devon Acres Organic Farm. It is a creative research project, which involved the hosting of a “Celebration of Food” event on the grounds of Devon Acres, and explored share members’ perspectives on celebration and its influence on community building within the CSA.

Research Methods

The information collection process of this research is a case study based on surveys and interviews in concert with participant observation on the part of the researcher. A case study involves an analysis of one particular event or group of people. There are multiple styles of qualitative research that have been linked to case studies (such as detailed histories of single individuals or events) but this project takes an “ethnographic” or “field research” approach. This includes a detailed description and
analysis of the activities of a certain group of people (i.e. the share members at Devon Acres).

Participant observation often takes place in these situations and requires the researcher to take on the role as both an observer and a participant, allowing for a more extensive analysis of the case in question (Feagin 1991, Levine et al 2009). This method of research consisted of my participation at the Devon Acres Farm over a 9 month period as a farm-worker assistant approximately a day or two a week, coupled with my detailed journals of field notes after each day. It culminated with my role where I observed and took part in the collection of information during the celebration event. A case study was chosen as the method of research as it focuses on an in depth description of a micro event at the same times as permitting cautious generalizations. It allows observations to take place in the natural settings studied and provides a more holistic study of the complex social network which can be witnessed within groups (Feagin, 1991). However the case study was also chosen out of convenience as Devon Acres is one of the only CSAs in the immediate area and allows for the research to bring in contextual perspectives about Brantford and its surrounding area.

In alignment with the case study and participant observation, data collection consisted of semi-structured interview questions asked over the span of the event. This included 12 individuals; 10 share members, 1 chef and 1 farmer from Devon Acres (expanded on in the results and discussion section). The sample was chosen predominantly to reflect the perspectives of the CSA members (as this is the main focus of the research project). However, I decided that the perspectives of the chef from Liaison College and a farmer at Devon Acres were appropriate as well. The perspective of the chef instructor was included to examine how they thought the celebration of food manifested in other areas of the community (i.e. within restaurants), and the perspectives of the farmer was included to gain insight into how they viewed the event (i.e. what they thought was beneficial, concerns they had and limitations to holding more celebrations). Conversations, which happened in both group and individual settings, were recorded with the consent of those involved. Individuals were chosen randomly although preference
was given to share members instead of family or friends\(^3\). The closeness of the tables during meal time made for easy interaction and allowed for group conversations, which were first approved by all those sitting at the table through verbal consent.

**Analytical Approach**

There are multiple ways in which data can be read and organized. This particular research project will examine the collected data in a combination of ways – including literal, interpretative, and reflexive. A literal reading looks at the literal form and content of the data, interpretative reads further into or through the data, and a reflexive reading requires the researcher to locate themselves and their role as part of the data (Mason, 2002). The reasoning for this combination is because of the diversity of data. Data was collected in the form of observation, field notes during work days at the farm and the event and through semi-structured interviews with event attendees.

After data was collected, multiple methods were used to organize it as well. Specifically cross sectional and non-cross sectional methods were drawn on. In terms of the field notes, data was organized under a non-cross sectional method. This included a contextual or holistic system of organization (Mason, 2002). The reason for this was to gain a better understand of the interwoven aspects of the data set. It would be difficult to consider the data in terms of codes or groups when its collection happened over the span of 9 months and included recordings of growth and expansion in my own personal understanding and knowledge. It is more fitting that it be experienced and organized in terms of a timeline, incorporating the holistic nature of the information collection.

\(^3\) These individuals were identified during the placement aspect of this project. I met and got to know them during the pick-up days (Tuesdays and Thursdays).
Data which was collected through the semi-structured interviews were organized in a cross sectional manner. This required using a more structured coding set and organizing the interviews on common principles (Mason, 2002). I believe this allowed me to step back from this aspect of the data and make comparison between the perspectives of the attendees and my own personal observations. The method of a case study benefited this process very well as it allowed my field notes and personal observations to have a direct connection to the findings which had been drawn out of the “Celebration of Food” event.

**Personal Context**

My first interactions with the agricultural community began in 2013 when I heard about Monsanto and the issues with the industrial food system. Wishing to express my dissatisfaction with what I was learning, I organized a “March Against Monsanto” rally\(^4\) in the downtown Brantford core in 2014. Throughout this process I had the ability to meet many local farmers, grassroots organizers, and food activists. I then began working with a local organic farm in the area as an intern for the summer of 2014. Interacting with these individuals brought to light many issues which I had not previously been aware of, such as the local farmland grab. Learning about those issues and hearing stories about how they personally affected many individuals motivated me to explore a more in-depth critique of the industrial system as well as potential alternatives. I am not a local farmer and have not been a member of a CSA but the goal is to acknowledge that separation while still attempting to create a platform where those voices can be expressed.

**Local Context**

As the literature review above argues, our current agricultural practices are not sustainable and as resulted in a growing number of alternatives appearing outside of the dominant food system. Within

\(^4\) This was in solidarity with the global annual March Against Monsanto Movement which had its first year in 2013.

the local context of Brantford/Brant County ON, both the concerns as well as positive initiatives can be witnessed and are important to acknowledge in order to accurately situate this research project within the local community.

Brantford/Brant County is located in Southwestern Ontario. Although it has some of the highest potential for agricultural growth, industrial manufacturing took over, resulting in urban sprawl and the loss of arable farmland (Willms, 2010). During its early years in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the Brantford area was known for its rich agricultural lands and extensive watershed (as it is located directly on the Grand River). Not only did the river provide a stable water source, it also played a role in transportation of products to other domestic and international destinations (Brantford & District Labour Council, n.d.). In the early 1990s, Brantford was the 3rd largest manufacturer of exported goods in all of Canada, with only Toronto and Montreal ahead of them (Dearlove, 2011). This agriculture market (as well as production of agricultural equipment) is what fueled Brantford up until the 1980s. However, during the mid-1980s, a recession drastically affected the agricultural industry as local farmers could no longer afford to buy the products that were being produced in Brantford. As a result, many of the prominent equipment producers (White Farm Equipment and Massey Ferguson) went out of business. As of 1998, unemployment in Brantford and Brant country had reached 24% (Brantford & District Labour Council, n.d.).

This situation is not unique to the Brantford area. Through the late 1800s and much of the 1900s, Canadian farmers predominantly operated small-scale and family run farms. As of 1991, the average farm area increased from 598 acres to 728 acres, with an associated decrease in the number of farmers and operators from 390,875 in 1991 to 74,840 in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2011). This shift has been a result of industrialization (which increased the use of mechanical equipment and lowered the necessity of human labour) and the use of previous farmland for developmental purposes. At the national level, there were 280,043 operating farms in 1991, with a decrease to 205,730 by 2011.
(Statistics Canada, 2012). The National Farmers Union of Canada has recorded these shifts and has been monitoring the activities of investment companies such as Hancock Agricultural Investment Group and Walton International. The latter is active in both Alberta and the Greenbelt area of Ontario, and has a tendency to purchase agricultural land and hold it for later development when it is profitable (Smythe, 2015). These companies have been particularly active around the edges of the Greenbelt in Southwestern Ontario in recent years and have been steadily increasing their purchases of land. The Greenbelt, which was established in 2005 by the provincial government, is a permanently protected area of green space, farmland, forests, wetlands and watersheds (The Greenbelt, 2015). Immediately after its preservation, an aggressive farmland grab initiated by Walton Int. began just outside its borders towards Brant County.

Image from Ontario ministry of public infrastructure renewal
http://www.planetizen.com/node/24621
As can be seen in the bottom left of the image – Brantford and Brant County fall just outside of the protected zone of the Greenbelt. Developers, with the support of offshore investors from a multitude of countries, bought up thousands of acres of farmland and are in the process of purchasing 12,000 more in the near future (Haley, 2013). This is worrisome as Brantford/Brant County has some of the most fertile land in Canada and after farmland has been developed, it is difficult and sometimes impossible to convert back.

Walton International currently owns 6% of Brant County farmland, with large holdings in the Langford community at the east end of Brantford – 600 acres of farmland – sometimes receiving little attention (Hayley, 2013). This process has also had negative social impacts as some farmers want to sell, while others do not (Hayley, 2013). This farmland purchasing and changes in ownership, have resulted in the breakup of local rural communities and made it difficult for unified farmland protection initiatives. As agriculture is woven into the history of Brantford and Brant County (Brantford & District Labour Council n.d., Willms 2010, Dearlove 2011), this process is seen as weakening historic community connections.

Ethics

*Note: A Research Ethics Board application was submitted prior to the “Celebration of Food” event and the research project abided by all ethical requirements. Informed consent forms were signed by all participating individuals and have been attached to the appendix section.*

*Non-REB Ethics*

When conducting research, there are many ethical considerations involved with a project that may not require confirmation or clearance. Despite the fact that they do not require clearance, I would still like to acknowledge those aspects in this section.
One ethical consideration is that of the point of views of the researcher. Herising, in their (2005) work, stated that “regardless of our relative distance and location between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ the position of the research has its vestments in power” (p.133). Although I am conscious and reflective of my relations with both the Devon Acres farmers and the shareholders involved in the research, it is important to still acknowledge my place as the researcher. This position needs to be acknowledged given the information-collection role and subsequent analysis, and that the community is not that of the researcher. As mentioned above under the concept of personal context, I am not a farmer and have only been active in the local farming community for a year. As an “outsider” and researcher, I consciously addressed these ‘positions’ while simultaneously ensuring that leadership and guidance from the operators of Devon Acres Farm was taken into account by working closely with them on the construction of the “Celebration of Food” event.

Secondly, ethical consideration must be given to the community of CSA and who is excluded. This specific CSA consists predominately of white, European, middle to upper income individuals and that is not unique for CSAs or AFSs in general. Authors such as Alkon & Agyeman (2011), Holt-Gimenez (2011), Allen (2014), and Ryan (2014) have also recognized the underlying issues of race and class within AFS. Although it was not within the scope of this research to explore the reasons or consequences of such a dynamic, I believe it is important to acknowledge the importance of future research on this topic for instance, as well as to advocate for attempts for more inclusion within CSAs generally. Though there are many urban gardening projects happening, particularly in the United States in racialized areas where there is often poor access to fresh and healthy food (A Place at the Table, 2014), the AFS movement could benefit from an increased awareness of class and race issues generally.
A Celebration of Food

Pre-Event Planning

I began working closely with the operators of Devon Acres Organic Farm and CSA share in October of 2014 after being introduced to the operators by my graduate advisor. The farm is situated on 42 acres of land in Southwestern Ontario in an area that has been referred to as the Carolinian Zone, a diverse and abundant area similar to the United States Carolinas to the south (Feagan and Henderson, 2009). Two acres of land is used for their vegetable garden (which supplies their CSA share) and 20 acres used for animal grazing (including chickens, ducks, horses, cows and lamb). The farm also contains an extended forested area which runs along the Grand River. An average of 40 different kinds of vegetables and herbs are provided over the course of the harvest season, as well as some meat, dairy, and eggs available on occasion. The farms 2008 CSA pamphlet states;

*We farm using organic principles which strive to work in harmony with natural cycles, sustaining or increasing the fertility, biodiversity, and integrity of our cultivated, pastured, and wild lands. As much as we can, we use horses to work the land thus reducing our use of fossil fuels. We plant many heirloom varieties and maintain rare breeds of livestock and poultry. We are trying to encourage and preserve genetic diversity.*

My role on the farm included planting, weeding, harvesting, helping with the construction of a new chicken coup, harvesting hay from a neighbouring farm, and conversing about what the “Celebration of Food” might look like (an idea that originated through discussion with the farmers and graduate advisor regarding the benefits of a creative aspect and inclusion of the share members). Although I have worked on farms before, this had a strong educational component as every farm and
CSA operates differently. Throughout the process I learned which plants should be planted when, what insects were beneficial and which ones were not (the latter being picked off the plants by hand), and processes like making natural compost. Much of the planning for the event was done through conversation while doing chores. Weeding for example fostered an environment where we were close together in the field for many hours.

The beginning of the season was colder than usual and when it started to warm up it was accompanied by a dry period. This made for a late start, a consequent quick planting period, and then much watering by hand because of the lack of moisture. As planning for the celebration event was contingent on what food was available from the fields, it was then obviously dependent on the weather and moisture conditions. Despite being slightly behind, the farmers, and myself and others that volunteer to help, remained optimistic. There were many things to be done including thinking about what crops would be available for the meals, advertising, creating the event space – for tables and cooking area, and the building of an outhouse. The long hours spent in the field watering by hand allowed us to converse extensively about the required steps and how they could be executed.

The project became even more connected with the community in late spring (June) when Liaison College – a chef college with a location in Brantford, ON – approached Devon Acres about a potential field trip to the farm. The event was mentioned during a conversation and the instructors agreed to participate by helping out with the meal preparation. This allowed for our attention to be focused on other aspects of the event. Shortly after, when share members began to visit the farm weekly for their produce (which began early to mid-June), we started to explain and promote the event.

The Event

The “Celebration of Food” event was planned for July 17th, 2015 to take place on the grounds of Devon Acres. Until the preceding day, the weather had been promising. But less than 24 hours prior, a
thunderstorm warning appeared. I woke the morning of with some doubts about the event and if we would be able to carry through with it. The weather was intimidating – threatening storm clouds, wind and rain moving over the area as we gathered the last of the supplies needed for the meal. This called for a makeshift shelter to be constructed for the attendees to eat under. That is, of course, if the shareholders decided to come given what appeared to be an impending storm. This brought to light the challenges of being a farmer. While others could make the decision to not chance the weather and stay at home, the farmers were already in the field in their rain gear working when I arrived at noon. To them, there was no other option. This was just another day – and due to the lack of rain over the last week or two, they were happy to have some water for their fields, although this was in contrast to the anxiety that I was feeling.

We did not have a plan for any sort of covering, so the construction of a dinner-area tarp happened on the spot and took much longer than expected. Luckily, share members and friends started to come early and helped set up what ended up being a cozy – albeit efficient – shelter. It greatly reinforced the community feel to have individuals show up and help with the setting of the tables, harvesting food, and anything else that was needed. Not only was everyone excited to attend the event, but they were also excited to help with its preparation in any way they could.
The rain held off, but the wind did not. The bulk of participants started to show up around 4:30pm. As this was a half hour after our intended start time, I had been nervous that the weather had influenced people to change their mind about attending. However, people kept arriving, and once we finally finished setting up – a good turnout of shareholders and other invitees had shown up and everyone mingled with each other as the chef students completed their meals. There was lots of conversation, lots of introductions (as many share members had not met each other) and lots of laughter. Many of the shareholders (as well as the farmers) have children and they added to the excitement by running around and investigating the farm and visiting the animals. Previously, during the planning stages of the event, we had been attempting to plan activities to keep the children entertained. However, this proved to be unnecessary as they entertained themselves, and despite the weather there was a festive feel in the air.
Just prior to the meal, attendees were called together for introductory remarks. Chef Tracy Winkwork (a main instructor at Liaison College) introduced the chef students and described the different dishes that they had prepared over the last hour. Much of the menu had been based on what was available from Devon Acres but also included some products from the students’ own personal gardens, the St. Jacobs Farmers’ Market (located in St. Jacobs ON), Bell City Brewery (a local craft-brewing company) and honey provided by the researcher’s second reader Bree Akesson, who is also a share member. Three main dishes were prepared – each by a group of two students. The first dish was a beef taco made from meat and veggies from Devon Acres and handmade tortillas. The second dish included a corn bread and a wheat berry salad (made with squash, sweet peppers and grapes). The last dish was a Shepherd’s Pie, made with lamb meat and potatoes from the farm. For dessert, they had prepared a raspberry, gooseberry, and rhubarb cobbler.
A total of 50 people (including share members, farmers, friends, family members, and students) enjoyed their meal amongst more conversation and storytelling. The limited space underneath the cover made for close quarters and made the dinner feel more like an oversized family picnic.

During the dinner, I interviewed 12 individuals regarding their perspectives on the event, of the CSA in general, and how they thought celebration of food impacted community. Along with journal entries from the ‘placement’ on the farm and examination of the event, the additional data collection allowed for a deeper and more personal understanding of the perspectives of the share members.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the data collection revealed three main themes. It was found that all CSA members felt as if they were a part of a community by participating in the share (although there was variance in this perception), all viewed celebration of food as being vital (both at the individual and community level), and all viewed celebration as positively impacting the CSA community (although there were
varying opinions on what the impact looked like). There were also two minor observations made which I refer to as fluid findings as there was lass solidity on these views within the group. This included 1) the motivations for participating in the CSA and 2) a desire to give back to the local community. The results of this project will be explored below and analyzed in order of the three main question themes. That is, if share members’ felt like they were a part of a community; whether celebration as part of their daily lives, and whether they perceived celebration as a community building technique within the CSA.

CSA as a Community

The first critical theme acknowledged is that share members viewed themselves as being a part of a community through their share in the CSA. Perspectives on what that community looked like varied although all 10 interviewed members positively referred to it as a community.

CSAs can be made up of a multitude of people as membership is not restricted (other than by an ability to pay the required price – it is acknowledged that this can be exclusionary of those of lower income). In the specific case of Devon Acres – there are also two pick-up days where members can receive their shares over a span of 3 hours on one of those days. These conditions mean there is less interaction among shareholders, and therefore less opportunities to meet. And, there are times when there are upwards of 8-10 members picking up at the same time, with other times having only 1-2 members on-site at the farm. Despite this, when asked if they felt as though they were part of a community by being part of a CSA share, every participant affirmed this. Participant #3 expanded on the concept of community both at the event and share pick up days by saying;

“Even with a share you already belong to something. Like when you come and talk to the people when they come to get the veggies. It’s the community that’s important. I think this is important for a person. To expand and not isolate yourself. To feel good is to connect to something. All the time when there is something important happening you have food. This I think is offering the good feelings and trust between people. And you are comfortable together when they have food around. Some flowers or a cup of tea is not the same. You are connecting to something. And it is an opening subject. You talk and it makes everything feel better.”
Participant #5 expressed their perspective of the CSA community by saying;

“When I look around and see the people that are here – these are not the people that I would cross paths with in other parts of my life. So I think it’s the common purpose and the common goal. And everyone’s philosophy or whatever – it can be enacted within a CSA. They can say okay I’m doing this to a) support the farmer, b) I want to eat as organically as possible or c) I believe in local and small. So there’s probably a variety of reasons that people are here but in the end they want to be different than the mainstream.”

Many commented that although there was not always the chance to meet everyone, they knew that others were there and supporting the CSA and that in and of itself was a comforting thing. This can be reflected perfectly in Participant #4’s comment of it being a “hit or miss community” but regardless –

“you know that they [other shareholders] are there and that they support. It’s nice to be a part of a group that thinks this is important.”

These findings depict a fluid community, where share members may not meet every other share member but they are aware that the support is present. During a time when communities are becoming increasingly more individual in orientation (Casotti, 2005), the CSA could be said to reflect peoples’ desire to be around those who share similar ideas and are supportive of similar goals. Even though the share members only get to see each other once a week, it was still perceived as a special connection and considered a community.

Celebration of Food as a Vital Factor in Daily Life

Expanding from the first main theme, all individuals interviewed moved on to express positive views of the celebration of food and described how they viewed this in their own unique ways. Participants here supported past literature findings by saying that celebration was an important aspect that was present in the inherent workings of a local, CSA based food system (Farmers Thrive 1996, Thompson 2010, Sumner et al 2010 Frost & Laing 2013). Through these conversations, three sub themes were discerned regarding how this celebration manifested in peoples’ lives and what it looked like for
them. These themes included 1) connections to the *slow food* movement, 2) an appreciation of the natural factors which make food possible, 3) and a ‘sense of place’.

*Sub Theme 1: Connection to Slow Food Movement*

Although no participant overtly referenced the Slow Food movement, multiple CSA members described how they made a commitment to sitting down and enjoying a meal with their family as often as they could and explained how they attempted to give themselves time to enjoy the food and each other’s company. Participant #1 stated;

“We always enjoy our food. Always make sure I sit down and eat my food. I don’t eat on the run. We like to cook. And as I was saying earlier, when we have our food from here it becomes very precious. You don’t want to throw any of it out. So we eat every last little bit of it. Whatever is left over gets put in the fridge and it’s eaten tomorrow. It becomes very very important. Because someone grew this you know.”

Although these were not what one would call large celebrations and instead daily rituals, they were still considered celebrations in the eyes of those who were describing them.

*Sub Theme 2: Appreciation of Nature*

Another description of how individuals celebrated food in their daily lives manifested as the appreciation for what makes our food possible. Participant #3 explained this poetically by saying;

“I’m thankful whenever the grass grows and the sun shines and it rains. I think celebration of food – it doesn’t have to be big events and it doesn’t have to be lots of people. But I think every day is a celebration when food actually grows on your land and you actually get to taste it.”

This depicts a celebration of the process of growth and not just the consumption of the food itself. This connects back to and supports the literature on the de-commodification of food (Sayer 2003, Lowy 2005, Schwenkler 2011, Kovel 2014). As with the past literature, participants also expressed situations where they were moving away from the role as a passive consumer and towards a more
integrated or comprehensive role. Instead of only having an interest in the end stage of consumption, individuals were expressive gratitude for the entire process of food growth and production.

Sub Theme 3: A Sense of Place

The last manifestation of celebration in daily life was expressed through the act of remembering and recognizing where we come from. Two participants expanded on the idea of celebrating the land and acknowledging that we are surrounded by something special. Participant #4 said;

“It’s so easy for people to get distracted and go to the mall and fantasize about other places and consumer goods that come from other places. It’s important to be rooted in and care about the things that come from here.”

The fertile land of Brantford and Brant County is something that is unique and special to Ontario, and to Canada in general. We are surrounded on all sides by prime farmland and this is part of what it means to live in Southern Ontario. This participant’s quote underscores how we are so close to our source of food and that we can both take advantage of that fact by connecting with local farmers, and also take the time out of our daily lives to acknowledge that we are privileged to have the ability to connect to our land in ways that individuals in cities or larger areas may not.

Celebrations Ability to Influence Community Building Within CSAs

The third main observation made was that the participants viewed celebration as having a positive impact on community building. Much like the above two situations, although there were slight variations in these descriptions, all agreed that the impact was positive. Once again, participants expressed their perspectives in ways which suggested three sub themes: 1) connection, 2) conversation, and (as with in their daily lives) 3) a sense of place.

Sub Theme 1: Connection
Most individuals stated that celebrations such as the one held on Devon Acres Farm allowed them to have a better connection to the people around them, the food, and the land. Participant #1 stated:

“I think our food usually comes from far off countries. We never have anything in common with the food. Here [at Devon Acres] we have something in common with the food and something in common with each other.”

That shared experience brings the community together. During pick up days share members would often talk about their experience with the food, what they had done with it, and what others had used it for. Many also touched on the fact that the industrial food system simultaneously disconnects us from our food and from each other, as individuals in grocery stores do not often stop to talk about what they used certain food products for or to make recommendations. Being part of a CSA allowed the participants to build connections between the food and the other share members and farmers as well.

Sub Theme 2: The Sparking of Conversation

At the family level, many said that dinnertime was prime conversation time for their family and a place to catch up with everyone – to share the stories of their day. On the extended community level, it allowed people to come together and talk and get to know each other. Participant #1 looked around at the event after having the question posed, and responded;

“Well look, everyone’s standing around talking - because of food...because of our food. It brings us back to where it all started when we were trading services and I think there was a lot more going on in terms of connectivity in that. You know the villages that celebrated harvest and things like that.”

With the increasing pace of daily life, it is not common for individuals to gather in larger settings to enjoy meals (Casotti, 2005). Having this food celebration event connection creates a platform to bring people together and, according to multiple share members, acts as a great ‘ice breaker’. Four different participants referred to how it was easier to converse with someone they did not know over a meal
because of the celebration. It gave them something to talk about which could lead to other conversations. This reflects research by Ackerman – Leist (2013) who states that:

“A primary benefit is the actual act of storytelling that these actions[AFSs] can prompt, rekindling community and cultural connections through food. We love to talk about food, and sharing food dissolves boundaries. All kinds of unexpected relationships pop up” (p.220)

Sub Theme 3: Sense of Place

Similar to the sense of place sub theme within the conversation regarding celebration in daily life, participants referred back to Brantford/Brant County and what it means to live in this area. Two participants referred to the selling and development of the farmland in the local area; and how sad it was to see it go because it had been a part of the history of that area for so long. Participant #6 spoke about growing up playing in corn fields and now watching it being rezoned for development, expressing her concern about the fact that her children are missing out on things that were part of her youth:

“My daughters are getting older but I really wish they could be at something like this. What they won’t understand is how unusual this is. You take it for granted when you grow up in southern Ontario. And I’ve lived all over the world and I realized no this is really special. This is a special thing about this area. So I’d want them to know how special it is that they are of this place. I think hats just so important.”

She hoped that being involved with a CSA would help support the local culture and prevent it from being diminished. This can be viewed as a type of social justice resistance - living the change we want to see and not allowing it to be taken from us – even though developers are buying prime farmland in the area. Because of the celebration of the land and an increased connection to it (which developed through participating in the CSA and learning more about the individuals involved with local farming) – participants expressed a desire to protect it. The celebration may not only effect the social and emotional experiences of the share members, but may also affect positively the community at large as individuals feel more obligated and motivated to change current economic and land amalgamation actions taking part in Brantford and Brant County. Although multiple participants expressed their dislike
for the loss of farmland and a desire to stop it, only one participant described taking action through their desire to write about the issues.

**Fluid/Unexpected Findings**

Two smaller and less commonly-held findings appeared from analysis of the data collection – responses that were offered outside of the intentional questions. The two findings included 1) motivations for participating in the CSA share, and 2) a motivation to give back to the local community of Brantford/Brant County.

**Fluid Theme 1: Motivation for Participating in a CSA**

Throughout the conversations, many shareholders mentioned why they had begun participating in a local CSA. Although this was not a central research questions it is included because all members felt it was important enough to mention without being prompted. Three apparent reasons raised by the 10 share members were 1) a love for the farm and wanting to support the farmers, 2) education (predominately about new foods) and 3) the connection it provided with like-minded individual (something many said was rare in other areas of their lives). As participant #2 put it;

“Who else is interested in this stuff? You don’t see that on a daily basis.”

Participant #4 also supported this by saying;

“It’s nice to be a part of a group that thinks this is important.”

Participant #2 was the only individual to mention the benefits of health with their statement;

“The health has always been huge because we’ve always been healthier people, and it really makes that connection between your food source and what’s at your table. Because you know there’s the disconnect when you buy industrial food. And when you see where it’s grown and who’s actually growing the food, it’s a really heartwarming experience.”

However the concept of health was not expanded on in more depth. In general, it seems the motivations for the particular share members who attended the event were based on social attributes
and values. For example, this meant wanting to meet others who are passionate about the same issues and wishing to support local farmers.

**Fluid Finding 2: Giving Back to the Community**

One particular participant brought up the concept of wanting to give back to those who were more marginalized within the Brantford community. The participant expressed that celebrating food and caring for the land could sometimes be difficult when they knew that others were being left out. Due to this fact, they and a small group of other local farmers, made donations to the food bank in town.

“We recognize people aren’t in the same capacity to come out to farms in cars and buy things every week so. So once a year we go down to the market and we promote local food and we sell stuff to raise money for the food bank and our farmers now get a tax credit if they give a certain amount of donated fresh produce so we were trying to encourage them to do that. So that bounty is shared with everyone.”

(Participant #5)

Describing herself as a cattle farmer near Devon Acres, she acknowledged how precious good food is and her dislike for the fact that many people do not have access due to lack of resources or lack of physical access to the farm. This factor, although small, added to the conversation as this showed the humanitarian character of multiple local farms and how they realized it was not a celebration if some were left out and unable to participate. This attempt at bridging the gap and bringing more marginalized individuals into the community demonstrates ‘caring’ and is a clear attempt to create a more equitable foundation for the Brantford/Brant County community at large. These findings align with many of the aspirations of other CSAs and AFSs such as wanting to bring communities together, offer educational experiences, to foster a sense of place, a commitment to local farmers, and to enjoy and appreciate the origins of our food (Farmers Thrive 1996, Sumner et al 2010, Tencati & Zsolnai 2012, Frost & Laing 2013).
Through the above three main findings – the CSA being viewed as a community, celebration being viewed as vital in daily life, and celebration positively impacting the CSA community) it can be concluded that the act of celebrating impacted the local CSA community at Devon Acres in a beneficial manner. The fluid findings of this project added to the findings by helping contextualize why individuals supported the CSA in the first place and what was being done to acknowledge those who are often left out of such celebrations.

**Conclusion**

This work consisted of a case study of the Devon Acres CSA share in Brantford Ontario Canada. The research was constructed around a framework of AFSs (specifically CSAs) and an objective to find out if an integration of celebration would influence community building across the shareholding membership. This was first done though exploring the changes to an industrial food system in the last century, and the associated growing disconnection between consumers, farmers, the source of food, and the land (Kimbrell 2002, Blay-Palmer 2008, Foer 2009, Ryan 2014). This project also included the factor of celebration, something which previous literature has touched on briefly, but not as directly with respect to CSAs. Some research has touched on the idea of celebration with CSAs and how there is a “festive” spirit on pick up days, but not in depth (Farmers Thrive 1996, Sumner et al 2010). With the apparent gap in the literature, directly exploring the celebration in relation to CSA shares was chosen as the main focus. This concept of celebration arises with aspects of AFS like the “slow food” movement and its philosophy of appreciating food, connecting with the community, and acknowledging and appreciating the origins of food. These were all concepts mentioned by share members when speaking about celebration, similar to some previous research (Tencati & Zsolnai, 2012). The concept of social
justice also was raised in conjunction with the experience of the “Celebration of Food” event and reflects grassroots activism around developing bridges to those excluded in our prevailing food system.

Through the hosting of the “Celebration of Food” event and the data collected, it was confirmed that all share members felt as if they were a part of a community through their CSA share - even though it could be described as ‘hit or miss’. The general sentiment was about peoples’ desire to be around those who share similar ideas and are supportive of similar goals. Even though the share members are dispersed and individuals only get to see each other once a week, it was still seen as a special enough connection to be considered a community. Members were also unanimous in their celebration of food in their daily lives, although it manifested in different ways i.e., through a comparison to the slow food movement, an appreciation of the process of growing food, an acknowledgement of the land they are on and the community of which they are a part. Similar notions were discerned from attendees perspectives on how celebrations can influence community building within the CSA. This included creating a better connection between members, sparking conversations, and again, fostering a sense of place and appreciation for the Brantford/Brant County area.

Through these findings it has been made clear that share members at Devon Acres Organic Farm and CSA feel as if they are a part of a community, and that “Celebration of Food” events can positively impact that community and each of its members. Share members and chef students were talking about the event and expressing their excitement for days after as witnessed through personal conversations during pick up days at the CSA, and the development of plans for a Harvest Festival in the fall which arose as a consequence of this celebration. Personally I am very pleased with how the “Celebration of Food” event transpired and have been motivated by the positivity and optimism expressed by the event attendees. When examining issues with the industrial food system, it is easy to get overwhelmed and view the situation as being too powerful to alter. However, the share members at Devon Acres spoke about their community and the CSA with very positive and uplifting voices. If I were to conduct this
event again, I would change very little, although I imagine with more time and resources, there might have been an opportunity to explore questions in more detail, about what groups are left out of the CSA experience, and how to better organize CSAs and AFSs with this in mind.

**Significance and Implications**

Due to the “close to home” factor of this work, one can speculate on its ability to re-establish connections to the local food systems within the CSA share and to the greater community of Brantford/Brant County as well. Based on the findings of this research, I believe that a reestablishment of celebration within the food system could create positive impacts on the greater community. This comes at a time when Brantford/Brant County is experiencing increasingly aggressive land acquisition and the degradation of parts of its farmland base (Haley, 2013). It is my hope that this research could help raise the visibility more broadly about the potential negative impacts of such farmland changes.

In terms of what these findings means for farmers and shareholders, it suggests that group celebrations can positively impact the CSA community. Both farmers and shareholders shared their views regarding the beneficial attributes of the event. Such celebratory events can help bridge the gap between what members referred to as a “hit or miss” community and a more close-knit community where there is increased interaction and conviviality. However it is important to acknowledge the limitations to such events. The planning process was lengthy and required much time and communication with various groups. Within continuously busy schedules, conducting such events on a regular basis is likely to be impractical for operators of CSAs without assistance.

Another noted limitation, which was raised by one share member during an interview, was that of exclusion. The share member spoke of local farmers donating to the Brantford foodbank and how CSA shares might be out of reach for vulnerable populations without physical access or the financial ability to be a part of the share. Marginalized populations such as lower income or racialized groups have not
been included in the scope of this research although they are affected disproportionately by the industrial food system and the increasing insecurity it creates. Food insecurity in association with the elitism of some aspects of AFS have been covered in documentaries such as A Place at the Table (2012) and Farmageddon (2011), and it would likely benefit the AFS movement to have increased research support as well. This is an aspect which future research could explore.

**Policy Improvements and Suggestions**

There is much room for improvement in terms of policies and support for local CSA shares which may help local CSA groups increase the incidents of celebrations and gatherings for their members. For example, the introduction of farm and food policies which focus on domestic production and supporting local farmers in monetary ways such as subsides or grant support could free up resources to conduct more of such events. Increased support for the preservation of farmland at the provincial and national levels could also be beneficial, as it would allow more individuals to have access to local food products and initiatives such as CSAs and food co-operatives. A final suggestion would be to increase grant support for farmers to hire interns and farm workers. The vast majority of the responsibilities of operating a farm rest on the shoulders of the owners (two individuals in the case of Devon Acres) and few small-scale farms have the financial ability to hire part-time or full-time interns. With increased work support, farmers would be able to also focus their energy in other areas such as outreach to their consumer community and holding more events. Future research on how such policies or initiatives could impact the CSA community would be beneficial.

While acknowledging the limitations, the benefits that come from the increased connection and celebration were shown to have a large and positive impact on the share members, families, friends, chef students, and farmers alike. Although this was a case study of a particular CSA share, it is possible
that other groups can come together to build the same kinds of connections – creating a community and developing the concepts of communal support and building within the agricultural system.

“The work ahead of us is not easy. It requires us to move from a sense of individual resignation to a spirit of collective resolve. The values that drive us to begin this community-based food systems work must also be values that can sustain us over the long haul. In the end, building resilient local food systems is a remapping of our expectations. It is a cartography of hope” (Ackerman-Leist, 2013p. 292)
SOURCES


Kloppenburg, Jr, Jack, John Hendrickson, and G.W. Stevenson. "Coming In to the Foodshed." Rooted in


Mooney, Patrick H., Keiko Tanaka, and Gabriele Ciciurkaitė. "Food Policy Council Movement in North


"Travel To Wellness Inc." Canada Food and Wine Festivals and Events. 2015. Web. 23 Aug. 2015.


APPENDEX

Note: Find included the informed consent form and semi-structured interview questions used during this project.

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY
SOCIAL JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

“Celebration of Food and Community Well-being”

Student Researcher: Jennie Rideout, Social Justice and Community Engagement
Supervisor: Dr. Robert Feagan, Associate Professor, Society, Culture and Environment

INFORMATION

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Jennie Rideout under the supervision of Dr. Robert Feagan. This project is being completed in partial fulfillment of Jennie Rideout’s graduate research project. In this study, we are interested in celebrating local food and its connections to community well-being and identity. These ideas will be discussion in a group setting with the other people at this table.

Risks:
There are no foreseen risks associated with this research study. As a volunteer participant, you are able to leave the research at any point in time and direct quotations will not be used unless consent is given (refer to page 2). A short time commitment (10 minutes) will be required and questions will be answered in a group setting. If you are uncomfortable with the group conversation, you are able to discontinue your participation at any time. This will help build on an understanding of celebration of food and community building. The discussions focus around opinions of the role of celebration of food in daily lives and in general no personal information is sought so there is no risk of outside identification.

Benefits:
As a participant in this study, you will contribute to the development of knowledge in the fields of local food systems, alternatives to the industrial or conventional food system, and connections to celebration and community well-being and identity. You will also strengthen the final project by adding your unique voice and opinion. All perspectives are welcome as the objective is to highlight the diversity of community member viewpoints involved with local and sustainable food systems.
CONFIDENTIALITY

Your data will be confidential, which means no one other than Jennie Rideout will have access to your responses and/or data. All data will be recorded on a personal recording device and stored on a password protected computer. All recordings will be deleted by Jennie Rideout by January 2016. Data will be analysed and presented in any publications/conferences resulting from this project.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate. If you decide to participate, you have the right to skip any question or procedure you choose. You may withdraw from the study at any time. If you begin the study, but withdraw prior to completion, your data will be destroyed. Your data cannot be withdrawn once data collection is complete because data are stored without identifiers.

If you have any questions about the project or the procedures you may contact the student researcher, Jennie Rideout at (519)209-4060 or via email (ride0040@mylaurier.ca). You can also contact the graduate supervisor Dr. Robert Feagan (rfeagan@wlu.ca). This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board (INSERT REB NUMBER). If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in the research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact (Robert Basso - rbasso@wlu.ca or Paul Barnard - pbarnard@wlu.ca).

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

The results of this study will be used as a part of Jennie Rideout’s graduate research project and may be presented at conferences or published in scholarly journals. If you provide an email contact you may receive a summary of the results by August 31st 2015. If you would like more detailed information about the research project and ideas supporting it, contact the lead researcher.

CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information. I agree to participate in this study. Circle one (YES/NO)

I give consent and allow for my children (individuals under the age of 16) to participate in this research project. Circle one (YES / NO)

If you have children under the age of 16 participating in this research project – please sign here if you give permission for their direct quotations to be used within the final project.

Signature:________________________________________

Participant Name:__________________________________

Email (optional):____________________________________
Please sign here if you give permission for direct quotations to be used within the final Major Research Project.

Signature:_______________________________________

SEMI STRUCTURED RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What motivated you to come to this event?

2. What is your connection with Devon Acres?
   ___Operator ___Share holder _____________________Other (Specify)

3. Do you celebrate food in your life? If so, how?

4. How might celebration of food have a place in our communities?

5. What effects might celebration of food have in our communities?

6. What does participating in this celebration mean for you (and your family)?

7. Any last thoughts you’d like to share around food, celebration, or community?