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Place, work, and civic agriculture: Common fields for cultivation

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Abstract. "Civic agriculture" identifies a diverse and growing body of food and farming enterprises fitted to the needs of local growers, consumers, rural economies, and communities. The term lends shape and legitimacy to development paradigms that exist in opposition to the global, corporately-dominated food system. Civic agriculture also widens the scope of ag-related concerns, moving away from a strictly mechanistic focus on production and capital efficiency, and toward the more holistic reintegration of people in place. To date, researchers and practitioners have attended closely to the economic benefits of new marketing arrangements and institutions (e.g., value-added co-ops, CSAs, and farmer's markets). Local food and farming has a critical role to play in the development of an alternative commerce. At the same time, this is only half the promise of civic agriculture. Civic agriculture can (and should) promote citizenship and environmentalism within both rural and urban settings not only through market-based models of economic behavior, but through common ties to place and physical engagement with that place.

Key words: Community, Citizenship, Civic agriculture, Local food and farming, Place, Work

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Introduction

The term "civic agriculture" frames a collection of food and farming enterprises that addresses the needs of local growers, consumers, rural economies, and communities of place (Lyson, 2000). It is a wonderful term, one that lends shape and legitimacy to a diverse and growing body of creative, socioeconomic relationships – farmer's markets, CSAs, co-ops, community gardens among them.

As a conceptual tool, civic agriculture has the power to focus public attention on the contradictions within our industrially-modeled and corporately-controlled agriculture, as well as on the potential of "relocalized" food systems. Civic agriculture (CA) scans from the ground up, attending to less standardized, more direct and self-reliant approaches to food production, distribution, and consumption. Equally important, it also widens the scope of ag-related concerns. CA moves away from a strictly mechanistic focus on production and economic efficiency and toward food and farming systems responsive to particular ecological and socioeconomic contexts. The emphasis on agriculture as a civic, as opposed to a purely economic issue, is a liberating departure from the rational prison of neoclassical thought. It extends an invitation for academics, activists, and practitioners alike to rethink conventional and universalizing categories (e.g., consumer, producer, commodity, private profit) and to explore more closely and less partially the role agriculture can play in the lives, bodies, and minds of real people.[1]

My purpose here, then, is to take up the challenge, to applaud the concept of civic agriculture and to add to the fullness of its holistic embrace. In this spirit, I would like to present some concerns that I have been wrestling with, concerns that I hope will stimulate an expanded discussion of the nature and potential of civic agriculture not only as an alternative strategy for food production, distribution, and consumption but also as a tool and a venue for "grounding people in common purpose" – for nurturing a sense of belonging to a place and an organic sense of citizenship.

Considering the civic in civic agriculture

Gentleman, I fear we face insurmountable opportunities. – Pogo

To date, civic agriculture with its emphasis on the "relocalization" of food and farming has promoted regionally-based economic activity, the primary objectives of which are to improve farmer income and to revitalize rural communities and economies. Grants, loans, and research dollars from federal, state, and private sources have been made available to help small, diversified farmers identify new and/or niche markets through which they may successfully compete. The result has been a cornucopia of "good" food and/or value-added food products (e.g., organic vegetables, Bst-free cheeses, pastured poultry, unbleached wholewheat flour, heritage apples, biodegradable oils). These products, in turn, promise literally or figuratively to connect the consumer more directly to a farmer, a farm, and/or a bioregion.

There is much to be said environmentally and socially for such responsible small-scale enterprise, for keeping family farmers on the land and keeping good farm land in production. A respected and growing body of literature argues that the presence of many, small, locally-owned and operated businesses are positively correlated with greater economic stability, with greater income equity and with a more robust community infrastructure (Goldschmidt, 1978; Tolbert et al., 1998; Ikerd, 2001; Shuman, 1998). As important as these characteristics are – and here I want to make myself perfectly clear, I believe that farmers, like all workers, must be respected for their skills and fairly compensated for their labor, that rural communities must thrive and fully realize the particularities of place, and that we all must become wise consumers and understand and pay the full cost of what we consume – I, nonetheless, am troubled by several dominant patterns or themes that are emerging under the general rubric of civic agriculture.

The first, rhetoric aside, is a pronounced reliance or dependence upon traditional market relations. The principal players (however friendly and personalized) are still producers and consumers; their basic identities are still framed by the economic or commercial transaction. Value-added co-ops are farmer-owned businesses designed to process and market new products or identity-preserved commodities without the costly intervention of industry middlemen. Farm markets, u-picks, B and Bs, even CSAs are typically direct marketing strategies in which commodities, services, and/or opportunities are sold by individual business persons to appreciative and usually well-endowed customers. Trade journals, grower organizations, and list serves whether conventional, sustainable, or organic now reflect this shift to a demand-oriented economics. Farmers are wrestling directly with the realities of commerce – learning how to target their markets, how to retain (i.e., satisfy) their customers and how to competitively price their products.

A second and related theme is that the "doing" of civic agriculture tends, at present, to revolve largely around private enterprise, private ownership, and private accumulation. The result is that farmers, not unlike consumers, are pursuing individually felt and often contradictory lifestyle needs: "I want to farm," and "I want to know my food is safe"; "I want my farming to be profitable," and "I want my food to be convenient and cheap"; "I want my kids to be able to inherit my farm," and "I want my kids to eat whatever they want." As a result, major investments of personal energy, knowledge, and capital have produced (in addition to good food and green products) a fluorescence of trade secrets and private labels, ways of differentiating "my" products and processes from "yours." This entrepreneurial diversity easily becomes the stuff of persistent if not frenzied market competition rather than an instrument of group or regional stability. Even the word "organic" has been enclosed (in Michigan and soon nationally). No longer a conceptual commons, it has been transformed into a costly private possession, a tool for gaining market advantage.

Is there anything wrong with selling a well-crafted, green product to a well-informed buyer? Is there anything wrong with local commerce or local capitalism? I would say "no" to both these questions, but not without adding that there is something wrong when the metaphors and logic of this functionally narrow relationship begin to eclipse or negate more complex identities and self-awareness.

More specifically, I think, there is a danger in equating production and consumption, responsible or otherwise, with citizenship. A good producer, a good product, a good consumer is not at all the same thing as a good citizen. The making of commodities and their consumption (however infinite the opportunities) are simply not enough; they are not of themselves civic activities. As Gabriel and Lang explain,

> What this vision of . . . citizenship lacks . . . is any wider notion of social solidarity, civic debate, coordinated action or sacrifice. It individualizes the idea of citizenship, as if becoming a citizen is a matter of individual choice alone, In this way, citizenship becomes a lifestyle, however, praiseworthy and necessary, which can easily degenerate

> into tokenism and is hardly likely to alter the politics of consumption (Gabriel and Lang, 1995: 182).

Sclove makes a similar point when he argues,

> Our judgments as citizens need to consider but also transcend our narrower interests as consumers [and here I would also add "producers"]. When it comes to public policy and the common good, our citizen-selves ought to be sovereign over our consumer-selves. . . . Democracy, after all, is not just another ordinary consumer good (like corn chips or underarm deodorant) and it is not an arbitrary life-style option. Democracy is a first-order social value – a necessary condition for being able to decide fairly what other considerations, besides democracy itself, to take into account in determining public policy (Sclove, 2000).

Many will argue that civic agriculture does not advocate such traditionally narrow market relationships – and this is so. There is in theory and sometimes in practice considerable attention paid to the three pillars of sustainability – environmental soundness, economic viability, and social equity. Nonetheless, the logic of the commercial marketplace predominates in most CA projects. Or said somewhat differently, the logic of civic-ness is still a wished for second thought, something, it is assumed, that will spontaneously fall into place once our many, personal, green needs have been met.

I am not advocating that the latter replace the former, that common interest replace private interest. I am suggesting only that the latter be equally developed and exercised if we are to have the CA we envision. The idea of voting with one's dollars is comforting but hardly sufficient. It is at once too easy and too abstract. The same is basically true of the donation of individually or corporately owned "surplus" or the making of selected public contributions of privately held resources. Both tend to be discretionary "gifts" bestowed when individually convenient and not inherent responsibilities integral to the deeper needs and public work of commonwealth.

Because the "we" rarely replaces the "I" (except in an instrumental economic sense), civic agriculture manifests many of the same contradictions that characterize conventional agriculture. Value-added or new wave co-ops seldom have production and/or marketing limits. "Enough" is not an operational concept. Economic expansion remains the measure of success (and poor financial management the explanation for failure). Familiar predatory patterns are emerging. Co-ops, for example, are selling off farm acreage to manage their bottom-lines; they are negotiating contracts with multinational corporations, they are building their plants wherever the financial cost of doing business is the least burdensome – all the while claiming that they are, in fact, working with local farmers, and hence improving local economies. Likewise, there are now virtual CSAs and opportunities to buy fresh produce "on-line" from organic farmers, minority farmers, and unique bioregions. Burgeoning e-solutions (and the new opportunities they offer for investment) are being designed for those too busy or too remote (or otherwise too marginal) to shop.[2] Oddly consistent, are the insights of reformers like Michael Shuman, who with the best of intentions, advocates local food and farming on the basis that "what's cheapest is what's local" and further confides that "the other (attractive) feature of local food systems is that you can make a lot of money off them" (M. Shuman, "Community friendly business: An affordable alternative to globalization." Public presentation March 15, 2001, Michigan State University, East Lansing).

For all its potential, I think CA will be seriously handicapped if these sensibilities are allowed to overwhelm the movement's social and political dynamics. I do not want such a thing to happen. CA contains within it the seeds of a more mutualistic and holistic way of being and belonging. It recognizes, as its name implies, commitments that transcend the economic and that privilege citizenship and civic engagement. I think it is time to talk seriously and deliberately about this aspect of its nature, not as an outgrowth of, or a rationale for, good business practice and individual entrepreneurship, but as a purposeful and enlightening public obligation in its own right.

Civic agriculture and place

> *Woe betide any man who depends on the abstract humanity of another for his food and protection.*
> – Michael Ignatieff 1984 (as cited in Esteva and Prakash, 1998)

Kemmis in his extraordinary book, *Community and the Politics of Place*, argues that public life – "a civic republicanism" – can not be divorced from real, tangible places, that, in fact, the latter give shape and meaning to the former. In this regard, and using Hannah Arendt's metaphor of a table, he talks about place and the landscape of places as serving as "the res publica" or "the public thing" – simultaneously holding people together and keeping them safely apart. Aspects of the physical environment – a woods, a mountain range, a stream, a berry patch – he argues, can provide the locus or ground that prevents people

from being swallowed up and thus "disappeared" by the twin voids of anywhere and nowhere at all. By keeping people physically spaced and related, separated and connected, this "thing" provides the concrete experience and framework for a collective identity and a democratic political culture. "(P)ublic life," he argues, "can only be reclaimed by understanding, and then practicing, its connection to real, identifiable places" (Kemmis, 1990: 6).

The understanding of place and practice within a particular place Kemmis calls inhabitation. Inhabitation, he wisely recognizes, is essentially a matter of survival. It is the condition of vulnerability and the need to surrender something of oneself to the group and the place that makes inhabitation possible. In such a setting, individual differences are tolerated and individual wants (as opposed to basic needs) minimized – simultaneously embraced and distanced – in the interest of collective well being, and the "politics of cooperation" (Kemmis, 1990: 72). For Kemmis, it is through the process of inhabitation, through "dwell(ing) [in a place] ... in a practiced way, in a way which relies upon certain regular trusted habits of behavior" (Kemmis, 1990: 79) that culture and shared values take shape. It is also through the process of inhabitation that the raw material of citizenship, of civic virtue, of "we-ness" emerges, and "the second language" – the language of tradition and commitment to community, to memory, to hope, to common ground – is acquired (Bellah et al., 1985).

There is much here that relates to civic agriculture. There are many who have spoken of the symbol and substance, the "second language," the "ensouled geography" embedded in place (Berry, 1990; Kirschenmann, 1997; Cajete, 1993). Recently, Esteva and Prakash (1998) have come to speak about "soil (agri)cultures." Most specifically, they are referring to indigenous, largely subsistence-based communities, like those of Chiapas, where residents have chosen not to surrender their commons, their ancestors, their "absence of scarcity" to development. They are, in essence, rejecting the culture of material separation, market accumulation, and physical and spiritual displacement. Such cultures through their grass-roots resistance to global domination and "dis-memberment," can serve as guideposts, a source of inspiration and metaphor for moving us toward a (re)newed way of being and belonging. For Esteva and Prakash, "comida" is one such metaphor.

> [It] defines a social condition in which power remains in the hands of the people. It is their source of solidarity and conviviality; their antidote to ragged, lonely individualism. Every post-modern group has to rediscover its own ideal of comida – in its attempts to rediscover sustainable living and agri-culture (Esteva and Prakash, 1998: 67).

The rediscovery of "hidden stocks of comida," I feel, is also an inherent responsibility of civic agriculture. Oddly enough, our connection with "soil culture" seems, at present, less developed in rural areas than in urban neighborhoods. Perhaps our market mind set has directed us to attend more closely to the commercial needs of independent producers and the resource potential of rural landscapes and less to the power of any particular place. Nevertheless, it is in these less traditional agricultural settings, that urban residents are turning small patches of soil and natural landscape into commons within which to grow a type of "comida," as opposed to a type of vegetable or value-added product (Hynes, 1996; Payne and Fryman, 2001; Schwartz, 1997).

In his beautiful essay, "Elegy to a Garden," Andrew Light (2001) describes the depth of commitment and identification that emerges from this collective experience. For 22 years, the Esperanza Garden located in a Puerto Rican community in New York City tapped and fed an "organic memory." It was a real place, a soil place, a "res publica" that held together the social and environmental values of a group of people. "The garden," Light writes,

> ... contained flowers, vegetables, and also medicinal plants used by local residents. This garden was not just a patch of green on a brown landscape or a clever bit of utopian protest art. It was a schoolhouse for this particular community where elders could teach the young something about their environmental traditions, their past, and also their aspirations for the future. The land ... became the literal ground for intergenerational community ... (2001: 7)

The strength of this attachment was evidenced in the symbols, the planning, and the grass-roots activism that citizens put forth in their collective attempt to defend their garden – a defense that ultimately proved unsuccessful.

For Light, the impassioned struggle to save the garden was enough to make him realize that a true environmental ethic must embrace these small, built spaces as tightly as any wilderness. Like Kemmis, he recognized that it is in the inhabitation of a tangible and shared place, in the confluence of nature and culture, that environmental responsibility and sustainability take shape. These are the everyday, the non-specialized, the "comida-like," connections that inspire the belonging, the identity, and civic engage-

ment that allow us to "pay serious attention to the power of all environments to draw us in as a partner worthy of protection" (Light, 2001: 8).

Civic agriculture and work

> *Democracy to be real and continuous, must be lived daily, its values woven into the fabric of society. It cannot be 'handed down' or planned from above.*
> – Stauber and Rampton (1995: 204)

If citizenship (and environmentalism) is framed by place, then it also is realized through work in place. To be truly civic, such work, like place itself, needs to be embodied (not abstract) and public (not individual). In their work *Building America: the Democratic Promise of Public Work*, Boyte and Kari present this idea very clearly. For them, "work is not beside the point. It is at the center of citizenship," and public work, in turn, is at the heart of democracy.

"Public work," they write, "is work *for* the public. It is also work *of* the public and *by* the public. It brings to the fore questions of responsibility, reciprocity, civic dignity, and accountability" (Boyte and Kari, 1996: 23). Whatever its outward form – as a barn raising, an urban garden, a town hall meeting – public work is not about producing a thing or a final product. Rather it is about "the work activity itself" and the relationships that emerge from it and help sustain it (Boyte and Kari, 1996: 21).

In this regard, the work activity (and the citizenship and democratic process it enables) is not a "now and again" thing. It can not be a voluntary effort put forth whenever it is convenient, when there is spare time, surplus material, or extra cash. Community is a function of necessity not of choice and civic engagement is a matter of personal sacrifice, of relinquishing self-interest to a group or common good. It exists only in continual and often tiresome practice.

Such activity conflicts mightily with the mantra of our modern times – it is decidedly inconvenient. Public work requires that individuals invest themselves not as specialists or professionals, not as producers or consumers, not as partial players, but as citizens in the activities of daily life – in the activities of inhabitation. "The concept of public work," Boyte and Kari explain,

> . . . is associated with a constellation of other insights and themes. For instance, it is connected to the idea that democratization depends on people's own largely self-directed learning, drawing strongly from people's cultures, traditions and ways of life but also informed by larger civic concepts and lessons. Put differently, this means a focus on the development of the civic capacities of individual, institutions and communities. "Public leadership development" (in contemporary language) – or popular civic education – is central to building democracy. In turn, the key to such development is reconfiguring jobs as public work (Boyte and Kari, 1996: 9).

It is not sufficient, then – regardless of whether one is a brain surgeon, a soccer mom, or a factory worker – to buy one's way out of responsibility and/or guilt. To do so, bypasses the sustained commitment, the "res," at the core of public work.

Equally inconvenient, public work requires that personal differences of opinion and perspective be allowed to exist – that they be tolerated and collectively negotiated to avoid becoming the fault lines along which permanent social segregation and alienation can occur. Not only does public work, like the participatory democracy it supports, demand time and tolerance, but it also needs, according to Boyte and Kari, free spaces, common places, within which to operate. These public spaces, they explain, are

> . . . places for accountable productive work with people whom one might well not like or agree with on many issues. Public space is a distinctive vital arena in its own right, where citizens exchange ideas and power, achieve visibility, engage in conflict and collaboration (Boyte and Kari, 1996: 146).

Civic agriculture can provide the venue, the space within which such public education and political practice can take place. Brian Donahue's (1999) story of Weston, Massachusetts, serves as a case in point. Here, in an affluent suburban community – in the belly of the materialist beast – residents actively maintain an agricultural and forest commons. These public spaces have become a palpable dimension of Weston community life and identity – and of a growing land ethic. Here too, the relationship of people to place grows not through controlled, museum-like isolation, but through direct physical engagement. These common spaces teach residents (often by way of their children) how to see and feel and interact year-round with the beauty, the history, the food, lumber, and fuel that binds them to the land. It is through their embodied experience – through farming, lumbering, sugaring, lambing, preserving, eating, building, sweating – not as play or volunteerism, but as real work that residents come to share a perspective, a respect, and a long-term commitment to caring for their environment and each other. "I suppose to some," Donahue confesses,

> . . . this sounds like so much romantic treacle. That does not make it any less satisfying to those of us

> lucky enough to be caught up in it, year after year. Reading about maple syruping is a pale pleasure compared to picking up a brace and bit and trying to figure out where to put a hole in a tree. ... Some may object that the trees are so threatened we dare not tap them; for the last few grand maples by the town green, they may be right. But that is tokenism. The truth is, if we do not change our ways, those last trees will soon die anyway. If more people don't start making syrup, instead of just driving around in the fall to gawk at the foliage and buying corn syrup with maple flavor, we don't have a prayer of making the changes necessary to save the maples from destruction. The healthy maples cannot be merely preserved – they must be passionately embraced by people with a deeply felt stake in the matter (Donahue, 1999: 179).

Maintaining the Weston commons is hardly convenient or economically rational in any conventional sense of that term. But they are spaces wherein people may start to think (and act) about water catchments, energy sources, and suburban sprawl, where they may consider food availability, resource distribution, collective ownership, and public education – issues and understandings that, in turn, are reflected in the decisions made by their local officials and governing boards. These commons are the spaces that expand and deepen cultural and ecological vision and mold citizenship. They are the spaces, according to Donahue, and I would agree, that will make it possible for a population, a community, a citizenry to enthusiastically support private farmers and loggers, their livelihoods and their sustainable use of the earth.

So what am I trying to say here?

> *Ultimately we can all lay claim to the term* **native** *and the songs and dances, the beads and feathers, and the profound responsibilities that go with it. We are all indigenous to this planet, this mosaic of wild gardens we are being called by nature and history to reinhabit in good spirit. Part of that responsibility is to choose a place. To restore the land one must live and work in a place. To work in a place is to work with others. People who work together in a place become a community, and a community, in time, grows a culture. To work on behalf of the wild is to restore culture*. – Gary Snyder (1995: 236)

I am trying to say a number of things here. The first is that, at present, civic agriculture, for all its good work and public potential, is focused most keenly on creating economic infrastructure rather than common inner structure. I worry about this direction when small farmers and "would be" farmers continue to think of themselves (and are encouraged to think of themselves) primarily as entrepreneurs looking to grow for specialty markets, local or otherwise. Somewhat ironically, they themselves, have become a specialty market, the avid consumers of an endless stream of "how to" books, workshops, tours, and e-tools. They (and we) are still manufacturing and catering to "wants." They (and we) are still bound to a concept of scarcity that they (and we) are trying to overcome individually and hence can only perpetuate. They (and we) are still relating to each other as one-dimensional abstractions – as producers or consumers, as buyers or sellers – no matter how pleasant our smiles or conscientious our purchases. Simply put, it is not the job of small-scale, alternative farmer-entrepreneurs to feed, clothe, educate, and right the injustices of society while the rest of us clap and cheer and ask to have our green beans delivered washed and herringbone to our doorstep. We need to find and create more complex and organically-grounded identities for ourselves.

The second thing I am trying to say is that a sense of place and embodied work in a place are essential elements of civic agriculture and civic engagement. It is in literally feeling the "res publica" and in our individual and sweaty sacrifices to it that we begin to inhabit places in any deep and collective way. This sense of belonging, of "we-ness" and community, comes far less from choice than it does from necessity. To live well in community, our individual consumption and acquisition will be reigned in and held by the bonds of inconvenience. In turn, we will be connected in multiple ways to nonvoluntary responsibilities, and natural seasons, and common cause. Living with a measure of inconvenience and with the energizing and irritating connections it implies keeps us "in our places" and "in our senses." We trap ourselves in a huge contradiction, I believe, when we – farmers and consumers alike – continue to want and cater to convenience on the one hand and mourn the loss of mutuality and collective concern on the other.

Third, I am trying to say that soil is an embodiment, both literally and figuratively, of people living in place. It is a public trust, a commons, and a source of cultural energy. Civic agriculture must be about soil and building soil, not only as a medium within which to grow good food, but also as a medium and marker of sacred places – places that tie us to our past, our present, and our future. Such a shared responsibility and reverence for a particular place can (and should) emerge in urban and suburban as well as in rural environments – in city lots, in 10 acre woods, in 100 acre fields. The publicly-owned and decidedly non-commercial Esperanza Garden and Weston commons serve as cases in point. Such places can nourish the

seeds – the values and daily negotiations – of soil culture. They can also provide the venues, the multicultural well- springs of civic engagement, and participatory democracy. Yet for all they may offer in terms of "soil citizenship" and public good, they remain extremely fragile. The Esperanza Garden, despite heroic grass-roots activism and civil disobedience, was leveled for commercial housing and with it the shared and rooted traditions of many urban residents. This is a loss for civic agriculture.

Fourth, and possibly most important, I am trying to say that civic agriculture and its advocates must also embrace these commonly-held, not-for-profit spaces with the same creative energy that they now give to individual marketing strategies and economic structures. To do this, we will need to learn to speak in humanistic ways about the socioeconomic dimensions of place and to position food and farming within this wider and deeper context. We will need to understand how civic engagement *feels* in all senses of the word.

Currently we talk about constructing local food systems with the same pragmatic zeal we apply to assembling bicycles. Snap farmer "A" into local market "B," insert seasonal food "C" into local kitchen "D," fasten value-added food product "E" to local economy "F," fit policy "G" to population "H," and there you have it – the green machinery to move the food system along an alternative path. Certainly, this is a good thing to do, we all know the food system needs to pedal in a new direction, but it simply is not sufficient. We can not leave out the collective spirit, the non-voluntary responsibility and grace, the hospitality and sacredness of the enterprise. It is true that we hope such place-inspired insight and belonging may emerge over time. But they may not.[3] In the first place, a civic agriculture of this sort needs vital bodies and a patchwork of voices. When our only voice is through the marketplace, it is a very poor voice at best. When we connect principally as producers and consumers, we are still living *off* the land and not *in* it, off nature and off each other. In the second place, inhabitation takes time – there is no "instant- comida" or "instant soil," like there is an "instant-cup-of-soup." We would do well to find it, honor it, study it, and protect it where it has already begun to grow. For therein lie the understandings that will protect us all in return – farmers, eaters, urban and rural dwellers, the land, and its diverse biological communities. There too, it seems to me, resides the spirit and energy – as well as half the purpose – of the project of civic agriculture.

Notes

1. What distinguishes "civic agriculture" from other alternative strategies and development paradigms designed to counter the excesses and inequities of a global food supply is its ideological flexibility. Unlike the concepts "local food systems" or "community food security," CA does not (at least at the moment) have a primary constituency or a specific agenda (e.g., farmers, hunger) closely associated with it. CA does not "protect against" as much as it "opens up" social spaces within which new community relations and place-based understandings may take shape.

   As Lyson notes, "Each of these efforts [of civic agriculture] . . . provide forums where producers and consumers can come together to solidify bonds of community" (Lyson, 2000: 44). Because of its inclusive nature, civic agriculture can encompass the context and culture of citizenship as an organic resource in its own right. The melding of producers and consumers into earth-bound citizens embraces the practice of personal and interpersonal expression, communication, and conflict resolution (around issues such as soil, place, ecology, history, cuisine) quite apart from prescribed outcomes and quantifiable goals.

   Civic agriculture, as a consequence, is able to name and thus put into words, a wide range of ideas (and actions) that are at present still experimental and often ephemeral. There is need for such a conceptual tool. A recent posting on the Community Food Security Coalition list serve, for example, sought language to "briefly and basically describe 'urban agriculture and educational farms' " (J. Mathers, "Seeking 2 Line Concise Definitions of Urban CSA and Educational Farms for Legislation." E-mail to Community Food Security Coalition, March 22, 2001). Terms like "food security," "sustainable agriculture," and "local food" have become too controlled and functionally specialized for this purpose. Civic agriculture presents an engaged and engaging possibility.
2. While the Internet is a tool used by small producers and processors to access markets and distribute products locally and otherwise, it is hard to know just how many e-type solutions exist or how many vendors rely on them. Nevertheless, programs like "Fresh On Line" and "Organic Trader" and "America Fresh," and the "SuperMarket Project's Virtual CSA" appear to be substantial in scope, promoted and often managed by regional and national advocacy groups and NGO's.
3. This is not a matter of seeing the glass half-full or half-empty, but of seeing the need for a somewhat different container. The fact that there are now many cooperative and direct marketing projects that connect small and family-scale farmers with satisfied customers and supportive public policy is a very good thing. At the same time, this does not mean that these projects are socially sufficient or conceptually complete.

   To move in the direction of greater sufficiency and completeness will require grounding activities in place and loosening economic relationships from a totalizing market hegemony. Examples do exist though they tend to be offered up in little bits and anecdotal pieces. There are endowments, like the Wagbo Peace Center, that prac-

tice a way of living that does not discount real work. There are individual CSAs (e.g., Growing In Place) and working farms (e.g., Cuyahoga Valley Countryside Initiative) that incorporate and/or exist as commons. There are urban gardens (e.g., Detroit's Gardening Angels; Catherine Sneed's Garden Project) that rehabilitate souls and seed political action. There are school gardens that re-educate young people (and their teachers) to the science and mystery of being and belonging.

It is quite true that projects such as these will never "swamp capitalism." But, that was never their purpose. Nor, in fact, is it being advocated here. Rather, what is being suggested is that civic agriculture with its expanded sense of the sensual and the sociocultural has the capacity and the responsibility to heighten the visibility and credibility of "home economics" – so that the latter may acquire sufficient density and weight to keep the business of value-added contracts and brick and mortar development in balance.

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