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A Case for Re-Commoning: The (De)commodification of Food in Lewiston, Maine

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The (De)commodification of Food in

Lewiston, Maine

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Abstract

The enclosure of land and food production technology that began during Western colonization in what is now called Lewiston was part of a larger global movement towards the commodification of food through Western notions of capital and private ownership. The contention of this paper is that this historical context has produced our current food crisis: a paradox where, despite production of more than enough food to feed the world's population, hundreds of millions of people do not have access to adequate food. The Lewiston community experiences high rates of food insecurity despite the presence of food organizations battling hunger. Through an analysis of three frameworks aimed at addressing food insecurity, this paper argues that the persistence of hunger is not a result of organizational or production failures, but of structural ones. In response to this conclusion, this thesis explores the potential for re-commoning and revaluing food in Lewiston. I argue that to begin to escape from the commodified foodscape, food must be revalued to include its multiple, complex, and highly personal qualities. I explore this potential through an analysis of three models of potential commoning – community fridges, food sharing technology, and non-profit community kitchens.

Introduction

At its most fundamental level, food is a life-giver. Food nourishes our bodies, connects us with our families, communities, and cultures, provides us with essential nutrients, gives us energy to follow our passions and provide care for the people we love, and is essential to any form of life that we may choose to pursue. Our most memorable moments with loved ones often revolve around the process of cooking or sharing of food. Yet, despite the near-universal values found in and through food, our current food system allows millions to suffer from hunger each year. This thesis is about reimagining food as a common resource.

Since 2019, the number of people facing acute food insecurity has risen from 135 million to 345 million (World Food Programme). And despite the agricultural production of a sufficient quantity of food to feed the entire planet and the prevalence of anti-hunger campaigns, global hunger persists. This is a result of multiple intersecting factors, including the increased demand for animal protein and colossal levels of food waste. As climate change and political conflicts intensify, and volatile markets complicate global accessibility of food, rates of food insecurity and hunger have surged. Yet, the unifying factor constructing our current food crisis is the consideration of food as a commodity in the global market.

Nevertheless, there is hope. Food is uniquely positioned as a political agent in the global community. Due to its universality and social and cultural power, food has the distinctive potential to undermine hegemonic structures of power, bring diverse communities together, reestablish the connections between people and land, and ultimately bring about global change. Over the past few decades particularly, organizers, grassroots activists, food producers, academics, farmers, eaters, and growers from across the globe have been mobilizing to radically

shift global food production and consumption. They provide ground-up solutions to local issues while simultaneously antagonizing global structures of inequity and injustice.

This type of activist organizing is present in Lewiston – emerging in response to the pervasiveness of food insecurity and the drastic health implications that chronic food insecurity produces. It is my aim to illustrate the value in this local work, to frame the gaps in the Lewiston (emergency) food system as consequences of commodification, and to offer radical prospects for the future.

This thesis is thus about revaluing food and challenging the passive acceptance of its commodification and devaluation. It is about the glaring limitations of food accessibility in Lewiston, Maine despite myriad community organizers working towards food security. It is about imagining how we can support each other to alleviate the prevalence of food insecurity, hunger, and suffering in our communities.

This research is inspired by my work with the St. Mary's Nutrition Center in Lewiston beginning in May of 2022. Through the Nutrition Center, I've met countless community members - organizers, families, elementary school children, gardeners, food pantry users, outdoor education leaders, farmers, and growers. My experiences working with these folks, listening to their stories, sharing ideas and growing techniques, and exchanging recipes transformed my prior understanding of the local food system from basic information to a more nuanced, critical, and subjective sense of its complexities and restraints.

The first section of this thesis outlines these frameworks and their proposed solutions to food insecurity. These models include food security, food sovereignty, and food as/is commons. Their contributions to the conversation shape my critical perspectives on food systems.

In the following section, I trace through the history of Lewiston, discussing the process of colonization, land enclosure, the introduction of capitalism, exploitation, and the commodification of natural resources, including food. I was interested in how this history produced the current reality of food insecurity and how various frameworks, both academic and practical, were discussing and framing their suggested solutions. I discuss the notion that current widespread food insecurity is a direct result of specific historical circumstances – i.e., Western colonialism – and that commodification of food is not an inevitable outcome. I use this history to assert that the lack of access to fresh, local, healthy, sustainably and ethically produced, culturally appropriate, nourishing, and safe foods is a direct result of commodification and the flattening of the values of food.

In my first chapter, I move my analysis inwards, towards local organizations addressing food insecurity in Lewiston. In this chapter, I provide both statistical and qualitative information about the Lewiston community and discuss folks' varied experiences of food insecurity. I then examine the limitations of three different food security organizations in Lewiston – the St. Mary's Nutrition Center, the Trinity Jubilee Center, and the Good Shepherd Food Bank – using a food as/is commons framework to critique the operation of these organizations within a food as commodity lens.

In my second and final chapter, I offer three potential modes of re-commoning in Lewiston that include community fridges, food sharing technology, and nonprofit community kitchens. I argue that these methods revalue food and enforce the multidimensional value of food – a subversive action within the capitalist system. I also argue that there are a plethora of existing opportunities to participate in the re-commoning and decommodification of food in Lewiston and

the surrounding area, and that there are even more avenues yet to be explored that would

mitigate modern food-system issues.

Literature Review

The central theme that I will explore in the following chapter is the theoretical frameworks that have emerged in response to global food insecurity, which include food security, food sovereignty, and food as/is commons. These frameworks have emerged in conversation with each other and are a part of a highly interdisciplinary discussion, including a wide range of participants and academics, from agro-economists to indigenous activists, from farmers to consumers. These actors have responded to the myriad issues within the broken global food system in varied ways. The frameworks discussed below have been mobilized in the hopes of assuaging - and eventually eradicating - the harms that a lack of healthy and fresh food has on people – on the individual, household, regional, national, and global level. These theoretical frameworks ultimately aim to encourage a massive global shift in the availability of appropriate foods, modes of ethical production, and sustainability of food systems through different approaches and methodologies. In this chapter, I will trace the history of these frameworks – food security, food sovereignty, and food as/is commons – and examine the changes that they have adopted over time and their adaptations to new realities.

To provide adequate context of the larger conversation and scholarship from which an analysis of our local food system in Lewiston can be better conceptualized, I will explore the various academic frameworks that have emerged in response to rampant food insecurity. The authors I have chosen and the narratives they craft all aim to address and mitigate the harms that food insecure individuals, households, communities, and nations experience, though the extent to which they critically engage with the foundational roots of the issue and their effectiveness in increasing food access is varied and complex. This analysis will trace the origin of theories through to their current manifestations, criticisms, and critiques.

Food Security

Among texts that critically engage with food security as a framework is "Peasants'
Transnational Mobilization for Food Sovereignty in La Vía Campesina", a book chapter written
by Delphine Thivet which provides a critical lens of the shortcomings of the food security
framework. Thivet maintains that food security's responses to food *in*security are reliant on
explicit market-based solutions, which I will argue is an implicit guiding principle of the current
dogma of food security. An analysis of the academic work surrounding food security demands a
brief historical analysis of the evolution of the term and its multiple meanings. To this end, this
paper draws heavily upon "Trade Reforms and Food Security", a report compiled by the Food
and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and "Food Security: Conceptual History and
Pillars", a report for the Center for Sustainable Development compiled by Manoela de Oliveira
Veras, Emanuelle Parenti and Samara da Silva Neiva.

The concept of food security first came into being in the 1970s in response to the
international food crisis which augmented global hunger and malnutrition. The authors of
"Trade Reforms and Food Security" provide a useful outline of the development of food
security and the evolution of the term. According to the FAO, food security was first defined as
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" at the
World Food Summit in 1974, focusing on availability and the economic dimensions of access
(FAO 27). In 1983, a clause addressing the demand for food, a more human element of food
consumption, was added: "ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic
access to the basic food that they need" (FAO 27). Previously, the concept of food security had
centered the supply side of the issue – the sheer quantity of food that was produced and available

for consumption by the increasing global population. But beginning in the 1980s, the idea that food security should take demand-side individual agency and choice into serious consideration was growing. In 1986, the World Bank compiled a report entitled "Poverty and Hunger" that explored the temporal dynamics of hunger and food insecurity – distinguishing between chronic food insecurity and transitory food insecurity. The definition then included the assertion that food security involved "access of all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy, life", finally addressing the role of food in personal health (FAO 27).

During the 1990s, the international community again reevaluated the scope of the term, this time expanding to include nutrition and food preferences and including personal agency and dignity as a defining factor: "at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels [food security is achieved] 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 an active and healthy life" (FAO 28). And in 1994, the UNDP Human Development Report expanded upon the concept of social security (denoted as "human security", not in the formal United States connotation), and included food security as one element among others. The purpose of this chapter of the FAO report is therefore to establish a historical context for the evolution of the term food security and to outline the scopes of measurement (from individuals to household to region, and so on).

Today, the International Food Policy Research Institute's definition of food security requires that "all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life" (IFPRI). In this conception, food security consists of four crucial pillars: availability, access, consumption and stability, where availability refers to the production and

existence of food, access implies the household level ability to acquire sufficient food, consumption refers to health and nutrition standards, and stability refers to temporal dimensions of (in)consistent access (de Oliveira Veras et al. 2). Though these pillars do resonate in some circumstances and can provide a useful set of qualifications for a baseline level of food stability, they also serve to significantly narrow the potential qualifying causes for an individual, family, or region to suffer from food insecurity, a common critique leveled by emergent frameworks. If food *security* requires availability, access, utilization, and stability, food *insecurity* must therefore be a failure of fulfillment of one of these pillars. Feeding America also defines food insecurity in narrow terms, listing these causes on their webpage: "poverty, unemployment or low income, lack of affordable housing, chronic health conditions or lack of access to healthcare, systemic racism and racial discrimination" (America). While these factors do contribute to an individual or household's risk of food insecurity and hunger, fundamentally, they are merely *symptomatic* of the larger issue: the commodification of food. Thus, these factors (poverty, lack of healthcare, systemic racism, etc.) do not *cause* food insecurity, but are vehicles through which the insidious effects of food commodification travel. The framework of food security fails in this regard, as it offers no wide lensed critique of food as a commodified good or any alternative valuations.

For an example of food security's central focus of the symptoms of food insecurity as opposed to the root issues, consider a family of four: a single mother and three children. The mother loses her job and cannot make ends meet. She feeds her children as best she can, sacrificing her own nutrition. In this example, the framework of food security would imply that the onset of their experience of food insecurity was caused by the *mother's economic inability* to pay for healthy, adequate, and nutritious food. Her experience of access would be defined solely

by the limitations of her economic mobility. In response, the food security framework produces neoliberal solutions that seek to alleviate the mother's personal economic struggles, framing her food insecurity as a personal failure and assigning her full responsibility. These solutions include government funded programs such as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) or WIC (Women, Infants and Children food aid program) rather than delving deeper into a holistic and complete critique of the failures of the food system. The food security framework, at its most basic level, fails to consider broader structural issues such as the fundamental paradigm of food as commodity and the valuations of food that are hidden by this hegemonic narrative. This critique will be addressed further in subsequent discussion of food as/is commons.

As Delphine Thivet argues in her chapter "Peasants' Transnational Mobilization for Food Sovereignty in La Vía Campesina", the limitations of the food security approach are rooted in its *practical* inability to address larger global food superpowers like agribusinesses and seed companies – corporate entities who leverage monopolistic control over the global food system. Food security approaches tend to encourage the increase in industrial agricultural production and increased distribution as a response to food insecurity, a trend which Thivet identifies and critiques: "the liberalization of the agricultural economic sector… has far from improved access to food and eradicated hunger… this neoliberal economic orientation has led, in particular in the Global South, to a shift from agricultural production for domestic consumption to production for international external markets" (Thivet 195-96). Thivet also explores the emergence and evolution of the food sovereignty movement, which she argues occurred in response to the inadequacy of the food security framework in including the producers of global food systems and the complexities, historical nuances, and injustices that require a comprehensive response.

This framework of food security has long been mobilized in response to a vast array of global and local food access issues. Organizations such as the FAO, the United Nations, and other international governmental groups use the dominant rhetoric of food security to discuss the success of a nation in decreasing food insecurity (as they define it) and hunger in different countries. However, since the embrace of this approach and the solutions that it presents, these solutions have not come to fruition. As Vivero-Pol writes, "[d]espite years of international anti-hunger efforts and rising levels of gross national income and per capita food availability in a world that already produces enough food to adequately feed all, the number of hungry people has only been declining at a very slow pace since 2000 (FAO, IFAD, and WFP, 2015) (Vivero-Pol *Perspectives on Commoning : Autonomist Principles and Practices* 328). The dominant framework of food security relies heavily on a neoliberal agenda within which the "no money-no food rationality" thrives (Vivero-Pol "The Idea of Food as Commons or Commodity in Academia. A Systematic Review of English Scholarly Texts" 185). As previously posited, food security narratives and solutions manifest in the US in the form of SNAP and WIC benefits, which are highly generalized, and which limit personal agency in food choices and valuations. It operates *within* the highly commoditized view of the globalized food system and passively, nefariously reinforces the status quo. If the real goal is to eradicate hunger on every level, food security has failed both in terms of immediate effects and larger trends.

Ultimately, if we understand the goals of individual food security correctly - ensuring that all people have consistent access to healthy, adequate, and safe food - the solutions that food security presents are outrageously inadequate on every level – from the individual level to the global sustainability of food production for producers and consumers. It is this context from which the food sovereignty movement materializes.

Food Sovereignty

In response to the shortcomings of the neoliberal, market-based solutions that food security produces and the subsequent continuation of overwhelming rates of global hunger, food insecurity, isolation from food production, exploitation of farmers and laborers, and the increasing effects of climate change, people began organizing, in a movement I will refer to as food sovereignty. The birth of this transnational social movement in 1996 was sparked by the "negative social impacts of the neoliberal economic globalization of agriculture" (Thivet 193) and addresses a plethora of food related injustices in the globalized world.

Texts that engage with food sovereignty include the previously referenced "Peasants' Transnational Mobilization for Food Sovereignty in La Vía Campesina" by Delphine Thivet and "Building capacity between the private emergency food system and the local food movement: Working toward food justice and sovereignty in the global North" by Jesse C. McEntee and Elena N. Naumova.

In her scholarship, Delphine traces the trajectory of the food rights movement, from food security to food sovereignty, centering the emergence of the peasants' movement La Vía Campesina in 1996, which in 2008 was "comprised of 163 rural organizations made up of peasants, small- and medium-scale farmers, organic farmers, rural women, rural workers, and indigenous and landless peoples from the Americas, Asia, Europe, and Africa" (Thivet 193). Though there have been inconsistent definitions of food sovereignty since its inception, it can be broadly defined as "the right of each nation or people to define their own agricultural and food policies" (Thivet 193) and prioritizes the rights of small, rural farmers and producers, providing a platform for advocacy and empowering the voices of those most marginalized by the agri-business model of globalized agriculture. Of utmost importance for La Vía Campesina and the

food sovereignty movement as a whole is the reality that 70% of people suffering from food insecurity and hunger are food producers themselves (Vivero-Pol "Food as Commons or Commodity? Exploring the Links between Normative Valuations and Agency in Food Transition" 3). In Thivet's account, food sovereignty is an agri-food activist movement that aims to address the domination and exploitation of rural producers at the hands of transnational corporations. She asserts that agri-businesses like Monsanto and Cargill falsely claim to "feed the world (Kneen 1999: 162)" (Thivet 199) through their agricultural output. In reality, according to La Vía Campesina, although "[p]easants [in Brazil] have less than 25% of farm land… they generate 40% of all agricultural value… It is still Brazilian peasants and family farmers that feed the Brazilian people… Brazilian agribusiness is more likely to feed cattle in Europe or produce ethanol for automobiles than it is to feed a hungry child in Brazil" (La Vía Campesina 2010: 4-5) (Thivet 199). As Thivet interprets the work of La Vía Campesina, the framework of food sovereignty is useful in providing a foundation of conditions onto which fundamental human rights can be fully realized (Thivet 197). In other words, food sovereignty would create the conditions required for the establishment of the fundamental right to food for all: food sovereignty is the *precursor* to true food security.

Jesse McEntee and Elena Naumova, authors of the compelling article "Building capacity between the private emergency food system and the local food movement: Working toward food justice and sovereignty in the global North", have similar ideas about the necessity of food sovereignty in achieving food security, though the scope of their application is highly localized as opposed to the larger, transnational lens of Thivet. McEntee and Naumova explore the failures of the private emergency food system (PEFS), which consists of food donations from individuals, the state, and companies and distributed by food pantries, food banks, soup kitchens,

and shelters, among other organizations. The authors' primary critique of these entities is that the food they distribute is often low-quality, highly processed and high in sugar (McEntee and Naumova). They argue that this is largely because the food they receive is from companies who receive tax breaks for donating food, regardless of the quality or nutritional content. The crux of their critique of this system is the corporate nature of the current food regime – including policies that have allowed corporations to receive tax breaks for donating surplus foods. Effectively, these policies have allowed "unwanted food (food that would otherwise be considered waste) to be utilized… allowing large corporate entities to dump surplus product of questionable nutritional quality upon the PEFS", and as a result, "corporations are… benefiting from policies that minimize their legal risk" (McEntee and Naumova 239).

These authors explicitly critique the food security framework, from which the failures of the PEFS were created, claiming that "food security frameworks often operate within traditional markets that are agents of the industrial agricultural system representative of a neoliberal economy" (McEntee and Naumova 237) and that these policies prioritize the short term profit goals of companies at the cost of long term food security, nutrition, and health of individuals. In other words, food security only benefits the corporate producers, not individuals. A crucial element to center in this argument is the harm and disempowerment that individuals participating in PEFS experience. As McEntee and Naumova illuminate, the individuals in the PEFS context no longer have the power they may have in a public retail setting such as a grocery store or farmer's market. Instead, they navigate food access within the unpredictable confines of the PEFS, which deny them their food rights and positioning these individuals "in an even more food-precarious state, disempowering them beyond that which is accomplished through retail markets" (McEntee and Naumova 245).

In response, McEntee and Naumova advocate for the alternative of food sovereignty which, in their words, "focuses on dismantling the corporate food regime and puts "the aspirations, needs, and livelihoods of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of the market" (McEntee and Naumova 238). In applying this theory to their field site of Grafton County, New Hampshire, the authors note several crucial points. First, they assert that low-income consumers' interest in becoming involved with local food production through activities such as farming or hunting or to consume local fruits/vegetables and products has not been engaged with in research (247). As a response to this and in an attempt to negotiate the benefits of both PEFS and the local food system, the authors argue for a traditional localism – which "engages participants through non-capitalist, de-commodified means that are affordable and accessible where food is grown/raised/hunted, not with the intention to gain profit, but to obtain fresh and affordable food" (McEntee and Naumova 247). Traditional localism serves as a useful tool for imagining how food sovereignty may be practiced and embodied in local scenarios and for how larger, structural solutions to food insecurity, though problematic, may be pushed towards a more holistic, sustainable, and effective mode of addressing local food insecurity and creating "food *citizens*, not only food *consumers*" (248). McEntee and Naumova conclude with an optimistic view of this collaboration between PEFS and local food movements which they contend could "improve access to high quality local foods and… challenge the systemic income and race-based inequalities that increasingly define the modern food system and are the result of prioritizing market-based reforms that recreate inequality at the local and regional levels" (McEntee and Naumova 235).

Food As/Is Commons

Despite the rhetorical strength and political power that the food sovereignty movement has garnered for increased attention on food producers' rights, there have been recent criticisms of its shortcomings, primarily surrounding the rhetorical valuations and general conceptions of food that it tends to center.

Authors engaging with the concept of commoning or re-commoning include Jose Luis Vivero-Pol's multiple meditations on the issue including "Food as Commons or Commodity? Exploring the Links between Normative Valuations and Agency in Food Transition", "The idea of food as commons in academia. A systematic review of English scholarly texts" and Joy Y. Zhang and Michael Barr's 2018 article "The Transformative Power of Commoning and Alternative Food Networks". Also, of note in terms of the wider conversation centering commoning and the academic regard of natural resources as communal are Garret Hardin's "The Tragedy of the Commons" (1968) and Elinor Ostrom's seminal work, "Governing the Commons" (1990).

In Garrett Hardin's influential work, "The Tragedy of the Commons", Hardin argues that common access resources are inevitably exploited by people, particularly in areas of high population density and demand. His popularized example is of the sheep in a pasture – each herder adds a sheep to their herd, increasing their personal benefit. Yet, as herders add more animals and graze them on shared pasture, the pasture is degraded, and each herder experiences the harms of this degradation equally. As Hardin sees it, privatization of land and resources is one compelling solution for regulation: "the tragedy of the commons as a food basket is averted by private property… the air and waters surrounding us cannot be readily fenced, and so… must be prevented by different means, by coercive laws or taxing devices" (Hardin). Though he

admits that private ownership in its current manifestation often results in pollution and exploitation, Hardin sees private regulation as a strategy for avoiding the tragedy of the commons.

In 1990, Elinor Ostrom published her now-famous, seminal commentary "Governing the Commons", which expertly leveraged case studies and theoretical meditations on common pool resources (CPR) to argue that commoning does not inevitably end in exploitation and environmental degradation. As opposed to the theories of economists, Ostrom argues that in reality, people are exceedingly willing and able to manage common access resources through community agreed upon practices and regulation (Ostrom). Using case studies, including fieldwork in Maine, Ostrom argues that the commoning of resources is most successful when those who regulate them are those who benefit from them – implying that proximity and place-based knowledge are essential. The so-called "tragedy of the commons" only occurs when external entities attempt to regulate local common resources for personal benefit.

These two works are prominent in any discussion of common pool resources and are therefore implicit in discussions of food as/is commons. Commoning is often imagined as a lawless, unpredictable, and environmentally degrading process. However, as Ostrom's argument implicitly proves, commoning in practice allows for profound community building through discussions of regulation, implementation of practice, and use. In the following discussion, I will explain how the authors explore the application of commoning to food and discuss its potential through a multi-dimensional revaluation of food.

Within the conversation between these frameworks of food security and food sovereignty, there has been serious criticism for their complete lack of discussion of one integral factor – the valuation(s) of food. In his article "Food as Commons or Commodity? Exploring the

Links between Normative Valuations and Agency in Food Transition", Jose Luis Vivero-Pol discusses the contradictions within imagined transitory food regimes that continue to center the value of food around its exchange value, or value in exchange, as opposed to its practical value, or value in use. He argues that to pursue a truly radical, paradigm-shifting global food system, the social construction of food as a commodity must be broken out of and a new conception of food as a common good consisting of multiple meanings and values must be adopted (Vivero-Pol "Food as Commons or Commodity? Exploring the Links between Normative Valuations and Agency in Food Transition"). Vivero-Pol is highly critical of these previously discussed frameworks, positing that "despite [their] call for a "paradigm shift", major analyses on flaws in the global food system and… hunger do not question the very nature of food as a private good" (3). Vivero-Pol's position hinges on his belief that the value of food cannot be fully expressed or conveyed by its ever-shifting market value or through its "tradeable features", which he defines as "durability, external beauty and the standardization of naturally-diverse food products" (3).

Instead, he asserts that there are six dimensions of food that contribute to a more complete series of valuations which require attention: "food as an essential life-enabler, a natural resource, a human right, a cultural determinant, a tradeable good, and a public good" (Vivero-Pol "The Idea of Food as Commons or Commodity in Academia. A Systematic Review of English Scholarly Texts" 183). These multi-dimensional valuations of food directly and pointedly criticize the mono-dimensional and flattened valuation of food as commodity and present an alternative to the contemporary commoditized, impersonal, and unsustainable system. Vivero-Pol also explores the historical roots of commoning, explaining that food trade has nearly always been an important element of human communities, and is often tightly regulated by those in power. However, he maintains that food trades "were done under strict public governance and

always with the primary purpose of feeding people, since non-economic dimensions of food were also valued and protected. Profit maximization was not the only driving ethos… but earning a living and feeding humanity" (Vivero-Pol "Food as Commons or Commodity? Exploring the Links between Normative Valuations and Agency in Food Transition" 7). In our current industrialized, globalized, agri-business dominated food system, these valuations have been diminished and pushed aside in favor of exchange value. In a nod to history, Vivero-Pol emphasizes that this current situation reflects one specific spatial and temporal outcome and is definitively *not* an inevitable situation.

In his related article "The idea of food as commons in academia. A systematic review of English scholarly texts", Jose Luis Vivero-Pol analyzes past academic examinations of food valuations and its conception as either a commodity or a common, understanding the construction of food as a commodity as the dominant theory and the construction of food as commons as the "marginal valuation" (Vivero-Pol "The Idea of Food as Commons or Commodity in Academia. A Systematic Review of English Scholarly Texts" 184). Vivero-Pol discusses the process of the three waves of enclosure of food production related resources and how this enclosure created the social construction of food as a commodity. Building from his previous work, he argues that due to the myriad social and cultural meanings of food and the fact that it is essential to life, food should be a common resource. To further this point, Vivero-Pol investigates the history and progression of the academic discussion of food as a common resource, tracing its development from 1900 onward and making note of the increase in academic discussion of food + commons after the 2008 food crisis. Also of note is the difference between "[t]he phenomenological approach to food (epitomized in the "food as" search term)" and "the ontological approach to food ('food is')", in which the presence of the former largely

outweighs the presence of the latter, implying that food is *imagined* as commons, but not *assumed* to be commons (ontologically) in academia (187). He argues that his conception of the commons "is about caring, collectiveness, equity, responsibility and stewardship (Helfrich and Haas 2009)" (187). Vivero-Pol also synthesizes that "safe and healthy food for everyone is proposed as a feasible policy option as long as food is given the status of a global public good the states have to take care of (Lérin, 2002; Firer, 2004; Burns and Stohr, 2011; Beltrán-García and Gifra-Durall, 2013; McMahon, 2013)", yet there is still potentially a concern embedded here regarding the reliability of the state to equitably distribute resources (194). It seems that state management may be too high up in the power structure to be effective and that more localized or community management practices may be more effective, though his idea of the "consideration of access to healthy food as a public good that requires public intervention through policies, regulations, and incentives" is appealing (195). Vivero-Pol's conclusion is that the commodification of food is the root of the issues we experience today regarding food and the emancipatory solution to this problem is the decommodification and re-commonification of food.

Thus far, the conversation surrounding commoning has been largely theoretical. The case for re-commoning hasn't yet taken off in academia –José Luis Vivero-Pol is one of the only authors engaging with theoretical and philosophical notions of food and commoning. Though the physical application of commoning in communities is frequently practiced and has been practiced for generations by various groups (whether it is described explicitly as such or not), the academic engagement with commoning has been scarce. This disconnect is referenced in "The Transformative Power of Commoning and Alternative Food Networks" by Joy Y. Zhang and Michael Barr. In this case, the authors apply a commoning framework to an alternative food network in southern China called *Natur*. This application highlights the social implications that

come with the act of communal commoning, including its "introduction of an alternative set of social relations" and its potential for creating more cohesive social bonds through participation in the commons (Zhang and Barr 733).

This participation, as described by one member of *Natur*, "is a wide concept". The member explains that they "can participate by making a purchase, by being a volunteer, by visiting a farm. Participation doesn't mean that one literally has to take part in the labour. It's about your contribution to the making of a community'" (Zhang and Barr 777). These authors are interested in the benefits of applying a commoning framework to alternative food networks (AFNs) to more thoroughly understand the potential relationships that could be fostered between individuals, within communities, and between food producers and consumers. They argue that "[t]he commons are not merely resources that are owned or accessed by the collective. They are also the nexus of place, intricate social relations and collectively defined norms and interests" and that the "very process of commoning brings internal change in how we contextualise and anchor our social relations to one another vis-a-vis the use of natural resources" (Zhang and Barr 787; 80). As opposed to a food within a market, commoning incorporates radically different ways to interact with and think about personal communities. The framework of commoning provides an opportunity for people to perform commoning – to take part in meaningful and transformative community building experiences. These authors also argue that commoning "is not a process to reduce the multiplicity of life; it is a method for how to work with it. To seek common ground amongst its diverse members" (Zhang and Barr 782) - that the process of commoning facilitates meaningful discourse between community members with varying priorities and ideas for the future. In theory, it removes hierarchical dynamics and offers an equal platform for all members to share their opinions and perspectives. This application of

commoning differs from others previously explored (food security and food sovereignty) – it provides a real example of the transformative power of commoning within food systems on the individual and community level through shared commitments and values, fostering social relationships and establishing value in the internal experience of commoning as an essential part of a person's identity.

Conclusion

In sum, these frameworks have been mobilized to work towards a total transformation of the global food system as we know it. Although the frameworks of food security and food sovereignty are useful in that they challenge the effects of the globalized, industrialized food system, the extent to which they challenge the status quo and the degree to which they advocate for the modification or eradication of the existing system varies. The mobilization of food as/is commons in response to these conservative tendencies offers a compelling alternative, one that is radical and adaptable, and practically applicable to a wide range of scenarios on all levels of management. In the discussion following, I will explore the potential of re-commoning food in Lewiston, Maine.

Background: A Brief History of Land and Exploitation in Lewiston

Located on the ancestral and current homelands of the Wabanaki people, Lewiston, Maine is a post-industrial city in central Maine. It rests halfway between the capital of Augusta and the larger hub city of Portland, Maine. For thousands of years or "as long as anyone can remember" members of the Wabanaki (Dawnland) Confederacy - comprised of the Maliseet, Mi'kmaw, Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, and Abenaki tribes, lived and labored with these lands, fishing for salmon and other migratory fish species on the Androscoggin River, hunting, foraging, and trading (Hall; James). In what is now called Lewiston-Auburn, members of the Wabanaki tribes cultivated beans, squash, and corn along the banks of the Androscoggin River by the Great Falls and used the river's clay deposits for pottery (Hall).

For the members of the Wabanaki Confederacy, there was no conception of land ownership or private property prior to the arrival of the European settlers. Though there were territorial understandings and boundaries among tribes, the question of ownership and the enclosure of swaths of land was not present. In a speech given on the National Day of Mourning, Frank James (Wamsutta) of the Aquinnah Wampanoag states that his ancestors "understood that there were boundaries, but never before had we had to deal with fences and stone walls. But the white man had a need to prove his worth by the amount of land that he owned" (James 394). Clearly, the Wampanoags and the tribes that comprise the Wabanaki Confederacy are distinct, and each have vastly different ancestral and modern histories and experiences. The throughline from Frank James and his tribe's experiences and others who lived along the Androscoggin exists within the novel and violent conception of land that the Europeans brought with them – an ideological conflict that devolved into violence, generational trauma, and land disconnection. James continues in his speech, addressing the dissonance between the two distinct

understandings of land - utilization versus relationality: "[t]he Indian, having been stripped of his power, could only stand by and watch while the white man took his land and use it for his personal gain…[he] could not understand; for to him, land was survival, to farm, to hunt, to be enjoyed. It was not to be abused" (395). Because the settlers believed that their system of enclosure and understandings of land were "advanced" and "civilized", and that traditional Native notions were "backwards" and "uncivilized", they rationalized the dislocation, pain, and generational suffering that they inflicted on the Indigenous peoples they encountered.

Though there were significant interactions between and among tribes, traditional ways of life did not alter drastically until the arrival of the Europeans in the seventeenth century. Colonists arrived in Maine, bringing brutal violence, highly infectious and fatal disease, and an entirely foreign conception of human relations with the natural world along with them. Mi'kmaw academics[1] have defined this period as "the contact period", in which the Mi'kmaw people "had their own governance structure, with an economy based on trade within our nations and an education based on survival and cooperation" (Senier 22). According to a Maine Memory exhibit curated and advised by a group of Indigenous individuals in Maine, during this time "Wabanaki leaders worked to incorporate settlers into their social and ecological networks, to create responsible relationships, and to 'make kin' and alliances with their guests" (Lisa Brooks). However, English colonists soon took advantage of the hospitality of the Wabanaki peoples and "[e]ven as Wabanaki people strove to incorporate settlers into their…cultural and economic

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[1] Though the groups based in the Androscoggin Valley were from other Wabanaki groups, such as the Anasagunticooks, the Mi'kmaw perspective is integral in reconstructing the larger trends in the area. The histories of other Wabanaki groups are more difficult to find, due to the differing modes of history-keeping and oral traditions and the violence that precipitated their genocide/dislocation from the land. Because of this, it is necessary to rely on accounts from other Native communities in the state.

systems, the settlers sought their signatures and consent of land ownership on finite political documents", deliberating dispossessing the Wabanaki of their rights to the land (Lisa Brooks).

As defined by Jaime Battiste and her fellow scholars, this period of initial contact and negotiation is followed by the "treaty diplomacy period", "in which Mi'kmaq diplomats advocated for and negotiated treaties with European settlers and royalty" which occurred between 1630 and 1796 (Senier 22). In 1690, amidst this era of supposed negotiation and fairness, English settlers brutally destroyed the town of Amitgonpontook, killing Wabanaki people and forcing them off the land they had lived on and stewarded for generations.

The diplomacy period was in turn followed by "the treaty denial era", which lasted from 1800 to 1982. According to these authors, this period of treaty denial was a "dark time in our experience" and was defined by the denial of "rights that they had negotiated" and the implementation of "assimilation policies aimed at destroying the Mi'kmaq culture, language, knowledge, and ways of life" (41).

The arrival of the colonists was not only the beginning of a period of physical and cultural violence, but also marked the beginning of the infringement of Western values of land and capital onto the physical land where it had previously solely been valued in terms of relationality and commonality. The use of the natural resources that these tribes negotiated with each other was suddenly valued in a radically and fundamentally different manner. Land, water, food, and other natural resources were commodified. From the perspective of colonizers, relationality with elements of the natural world was transformed, from matters of relation to objects of potential capital. Yet, despite the atrocities enacted upon the Native communities in Maine, their presence and continued history in Lewiston today endures.

Due to the calculated erasure of the Indigenous peoples of this land, through physical and cultural genocide, there is little written information about the goings-on in the area of what is now Lewiston during this time in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly in terms of land and the use of natural resources. In 1768, the record becomes clearer, as European settlers kept written documentation. In that year, members of the Pejepscot Proprietors, a land speculation company comprised of elites from Boston who divvied up much of the land of what is now called Maine, granted two of their members the land comprising the city of "Lewiston". Their goal was to encourage other families to settle. By 1795, the town was successfully incorporated as Lewistown.

Over the years, the town became a small yet successful farming community. As the East Coast teetered on the edge of industrialization during the early to mid-nineteenth century, the physical location of the city of Lewiston and particularly the presence of the Androscoggin River and the Great Falls began to hint at a potentially lucrative industrial setting. By 1836, the Androscoggin Falls Dam, Lock, and Canal Company was formed by local entrepreneurs and the wooden sawmill was fully functioning on the Great Falls of the Androscoggin. Business tycoon Benjamin Bates, encouraged by an industry investor from Boston, Alexander De Witt, arrived in Lewiston in the 1840s, bringing with him an ideology of capitalistic intentions and production goals. In 1850, Irish immigrants recruited from Boston arrived and began to work on building the canal system, digging huge trenches through the city by hand. This back breaking labor was brutal and relentless and the Irish experienced racial harassment and discrimination. Bates Mill No 1 was built and was fully functioning by 1852 and provided employment for Irish, French-Canadians, and other European immigrants who had largely previously worked on small subsistence family farms.

In 1849, the construction of railroads in the twin cities of Lewiston and Auburn, on the west side of the Androscoggin, facilitated the constant stream of materials needed for the mills and connected Lewiston-Auburn with other towns in Maine, Canada, and ultimately, the South. The industrialization and economic success of the cities of Lewiston and Auburn were directly facilitated through the cotton produced by the forced labor and enslavement of African Americans in the South. Without cheap cotton, the mills would have shut down, taking the thousands of jobs, albeit difficult and poorly paying jobs, with them. The city of Lewiston is therefore inextricably entangled with the horrors of American enslavement through the buying and transforming of cotton into expensive textiles. A history of this area that ignores or omits this is complicit in a violent historical erasure.

The long history of exploitation that occurred in Lewiston can be traced through to the structural basis of the mill business itself. It was built on exploitation, in invisibilized ways, as evidenced above and through the exploitation of natural resources such as cotton and dye, and more visibly, through the long-term exploitation of workers. Mill workers, many of whom were young children, experienced harsh working conditions, long hours, and low wages and employee injuries and even deaths on the job were not uncommon.

As electricity took a more central role in industrialization and the production of goods, textile companies moved closer to the source of their raw materials – the South. The mills in Lewiston closed in the late 1950s, leaving the city empty and many buildings partially abandoned. In the early 2000s, a large influx of Somali and Somali Bantu families began to arrive in Lewiston. Their presence and the arrival of other primarily African and South/Central American families and individuals to Lewiston has brought new life and perspective to the city and the revitalization that Lewiston has experienced would not have been possible or nearly as

complex and interesting without them. It has taken time and substantial work within the Lewiston community, but the city has revitalized itself through community-based efforts to increase housing accessibility, reestablish business friendly policy, build community among and within neighborhoods, promote public health, and notably for this paper, expand access to healthy, affordable, and local food.

It may be pertinent for the reader to ask how this history is relevant to the issue of the modern globalized food system and its multiplicity of failures. How does the history of the city, starting from the very beginning when it wasn't a city at all, but the homelands of the Abenaki people, enable an understanding of the current problems we face? In other words, how are these contextual details important in telling the story of food commodification and its impacts today?

As I will assert throughout this analysis, the city of Lewiston, Maine serves as a case-study of the effects of the commodification of food on people's ability to access fresh, local, healthy, sustainably and ethically produced, culturally appropriate, nourishing, and safe foods for themselves and their families. Providing this context also serves to deny the inevitability of the commodification of food and the food systems we find ourselves in today. As will be explored, the modern food system is *not* in fact inevitable, but the result of a specific colonial violence and an imposition of Western capitalism. This history offers an opportunity to explore alternatives to this reality and makes possible a range of possibilities for the future.

Lewiston also provides a specific chance to investigate the existing and potential reactions and responses to widespread inaccessibility to food as well as a scalable approach to new ways of conceptualizing and valuing food that exist outside of a commodity economy and instead center community, sustainability, collaboration, accessibility, and care.

The history of Lewiston is therefore *integral* to the current manifestations of food insecurity. The city's foundational roots in colonial entanglements and violence, the history of industrialization and the concurrent complicity in violent enslavement that made the establishment and success of the city possible, the shifting conceptions of land and property, capital and relationships, and the process of isolation of people from land through increased globalization and industrialization and the relentless nature of capitalism all contribute to current manifestations of inequity and injustice.

Critical to a discussion of these issues is the increasingly strong-willed, determined, and focused community efforts to address food insecurity (among other issues). This broad history and the contemporary reactions to its effects together form an essential context through which all discussions of the city moving forward must be viewed through.

Chapter 1: Food Access and Commodification

Considering the previous discussion of the frameworks of food security and food sovereignty and their varied approaches to addressing food insecurity, it is evident that central failures manifest due to the passive acceptance of one central idea – that it is acceptable for food to be treated and valued solely as a commodity. This acceptance of commodification, which has become dangerously normalized to the point where questioning it is considered highly impractical and impossible, has facilitated immense harm to the global community and to Lewiston particularly. It is primarily for these reasons that I consider the notion of food as/is commons to be the only ethical, effective, and applicable framework to address the urgency of the issue of food insecurity as an issue of environmental justice. Food as/is commons fundamentally challenges hegemonic discourse and practice surrounding food and asserts a radical, new, *just*, food system.

In the following profile[2], I will consider current patterns of food insecurity in Lewiston before analyzing the role that commodification plays in the manifestation of these issues and then exploring several current modes of addressing local food insecurity, using case studies of establishments in Lewiston.

Food Access and Limitations in Lewiston

In 2021, 85,000 Mainers experienced "very low food insecurity", estimated to be "up 10% since pre-pandemic levels" (GSFB "How Does Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine Find Food?"). Maine has the sixth-highest rate of very low food security in the nation and 1 in 5

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[2] Much of the data in the following community profile was gathered from the Community Food Assessment GFCLA. "Community Food Assessment: Lewiston, Maine." edited by Good Food Council of Lewiston-Auburn, 2013, pp. 1-46., a report compiled by the Good Food Council of Lewiston-Auburn in 2013. The data is therefore outdated, though updated figures are included wherever possible.

children are food insecure (GSFB "Maine's Good Shepherd Food Bank Releases 2021 Hunger Projections"). According to the Maine Center for Economic Policy, the prevalence of pre-pandemic food insecurity for families of color was double that of all households (MECEP). Black households experienced food insecurity at nearly three times the rate of all other households.

Over 20% of the Lewiston community lives below the poverty line, with some neighborhoods earning only $20,000 annual median salary (HealthyNeighborhoods). One of these neighborhoods is the Tree Street Neighborhood, a 30-block area in downtown Lewiston stretching from the Colisée to Kennedy Park that is home to nearly 11,000 residents and 5,000 households and is the most diverse area in Lewiston (Gorman). Three of the six poorest census tracts in Maine are in the Tree Street Neighborhood and nearly half of the families in the neighborhood live below poverty (HealthyNeighborhoods 30). According to 2018 estimates, 4,825 residents in 1,855 households live in these tracts within the Tree Street area (30). This neighborhood also has the densest population of children under 5 in the entire state of Maine (Gorman). Eligibility rates for free or reduced lunch for students who attend the two elementary schools serving the Tree Street neighborhood, Longley and Montello, were 96% and 79% of students respectively (GFCLA "Community Food Assessment: Lewiston, Maine" 23; HealthyNeighborhoods 32). The community is rife with overlapping and compounding hardships, many of which occur simultaneously in households. Drug use, racism, economic immobility, generational and/or chronic poverty, the presence of lead in rental apartments, and food insecurity all interact in intersectional and complex ways. Of particular interest to this study are barriers to healthy, affordable, fresh, culturally appropriate, local foods for residents living in Lewiston, and particularly barriers that residents who are the most marginalized face.

According to a survey of 2,700 Lewiston residents in 2014, 25.2% of households did not have high food security [3] (Harris et al. 103) and from 2008-2012, SNAP/EBT usage in Lewiston has been consistently nearly twice that of the state of Maine (GFCLA "Community Food Assessment: Lewiston, Maine" 23). Harris et al. also discovered in their 2014 report that "the differences in the overall distribution of food security status by census tract was not statistically significant", meaning that food insecurity is geographically widespread in Lewiston – from the downtown area to more rural neighborhoods (Harris et al. 103-04). Though the Tree Streets experience food insecurity due to specific geographical limitations to access including issues of transportation, food insecurity in more suburban/rural households in Lewiston is more widespread and potentially more prevalent than previously imagined.

In the entire city of Lewiston, only "three supermarkets and four neighborhood markets had at least six out of seven types of food identified as healthy", foods that include "fresh fruit, fresh vegetables, whole grains, frozen vegetables, lean meats, low-fat dairy, and canned/dry vegetables" (GFCLA "Community Food Assessment: Lewiston, Maine"). Evidently, government assistance, or SNAP/EBT benefits, may increase *access* to food, but does not translate directly into greater access to *good* food (GFCLA "Community Food Assessment: Lewiston, Maine" 10, emphasis original). Yet, government assistance is essential in facilitating easier access to food. The weekly farmers market, which is in the downtown area and therefore largely within walking distance for many residents, accepts SNAP/WIC benefits and offers a program called Maine Harvest Bucks, in which SNAP/EBT users buy goods using their EBT card, receiving 50% back

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[3] This statistic is likely a low estimate, as the survey was conducted through house phones, meaning that unhoused people and those without home phones were excluded.

in "Harvest Bucks", which can then be used to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at the Farmer's Market.

As is the case in the state of Maine, nationally, and globally, food insecurity disproportionately affects people of color in Lewiston. African immigrants and their families experience specific barriers to food access including, but not limited to, language barriers, lack of knowledge of or eligibility for government benefits, high rates of unemployment and poverty, confusion about appropriate Halal products due to language barriers, high expense of Halal products, and transportation (Vasquez-Jacobus and Jalali). According to preliminary data compiled in 2013, 72% of recent Somali and Somali-Bantu immigrants experienced barriers to obtaining nutritious culturally appropriate foods (Vasquez-Jacobus and Jalali). Most African food stores in Lewiston are in the downtown area, making transportation and limited bus schedules an additional limiting factor for families living in public housing complexes that are beyond walking distance.

Additional factors limiting the accessibility of fresh, local, healthy, culturally appropriate, and affordable food include the proximity of fast food locations (89% of single-parent households in Lewiston live within 0.5 miles of at least three fast food restaurants) (GFCLA "Community Food Assessment: Lewiston, Maine"). An additional factor limiting accessibility of fresh, local, healthy, culturally appropriate, and affordable food is the expense of healthy food in the downtown area (which is 40% more expensive than the same food in more suburban areas" (10). Due to the limited bus schedule and the impracticality of carrying multiple bags of heavy groceries on the bus, sometimes with children, many families must shop at more expensive shops downtown that do not have as many affordable options for healthy foods. Therefore, "many people frequently run out of grocery funds by the end of the month" (10).

According to the Harris et al report, "in multi-variable analysis, only the presence of children and fewer adults in the household predicted lower food security status" (Harris et al. 107), meaning that single-parent households are at increased risk of food insecurity regardless of geography. When grocery funds are depleted, fast-food chains are a convenient way to address immediate caloric needs, despite the overwhelming desire of parents and caregivers to provide their children with healthier options. In a survey of 36 downtown consumers conducted by Bates student Rebecca Duggan in 2011, nearly 25 responded that the primary factor discouraging them from buying healthier foods was that it was too expensive. In the same survey, all 36 respondents emphasized their desire to consume more fresh fruits and vegetables (13).

Though essential in providing an overview of the state of food access and insecurity in this specific temporal and spatial moment, these statistics offer a one-dimensional and impersonal depiction of the neighborhoods in Lewiston. In my experience meeting residents, albeit limited to four years, the passion, care, motivation, drive, and love that they embody for their families, their communities and the city is palpable. As a 2022 summer fellow at the Nutrition Center, I had the opportunity to work with community gardeners, youth, pantry clients, and people interested in cooking, growing, and community. The dreams and ideas that people have for the future of the city and their neighborhoods are radical and communally focused – increasing land access for landless/land-limited gardeners who want to grow more produce for their families and neighbors, increasing education about how to grow African herbs and vegetables in Maine's climate, cooking classes with a focus on locally grown, seasonal foods, etc. Yet as motivated and driven as people are, food insecurity persists.

In sum, Lewiston residents experience food insecurity to varying degrees and face barriers specific to their situations and overlapping marginalization. Though government

assistance is integral to food access, it often falls short of providing *good* and *enough* food for residents and their families.

In response to the failure of government assistance in providing adequate food, local organizers established private emergency food systems (PEFS) such as food pantries, food banks, soup kitchens, and emergency shelters. In Lewiston, these resources are widespread and include locations such as St. Mary's Food Pantry, Hope Haven Gospel Mission (food kitchen/shelter), Salvation Army (food pantry), Trinity Jubilee Center (food pantry and soup kitchen), Calvary United Methodist Church/Calvary City Mission Meals Program (soup kitchen), New Beginnings (soup kitchen for youth under 22 years old), The Root Cellar Food Pantry, and Pathway Vineyard Church (soup kitchen) (GFCLA "Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens in Lewiston-Auburn").

Discussion

In the following discussion, I will analyze a local food pantry, soup kitchen, and food bank through a critical lens, centering the impact that the commodification of food plays in the gaps in their abilities to provide food for the community.

St. Mary's Nutrition Center: Lewiston, Maine

The St. Mary's Nutrition Center (the NC) is in downtown Lewiston on the edge of Kennedy Park in the heart of the Tree Streets neighborhood. The NC's primary programs include a food pantry that is open twice a week (though clients can only shop once a week), a community garden program with locations across Lewiston and Auburn, gardening and cooking programs for youth, cooking and nutrition classes for adults, food access initiatives such as farmer's

markets and food buying clubs, and youth leadership opportunities (SMNC). According to the NC, their guiding belief is "that everyone deserves access to healthy food, as a fundamental right" and to this end, "intentionally uses food as a tool for community building, leadership and youth development, and neighborhood revitalization", understanding that "equity in our food system is deeply tied to inequity within our community" (SMNC). With these values at the fore, the NC commits to radically supportive work within the community, actively centering equity and justice for all community members. The food pantry is therefore an excellent and effective resource for NC clients. Every Tuesday and Friday, the NC pantry is open from 11am - 2pm, offering fresh fruits and vegetables (with an influx of local produce according to seasonal availability), canned goods such as vegetables, tomatoes, and beans, bread products, cleaning and/or personal hygiene products, milk, eggs, juice, yogurt, and cheese, depending on both the day and donations from local food stores, and frozen meats, fish, and vegetarian/vegan protein.

Yet, despite the sincere and largely successful mission of the Nutrition Center to increase access to nourishing, local, culturally appropriate food, there remain glaring gaps in the application of their goals. These issues lay largely in the external forces dictating what sort of food is available for the NC to distribute. The NC relies on TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program), donations from local food stores, Good Shepherd Food Bank donations, produce from local farmers, and donations from individuals and other community organizations. Though the NC has a certain degree of agency over the sorts of foodstuffs they receive, the actual food received is often not exactly what is ordered or expected. Hannaford, for example, donates varying perishables each week that are nearing their best by date, sometimes arriving already gone by. They also donate copious amounts of bread products – primarily bakery items

with shorter shelf lives, such as muffins, cakes, cookies, and other sweet products that introduce specific nutritional and medical concerns.

Specifically, when clients arrive at the pantry to access emergency food, the food that is available is often of low-nutritional quality and high in sugar and refined carbohydrates. For clients who are currently sober or suffering with substance use disorder, diets that are high in sugar and refined carbohydrates can trigger relapse, as the sugar activates the release of insulin and the resultant hypoglycemia, or a sugar crash. According to Lyle R. Fried, a CHC (Certified in Healthcare Compliance) in Nutrition and Mental Health and Relapse Prevention, people who consistently eat a high sugar/refined carbohydrate diet often experience "reactive hypoglycemia", which produces an overwhelming craving that for some, increases the probability for a turn to substances (Fried). Evidently, those in our community suffering from substance use disorder are also often food insecure and rely on the emergency food system to access food, though this population is chronically under researched. Particularly for the unhoused population, the complexities of accessing *good* food are intensified. Since much of the food that is accessible for this population is high in sugar and refined carbohydrates, they will be at greater risk for relapse. This is a clear situation of food injustice. More qualitative research into the specific experiences of community members suffering from substance use disorder is needed to fully grasp the gravity of the situation. Yet, this medical phenomenon emphasizes the *necessity* of fresh and healthy food for individuals in asserting their agency.

The St. Mary's Nutrition Center embodies the multiple valuations of food that transcend its "value in exchange" and attend to food's "value in use" that is central to a food as/is commons framework. The value of food as "an essential life-enabler, a natural resource, a human right, a cultural determinant, a tradeable good, and a public good" is acknowledged and

emphatically reinforced throughout the NC's programming and within its internal and external rhetoric (Vivero-Pol "The Idea of Food as Commons or Commodity in Academia. A Systematic Review of English Scholarly Texts" 183). Yet, despite this adoption of a multidimensional system of valuation, the NC is limited in its abilities to address food insecurity. The lack of consistent high-quality food, the prevalence of low-quality foods, and the limitations on individual's pantry use per week indicate the external forces (i.e., late-stage capitalism) that dictate how the Nutrition Center can operate and the extent to which these different valuations can be attended to.

Trinity Jubilee Center: Lewiston, Maine

The Trinity Jubilee Center is a soup kitchen, food pantry, day shelter, and resource center on Spruce Street in Lewiston, just two blocks away from the Nutrition Center. The soup kitchen serves a to-go lunch program on Monday through Saturday at 11:00 am. They also offer a meal delivery option for seniors who are unable to physically come to the center. The food pantry is open every Thursday morning from 7:45 am to 3:00 pm and offers fresh fruits and vegetables, meat, eggs and cheese, diapers, and canned goods. Clients can pick up food once a week, and diapers once a month. According to the Trinity Jubilee Center website, the pantry serves between 200 and 250 families each week and obtains the majority of their produce and food from the USDA and from the Good Shepherd Food Bank, "which allows [them] to purchase discounted non-perishable foods and [obtain] free fresh foods" (TJC "Food Pantry") (foodbanks.org).

The predominance of low nutritional value foods and the lack of food choices for clients – issues that also arise for the NC – arise in the implementation of Trinity's goals of providing food for people struggling with food insecurity. As an emergency food distributor, the Trinity

soup kitchen provides meals for people who might otherwise go hungry. Through donations from Bates College and Hannaford Supermarket, the soup kitchen serves "excess food" and "about-to-expire bakery, meat, deli, bread, and produce items" (TJC "Soup Kitchen"). Though the soup kitchen is effective in distributing food — that would otherwise be waste — to people who need it, the value of food in this case appears solely instrumental and one-dimensional. Valuations of food beyond commodification such as food as an essential life enabler are attended to, but the specific preferences of clients are not considered – in fact, they *cannot* be considered due to the constraints of food available to the Trinity Jubilee Center. Therein lies the issue. Though the work that Trinity undertakes is meaningful and important in addressing immediate food concerns, utilizing food from entities that conceptualize food solely as a commodity or tradeable good does not challenge the larger structure from which the issue of food insecurity arises in the first place.

Tangibly, the soup kitchen operates within the state/national/global context of food commodification and therefore can only provide food for clients on the whim of larger entities such as the USDA or the Good Shepherd Food Bank, discussed below.

Good Shepherd Food Bank: Auburn, Maine:

The Good Shepherd Food Bank in Auburn, Maine distributes food to emergency food organizations in Lewiston-Auburn including St. Mary's Nutrition Center and Trinity Jubilee Center as well as Hope House Network, New Beginnings Outreach, Root Cellar, Hope Haven Gospel Mission, and Maine Immigrant and Refugee Services, among others in the larger Maine community. Good Shepherd also offers food programming for the community such as 4 Youth and Family Programs, Cooking Matters Maine, Mainers Feeding Mainers, and Community

Health and Hunger, which aim to connect good, local food and nutritional knowledge to food insecure people.

The Good Shepherd Food Bank receives food from several sources, including local farmers through a partnership called Mainers Feeding Mainers, which connects Maine-harvested food to food insecure Mainers and from companies and local retail businesses such as Hannaford and Walmart. To supplement these donated foods, the Good Shepherd Food Bank also receives food from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) through federal programming and also purchases foods that are shelf stable or frozen and (GSFB "How Does Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine Find Food?"). As a federal entity, the USDA buys food from across the country that is then distributed nationally through TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) and CSFP (The Commodity Supplemental Food Program), which provides food for low-income residents and food for low-income people who are at least 60 years old, respectively.

Like most private emergency food systems, Good Shepherd Food Bank relies heavily (nearly entirely) on corporate and governmental donations. As Jesse M. McEntee and Elena N. Naumova posit in their 2012 article, private emergency food systems (PEFS) are complexly entangled in corporate interests, government regulated tax breaks, and fundamentally, commodification and must often accept corporate donations regardless of their nutritional value due to lack of other sources (McEntee and Naumova). Through tax incentives and liability protection, companies in the Lewiston-Auburn area such as Hannaford, Walmart, Shaw's, Barber Foods Co., Lepage Bakeries, SureWinner Foods, and other smaller businesses are encouraged to donate excess food to local private emergency food systems (GSFB "How Does Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine Find Food?"). There are no nutritional standards associated with these donations, meaning that companies "can donate food that would otherwise be wasted, forgoing

dumping costs while engaging in what many of these entities now call "corporate social responsibility" (McEntee and Naumova 240). These tax exemptions and regulations allow companies to brand themselves as socially conscientious, ethical, and philanthropic while simultaneously purging themselves of the responsibility (financial and otherwise) of disposing of food that they legally or qualitatively consider waste and would otherwise dispose of. The dumping of this low-quality food into local food systems may be beneficial and immediately helpful in providing emergency food to those who need it. Yet, because so many of our fellow community members rely on private emergency food providers on a regular basis, the consistently low nutritional value of available food and the lack of choice in food options becomes a larger issue of food injustice. Applied to a local context, the urgent needs of the community in Lewiston result in "the consumption of low-quality foods [which] can be overlooked to satisfy immediate food needs, thereby reinforcing the value placed on the low-quality supply being donated" (McEntee and Naumova 241). As a result, companies keep donating food and PEFS users continue being forced into consuming low-quality foodstuffs.

As of May 2021, the food bank has provided 31.1 million meals to Mainers since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (GSFB "How Does Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine Find Food?"). The food bank is ostensibly a crucial element in providing adequate food to hungry people in Maine and in Lewiston. The Mainers Feeding Mainers program has had huge success in connecting fresh, local produce harvested in Maine to people suffering from food insecurity and as a model, offers a new paradigm of keeping locally produced food local as opposed to the current trend of exportation – both in the context of Maine as a shockingly food insecure state, and in the context of climate change and the movement to decrease food miles.

However, despite the general successes of the food bank in distributing high quantities of meals to food insecure folks, their purported goal of "partnering to end hunger" is no closer to realization and true food equity and justice have not been reached. This is a consequence of the food bank's existence within the global/national industrialized food system and the valuation of food solely as a commodity and the disregard of the multitude of more complex and personal valuations of food.

Discussion

In the current paradigm, hunger and food insecurity are obvious consequences of significant poverty and economic hardship. If these financial inequities persist, so will food insecurity. This may seem so obvious that we begin to take it for an absolute truth. However, it cannot be emphasized enough that our current food system (in the globalized world, in the US, in Maine, in Lewiston) is hyper industrialized, globalized, and commodified and that its failings exist within this food as/is commodity framework. Thus, mainstream attempts to address these issues have emerged largely *within* the food security framework previously discussed, reinforcing the one-dimensional valuation of food as a tradeable good and leaving unchallenged the "no money, no food" discourse.

As evidenced in the prior analysis, these trends are manifest in Lewiston's emergency food systems. Through an implicit and substantial reliance on government and corporate donated food, these organizations are forced to operate within a food security framework, despite internal narratives that subscribe to a multi-dimensional, multi-valuational approach to food that more closely aligns with food sovereignty as an ultimate goal. And despite the deep awareness that the NC, the Trinity Jubilee Center, and countless other community organizations have of the city's

basic needs, the full realization of food liberation is hindered by the nefarious ways commodification manifests. They continue to operate within the "sole value in exchange" narrative and therefore cannot challenge the overarching food security framework.

In no way do I mean to criticize or condemn the work of these organizations. They do crucial work for the community, providing care and distributing much needed resources to individuals and families. The efforts of these passionate, dedicated, and driven people are transformative, deeply meaningful, and integral to the community. Yet why, if these organizations are committed to the mission of providing good food to all people and are cognizant of and committed to the multiple valuations of food, are there still gaps in the emergency food system in Lewiston? Why do people who require emergency food struggle to obtain nutritious foods and why are their options largely limited to low nutritional value food when there is a plethora of fresh, healthy, local food produced in Maine (Wixson)? Despite Maine producing enough crops to "meet the total energy needs of Maine's 1.3 million residents", why is 90% of food consumed in Maine imported from out of state?

This dissonance begs several questions. How much of our current situation of "no money, no food" is *inevitable*? If current methods of addressing food insecurity and increasing food access continue as they operate now, will the situation eventually change? If we cannot imagine current methods radically/positively altering food access, what needs to change? How can we pressure governments at every level to enact policies that make food as/is commons the default? As individuals, how can we begin to escape commodification and embody new notions and imaginings of equitable food systems for all? Critically, how can we avoid placing responsibility on the individual while still prioritizing local, interpersonal interactions as the primary site of radical food/commoning relations?

Decommodifying and re-conceptualizing food as/is commons is a significant social, cultural, economic, and political undertaking. These changes require a plethora of massive structural changes to the current global food system. Yet, the construction of food as a commodity is just that – a social construction. Food as commodity is not an inevitable result of our community – it is a product of the spatial and temporal constraints of this particular moment in history in this particular place, which means that there are possibilities for escaping the cycle. Though perhaps difficult to conceptualize or imagine a de-commodified foodscape, it is vital to push against the acceptance of commodification as inevitable if true food security is to be fully realized. In the following discussion, it is my aim to highlight several important opportunities, both existing and novel, in advancing the food as/is commons framework in Lewiston and beginning this critical, subversive work.

Chapter 2: Embodying Multiple Valuations of Food

"Commons" are goods or resources that are created or produced, cared for, shared, and regulated by those who use them. When "commoning" tangible goods, agreed-upon rules and governance are practiced by members to establish a community of commons-users working towards mutual goals. In José Luis Vivero-Pol's conception of commoning, attending to the multiple valuations of food is integral and *foundational* to the practice of commoning food. By foregrounding these values in *use*, the hegemonic value in *exchange* is forced into irrelevance.

In practice, and on an immediate and individual level, commoning can be embodied through practices including, but not limited to, mutual aid through community fridges, food saving and sharing technology, and non-profit community kitchens. Community fridges and food sharing practices are uniquely positioned in our food system due to their reliance on community-based notions of risk and liability as opposed to government regulation. Non-profit community kitchens, on the other hand, in their existing iterations, still operate within the non-profit structure, meaning that their risk and liability must be regulated by the government. I will discuss liability and risk more in depth after an analysis of community fridges and food sharing.

These three models, in the context of modern-day Lewiston, represent the most explicit furtherance of a food as/is commons framework and are therefore the most subversive. The following discussion will explore these opportunities and evaluate their potential to destabilize the hegemony of capitalist valuations of food.

Mutual Aid through Community Fridges

Mutual aid fundamentally organizes around the following principles: they "rely on the expectation of reciprocity", "build community strength and resilience by fostering community

collaborations and working at the grassroots level to support each other" (Lofton et al. 120). In the current political and economic context of the United States, mutual aid functions to redistribute resources between variously privileged community members. Mutual aid often serves to alleviate financial and social burdens that disproportionately affect low-income, BIPOC, or otherwise marginalized communities. In the case of food-related mutual aid, the goal is to "work to radically reimagine local food systems" (Lofton et al. 120). Critically, food oriented mutual aid practices, in their most ethical and effective iteration, not only address the immediate needs of community members but also champion efforts toward systemic shifts in the food system – through voting, running for public office, attending local political events, working with farmers and food producers, etc. Mutual aid does not *solve* hunger, but functions to identify and address access issues on a community basis and then advocates for systemic change based on the excavation and triage of these issues.

The COVID-19 global pandemic revealed the depth of the existing cracks in the industrial food system in profound and frightening ways. The resiliency of large-scale food distribution organizations such as food banks was demonstrated to be shockingly inadequate. During the early days of the pandemic, as rates of national food insecurity tripled (Wolfson and Leung) both the traditional food system (i.e. grocery stores, convenience stores, etc) and the private emergency food system (PEFS—i.e. food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens) failed to provide adequate, affordable food to people. As prices in traditional food stores rose sharply, reliance on food from PEFS increased. And when PEFS couldn't keep up with the increased demand for emergency food, food insecurity rose (Lofton et al. 119). Bearing direct witness to this, mutual aid organizations across the country (and the world) sprang into action – neighbors recognizing and responding immediately to their neighbors needs. As discussed in Lofton's

article describing the operations of mutual aid organizations in early-pandemic Chicago, the belief that "food is a right, not a privilege, and that providing food is a way to re-envision safety in communities" is a central tenet of the food related mutual aid movement (Lofton et al.).

Community fridges and micro-pantries are mediums for the practice of mutual aid and the redistribution of food. They are highly effective at distributing food — both through engaging with small scale food producers and encouraging the involvement of local foods, and by removing food from the larger commodified system and reintroducing it to local foodscapes. They are often placed outside, using the electricity of partner organizations, businesses, buildings, etc. The prevalence of community fridges skyrocketed during the early pandemic, from about 15 (nationally, pre-pandemic) to more than 200 in 2021, as people became increasingly vulnerable to food insecurity (Long). These fridges and pantries are largely spearheaded by local, grassroots groups who have intimate understandings of the particular hardships experienced by their fellow community members and of their specific needs. The fridges are stocked with donations from local farmers, grocery stores, restaurants, and anyone with leftovers to share. A common phrase found on community fridges is "take what you need, leave what you have", emphasizing the mutual and reciprocal tenet of mutual aid (Oung). And because they are not often associated with any larger organization, regulations and liability issues are rare. Integrally, users do not have to have particular documentation in order to access services and obtain food. The fridges function simply: a central, accessible location is chosen, a fridge is donated, bought, or otherwise obtained, volunteers sign up to aid in upkeep and regulation, and word is spread through social media or physical signposting about the availability of different foods in the fridge, which is updated on a regular basis. The fridges are open throughout the day, in some cases remaining open and accessible 24/7. In the case of the Love

Fridge Chicago, a group of nineteen community fridges across Chicago, partnerships with other community-based groups are essential and include organizations "run by Black and Brown individuals experienced in food security work for mutual benefit" (Lofton et al. 120).

Though the popularity and prevalence of community fridges exponentially increased during the initial economic precarity of the COVID-19 pandemic, the practice of mutual aid in relation to food access should be permanently implemented and not solely reserved for situations of emergency. In Chicago, mutual aid organizations "established relationships with farmers, producers, and consumers", creating "cooperative agreements" and increasing the resilience of the local food system and stability of access to healthy, local, affordable (i.e. free), and sustainable (through a reduction in food waste) food (Lofton et al. 120). Reliable, consistent access to stigma-reduced food exponentially increases the resilience of communities to withstand fluctuations in the volatile market, such as increased prices or unavailability of certain foods. For people accessing emergency food, feelings of shame and embarrassment are common. As one micro-pantry user noted, the mutual aid aspect reduced the stigma associated with emergency food: "'you also can't really tell if someone's putting something in or taking it out… That, in a way, reduces the stigma related to it'" (Wilson et al. 305).

Mutual aid organizations "are committed to providing food and other resources to individuals within their reciprocal exchange framework, facilitating self-reliance, strong communities and resilience" (Lofton et al. 121). The advantages of commoning food through mutual aid are not solely beneficial during times of crisis but in fact carry immense potential in long term efforts to transition the local food system to a more decommodified, equitable model.

Commoning food also increases agency and choice for individuals. Community organizations offer "members with the power to define the food they procure" as well as increase

"a sense of autonomy" and "reduce stigma" associated with emergency food through the opportunity to reciprocate donations (Lofton et al. 120) (Wilson et al. 304). They decrease bureaucratic limitations on accessing government or PEFS services, provide access to food on demand, and contribute to a wider network of reliable resources and community. The redistribution of homemade, nutritious, locally grown, and barrier free food is an exciting opportunity to escape the commodified foodscape.

In Lewiston, community fridges and micro-pantries should be permanent fixtures in the Lewiston foodscape: sustaining the maintenance of community fridges and micro-pantries as permanent entities is a critical move towards a more resilient, just community. There are multiple locations where community fridges and micro-pantries could be physically implemented. In the parking lot outside the Nutrition Center, in downtown Lewiston on Lisbon Street, or in collaboration with the Community Garden program in the downtown area – all of which would allow for the prioritization of community fridges in partnership with community gardeners who are already a part of the local food system— are just a few feasible possibilities. I raise these locations for the sake of visualizing the implementation of this model as a real, tangible, and relatively uncomplicated possibility. Community interest forms, surveys about location, and volunteer interest are all essential first steps to ensure that a potential community fridge/pantry project accurately represents the interests, desires and priorities of the community[4].

Annika Mirchandani, a Bates student, is currently working with Lewiston Housing Authority to implement a community fridge in the city, though logistical bureaucratic matters are slowing the process (Mirchandani). The project has received substantial interest and could

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[4] More information regarding the logistics of establishing a community fridge in Maine can be found at
https://freedge.org/freedge-yourself/legal/

expand access to local, nutritious foods. Around the clock, barrier-free, stigma-reduced access to food could permanently alter the Lewiston foodscape. As the community fridge program in Chicago demonstrated, these installations facilitate opportunities to give/receive nutritious food, decrease food waste, build relationships with fellow community members, and critically, access healthy food outside of the traditional capitalist market. Mutual aid is an accessible mode of commoning in a modern context — of defying the current food as/is commodity paradigm and operating within a distinct set of food valuations in which value in exchange is decentered.

Food Sharing Technology

In the rapidly developing world of technology, the sharing of immediate and near-universally accessible information opens the door to a myriad of possibilities for contemporary commoning. Various technological approaches have the capacity to lead to significant changes to foodscapes by increasing the accessibility of healthy, nutritious, and affordable/free food. Of particular importance to this study is food sharing technologies such as ICT (information communication technology) tools used by grassroots food rescue organizations.

ICT-facilitated food rescue operations often come under scrutiny for perpetuating societal failures and for "redistributing food and not wealth or power," and therefore reinforcing the structural inequities of the capitalistic food system as "logistics problems that can be solved without addressing equity or justice in our food system and economy" (Morrow 202). However, as Morrow argues, the power and potential ICT tools have to connect people with food is significant. In one largely successful case, the "participants co-create[d] the resources they benefit from, in ways that destabilize[d] the boundaries between donor and recipient, provider and client, grower and eater" (Morrow 202). In this way, these tools can begin to break down

hierarchical structures and provide thrilling new opportunities for exploration into the possibilities of commoning food and for multidimensional valuations of food to be brought to the fore again.

In Germany, the website Foodsharing.de facilitates food rescue and food sharing, using a form to connect people to surplus food. Foodsharing.de functions as "a volunteer-run organization and online logistics platform founded in 2012 to support decentralized food rescue and peer-to-peer food sharing activities in Germany" (Morrow 202). The platform allows individuals to either be a "food-sharer" or a "food-saver", eliminating, to a certain degree, the power dynamics present within the dominant language surrounding food reallocation, i.e., donations, receiver, need, etc. Within these relationships between sharers and savers, food is imagined and conceptualized as containing multidimensional, complex valuations. It is transformed from a one-dimensionally valued commodity (in the market) into a gift (in the community economy).

In an ethnographic study of members of Foodsharing.de conducted in 2016 and 2017, interviewees embodied the multiple valuations of food through their following of several guiding rules: "you take everything that is offered, redistribute the surplus, never sell the rescued food, and never share something you wouldn't eat" (Morrow 207). Much of the rescued surplus food is reallocated to a network of community fridges across the city – some food-sharers going so far as to choose the "least appealing food for themselves and share only the best with others… baking mushy bananas into breads before sharing them" (Morrow 209). The reallocation process allows for care to be enmeshed into surplus food – food-sharers transform potentially undesirable food into foodstuffs of great value.

The distribution of surplus food that Foodsharing.de and similar ICT tools facilitate is a prime example of mobilizing contemporary assets to common food. Through the online interface, access to surplus food is nearly universal. Though it may be restricted by inequalities in internet access, the connection between food-savers and community fridges in Foodsharing.de begins to bridge this gap.

This model of food surplus rescued through an interactive, *free,* barrier-reduced online interface has immense potential in Lewiston. Food pantries in Lewiston, primarily the Nutrition Center, often receive donations or food that they cannot distribute in time. Due to logistical constraints such as the pantry's hours – Tuesdays and Fridays, 11:00 am – 2:00 pm – perishable foods may expire before they can be distributed or used. Fresh fruit and vegetables, particularly during the Maine growing season, often pass their prime before they can be eaten. The pantry may receive food during the week that needs to be eaten immediately – ideally before the next open pantry hours. What often happens is that the food, which arrives generally in good condition, goes bad before it can be eaten and thus becomes food waste. An online interface where the pantry - and other food organizations - could share surplus food would be dually beneficial, serving to 1) immediately connect people with good food and 2) interrupting the flow of food to waste. The posted food would mainly be perishables – fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy products, etc. – creating more opportunities for people to access good, nutritious, high-quality food. Additionally, food that is going by could be saved by individuals separate from organizations, circumventing liability issues they may be subject to. The food could then be transformed into more desirable food (mushy bananas into banana bread, apples into applesauce for example).

Farmers, growers, and other food producers could also use the interface. As discussed, within the commodified market system, food is solely valued for its value in exchange. Fruits and vegetables that do not fit the aesthetic ideals of the market are often discarded or recovered through gleaning [5]. As food commons scholar José Luis Vivero-Pol argues, commodification has deprived "food from its non-economic attributes just to retain its tradeable features, namely durability, external beauty and the standardization of naturally-diverse food products" (Vivero-Pol "The Idea of Food as Commons or Commodity in Academia. A Systematic Review of English Scholarly Texts" 185). Though produce that doesn't meet these standards is not as valuable in the market, their value *in use* is not diminished. Farmers could share these items through the online interface, eliminating food waste, challenging the dominant value of standardization, and connecting people to high quality, nutritious, local produce.

Commoning Risk

In the case of both community fridges and ICT tools that connect food sharers with food savers, there are associated risks involving food quality and liability. The risks associated with food quality, food borne illnesses and hygiene are often the first concern raised when these types of commoning initiatives are raised. The major assumption undergirding these concerns is the notion that individuals or organized collectives cannot manage risk without official organizational power and further, that risk *necessitates* external regulation – in short, that "the absence of (private) ownership" implies "an absence of rules and responsibilities" (Morrow 203).

The complexity of distributing risk and responsibility within a capitalist system is an integral aspect of the commoning conversation. Commoning projects involving food run the risk

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[5] In fact, the Androscoggin Gleaners do significant work in Androscoggin Country to salvage produce that may otherwise become waste due to its lack of aesthetic appeal.
https://www.mainegleaningnetwork.org/androscoggin-gleaners

of externally mandated shutdown, despite universally subscribed-to community understandings of acceptable food groups, quality, and common sense. It is thus surprising that scholars engaging with commoning as a serious, tangible solution to societal issues have largely ignored the parallel discussion of risk. However, Oona Morrow, a scholar studying the nature of urban food commons, wrote a fascinating article about the necessity of commoning risk as well as goods. It is this case study which will frame the following analysis of risk.

As the community fridge network in Berlin expanded, the Food Safety Authority in Berlin began to "declar[e] them unsafe and unhygienic", threatening host businesses with hefty fines (Morrow 205). This regulation of risk is from the perspective of Food Safety officials who try to manage risk "through the legal and institutional frameworks that make it possible to assign liability and blame for risks" (Morrow 209). In contrast to the real context, the risks "are increasingly recognized as inevitable and systemic" by the FSA, perhaps implying that external regulation is not as effective at decreasing risk as food safety organizations would like to purport. According to one author concerned with Berlin's urban food commons, the food safety group was "inclined to portray the public fridges as riskier than the broader food system they are embedded in" (Morrow 209).

More practically, these threatened fridge enclosures by the state rested on two major assumptions: that 1) "food that is open-access is dangerous because people cannot be trusted to freely and anonymously share" food and that 2) "people do not have the knowledge and skills to determine if food is edible and safe" (Morrow 205). This evaluation of the community fridge system is one-dimensional and overlooks a plethora of community-based regulatory practices and agreed-upon rules. For instance, as Foodsharing.de membership grew, organizers codified existing community expectations. Food sharers and food savers (Foodsharing.de members) now

take an online quiz ensuring that they understand the rules and responsibilities that accompany their membership. These rules prioritize "food safety best practices, such as not sharing microbiologically sensitive or expired foods, and following the cold chain, as well as good behavior, like showing up on time, being courteous, taking everything that is offered, not being greedy, cleaning up after yourself, and resolving conflicts appropriately" (Morrow 208). Prior to the intervention by the Food Safety officials, risk management was handled entirely through individual and community level judgment of food quality: food sharers and savers rely on their senses – taste, smell, sight – to determine whether food is waste, salvageable, or past its usable timeline. After the Food Safety officials got involved, risk was transformed from an accepted element of the commons to a series of liabilities that threatened the entire network. The network felt enormous pressure to register as a non-profit organization and to internalize risk within one entity.

As Morrow argues, even when *food* is removed/saved from the capitalist market and is shared and reallocated as commons, "the legal and liability structures of private property, capitalist enterprise, and commodity exchange will follow. Food can be shared, but risk cannot" (Morrow 210). This risk produces waste. Morrow's suggestion for addressing this disconnect – the obstruction of commoning efforts by government regulation that operates within capitalist institutions – is for cities to develop and implement regulations that "reflect the diverse ways in which food is produced, harvested, distributed, and consumed" (Morrow 210). This conclusion is unsatisfying as it continues to rely on a government dictated by capitalism in which larger producers and organizations, who have the resources to navigate the legal complexities of regulations, are privileged. However, Morrow offers a potential mode of future regulation. If there were financial, political, etc. incentives for cities to reduce food waste, an argument for

implementing food sharing regulations could be strengthened and communities would have much greater control over their local food systems.

Ultimately, food sharing is perhaps the "riskiest" mode of commoning in the eyes of city health officials due to the health and liability risks that accompany food. Yet, it is paradoxical to require the risks of food sharing to be adopted by an individual or singular entity considering the goal of the food sharing movement – to remove food from capitalist structures and reimagine it as a common resource, unbounded to any one entity. As Morrow argues, risk, as well as food, must be commoned— accountability and responsibility within and among community members must be fostered as opposed to external, divorced-from-reality regulatory structures. Evidently, there is a significant level of community regulations and individual responsibility that present in Germany's food sharing system, indicating that community-based regulation is not only possible, but is proven to be widespread and common.

Non-Profit Community Kitchen

Finally, non-profit community kitchens are a radical effort to build community and to challenge financial limitations to accessing warm, nutritious, healthy food. The following recommendation is based on the OneBowl kitchen and restaurant in Copenhagen, Denmark.

OneBowl operates within the belief that financial ability should not preclude people from accessing high-quality, nutritious food produced with care. Its operation relies nearly entirely on volunteers, with one paid employee, the head chef (OneBowl). OneBowl operates on a "pay it forward" or "pay what you can" basis – a process facilitated by the Danish payment service MobilePay. MobilePay is unique in that payment can be made anonymously. In this scenario, patrons are thus equalized – diners pay what they can, paying more or less than the suggested

amount. OneBowl serves all community members, regardless of their ability to pay. And because of the anonymity, there is, in theory, no hierarchy among patrons. Additionally, everyone eats at tables in the seating area of the facility. From my own personal experience at OneBowl, communication between strangers or groups becomes the default - the physical proximity to other groups in the dining area and the communal focus facilitates this communication and establishes new relationships with fellow community members of varying financial backgrounds. Food is a social adhesive – through cooking together or sharing a hot meal, community members build relationships and responsibility to each other.

The OneBowl kitchen is entirely plant-based, meaning that ingredients derived from or including animal products are never used in their meals. Volunteers are therefore exposed to a wide variety of cooking techniques and ingredients. Plant-based food relies heavily on fresh fruits and vegetables, and thus typically emphasizes the centrality of whole, fresh, and healthy ingredients. In this way, both volunteers and patrons are exposed to potentially novel ways of cooking and eating, experiencing the process together and building relationships.

Every evening, volunteers help the head chef with food preparation and deliver food to patrons in the dining area, also providing a to-go option. While the kitchen in Copenhagen was open every night of the week, this may be unattainable in Lewiston due to the size of the city and volunteer capacity. The core concept however, a non-profit community kitchen based on a "pay it forward" or "pay what you can" basis, is an exciting possibility for the city. The "pay it forward" model is fundamentally, mutual aid by a different name – the redistribution of the monetary resources of an individual to a community-based project.

In Lewiston, this community kitchen model could be located in the future Community Food Center, through the Nutrition Center kitchen, or in an alternative location (GFCLA

"Lewiston Community Food Center"). The space would have a communal commercial kitchen for food preparation and learning, as well as areas for people to eat and talk together. Food could be sourced from local pantries, farmers, hunters, fishers, foragers – any food producers or gatherers who are interested in becoming more involved in community food production. An employee, head volunteer, or trained food professional could lead a group of volunteers in producing a meal for the community, meeting the dual goals of expanding cooking knowledge, and providing free, nutritious meals to community members.

The implementation of a non-profit community kitchen is another mode through which food can be revalued as/is commons on a larger community level through the removal of food from the commodified market. Though some of the food in the kitchen would presumably be obtained through traditional market processes, the practice of enmeshing care, time, and energy into the food and the devotion of volunteers would transform it from commodity to gift – or commons. According to Berns and Rossitto, two researchers from the University of Stockholm, "[g]rassroots food sharing communities can be seen as existing and operating as a diverse, or community economy, alongside – rather than within – traditional economic structures" (Berns and Rossitto 3). In this view, therefore, food is no longer a product or commodity, valued within the market, but a "gift without any monetary value" (Berns and Rossitto 3). The value added from the collective time the volunteers dedicate to producing the meal and the participation of multiple people in the preparation and production process is significant and has powerful community and relationship building potential. And though this model of non-profit organization relies on donations to function, financial donations serve as a sort of mutual aid – a redistribution of resources based on the centering of equity, justice, and humanity.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis is not to suggest that community fridges, food sharing, and community kitchens are the solution to the ills of capitalism. The purpose, rather, is to shed light on the insidious effects of capitalism and commodification on our (relatively) small community of Lewiston, Maine. The purpose of this paper is further to highlight modes of resistance that critique the negative conceptual effects of the commodification of food. The goal is to offer locally-based remedies to the symptoms of capitalism that affect people in our communities – our neighbors, our students, our friends, our families, ourselves – and their ability to assert agency over the trajectory of their lives. With this thesis, I have hoped to offer practical, tangible, local solutions to global issues – to emphasize the value of community relationships, the value of food, and the value that can be found in the overlapping gray spaces of community and food.

The first section of this thesis outlined the current frameworks — used both in academia and in real-world application — mobilized to discuss food security. These frameworks included food security, food sovereignty, and food as/is commons. The next section focused on the history of Lewiston, from the generations of Abenaki tribes that lived and continue to live along the Androscoggin to the period of colonization, to the enclosure of private property, to the construction of the mill, to the exploitation of laborers locally and in the South. I discussed the notion that the current situation of widespread food insecurity is a direct result of colonialism and capitalism, though this is not an inevitable outcome.

In the first chapter, I applied food insecurity frameworks to local organizations in Lewiston. In this chapter, I provided statistical and qualitative information about the Lewiston community and discussed folks' varied experiences of food insecurity. I then examined the limitations of three different food security organizations in Lewiston – the St. Mary's Nutrition

Center, the Trinity Jubilee Center, and the Good Shepherd Food Bank – using a food as/is commons framework to critique the operation of these organizations within a food as commodity lens.

In my second and final chapter, I examined three potential modes of re-commoning in Lewiston, including community fridges, food sharing technology, and nonprofit community kitchens. I argued that these methods revalue food and explicitly challenge the acceptance of commodification and the presence of one-dimensional capitalist values in our food system.

Moving Forward

After conducting this research on commoning and the revaluing of food, I have concluded that though local commoning may not cause the upheaval of the entire global capitalist machine, it may alleviate, to some extent, the unnecessary suffering that food insecurity produces. In my view, any project that has the potential to alleviate suffering or redistribute wealth, resources, access, ability, or food is an ethical imperative.

Waiting for a massive global paradigm shift away from capitalism and towards an entirely radical utopia is not particularly effective when members of our own communities – our hometowns, the places we went to school, the places our family are from, the places we visited as a child – are struggling to survive. This conclusion is made particularly relevant by the current climate crisis. In this world-altering context, we cannot forgo solutions that are not complete, answers that are not fully fleshed out, projects that may not be as effective as anticipated. If they have a chance at reducing suffering or providing comfort or safety, they should be pursued.

In addition to the three recommendations I have provided, I would like to offer appreciation for the practices of commoning that are currently occurring in Lewiston. Of note is

Presente! Maine, an organization focused on food and land access, health and wellness, and community power (Presente!). The work they do to connect the community with critical, time sensitive resources is an element through which their larger goals of decolonization, racial justice, equitable land access centering the rights of Native communities, and radical community-based decision making are realized.

Presente! Maine is intimately connected with another group practicing commoning. Land in Common, a "member-run Community Land Trust" in Greene, Maine is a 383-acre swath of mixed-use land, on which Presente! has community growing space (Land in Common). Land in Common stewards the land while acknowledging its history and the contradictions that become evident when discussing the ownership of land. They "commit… to the work of reckoning, reparation, land return, healing and collective liberation, and to taking our leadership from those most impacted by injustice" (Land in Common).

These are two examples of *organization*-led commoning – the commoning of resources led by purposeful community groups. However, individual commoning in our daily lives is far more prevalent than may be initially identified. Transforming commodities into common resources can be as simple as sharing a meal with a friend or family member, dropping off leftovers to a neighbor, or sharing groceries with an elderly person or a family.

Of utmost importance to any form of this type of work is the centering of community voices throughout the city. Constant, consistent community involvement and feedback are essential in any project aiming to further genuinely radical, paradigm altering work. These dynamics, in their most unproblematic form, are born from long-term care and presence within a community. Community organizations in Lewiston, such as the Nutrition Center and the Trinity

Jubilee Center, among others, embody these values of place and purpose and are excellent examples of true care and profound attention.

I also suggest the continuation of research into re-commoning practices in relation to food and into novel ways in which food can be reevaluated and removed from a commodified system. The following questions may be helpful in evaluating future projects:

- *Who does this project benefit?*

- *What value specifically do I see this project or idea possessing?*

- *Why am I doing this work?*

- *Does this project center the voices of those most affected by systemic and/or structural inequity?*

- *What values of food does this project cater to?*

- *What are the limitations of this work?*

- *Am I prepared to adapt to new information or critiques of this work?*

I wrote this paper with the goal of centering the valuing of food as a fundamental human right, food as a powerful political device for social change, and a defense of locally based re-commoning practices. I realize mutual aid cannot solve world hunger. Yet the relationships that food facilitates within communities and the significance that engaging in mutual aid practices, commoning, community fridges, food sharing, and communal cooking has on the individual and community level – *this* is what has the potential to create substantial, lasting change and begin the process of building more resilient food systems for all.

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