Bad Apple: Complexities of New York City Food Aid Programs

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BAD APPLE:

COMPLEXITIES OF NEW YORK CITY FOOD AID PROGRAMS

by

ROSE MEAGAN JIMENEZ

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

BAD APPLE:

COMPLEXITIES OF NEW YORK CITY FOOD AID PROGRAMS

By

Rose Meagan Jimenez

Adviser: Professor Melissa Checker

The only universal thing about food is that everyone needs to eat. In the United States, there are more instances of food insecurity than impoverishment. Governmental and local food aid programs are complex but are essentially motivated by socioeconomic issues. Food aid programs, from community gardening to Food Stamps, initially stem from a depression-era need to stimulate the economy. However, as socioeconomic issues change, food aid programs also evolve to meet those needs. By excavating different pieces of literature that discuss issues in food aid, the forms of structural violence that cause hunger come to life. This piece discusses community gardens, urban farming, WIC, SNAP, food cooperatives, the National School Lunch Program, and farm subsidies. As we are currently battling a great recession, food aid programs are being used as economic stimulus. However, food aid programs serve to pacify hungry people without solving the issue of hunger.
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Robert Singer, my inspiration in rhetoric
Foreword

I love New York; I have an intimate relationship with New York City. It is my home. New York is not a place I saw romanticized on television and came to escape my hometown. In fact, it greatly offends me when people complain that New York does not feel “homey.” The New York City Native is a rare creature, but has an undying love for its city, and feels a loving sense of community despite its jaded demeanor. New Yorkers engage in a silent togetherness and speak a language that is, at best, poorly translated by an outsider. I was born in Methodist Hospital. I went to The Bensonhurst School for elementary education. Then I went to Brooklyn Studio Secondary School to study drama. At Brooklyn Technical High School I studied Environmental Science and Engineering. I started two environmental remediation projects on my hands and knees in the dirt in Ft. Greene Park. I helped start a pastry company in Staten Island. At Stony Brook University Center of the State University of New York (SUNY) in Long Island, I majored in Cinema and Cultural Studies. Now at the Graduate School University Center of the City University of New York (CUNY) I am getting my Master’s degree in Sustainability Science and Education.

I have almost never even left New York City, save for a few trips to New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. I only left the country once for three (very short) weeks to study in Antigua and Barbuda, through the support of the CUNY system. I care about the environment because New York City is a world capital of art, commerce, and cuisine. I dare you to find better pizza or Chinese food in the country. New York City Public Education is the reason that I value all knowledge. Any and every bit of knowledge on any subject stimulates the mind. Everything is intertextual.
“The Environment” is more than just an abstract idea of a distant rainforest. The environment is the condition of the sum of all parts around you—social, economic, ecological, psychological, and political spheres are all simultaneous actors in the creation of an environment. As such, sustainability can only truly exist when all of these factors are in harmony. Sustenance is two things: the maintaining of life or systems, and the literal food and drink that is necessary to maintain that life. Structure in The United States exists such that not all people have equal access to foods. The structural violence that contributes to that is some ideal where not everyone is perceived as having the same rights to food as others. Structural violence exists such that demographics (like biological sex, and body shape and color) have been subject to medicalization. Structural violence exists such that anyone seen as transgressive, or actively violating accepted standards in society, is not entirely worthy of free reign over what they eat.

These so-called transgressions include not wanting or being able to breastfeed, a desire to eat ethnic foods that seem unsavory to the American palate, choosing an unconventional profession (or even just a profession in the arts), and even not actively attempting to lose weight. Demographics have been subject to medicalization, and food choices are often an easy segue used to further isolate non-white, non-male, non-able bodied, and non-slender people. Assimilate or starve.
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Introduction

Long is the tradition of a historical novelization of The United States. From the ripe elementary school years, public school students in New York City encounter several tropes that bond them together. Amongst these are extremely predictable and repetitive school lunches on Styrofoam trays and a series of canonized reading materials. The canonized book that always had a strong affect on me was John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*. Many children are raised with governmental food programs like food stamps, WIC, free school breakfast and lunch, and summer programs where you could go to school and get free lunch, and learn early that the ultimate sin was wasting food. When I read the following passage in junior high school, I was more than appalled. After reading twenty-four chapters describing the orange as a symbol of bounty and beauty:

Carloads of oranges dumped on the ground. The People come for miles to take the fruit, but this could not be. How would they buy oranges if they could drive out and pick them up? And men with hoses squirt kerosene on the oranges … a million people hungry, needing the fruit—and kerosene sprayed over the golden mountains. And the smell of rot fills the country.

Burn coffee for fuel in the ships…Dump potatoes in the rivers and place guards along the banks to keep the hungry people from fishing them out. Slaughter pigs and bury them…

And children are dying of pellagra must die because a profit cannot be taken from an orange. And coroners must fill in the certificates—died of malnutrition— because food must be forced to rot. (Steinbeck 413-414)
Morals do not exist in black and white. There are more than just two sides to a story. Each individual perspective on an issue is formed through a lifetime of context. What can be excavated about a subject from various literary works? Everyone must eat, but not everyone has the same access to food. What are the controversies surrounding food subsidy and food insecurity? What are the struggles to obtain food? A core value of The United States is to be a fed nation, but is food security in The United States merely an illusion?

Issues in Food Aid are complex but essentially motivated by socioeconomic issues. Initially stemming from depression-era need to stimulate the economy, food aid programs in the United States still exist but evolve alongside changes in the economy and social climate. Presently, as we are recovering from a great recession, food insecurity exceeds poverty in this country. Food aid serves to solve problems similar to those existing when they were initiated. The way issues surrounding food subsidies and food aid like food coops, urban farming, community gardening, WIC, and food stamps are presented in the news can be analyzed through the lenses of race, gender, and class.

**Food Security**

The World Food Programme defines food security as people having “all-time access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life” (Food Security Analysis). Analysts of the World Food Programme take food availability, food accessibility, and food utilization into account when determining if a place has food security. This means that there must be enough food to feed the population at all times, and it must be regularly accessible. Accessibility, in this case, means that food is reachable physically and acquirable by purchase, trade, food aid, or home production. The last, and least understood aspect of food security is appropriateness. This entails both nutritional adequacy and cultural acceptance.
For example, a kosher household might have regular access to affordable food, but if that food is not kosher, they do not have food security. A person with celiac disease, autoimmune dysfunction, or autism might have access to food generally, but no food within a reasonable price range that meets their dietary restrictions. A vegetarian or vegan may have no access to more than the two-of-each-vegetable at a local bodega to have enough protein to sustain their health.

Food subsidies, or institutional or governmental aid that make food more easily affordable to those in need, are often a topic of debate, and is often cast in a negative light. This is surprising, given that a widely accepted societal theory is that of Foucauldian bio-power and the idea that a main function of the government is to keep people alive. Simply put, if a nation is not eating, or is not eating enough or in a manner that is culturally and nutritionally sound, they will die. Programs in New York like Food Stamps, and food endeavors like community gardens, urban farms, and food coops exist under much scrutiny but are also deeply loved, needed, and appreciated by those who make use of them.

The necessity of food banks, food stamps, soup kitchens, and other food programs are indicative of deeper social problems. The three major avenues of food aid in the United States are food stamps, the National School Lunch Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), which all serve to alleviate both social problems concerning hunger and surplus problems in industrial agriculture. While programs that serve only to feed the hungry are viewed with skepticism and distrust, programs that operate under the guide of serving to alleviate “environmental” problems are more easily accepted than that because they maintain the facade that New York is a city of dreams.

This is very much related to different paths of food movements that are also quite easily analyzed through critical race theory. There are big differences between the framing of food
movements that are labeled as “green” movements and dominated by a white demographic like food coops, and long-standing endeavors in non-white communities like composting, gardening for food, bike riding, urban farming, and car pooling. The way these issues are discussed in far reaching media can be very influential in how these issues are perceived.

**Made You Look**

Recently, results for above-threshold toxicity in soil bed in urban farms and community gardens in New York City have been cause for concern as these places remediate. Coverage of this incident in The New York Post, which circulates 299,950 hardcopy editions and 200,571 digital editions every weekday (Newspapers: Circulation at the Top 25 U.S. Sunday Newspapers), has been fairly negative. The negative skew is not only biased, but crosses the line into sensationalism and fear mongering that wrongfully depicts urban farmers as irresponsible and demonizes their monitoring and response efforts. The complexities surrounding the crisis in New York City community gardens is not an isolated problem caused by a bad soil test, but is the latest in a long line of speed bumps in subsidized and socialized food programs. These issues stem from economic problems, stigma, media criticisms, and changes in federal legislation.

There is a theme of unsupported but widely accepted accusation of irresponsibility in food aid is discussions. In the realm of government food subsidies like food stamps, the irresponsibility game is a class issue, and is aimed at those who live in food insecurity and or poverty. There is a racialized element to irresponsibility accusations in the realm of social food-inventory groups like community gardens, co-ops, and urban farms as well. Gender is generally deliberately erased from the issue as women take on more responsibility in these programs than men, but it seems that the United States Department of Agriculture is erasing women from statistics.
Since many urban farmers are non-white and female, fear mongering makes it even more difficult to engage in a successful counterhegemonic farming practice that colors the “farmer” as a white male. This, in conjunction with other texts on the subject, and a history of complicated strategies enacted by The United States Department of Agriculture creates an interesting dynamic within institutional food strategies that aim to fix both social and environmental problems. Though this might seem somewhat sustainable, these practices thrive off of big problems like food waste, overproduction in industrial agriculture, and underrepresentation of both race and gender diversity.

Figure 1: “Headlines That Make Headlines.”

In December 2014, The New York Post launched the “Made You Look” Campaign, featuring quirky headlines, footed by their Logo and the phrase “made you look.” Although this campaign, plastered all over the New York City infrastructure, aims to paint news as something that should be exciting, the unattainable idealized notion of unbiased news in the United States (though it is impossible for media to totally stray from an agenda) has fallen into a new realm of
unapologetic sensationalism. The New York Post has long been criticized for being a sensationalist publication.

In fact, in 1993, when Pete Hamill, a long-time reporter for both The Daily News and The New York Post, briefly took over as the Post’s editor, he said in response to these criticisms, “It’ll be a different paper in a month. [The Post will become] a tabloid-plus that will retain all the great classic slam-bang tabloid spirit…[It will be] a writer’s paper, with richer, more ironic, hipper writing that reflects the attitudes New Yorkers have,” (Liebma). But this does not make any sense. Hamill essentially claims that the New York Post will be switching from one sensationalist style to a different sensationalist style. Hanna Liebma’s March 29, 1993 article on the subject goes on to describe how Hamill, along with the new owner, Steven Hoffenberg, planned to hire more women, discuss more contemporary issues, and sell advertising space to more small businesses. However, these socially progressive moves are being used as a crutch to veil sensationalism as contemporary colloquialism.
The “Made You Look” campaign, with headlines like “Nobody Says ‘Hey, Wanna Hear a Dull Story the Longest Way Possible?’” and “A Good Headline Kicks You in the Eyeballs” amongst others only serve to exemplify a sensationalist agenda.

Figure 3: "A Good Headline Kicks You in the Eyeballs."
Figure 4: "Nobody Says, 'Hey Wanna Hear a Dull Story The Longest Way Possible?'"
Figure 5: "What Good is Freedom of the Press if You Don’t Use It?"
In November 2014, East New York found itself in crisis when many of the eighty-eight community gardens that feed the local population and are sold in farmer’s markets were found to yield produce with high levels of toxicity. The New York Post put out an article by Gary Buiso on November 16, entitled “Root of All Evil: Vegetables in NYC Gardens are ‘Toxic.’” The
article is accompanied by a photograph of a Brooklyn farmers’ market vendor, and captioned, “A vendor works a Brooklyn farmers market that sells veggies from East New York Farms garden, where carrots were found with unsafe levels of lead.”

Figure 7: Screenshot of "Root of All Evil"
Quite unfortunately, this article implies that the blame lies with the people of the community, and not with the New York City Government. In addition to reporters quoting people who complain that East New York Farms vegetables are not very “tasty,” a woman who claims she prays before eating anything she routinely buys from the community garden, and a man who likens eating from the garden to Russian roulette, the article quotes Councilman Corey Johnson, chairman of the council’s Health Committee:

New Yorkers are using these community gardens to grow their own vegetables, which poses a serious health risk given that the ingestion of lead can cause permanent brain damage and even death,” said the Manhattan Democrat, who urged increased awareness and testing. (Buiso)

This is an issue of fear mongering—deliberately arousing fear and alarm amongst the public. Although this article does some things right, like neutrally listing proposed dangerous lead levels in comparison to those lead levels found in herbs and vegetables at the community garden against the toxicity thresholds while also explaining that those thresholds are inconclusive, they still choose to add only negative and no positive comments by members of the community. This defamation has the potential to

State researchers found these toxicity levels in Spring 2014, but the New York Post reported that no specific locations would be named. The articles also both fail to mention that all the soil testing is the result of leaders in the garden community making the effort to have things tested in the manner suggested by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Though the EPA states that it is the responsibility of the creators of the community garden to make sure the grounds are safe, the government offers few to no resource options or suggested methodologies for doing this. Even in some bodies of water in New York City, while there are studies that the
determine the toxicity thresholds (i.e. the smallest “safe” amount of a toxin in water), there is no funding behind studies that show dangers of having more than one toxin in the water. That is, there is no knowledge of or any knowledge generation efforts to find out what health effects, if any, occur when there is a mix of below-threshold amounts of lead and below-threshold amounts of something like arsenic in the water.

This water is labeled “safe” without being studied on a higher, secondary level, and this water is used to irrigate community gardens. In 1986, the United States government enacted the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act, in which “industries were required to report toxic releases and communities were asked to plan emergency responses” (Merchant 265) to toxicity. These emergency responses could be planned using the community’s ability to access “the types of chemicals used in local industries and the quantities of pollutants the industries release,” (Merchant 186). However, this right to knowledge can only be applied to knowledge that has actually been generated. No study, no information.

While the Environmental Protection Agency offers an instructional guide on how to start a community garden, the instructions do not seem to offer enough information to create a sustainable system. The last step in the instructions reads: “6. Plant a safe and healthy garden and enjoy your growing community” (Steps to create a Community Garden). This is just vague and upbeat enough to portray running a community garden as a fun and simple hobby. The government does not offer enough support to local community efforts in food security in the way that they offer support to other small business owners through the United States Small Business Association (SBA), while they still collect taxes from these projects being sold from Community Gardens that have not reached official Non-Profit Organization (NPO) status (especially since
none of this produce is sold for profit but is immediately absorbed back into the community gardens).

Some people in New York City depend on local resources like community gardens to both obtain free food and to grow food for their booths at farmer’s markets. Prices of things like transportation and a store’s rent are absorbed into the price of things sold at retail. Community gardens eliminate some of these factors, and thus keep prices low. More local food literally means a stronger food economy—the community’s wealth of food and food resources (its production and consumption), and their agency over managing those food resources. In regard to the common argument that higher food prices yield fairer trade to farmers abroad, *The Right to Food, Interim Report of the Special Rapporteur Jean Ziegler* stemming from The United Nations General Assembly, Sixty-second session, Item 72 (b) of the provisional agenda A/62/289 (August 22, 2007) states offers a statement on increasing food prices in the global economy:

The prices of basic staple foods are likely to increase, threatening economic access to sufficient food, particularly for the poorest who already spend a high proportion of their incomes on food. It is estimated that there could be a rise of 20 per cent in the international price of maize between now and 2010, and 41 per cent by 2020. The prices of vegetable oil crops, especially soya and sunflower seeds could increase by 26 per cent by 2010 and 76 per cent by 2020, and wheat prices could increase by 11 per cent and then by 30 per cent. In the poorest regions of the sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Latin America, the price of manioc could rise by 33 per cent and up to 135 per cent by 2020. … [T]his will set up a battle of “food versus fuel”, less there are urgent investments in moving to the second generation of biofuels that will not depend so much on food products. The consequences of such a rapid increase in food process would be grave…. [T]he number of
people suffering from undernourishment would increase by 16 million people for each percentage point increase in the real price of staple food. This could mean that 1.2 billion people would be suffering from hunger by 2025. … Although increasing food prices should theoretically benefit millions of people working as peasant farmers in developing countries, that is not always the case. Many farming families are net buyers of staple foods, as they do not have enough land to be self-sufficient, and will therefore be affected by rising consumer prices. In addition, prices received by farmers at the farm gate are often exploitatively low, particularly for remote farmers with little choice of whom to sell their crops to, and often do not reflect global prices because of the greed of intermediaries. (Merchant 188)

The United Nations understands a need for better national food economies. Instead of strengthening food economies on a national level and waiting for trickle down, which would be inefficient, food economies should be strengthened at first on a community level and subsequently worked up to national level. Community Gardens are a more proactive and productive means of achieving this than food banks in that community gardens and urban farming fix systematic problems in food security. Food banks are often a last resort for people whereas community gardens (and especially home gardens) are a first choice.

Dr. Efrat Eizenberg’s *From the Ground Up: Community Gardens in New York City and the Politics of Spatial Transformation* is part of an academic literary series called “Re-Materializing Cultural Geography.” A work stemming from a long-term study conducted through CUNY’s Graduate Center, it discusses the history of community gardens in The United States and a contemporary survey of New York City urban farms. It notes that the first phase of community gardens in the United States was historically a “government-initiated poor relief
program” (Eizenberg 115) starting in Detroit in 1894. That is 120 years ago: more than half of this country’s age.

Community Gardens

The New York City Parks Department website, however, does not offer any information on Community Gardens before the 1970s’, when they discuss the financial crisis that lead to many vacant lots and foreclosed land. The Green Guerillas, an organization founded in 1973 began by using seed bombs to beautify vacant and abandoned spaces. The colors and the landscapes they created sparked a new wave in community gardening.

Over time, these different waves of community garden programs grew, but the government abandoned their responsibilities. This has had many good consequences, but as we are seeing in the news, some very bad consequences as well. The amateur gardeners create beautiful, low-cost or free, eclectic gardens, but may not be well versed on the science of horticulture. The government allows gardeners to be free agents and is open to grant proposals, but is not always there to support gardens’ efforts when they need it.

While some community gardens do subsist on a combination of government and nongovernment (NGO) grants, they also fall into the realm of being simultaneously a government institution and a social institution. Says Eizenberg, “the institution involves maintaining the right to participate in the urban sphere, to affect it, and to protect the spaces that are an important part of everyday life” (143). She goes on to explain that these practices can be a part of the infrastructure, and the community effort builds up into broader aspects from the neighborhood to the city to the state, and to the adjoining states.

The community garden is a platform for a melting pot for members of the community, but gardening itself can be a method of self-expression. Each of the eighty-eight gardens offers
something unique to the community. Different aesthetics and inventories reflect the collaboration of different individuals. Some also have workshops for food canning and fiber crafts. These people are not professionals and thus do not follow a template, but rather arrange the gardens in ways that feel right.

Consequently, Eizenberg deduced in her research that community garden is often a medium for different members of the community with different demographic standings to discuss local issues. East New York Farms also offers a youth internship, taking in over thirty children a year to teach them all about food security and gardening, giving them both a skill and an education. This empowers children to grow into helpful members in their family, and important members of their community. This is not a trickle down. This is a matter of getting in on the ground floor instead of repairing from the top, down.

The New York City Parks department website attributes what they consider the brilliant idea of “top-down emphasis in the management style” to Parks Commissioner Robert Moses. Although Moses’ ideas for parkways and other urban planning projects developed from 1934 to 1960 were brilliant, they were not effectively realized until the implementation of the High Line, which started opening in phases in 2009 and still is not completely open. This is due, in large part, to the implementation of those plans being done from the top, down. Jane Jacobs, another notorious urban academic believed in an “eyes on the street” approach to city planning—plan urban spaces based on the most basic behaviors and desires of people dwelling in urban spaces that already exist. Robert Moses believed more in the idea of creating urban spaces in such a way that people would move in accordance with the physical objects around them. Their theories are not necessarily pitted against each other, but can be read as two approaches to the same ideals in environmental psychology.
Eizenberg, who is now doing a similar study on community gardens in Israel, believes that urbanization is something that will never slow down. If people are to survive when they move to urban environments, community gardeners, who refer to themselves as “organic residents” (196) lead the way to making New York City more balanced in the realms of social relations and interpersonal relations: “Urban residents struggle to survive in the jungle of overly stimulating, nationalized, and impersonal environment. This is what urban life seemed to offer through remolding the personality and social relations of its inhabitants” (1). The people of New York put love into their gardens and that effort shows through.

East New York Farms has also been featured in The New York Times. An article on May 7, 2008, East New York Farms was featured in an article entitled, “Urban Farmers’ Crops Go From Vacant Lot to Market,” which praised the Brooklyn Farmers:

This urban agriculture movement has grown even more vigorously elsewhere. Hundreds of farmers are at work in Detroit, Milwaukee, Oakland and other areas that, like East New York, have low-income residents, high rates of obesity and diabetes, limited sources of fresh produce and available, undeveloped land. (McMillan)

Not only is the more rhetoric more supportive, calling this a vigorous “movement,” it also succinctly acknowledges that urban farming exists elsewhere in the nation. It acknowledges the sustainability of urban farming by pointing out issues of public health that urban farming aims to combat, cultural appropriateness of local produce, and economic benefits that stem from these sustainable low-overhead businesses.
The issue of toxicity and lead contamination is not the new development Root of All Evil makes it out to be. This New York Times article explains that the soil had been tested and precautions had been taken against found toxicity found there from breaking the ground.

**Pink-Collar Green Work**

Eizenberg also discusses issues of women’s participation in New York City Community Gardens. Whereas she observed Mexican women happily actively engaging in community activities, she noticed a trend in women relinquishing positions of power in those gardens. Interviews with recruiters from the New York City Community Garden Coalition brought to light that “women initially followed the program because they needed the substantive support it promised, but they were somewhat reluctant” (77) to take control over projects. Some voiced
concerns were a desire to work without being questioned, and inexperience in being in positions of power, especially considering their immigrant status.

Mexican Women, she theorizes, utilize the space of community gardens to “manifest and develop capacities and change their reaction to the environment from avoidance and anxiety into competence and agency” (78). Marginalized groups like Hispanic women are often discouraged from seizing positions of power and are often not comfortable participating in social movements or getting involved in advocacy. When anxieties stemming from being in the spotlight prevent non-citizen immigrant women of color from doing anything radical, working with their hands in a community garden offers an a way to make concrete changes to their environment. Non-citizenship diminishes the amount of agency a person has when it comes to affecting the country’s infrastructure. They cannot vote, and sometimes are not even able to work, pay taxes, or run for office. There are not many other opportunities to be community leaders. Working in community gardens is empowering because these women feel like they are directly affecting and controlling an environment where they previously held little to no power.

Operating within the confines of an institution like the New York City Community Garden Coalition offers these women protection from outside criticisms. Relinquishing or rejecting positions of power in these institutions also protects women from taking blame should crisis arise. It is hard to make radical visible motions for change when your mere visibility in the country as a female immigrant leaves you susceptible to violent criticisms.

The visibility of women in farming (urban or otherwise) and community gardening is dichotomous. At once these women are being underrepresented or misrepresented in the extent of their large contribution to these institutions but they are also offered protection from a public critical gaze. Unfortunately, woman’s invisibility perpetuates issues of devaluation of women’s
work, but the immediate remedies that it offers to the need for women’s safe spaces means it is not likely to end.

Figure 9: Screenshot of "Mother Nature's Daughters"

Mother Nature’s Daughters

AUG. 27, 2014

A New York Times article entitled, “Mother Nature’s Daughters” came out just two months before The New York Post’s “Root of All Evil,” and puts the spotlight on how “the green-collar work on these small holdings is the province of a largely pink-collar labor force” (Tortorello). Blatantly discussing race, class, and gender, this intersectional piece forces recognition of exclusionary data reports, saying that there is almost no representation of gender
in them. Blair Smith, data miner for the USDA, explains that the USDA does not consider urban farms “farm business,” and so they are not included in USDA data reports. The data report on “demographic characteristics of hired farmworkers and all wage and salary workers, 2012” (Tortorello) on the USDA’s Economic Research Service claims that 92% of all hired farm workers (including laborers, supervisors, and managerial staff) are white, and 82% of all hired farm workers are male. Managers of urban farms reported to The New York Times that sixty to eighty percent of urban farm workers in field, in education programs at the farms, and doing the clerical and managerial work are women.

The applicant pool is gendered to almost the same proportions, (Tortorello). Over half of the workers are Black or Hispanic/Latino. The New York Times’ exposure of race and gender demographics in urban farms shows how those farm-style businesses not recognized by the United States Department of Agriculture leaves skewed demographics, depicting farming in the United States as whiter and more masculine than it actually is. The Times questions what shifts might occur in agro business “if urban ag work comes to be seen as women’s work, what will that mean for the movement’s farming model, mission and pay?” (Tortorello).

This is not to say that The New York Times online articles on these topics are completely neutral in their rhetoric, but to show that two sides exist in journalistic endeavors to cover issues of food subsidy. Again, much can be excavated from reading multiple bodies of work on the subject.

The New York Times in particular takes great pride in being on the side of defense of food aid. An editorial from November 1, 2013 entitled “A Five-Decade Defense of Food Aid” credits the Times with chronicling major events in food subsidies since the 1964 modernization of the food stamp program. The table below shows headlines about food stamps and food
subsidies from The New York Times. Even alone, these headlines show the overall pro-food stamp air of The Times’ coverage, and tell a brief story about food stamps in New York City.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>New York Times Article Headline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 12, 1964</td>
<td>A New Era in Food Aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1, 1970</td>
<td>Distribution Begins in New York City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 29, 1977</td>
<td>Reforming the Reform of Food Stamps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 27, 1981</td>
<td>A War on the Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 30, 1985</td>
<td>Let Them Eat Less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 7, 1995</td>
<td>Food Stamps in Peril</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 26, 1996</td>
<td>A Broken Social Contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 12, 1998</td>
<td>No Free Lunch in New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 26, 2001</td>
<td>Hunger and Tragedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 30, 2002</td>
<td>A Meager Helping for the Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 14, 2005</td>
<td>Cuts Amid the Storm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 7, 2007</td>
<td>Hungry Hostages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 25, 2009</td>
<td>Food Stamps in Hard Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 19, 2011</td>
<td>US Rejects Mayor’s Plan to Ban Use of Food Stamps to Buy Soda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 20, 2013</td>
<td>An Insult to the Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2, 2013</td>
<td>Budget Grief for the Poor and Jobless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 21, 2014</td>
<td>Food Banks Anticipate Impact of Cuts to Food Stamps</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There is a long history of matriarchy in the history of food production of The United States. Chad Montrie’s *Making a Living: Work and Environment in the United States* is a book that discusses the intersection of labor and the environmental history of The United States. It cites what is called “the women’s sphere” (15) as historically encompassing many aspects of farming in New England at all levels in the realm of both food and textile production:

These included feeding poultry, milking cows, making butter and cheese, tending the garden, gathering berries and other wild edibles, preserving and pickling, shucking corn, paring apples, making cider and applesauce, cooking, washing, tidying the house, making soap and candles, preparing flax and cleaning fleece, spinning, knitting, weaving, and dyeing cloth, as well as bearing and caring for children. (Montrie 15)

Montrie asserts that these jobs were meticulous, hard on the body, and unenjoyable, but staples of survival in rural lifestyles. Women even stepped outside traditional women’s work to do things like kill snakes, haul barrels of water over miles of land, and chasing down things like raccoons and wild cats out of animal coops, (60-61).

The woman’s role laid not only in making things beautiful by planting flowers and keeping house, but in long-term survival chores like canning vegetables and preserving food for winter. But all of these jobs come with advanced knowledge and well-honed delicate skill sets from meticulous pruning of plants to he proper sealing of preservation vessels. Montrie calls the fundamental theme of women’s work in agriculture as domesticating nature: the point at which that which is natural is manipulated to work within the confines of the home. In New York City, Urban Farms are very dependent on Hispanic and Black women.
**Critical Theories of Race and Food**

There are major social problems that contribute to hunger in The United States that are rooted in racism. Racism is the belief that race is a major factor in human capability, and that some are inherently more or less capable. Critical Race theory suggests that in the United States, whiteness is treated as a default, and other races are described in relation to or as deviations of white. Cultural dominance by white people affects issues of food access. In 2006, a research group at the University of California Humanities Research Institute wrote a proposal to start research on people of color in the food production workforce, including the realms of both farming and cooking. In it, they cite whiteness as the “unmarked category.” This analysis frames whiteness as not only a default and non-whiteness as different categories as deviations from or permutations of the default, but as a standard for perfection that cannot be achieved by non-white people:

For both social justice and critical race theory, the problem with perfectionism or whiteness is that it sets forth a pre-fixed morality for social action rather than creating a process by which social action is the product of political contest and decision-making. Critical race theory provides the additional critique that privileged groups impose a perfectionist politics on others while presenting it as the product of democratic political processes. (DuPuis)

This application of racism is not based on individual hatred of non-white people by white people, but systematic oppression that treats white practices as normal and other practices as deviant.

In regard to a racialized discussion of East New York Farms, it is being portrayed as a demonic company that sold vegetables grown in areas with above-threshold toxicity soil. However, the demonization of a Black organization in the media is easily disguised as an
environmental problem. Critical race theory can be applied to this situation to excavate that an environmental problem is more at fault than a social problem.

Geographies of race are integral to critical race theory, as discussed by Patricia Price in *At the Crossroads: Critical Race Theory and Critical Geographies of Race*. There is a tradition of geographical segregation in this country that stems from years of restrictions on Black people and Afro-Latinos taking out home loans. Researchers at dosomething.org have analyzed maps of food deserts distributed by the USDA and determined that predominantly white neighborhoods have about four times as many supermarkets than predominantly Black neighborhoods.

Price believes that critical geographies of race are too important to maintaining the status quo to be counterhegemonic. If health is a major issue in parts of the population that have low access to food there should be fewer efforts to demonize organizations that have come upon crisis and more efforts to raise awareness of social, political, economic, and ecological factors that contribute to food access inequities in this country.

Cooperative food programs like The Park Slope Food Coop and the Flatbush Food Coop operate under the idea of equity. Anyone willing to roll up their sleeves is theoretically able to participate in discounted foods specially selected by the particular coop. Again, theoretically, the coop should serve to aid people regardless of gender, race, class, religion, or income level. However, those philosophies can still perpetuate issues of inequality in food access.

**Cooperative Food**

Regardless of demographic differences of class and race, the main difference between the Park Slope Food Coop and urban farms in East New York are the principles of exclusion and inclusion. Journalistic endeavors are exemplary of these core values. The New York Times article “Flunking Out at the Food Co-op” describes a member’s suspension from the co-op for
not meeting a certain quota of work in a certain time period. Park Slope Food Co-op requires 2.75 hours of work every four weeks for every adult member of the household to be able to purchase food there, which is advertised to cost as little as 60% of the price of competing vendors (Ain). New members also have to go to training and orientation sessions, and are not allowed to shop on the first day they join the coop. This work does not exist on a sliding scale.

“Flunking Out at the Food Coop” gives some insight into a few different things. First, there is no privacy given to those suspended from the coop. You are publically dismissed from entry if you are suspended. This form of shaming can lead to embarrassment and leaves people on unequal footing. As compared to other food coops with fewer white members, Park Slope Food Coop does not offer services to nonmember, nor does it allow the same negotiations in price versus work. Comparatively, Flatbush Food Coop, whose membership is more diverse in race and class, simply offers different benefits for different types and quantities of member contribution. Park Slope Food Coop also isolates students with deadlines, people with certain disabilities (only a certain “type” of disability can make a member exempt from the work requirement and management there takes it upon themselves to determine who is “disabled enough” to be exempt from working), people who work multiple jobs, parents unable to hire a babysitter during shifts, and people who work in the service industry who already work in loading, cleaning, etc.—all presumably people who need discounted food more than others.

One former member recalls how she occasionally needs to skip a shift and rest from her actual job, but the penalty for cancelling a shift is two make-up shifts, which easily snowballs into four, eight, or sixteen 2.75 hour shifts per household adult owed to the store. That is, households with three adults owe a combined 8.25 hours of work (over an average work day) a month, which cannot be divided amongst family members. The Coop’s website explains that
“all adult members of your household must be assigned a workslot before anyone in your household can work at the Coop” (Ain). This is true despite the over-staffing of the co-op, leading to members recollections of cleaning rooms that have already been cleaned and reorganizing shelves that are already shelved, and a reported air of “shirking,” (Ain). Another member interviewed for “Flunking Out” recounts being suspended because another busy adult in her household did not attend his orientation due to clergy obligations. Although Park Slope Food Coop currently has over 15,000 members, it stillpunishes those unable to meet its participatory mandates.

Unfortunately, The Food Coop runs on a Little Red Hen principle—only those who are “useful” are worthy of benefits. It operates under the false assumption of being a socialized food organization that thrives on community involvement but accomplishes less than urban farms in the Bronx and Brooklyn. The white green movement thrives on exclusivity, not inclusivity.

The Park Slope Food Coop’s mission statement says, “we strive to make the Coop welcoming and accessible to all and to respect the opinions, need and concerns of every member. We seek to maximize participation at every level, from policy making to running the store” (Park Slope Food Coop). If this is true, why not utilize a methodology that is based on proration of more than just number of adults per household? That is, if you have over 15,000 people at your disposal and aim to respect the “needs and concerns of every member,” it is possible to reorganize the work schedule to utilize people who more readily available and prorate their benefits. This style of food coop emphasizes an elitist system that does not exist for betterment of the community. If it did, it would organize itself to help and acknowledge those members of the community that are not able to do the work it is mandating.
Those who purchase produce from East New York Farms (part of United Community Centers Inc.) are guaranteed the same low fixed price despite their participation. Many community gardens, which serve non-white, low-income communities and food deserts, require little to no participation or payment for people to take produce.

The Park Slope Food Coop, The Flatbush Food Coop, and East New York Farms exist in communities with different levels of food access. The maps in Figures 10 and 11 show those locations and a USDA analysis of food deserts, respectively. These USDA designated food deserts are more actually more severe than indicated. This is because candy stores and bodegas that sell only pre-packaged high-energy low-nutritive foods and little to no fresh bread, fruits and vegetables are counted in locations of food access. The area where Park Slope Food Coop exists has food no indications of food inaccessibility. The Flatbush Food Coop is adjacent to an area with Low-Income and Low-Access to food within 1-20 miles (marked in red on Figure 11). East of that is an area with Low-Income and Low-Access to food even with access to a vehicle (marked in yellow on Figure 11, an Esri Geographic Information System map).

Figure 10: Relative Brooklyn Locations: East New York Farms, Park Slope Food Coop, Flatbush Food Coop (via Google Maps)
Food Deserts

A food desert is an area lacking accessibility to fresh fruits and vegetables, whole foods (food/produce in its unprocessed state) or a wide variety of healthful groceries “due to a lack of grocery stores, farmers’ markets, and healthy food providers” (Gallagher). The United States Department of Agriculture defines a “low-access community” as an area where “at least 500 people and/or at least 33 percent of the census tract’s population must reside more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store” (Gallagher). Food deserts can especially cause hardship to those disabled individuals unable to travel without accommodation, those without cars and/or cannot drive, those unable to use or reach public transportation, people unable to hire babysitters and must take children on long trips. If one must take a train or bus to a grocery store, must also bring their child, and must carry groceries home on public transportation, they are limited to buying only as much as they carry with one hand on the train. How is one to keep a kitchen stocked under these conditions?
A study done by Adi Segal cites industrialized agriculture as cause for food deserts, and therefore local small-scale agriculture should be able to help combat this issue. Industrial agriculture thrives on the avoidance of surplus. However, government subsidies keep agriculture business in a negative feedback loop of overproduction. This works by offering farmers subsidized crop insurance payments, but without a cap on how much can be produced and insured. This insurance is intended to insure against “risks inherent to farming, including volatile weather, natural disasters, and fluctuating prices,” (Hinton). And of course, placing a cap on a company’s production is decidedly “un-American” in that it transgresses against American core values of laissez faire and capitalist endeavors. One discrepancy in the Farm Bill’s policy in insuring against “fluctuating prices” is that the subsidy itself creates fluctuations in prices. This money may be intended to account for low crop yields that yield lower overall profits to farmers, but thrives on overproduction.

This was majorly exemplified by the farm depression of the 1920s. Whereas the United States suffered greatly in the 1930s, this precursor was a major contributing factor that is often overlooked. First, a struggle to keep up with demand of corn, wheat, and cotton to export to Europe during World War I drove prices to skyrocket. This lead to an acceleration of farm production, which includes not only an increase in manual labor and associated land degradation, but an increase in farmers’ loan requests to fund business expansion. However, when the war ended, prices crashed, and there was a rural financial collapse.

Farmers were not able to sell the large quantities of crops produced, because the quantities were high enough to meet domestic demand and send overseas. This included not only food, but cotton as well, causing duress in the textile industry. The shrinking overseas market was somehow not anticipated.
A major method of eradicating surplus of soy and corn, the two dominant American crops (the other two being wheat and cotton), is to create as much sellable food with it as cheaply as possible. This results in the production of energy-dense foods, or “junk food,”—high-calorie, low-nutritive, mass-produced food. Farm subsidies from the government keep industrial farms from operating in an economically and environmentally sustainable way. This, in combination with derogatory city planning that leaves Black and Hispanic/Latino communities with candy stores and bodegas that carry energy-dense foods instead of well-stocked grocery stores or supermarkets creates hunger crises. Government subsidies value industrialized agriculture over local food production.

**Spatial Aesthetics and Value**

How are community gardens and urban green space valued? Unfortunately, the valorization of urban green space is heavily based on aesthetic quality. The spatial aesthetics of my Brooklyn neighborhood, Bensonhurst, have often been an interesting aspect of litter patterns I have observed.

The image of my family’s home at the intersection of a one-way and a two-way street on Google Earth illustrates something very unexpected. The small garden to the left of the tree is mine. It contains a small flower patch, a large rose bush, and pepper plants. We purchased a small tree to place in the center of the garden but it was stolen in the moments we stepped inside the building between arriving home with the tree and planting it. The garden on the right of the image belongs to the neighbor. The garden is about seven times the size of mine. It even wraps around the building in an L shape and faces out onto the two-way street, which is exposed to more traffic (pedestrian and automobile).
The next image on Google Earth (between the white truck and the pole) is a small squash garden, from which one woman sells the two-dozen butternut squashes she yields a year to her neighbors on the block. The photograph below is a close-up of her racks and supplies, which is always completely clear from litter. My garden, despite lower traffic on the street and the fact that food plants are clearly visible and thriving, has been subject to litter including food wrappers, empty bottles, and bags of dog waste. After I caught three men urinating in our garden, we no longer used the garden peppers. The garden next door is highly manicured, and has never been subject to much litter, but my garden was not planned aesthetically. The plants exist where they landed.
Despite the greater openness of the squash garden and the manicured garden than mine, they have been subject to much less litter and abuse. Though not as extremely small-scale as this squash garden, small urban farms like these exist all over the city. Many do not have an Internet presence, but they can be the pride and joy of a community. And yet, the difference in how green spaces that are merely yards apart can be wild. My garden may look less manicured and is valorized as less valuable than more manicured gardens in the vicinity. Perhaps this lack of design makes people assume the people who own the garden to not care about it. The way green space is presented is a key component to how people value it. If community gardens are bashed in the news, they become devalued by society.

Community Gardens are still having a hard time being accepted by society in the way small businesses are. An anecdote in Mark Binelli’s *Detroit City is the Place to Be: The Afterlife of an American Metropolis* describes people coming into the community gardens late at night, “stealing” food and running away with it. But it was not stealing. All the food was free; only
small donations of time or labor were suggested of those needing food. And yet, the act of stealing is a lesser transgression than accepting free, socialized, non-institutionalized food. The coordinator of the garden says, “A lot of people just don’t understand the concept of a community garden. They’ll come at eleven at night, they think they have to sneak in. I planted pumpkins and the people started picking them in August. Who picks a pumpkin in August?” (Binelli 58).

Perhaps people feel a greater agency in stealing and the sacrifices that come with that than in receiving charity. Ironic, since Detroit has the longest running history of community gardens in the United States. Green movements in New York, even the gentrified ones, are efforts put forth by those who love New York, native or otherwise. Because it is so important to the livelihood of so many, newspapers like the New York Post have an obligation to report on the issues, but should not undermine the efforts.

**Hunger Stigma**

Perhaps a large problem in the acceptance of socialized food comes from a stigma against socialized anything. Although the exclusionary practices are harmful and isolating, I believe that a large motivation behind these rather authoritarian methods at the Park Slope Food Coop come from an attempt to fight a stigma of those receiving subsidies being lazy and undeserving of benefits. Food stamps, food banks, and other food subsidies, may carry a stigma similar to welfare, but have historically been more successful than welfare. Janet Poppendeick, sociologist, professor, and policy director of the New York City food Policy Center is of the opinion that this is due in part to two common threads of upper-class American thought.

First: anti-hunger. A fed nation is a core value in The United States. This follows in the Foucauldian principle of bio-power in which the government’s existence is rooted in the power
function of keeping people alive. Both forms of bio-power (using the human body like a productive machine, and using the human body as a social and reproductive unit) can only exist in a fed nation.

Second: a historical American mistrust of the poor. Food stamps (now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP) have more limits than welfare when it comes to what they can be spent on, even if welfare money can be spent on food. The restriction of SNAP benefits being used exclusively for groceries (not even ready-to-eat foods) has power to make those not using the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program feel like SNAP users are being better controlled, (Poppendeick). It is questionable as to whether American ideals are anti-hunger or anti-hungry people.

The Food Stamp Act of 1977 was a major reform that was based in part on the idea that food stamps are a necessity despite poverty status. The House Report for this legislation states that food subsidy reform must happen without regard to welfare reform because “the path to welfare reform is indeed rocky” (A Short history of SNAP). The changes made by this legislation were intended to get food stamps to those that needed it most by simplifying the application, making the application more accessible by offering it in different languages and offering more platforms to obtain the application. Most importantly, the purchase requirement and limits on how much of the household income could be reported as spent on food because of the restrictions it posed on people who need to buy food. It also lifted a limit on facilities a household must have (i.e. requiring that houses must contain a kitchen). However, it added limits on the eligibility of students, people who had quit jobs, and non-citizens in an attempt to reduce attempts at food stamp fraud. The declaration of the policy is as follows:
It is hereby declared to be the policy of Congress, in order to promote the general welfare, to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation’s population by raising levels of nutrition among low-income households. Congress hereby finds that the limited food purchasing power of low-income households contributes to hunger and malnutrition among members of such households. Congress further finds that increased utilization of food in establishing and maintaining adequate national levels of nutrition will promote the distribution in a beneficial manner of the Nation’s agricultural abundance and will strengthen the Nation’s agricultural economy, as well as result in more orderly marketing and distribution of foods. To alleviate such hunger and malnutrition, a food stamp program is herein authorized which will permit low-income households to obtain a more nutritious diet through normal channels of trade by increasing food purchasing power for all eligible households who apply for participation. (Food Stamp Act of 1977)

Furthermore, the rates of SNAP abuse have declined drastically since the advent of digitization. People’s use of food stamps can actually be monitored so that they cannot be trafficked (sold for cash). The USDA reported 96.19% payment accuracy in 2012. Less than 1% of benefits were trafficked that year, which is a record low, (SNAP: Frequently Asked Questions).

Another thing that helps to lessen Food Stamp stigma is that in contrast to welfare, most people using them are employed. Furthermore, easing access to SNAP benefits is a way to get federal funding circulated into local economies and stimulate business activity. When stores receive food stamp dollars, they redeem them for cash from the government. Sales are guaranteed to increase when food subsidy participants enter the vicinity. This is money that would otherwise not be spent at the store. $1.87 goes into circulation for every SNAP dollar spent, (Poppendeick). Food Stamps are yet another methodology of reducing surplus in
industrial agriculture business, and are quickly replacing cash assistance like welfare. Surprisingly, the statistics on poverty that necessitates welfare and food insecurity that necessitates SNAP benefits do not match. Let us compare the 2013 national demographics on poverty and food security in the United States as analyzed by Feeding America:

Table 2: Poverty Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of population in poverty vs.</th>
<th>Part of population in food insecure households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People aged 18-64 in poverty</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children under age 18 in poverty</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People aged 65 and over in poverty</td>
<td>09.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whereas the part of the population living in poverty was 14.5%, the part of the population living in food insecure households was 15.7%. In addition to this group, 6.8 million households (6% of households in the country) were living just above the food insecurity line, in low food security. 19.9% of the population of children under age 18 lives in poverty. Households with children also have higher rates of food insecurity (20%) than those without children (12%). There is also a gender and racial skew in the percent of households with children living in food insecurity. Whereas 23% of households with children headed by single men live in food insecurity, 34% of households with children headed by single women exist in food insecurity. Also living without food security are 26% of Black households with children, and 24% of Hispanic households with children. In the year 2013, 62% of households suffering from food insecurity utilized at least one of the major federal programs for food assistance (SNAP/Food Stamps, WIC, and/or NSLP), with over half using food stamps. Furthermore, these numbers might be higher than analyzed. This is because there is sometimes little scrutiny about
the quality of store that people in a community have access to. Some people labeled as being in
the vicinity of a store are in the vicinity of a supermarket, but some are only in the vicinity of
corner stores that carry mostly pre-packaged high-energy foods, not fresh produce.
(Supplemental Nutrition Assistant Program)

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines poverty as “the state of one who lacks a usual or
socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions.” Whereas the United States
census that year concluded that 43,300,000 people were living in poverty, it is estimated that
49,100,000 people were living in food insecure households. That leaves 5,800,000 people living
without adequate access to food at a price they can afford who are technically living above the
poverty and ineligible for welfare. Every county in the United States has instances of food
insecurity. About one in six Americans go hungry every day.

When the food stamp program was being planned by the United States Department of
Agriculture, it was intended to be mutually beneficial to farmers with surplus and the under-fed
urban population while still ending up with a net gain to farmers. Initially, food stamps had a
buying limit and very strict qualifications, which lead to too little food for too few people. For
example, a family or family member could be rejected from receiving food stamps if they owned
a dog, owned a television, or if someone in the household had been treated for alcoholism. This
punishment of entire families was based on the stigma of laziness and luxury. To say that an
alcoholic relative negates worthiness of entire families to be able to eat is indicative of
punishment of poor parents being valued over feeding children with poor parents. Statistically,
these issues are even worse for women, and for non-white people. Children are the most
important people in the issue of hunger and children come in to play as a major way to remove
surplus in agriculture.
The National School Lunch Program and “government cheese” also come out of this movement to alleviate surplus after World War I. The National School Lunch Program reimburses schools for every meal served to children. This makes schools, which can have thousands of students, buy food in mass quantities. This allows them to either offer food for free to children who qualify and charge other students at a discounted price. Of course, it is beneficial to schools to buy the cheapest food possible to ensure that their stipend per meal completely covers the cost. The National School Lunch program was created to solve surplus issues, and thus it is set up to serve the needs of selling low-cost high-energy foods. There are often very few choices (sometimes more substantial or less substantial than necessary), especially to kids like me who had dietary restrictions. (Poppendeick)

On March 18, 2008, my lunch at Brooklyn Technical High School consisted of three chicken nuggets, macaroni salad (elbow macaroni, minced red and green bell pepper), chocolate chip cookies, french fries, and fruit punch [see figure 14]. On March 21, 2008, my lunch at a Brooklyn Tech consisted of one chicken wing, a half cup of fried rice, a half cup of macaroni salad (elbow macaroni and mayonnaise) with two peas in it, a half-pint of chocolate milk, two slices of a carrot, and an orange so old it had mold on the rind [see figure 15]. On April 10, 2008, my lunch consisted of a cheeseburger, one small potato, a half-cup of potato salad (new potatoes, mayonnaise, and parsley), and a half-pint of milk [see figure 16]. On May 6, 2008, my lunch consisted of a half-pint of chocolate milk, potato chips, pickle chips, applesauce, and potato salad (new potatoes, mayonnaise, parsley) [see figure 17].
Figure 14: School Lunch 3/18/08

Figure 15: School Lunch 3/21/08
It will take more restructuring than just buying lower-calorie foods that are comparatively higher in nutritional content. Time Magazine, which has been in publication in New York City for almost a hundred years, put out a piece that discusses not only that there is a problem implementing healthier school lunches. It also raises awareness to the idea that there are systematic difficulties in getting the healthier products chosen by students. For example, it
discusses that schools introducing lower calorie or more raw meal components gradually had
more success than schools that changed their menu overnight. In younger students, finicky or
picky eaters, or children with sensory-based disabilities were taken aback at a change in their
eating routine. In older students dealing with athletics and changes in their bodies, instant drops
in calorie content did not suit their dietary needs. The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act can work,
but it must simultaneously aim to work on the issues of health and hunger. Time Magazine treats
the issue as complex, not just as a report on the potential failures of the Healthy Hunger-Free
Kids Act. (Sifferlin) That is the difference between this coverage and the coverage of problems
at East New York Farms by The New York Post.

One inspiration for government programs to directly provide food supplies or reimburse
institutions for giving out food was finding a way to get grain to the Red Cross. At the wake of
the depression, they needed grain supplies for bread lines. In 1932, the first grain donations of
grain that had, till then, been sitting in storage were sent to the Red Cross. This was
accomplished by informing farmers that the stored food would be going to people who would not
be buying any food anyway. Many new government policies were about to emerge that greatly
affected food surplus. (Poppendeick)

Scorched Earth Policies

Crisis struck again, however, in 1933. President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal was
enacted in the 1930s to help combat effects of the great depression, and agricultural financial
reform was a major focus. A New Deal-Era federal law called The Agricultural Adjustment Act
aimed to change commodity prices in the agriculture industry, which was burdened by
overproduction of wheat, cotton, corn, and say. Because these crops are so deeply fundamental
to the production of other important products, a price collapse at that level would cause a price
drop in all consumer goods made from these products from fuel to alcohol to food to clothing to animal feed. Says the Agricultural Adjustment Act,

That the present acute economic emergency being in part the consequence of a severe and increasing disparity between the prices of agricultural and other commodities, which disparity has largely destroyed the purchasing power of farmers for industrial products, has broken down the orderly exchange of commodities, and has seriously impaired the agricultural assets of supporting the national credit structure, it is hereby declared that these conditions in the basic industry of agriculture have affected transactions in agricultural commodities with a natural public interest, have burdened and obstructed the normal currents of commerce in such commodities…it is hereby declared to be the policy of Congress—(1) to establish and maintain such balance between the production and the consumption of agricultural commodities, and such marketing conditions therefor, as will reestablish prices to farmers at a level that will give agricultural commodities a purchasing power with respect to articles that farmers buy, equivalent to the purchasing power of agricultural commodities in the base period. (Agricultural Adjustment Act)

It was interpreted to mean that it was legal to burn or otherwise destroy crops and render them unusable, a view that was supported by the Supreme Court’s decision in Wickard v. Filburn 317 U.S. 111 (1942). In Wickard, the Court declared that a farmer’s surplus wheat crops, grown for personal use on his own farm were a violation of the Act and a danger to the overall agricultural market. They create a false inventory deficit that they assume will, in turn, drive prices back up. However, as mentioned previously, equilibrium was never reached. Farmers still receive subsidies to both insure their overproduced inventory, and also receive subsidies to keep inventory low.
Not only is it morally bankrupt to destroy food in a country where over 50,000,000 people live in food insecurity, it is extremely detrimental to the natural environment. Food production is unique in that it cannot halt when quotas are reached and wait for stored inventory to be consumed. This is because food is perishable. It cannot withstand being stored for too long without immense amounts of energy for refrigeration, and it would still eventually rot anyway. Also, it is hard to get crops to simply stop growing. To do such would have to require immaculate timing and probably destruction of areas that are being used to grow crops with the potential to permanently damage them.

Finding a means to make surplus crops disappear other than destroying it is very important. This is why the National School Lunch Program was created. Janet Poppendeick speaks of potential dangers in trying to dispose of crops in her book, *Free for All: Fixing School Food in America*. During the 1930s, farmers’ pens were not big enough to hold a tremendous number of surplus pigs, resulting in piglets running wild in the streets of Chicago. Under the advisement of Secretary of Agriculture in 1933, millions of piglets were slaughtered in an effort to create an artificial deficit and raise pork prices. Unable to dispose of this waste like vegetable waste, via compost or mulch, and since it had to disappear from the market to keep the plan working, many of the pigs were pureed into a liquid, and subsequently illegally dumped into the Chicago River during the winter. Though at first this river dumping was treated as an urban myth, upon a warm season the following year, the material rotting caused an overwhelmingly bad odor and uncontrollable vermin problem (i.e. flies and rats). (Poppendeick 48)

Every unit or produce grown or livestock raised utilizes nutrient energy that exists within the soil. Soil resources are being depleted to yield crops that will ultimately be turned to ash. This starts a cycle that yields no benefit to food security, but requires immense labor to replenish
land. This includes harvesting, showing, tilling, fertilization, and an immense amount of energy and water.

If scorched earth policy is a war tactic, why is it being used on a daily basis to regulate food prices?

**Negative Feedback**

The first round of the food stamp program, which ran from 1939 to 1943, had limitations that granted a lot of autonomy to users and was very transparent in its mission to alleviate food surplus. This was achieved by allowing those eligible to buy an amount of orange food stamps (theoretically equal to their food expenditure) one for one—$1.00 of cash would yield $1.00 worth of orange food stamps that could be spend on any food (presumably food they would already be buying with cash). In addition, for every orange stamp purchased, a blue food stamp would be received worth $0.50 to be spent on whichever foods currently determined by the USDA to be in surplus. Essentially, this system worked by offering a proportional amount of free surplus food equal to half of whatever other food was being purchased. The negative side of this is that only those who were able to invest money in food stamps were able to receive food stamps, excluding the neediest people.

Although food stamps do serve people who live in food insecurity, food stamps would not exist if they did not suit the needs of industrial agriculture. The visibility of food stamps as a means to cut down agricultural surplus and stimulate the economy has dwindled. Is it even invisible to members of the government?

Ironically, the junk foods created to minimize surplus are often subject to proposals to be banned from being purchased with food stamps, which were also created to diminish the surplus. To ban them from being purchased with food stamps would be counterproductive. In 2001, New
York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg proposed to ban the use of food stamps to buy soda in an effort to fight an epidemic of poor nutrition. The Department of Agriculture denied this motion, however, calling it a “disservice to low-income residents,” (McGeehan). According to a New York Times article, Dr. Thomas A. Farley expressed displeasure with the USDA, questioning, “how serious the U.S.D.A. is about addressing the nation’s most serious nutritional problem,” (McGeehan).

The problem with banning a “junk food” product from being purchased with food stamps is that it directly counters the mutual functions of food stamps and junk food creation. Besides literally burning crop surpluses, one form of burning corn is converting it into high fructose corn syrup. According to the USDA Economic Research Service 18,000,000,000 pounds of corn syrup are produced in the United States annually. This is made from almost 5% of all the corn produced in the United States. Soda is a major way to burn up the gross corn supply. Beverage companies receive 90% of the domestic corn syrup deliveries and use 41% of all the high fructose corn syrup in the country alone. Processed food manufacturers use 22%, cereal and bakery companies use 14%, and the dairy industry uses 9%. To exclude foods high in corn syrup is contrary to the fiscal goals of food subsidy. (USDA ERS – Sugar & Sweeteners: Background)
In New York City, foods eligible to be purchased are what are conventionally known as groceries—foods meant to be prepared and/or eaten by people within the household. People are also able to buy seeds or plants that produce food for members of the household. Non-food items the government feels need to be explicitly listed as excluded are alcoholic beverages, pet foods, paper products, cosmetics, and household supplies, and ready-to-eat or hot foods, lest these items be misconstrued as eligible because they are sometimes referred to as “groceries” and purchased in supermarkets. Food in restaurants is generally not eligible to be purchased except for a few cases, because you are paying not only for food, but for preparation and service. Furthermore, the issue of subsidies for purchasing non-food items is an issue for welfare benefits.

**Food is Food**

Currently, The United States Food and Nutrition Service website explicitly states that soft drinks, cookies, ice cream, whole cakes, seafood and steak, are eligible items because they are definitively food. Even though there have been many attempts to ban things conventionally

<table>
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<th>Table 3</th>
<th>Domestic Use of High Fructose Corn Syrup, By Industry*</th>
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<td>*data acquired from the USDA ERS</td>
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<tr>
<th>Beverage Industry</th>
<th>Processed food manufacturers</th>
<th>Cereal and Bakery Producers</th>
<th>Multiple Use Food Manufacturers</th>
<th>Dairy Industry</th>
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Table 3
Domestic Use of High Fructose Corn Syrup, By Industry*
*data acquired from the USDA ERS
called “junk food” or “luxury items,” it is extremely difficult to come to a federal agreement as to what those terms might mean legally. On March 1, 2007, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service put out a report entitled *Implications of Restricting The Use of Food Stamp Benefits*, which discusses the big problems with trying to ban certain foods based on the conventional rhetorical implications attached to that food. There are four major things holding back bans. There is no standard for defining healthfulness, it would be cost ineffective, it does not affect the habits or feelings of food stamp participants, and there is no proven correlation between food purchased by food stamp participants and poor nutrition.

A clear standard for defining a food’s healthfulness does not exist. Healthfulness is a relative term, and most food products are not necessarily healthful or harmful outside of the context of the rest of the diet. Whereas we can conventionally or colloquially call a food good or bad, healthfulness cannot be legally determined. This is partially due to the appropriateness of foods per household. To legally ban certain foods can is detrimental to morale of recipients, but is also dangerous to those who have dietary restrictions, whether they are for medical, religious, moral, or emotional reasons. To label certain foods as junk food implies that the food is unworthy of the people and to label foods as luxury foods implies that the people are unworthy of the food. Some arguments for bans say that junk foods should not be able to be purchased because they are bad for people. This implies a distrust of food insecure people to make their own decisions. Some arguments for bans say that junk foods should not be allowed to be purchased with food stamps because they are, in fact, luxury items—treats that people receiving food subsidies are not worthy of. To ban foods based on a scale of healthfulness or luxury would isolate those subsidy participants from partaking in designing a meal plans for their households without restrictions by operating under a semblance that people who are food insecure are
irresponsible and/or untrustworthy. When it comes to issues of responsibility, restricting the
decision making power of a food insecure person says that those with more wealth have more of
a right to be irresponsible. This can also imply that people who are food insecure are food
insecure because of personal irresponsibility, not because of problems in society. This is an
issue that is less concerned with health than with the way food subsidy participants are
perceived.

Secondly, putting food restrictions into effect would cost so much, people would have to
receive less money. Since thousands of new products are introduced every decade, thousands of
new products would have to be analyzed for healthfulness, which would have to be covered by
the USDA budget. Also, this would take a toll on a point of sale level. There is already
increased time on line in stores when a person has some SNAP eligible products. Since cashiers
at stores would have to be even more scrutinizing when it comes to ringing people up, efficiency
in stores would diminish, resulting in either lost customers or a need for more stuff, both of
which would cause a loss in profit for the store. Overall, the local economic stimulation directly
caused by food subsidy participants would be significantly less because those people would be
buying fewer items.

Another way that this affects an increased cost is that as people receive fewer monetary
subsidies they tend to put more stress on food banks. Their household grocery needs do not
decrease when their benefits do; their income level remains the same (and technically drops)
when benefits decrease. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 was a stimulus
package enacted in response to a giant recession. Billions of dollars were temporarily pumped
into the food stamp budget. The Capital Area Food Bank told the New York Times that they
already provided 45,000,000 pounds of food in 2013, but in November 2013, $5,000,000,000
was cut from the federal food stamp program. Even with donations and an attempt to restructure, there is no way food banks can replace an additional $5,000,000,000 of subsidized food. Nancy E. Roman, executive director at Capital Area Food Bank anticipates much longer lines and a lot of people that they are simply unable to provide to, (Nixon). When this cut occurred in November 2013, Feeding America, an organization of a coalition of food banks, analyzed that families of three and four lost at least twenty meals per month. Feeding America also analyzed that food aid services have already gone up 50% since 2006. In New York City alone, people looking for food aid increased 85% in the last two years while 23% of food pantries and soup kitchens reported a reduction in food supplies, (Nixon).

Third, The USDA feels that placing these bans and restrictions does not seem like it will have a big effect on the decisions of food subsidy participants. Any participants who receive less than the maximum allocation for food stamps receive less because they are expected to cover the rest of their average food expenditure with their own money. Whether that money comes from social security, disability benefits, welfare, savings, regular employment, credit cards, loans, or some combination, people will buy the food they want and need. The grocery needs of a household are unique to that household and exist due to a combination of number of people, religion, health status, ethnicity, familial traditions, and even abstract factors like values and tastes.

Lastly, there is no evidence that participation in food stamps is a cause for poor nutrition. According to USDA research, there is no discrepancy between how much food with little nutritional value people are buying based on their food subsidy participation status. The report on Implications of Restricting the Use of Food Stamp Benefits says:
Achieving dietary improvement among food stamp recipients is a complex challenge. It is not likely to be met by prohibiting use of benefits for a group of foods perceived as having limited nutritional value. Low-income consumers and food stamp recipients are subject to the same factors that influence food choices throughout our society—including marketing strategies, cultural preferences, the value of convenience, and personal taste.” (USA 7-8)

The report suggests that if the health were really the issue, and not stigma, an incentive program would be more effective at combatting malnutrition than restrictions. Health Bucks, for example, is a food stamp bonus program that provides $2.00 farmers’ market coupons for every $5.00 spent at farmers’ markets using food stamps, (nyc.gov). Although this program is small and is only for the farmers’ market season, it is beneficial to farmers at markets like those from East New York Farms, and encourages food stamp recipients to get out and explore the social and economic benefits of farmers’ markets. Many provide community building activities and even nutrition education, like the travelling “Just Say Yes to Fruits and Vegetables” course provided through the city’s Stellar Farmers’ Market program, (nyc.gov).

An article from PBS NewsHour published an interview with Steven Cummings, professor of population health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. He is currently conducting a study evaluating what happens when a new supermarket is added to a low-access community. Focusing on Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the study has shown that it takes more than just adding a supermarket to defeat a food desert. This is because food security does not simply mean being in the vicinity of food. After analyzing hundreds of interviews with people in areas where new supermarkets have opened, Cummings discovered that most people were either not utilizing the store or not buying the “healthier” products offered at the store. This, he
hypothesizes, is due to four factors. People are slaves to habit and are unwilling to change their food habits, people are either not being educated about how to implement items at the new stores into their diets, the store does not offer a wide enough variety of foods to suit the needs of the community (whether those needs are cultural, social, or medical), or people are still not able to afford the items available at new supermarkets. Food security can only exist if people are at once ready (emotionally and culturally), willing (socially and geographically), and able (financially and medically) to access enough food to sustain their household.

An interesting piece that covers food choices in regard to ethnicity and habit is *No Foreign Food: The American Diet in time and Place* by Richard Pillsbury. One insight on why we cannot settle on a national cuisine can be directly applied to why we cannot settle on a canon of staple foods eligible for food stamps.

The American way of eating is composed equally of content, the foods that we eat, and concept, the reasons we have come to eat them. Consumption of food is certainly necessary for the survival of our body, but bodily survival ultimately has little to do with what and how and when we eat. The American way of eating has been evolving for almost 400 years. The attempt to arrive at a national set of norms—a national cuisine—is at once both a stab at the obvious and a fool’s errand—a stab at the obvious because our foodways are so strikingly different from those of any culture in the world that everyone but us knows what they are, and a fool’s errand because those “norms” become extremely complex when examined in detail. (Pillsbury 2)

Proposed bans on both “junk” food items and “luxury” food items is indicative of an ideal that there is some canon of staple foods that will universally feed every household participating in
food stamps. But to ban those foods would neglect the humanizing aspects of people’s eating habits.

In regard to luxury, it is dangerous to label any food purchased to be prepared at home as a “luxury item.” The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines luxury as “a condition of abundance or great ease and comfort: sumptuous environment.” In that sense, food stamps are a luxury, ensuring the comfort of not suffering from hunger. To say that any food, like steak and seafood, which Missouri Republican are trying to be banned from food stamp access (Ferdman), are too luxurious to be consumed by subsidy recipients is a direct contradiction to the philosophy that wants to ban low-nutritive foods. Seafood (i.e. lobster) is renowned for being low in fat, low in cholesterol, high in protein, and high in vitamin and mineral content, compared to other protein sources like eggs and chicken. Further, seafood is high in iodine, which is necessary for healthy brain development in children. This is based on the idea that seafood and steak yield small amounts of food at a high price. But raising livestock is another way to burn crop surplus. Livestock consumes about one-third of all the grain produced in the United States, and in the 1990s, about one-third of the average American plate contained meat. (Rogers 62)

However, there is also a risk in that this might also affect food stamp participants’ ability to purchased canned tuna and sardines, frozen fish and fish sticks, or dried fish and shrimp that are all low-cost but staples in Latin, Caribbean, and Chinese cooking. This again is an issue of racialized problem in food subsidies. Staple foods in ethnic cuisines are under attack, as if they purely exist to add a fun touch to a traditional meat and potatoes dinner, but ethnic staples are not just for theme night. The term steak, for example, is also too vague, as it can apply to any generally long generally flat one to three serving cut of beef, but would not apply to beef of the
same amount or quality of beef cut into smaller pieces or ground down costing about the same price.

In a Washington Post article on the proposed ban, Rick Bratt recounts seeing someone buying fresh seafood and beef using an EBT card, the Electronic Benefit Transfer card that has replaced actual bills to use food stamps in a store. He says, “When I can’t afford it on my pay, I don’t want people on the taxpayer’s dime to be able to afford those kinds of food either,” (Ferdman). Unfortunately, placing bans on what groceries can be purchased does not changed the amount of money put into food stamps, especially since so much money has already been slashed from the budget. This also is another instance of claiming irresponsibility on the part of food stamp participants and denies recipients’ agency and budgeting capabilities.

Since food stamps are already aimed at minimizing surplus foods, and surplus foods are already the most available foods in food deserts, food stamp participants deserve an opportunity to plan meals that emphasize a more varied diet. Their food stamp budgets do not allow for this to happen often, anyway.

Food Stamp recipients have been painted negatively in the media elsewhere. Fox News broadcast an interview with a food stamp recipient called “Unabashed Surfer Receiving Food Stamps to Buy Sushi and Avoid Work.” The story surrounds a man named Jason Greenslate whose only income comes from cash received at occasional music gigs, and has no conventional job. He receives $200 a month in food stamps, and explains in poor grammar with poor diction that free food is “awesome.” And the narrator asks us how we feel that this person is getting food on the taxpayer’s dollar. But why should a person have to starve because they are in a low-income profession and dress in alternative clothing? The article title also suggests that he should be ashamed of receiving food stamps by calling him “unabashed.”
On a trip to the supermarket with Greenslate, he picks out several packs of bulk seafood, which the newscaster makes sure to point out is “sushi and lobster.” The narrator closes the segment by saying that the decision to give food stamps to people who do not live in absolute impoverishment must be reassessed and possibly stopped “so as not to lose all that made America great to begin with” (Watch: Unabashed Surfer Receiving Food Stamps to Buy Sushi and Avoid Work). Food Stamps are both a stimulus to the economy and a direct remedy to symptoms of social problems that cause hunger in this country.

User comments show a general failure to anger viewers about people other than model citizens receiving food stamps. Most explained that this person is an exception to the rule of who is receiving food stamps, and other express that although he is not personable, he still deserves to eat. People were mainly critical of this segment.

Figure 18: comment 1

**Smurph59**

The reporting is unbalanced by using Greenslate whom I believe to be an extreme example. How about reporting on the real world where for every $8.50 an hour job there are over 100 applicants, many college educated people who are unable to find work. This is the reality. I see it all the time and hear about from once employed people I know whose jobs were outsourced by the very corporations who get the big tax breaks.

The reporter talks about rugged individualism. Fine. Bring back the homestead act. Let people conquer the land. Instead the Government controls most of the land and will no longer even let it’s own citizens establish themselves independently on a small piece of it. You can't have it both ways. You can't talk about rugged individualism like it's still the 1800s when there is nowhere for the rugged individual to go when he can't find work anywhere.
Figure 19: comment 2

JoseMedeiros007

I am disappointed with Fox News that you would twist the truth about welfare recipients who have been long term unemployed. I haven’t worked since my 15 month contract at Symantec ended in January 2009, and am now also on Welfare, and receive $189.00 a month in EBT / Food Stamps, and $147.00 in cash assistance as a loan that has to be paid back, that's about $6.00 a day I can spend on food, every now and then I do buy a steak, and BBQ at a park, does that mean that I am taking advantage of the system? I had a back and neck injury working for the City of San Jose, 1990-1995, and was fired, and have had issue's keeping a job long term since. Why doesn't each reporter go under cover and stay at a homeless shelter for 30 days or more, and let me see if they still have the same opinion about the jobless, homeless, and the disabled who can't find good paying jobs because they were moved to another country.

Figure 20: comment 3

WilliamScanlon

Maybe FoxNews should do some stories on those of us that are disabled and over 60 who employers won't hire. I show up my oxygen bottle and the HR people say bye-bye. I live on less than $800 a month in Massachusetts. If it was not for a HUD housing voucher through the VA housing program I'd be on the street. I am a Vet. We did our service when the country needed us, now the country not there when we need it now. They want to cut VA benefits and benefits for the poor and the disabled and poor seniors. But the GOP including Ted Cruz gave themselves a 9% cost of living increase, but gave us on social security 1.5%. But you don’t see FoxNews reporting that.

Figure 21: comment 4

ManiacCat

Oh yeah...and you CANNOT BUY PREPARED FOOD with food stamps. Get real...

1 Like  Reply

Figure 22: comment 5

HJ1000

Congratulations! You found the rare exception to how SNAP works and he couldn't be more perfect.

Which makes one wonder if he's all he says he is.....
In the case of Greenslate, opinions expressed that he should not be allowed to continue to participate in the SNAP program are largely because of his personality, career choice, and food choices. However, these choices do not negate the fact that he does necessitate food subsidies. Those who have come to his defense bring up two points about his food choices. First, the choices (lobster in particular) exceed a price that would allow him to eat this food on a daily basis on a food stamp budget and, the ready-to-eat foods he is purchasing would have to be paid for out of pocket, not with food stamps. The first rounds of food stamp programs also required some out of pocket food expenses. Second, these people explain that they have been able to work in purchases similar to his with careful budgeting.

Similar limits already exist within the WIC community. I was able to speak with a mother who participates in WIC—The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women,
Infants, and Children. We will call her Lynn. Lynn is a 22-year-old new mother currently living in Des Moines, Iowa. She is a self-proclaimed stay-at-home mom, who is unable to work due a medical condition. Her child, who we will call Blair was born on December 23, 2014, and has dietary restrictions. The following is the transcript of that conversation:

Lynn: I signed up for WIC last year. I was about 4 months pregnant so June last year is the most accurate time.

Me: What did you receive as a "WIC Package," or what was the first thing you received?

Lynn: I got an orange folder, on which I signed my name, as well as my boyfriend signed his. 3 months worth of checks. A brochure of approved foods, list of stores that accept WIC, and the list of clinics in my area.

Me: That's great. Do they send you any food products, or just WIC checks?

Lynn: Just the checks

Me: What can you buy with WIC?

Lynn: It depends. When pregnant my choices included: milk, eggs, beans, juice, cereal, and something else (I forget now), they took the thing I forgot off now that I've had my daughter. I get 5 1/2 gallons of milk a month (who in their right mind drinks that much is beyond me), 16 oz. of dried beans or lentils, 36 oz. of cereal, 64 oz. of juice and one dozen eggs. They cannot be special (no added vitamins or minerals, no organic, "all natural" or other claims).

Me: [NAME REDACTED] tells me your baby has an allergy, and your WIC won't cover a formula brand your baby isn't allergic to.

Lynn: Correct, she's lactose intolerant. But we also believe her to have a vegetable
protein allergy like her uncle. She's on Nutramigen. WIC desperately is pushing the idea that babies grow out of lactose intolerance and allergies. Numerous representatives have told me that she needs to be on normal or soy based formulas. Just recently, April 10th I went in to get my checks again. They were only giving me a month’s worth because I had her on Nutramigen and they wouldn't agree to it. They didn't print any checks for the next three months for me for formula because I refused to feed my daughter something that made her ill.

Me: Coincidentally, my mother was in a similar situation. She had a septic C-section, and was on medication after I was born. So she could not breast feed, but the formula that WIC covered made me projectile vomit. When I was 6, we found out I was allergic to corn. The formula contained corn protein

Lynn: I’ve also been informed by the representatives here that when [Blair] is a year old, I will no longer receive any benefits for her. Even though the age limit is 5 years old.

Me: Why is that?

Lynn: My assumption is the fact I wouldn't agree to feed my daughter something that made her sick. As they put it "As long as she gains weight we don't care about colic, spit up, or fussiness." I didn't agree, and they simply stated that when she's a year old I won't receive any benefits period.

Me: If I may ask, why aren't you breastfeeding?

Lynn: I have flat nipples, and never got help despite my numerous requests at the
hospital. So my fruitless attempts to breastfeed just granted me misery and sore bloody nipples. At which point I had her on normal formula, and she started spitting up so much and so violently I was afraid to sleep for fear of her choking in her sleep. So we moved to soy, which made her spit up less, but gave her a terrible rash and constipation. By the time she was 3 weeks old I had her on Nutramigen and she was finally able to sleep and not spit up half her meal. My complaints with the hospital I attended are vast but for another time.

Me: What is Nutramigen? What makes it different?

Lynn: Nutramigen is a corn-based formula. It does have small amounts of soy and whey but they're inconsequential. It’s made for children who have whey allergies, lactose intolerance, and soy allergies. Its the Enfamil brand, Alimentum is the Similac version but it has more soy. Both are quite costly, Enfamil costs about $25.00 per small can.

Me: Why do you think this formula isn't covered by WIC?

Lynn: It is covered, if you have documented proof of need for it. WIC's inability to contact my daughter's doctor and the doctor's reluctance to formally call [Blair]'s lactose intolerance and fairly obvious soy allergy as they were, meant that I was obviously choosing the most expensive formula because I wanted to. In private when I, my boyfriend, and my mother spoke with my doctor she'd agree that [Blair] was rather clearly lactose intolerant and had an issue with soy. However, on paper, she wouldn't and therefore WIC refused to cover it.
Me: So, you were at the mercy of complicated administrative procedures, where you have no agency over what gets done and who communicates with whom?

Lynn: Yes.

Me: Do you think you would have had a better experience if you didn't need special permissions to get different versions of certain foods?

Lynn: Yes I do. I don't think I should have to provide proof for what my daughter can and can't eat. I mean, If I say I can't eat something, no one asks for proof from my doctor before accommodating it. They just accept it.

Me: Do you have anything else to share that you think is important?

Lynn: If anything is to change within the WIC system it has to get to the top. Simple as that. My grandma had told my mom that WIC isn't meant to help children with special dietary needs, and I don't think that should be her impression but its something that, at this point, I agree with. There are too many children with special dietary needs who's families won't get the help they need because of the fact they have to "prove" they can't eat something. Parents don't lie about this sort of thing on a normal basis. No one wants their kids to have a special need that will be difficult to live with. (Interview by Rose Jimenez)

Lynn’s issues with WIC lay in complicated protocols that she is personally unable to overcome. The implementation of limits on certain products based on their luxury-status is complicated. This is because valorization of food products is idealistic and therefore subjective. There is not a way to regulate what the high and low thresholds of appropriate foods are.

Both Lynn and Greenslate are both looking to suit the individual needs of their unique lives. There is dispute about whether their food needs and food choices are justified and at
present those needs and choices are being compromised. Despite whether their food choices and needs are being deemed “just,” their food security is at risk of being compromised. Food security is necessary to create a stable, sustainable, home environment.

**Sustainability**

The “environment” is comprised of more than just untouched lands and picturesque landscapes. The “environment” is not merely distant places that are distantly affected by a butterfly effect of industrial activity. The environment is all that surrounds you. There is no difference between “an” environment and “the” environment. Whichever environment you are in is “the environment.” This is comprised of both social and ecological spheres.

The issue of sustainability exists where ecological and sociological systems work in harmony so that the resulting system can remain productive. This is a form of technology in that scientific processes can be made for practical use. That includes knowing which parts of the system to manipulate and which parts to let rest or regenerate.

The current farming practices that lead to a giant surplus have also lead to a major drop in produce prices. This is not sustainable to farmers, who are wasting money, energy, and land resources. Although it might be more efficient to cut back on production instead of producing and destroying excess, which depletes soil nutrients and utilizes worker energy, that would not solve the more immediate financial problems. As discussed, financial incentives keep farmers in a cycle of overproduction and destruction. To diminish production quantities would also diminish the size of the needed workforce. The USDA put out the following statistics on farm workers for 2012:
Table 4: USDA Farm Worker Statistics

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>Number of total hired farmworkers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of full-year hired farmworkers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of non-metro area farmworkers hired</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hourly wages for nonsupervisory hired farmworkers</td>
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<td>Portion of hired farmworkers with any college education</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

That is only including research done on those companies the USDA has decided fits their definition of what a farm company is. There are even more people working in farmwork-style jobs that are not included in this list. Measures that might include cutting back on wages or hours for farmworkers can be extremely detrimental to those unable to work in fields other than farmwork. Working at only about $10.50 to $11.00 per hour, a wage or hour cut would make it very difficult to survive. It is reported that 72,311 hired workers in 2012 were from non-metro areas, making it difficult to find other jobs. Also, only 25% of these hired workers have any time spent at college, and this statistic includes managerial staff. Many of these people would have extreme difficulty finding work outside of farming. (USDA ERS)

In this way, although complicated, the process of overproduction and destruction of crops is a method of sustainability. Sustainability might have connotations of only being “environmentally friendly” but sometimes clearly detrimental practices must be sustained to sustain an entire economic system. Lay-offs would only serve to increase the number of people living in poverty and food insecurity, and increase the number of applications for unemployment, welfare, and SNAP benefits.
Another very complicated example of how New York’s water resources are divided. People are not able to develop areas in upstate New York around New York City’s water reservoirs. Whereas it might seem that this is keeping one area from its economic potentials. But out of New York State’s population of 19,750,000, 43% live in New York City alone (United States Census Bureau). It is only sustainable to allocate water not even according to geographic location, but by population distribution.

Conclusion

Food aid programs tend to avoid total reformation or deletion because they are direct remedies to symptoms of food insecurity caused by social problems without having to fix those social problems. These social problems include racialized geographies (food deserts), economic problems (unemployment), heightened availability of high-energy foods, systematic distrust of the poor, a fear of socialism, culturally based differences of food needs, racist and ableist ideas of food standardization.

When obstacles like soil toxicity and economic slumps coincide, food aid programs grow exponentially more complex. If people in positions of power are not willing to accept food subsidies, issues of hunger in The United States would be greatly exacerbated.

The issue surrounding lessening the availability of food aid programs is that food aid programs cannot undergo total reformation to make them less controversial. Any major undertaking to get industrial agriculture to halt production would cause rotting crops, unemployment, and impoverishment for people put out of work and potential food shortages. Things would have to get worse to get better, but the potential for starvation and death is too great a risk for the government and for the well being of its citizens.
Racist geographical formations are also so deeply embedded in the way New York City is designed that total reform would be difficult without engaging in activities that can be labeled as intentionally transgressive—purposely going against the expected and accepted boundaries of normal society. This is the result of structural violence, wherein social structures are harmful to people (especially minority groups). In this case, food aid programs alleviate symptoms of a system that creates food insecurity by feeding people who are hungry, minimizing the seriousness of fixing parts of the structure that cause food insecurity in the first place.

By excavating different works of literature, from newspapers to television to novels to government websites, we can produce a complex narrative about a particular subject. The issue of food subsidies and other food aid in New York City is open to debate. Different forms of aid exist in the form of government money, food directly given by or subsidized by the government, food cooperative organizations, food banks and soup kitchens, and private and public urban farming and community gardening. Food programs are not perfect, nor do they help all people in every situation, but they exist to keep people alive. Unfortunately, the problems are so deeply engrained in society and food subsidies solve symptoms of those problems so directly, they are used as a crutch to keep government and communities from solving social and economic problems that cause food insecurity. Food aid programs serve to satiate hungry people but do not solve issues of hunger.
Works Cited


Interview by Rose Jimenez. April 16, 2015


AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Rose Meagan was born in Brooklyn, NY in 1990. She is a former pastry chef. Her transdisciplinary studies involve methods of consumption in the fields of culinary arts, sustainability science, film studies, and audiovisual arts.
A VARIABLE RECIPE FOR RUMP ROAST

**Ingredients:**

1 boneless beef round rump roast, top round roast, or bottom round roast (3.5-4 pounds)

¼ cup of dried herbs of your choosing (suggestion: oregano and parsley)

1 tablespoon of garlic, minced

1 citrus fruit (lemon, orange, tangerine, meyer lemon, etc.)

1 teaspoon of black pepper

1 pound of potatoes, scrubbed clean and cubed

1 pound of assorted root vegetables (carrots, turnips, parsnips, sweet potatoes, etc.), cleaned and cubed

2 tablespoons of olive oil

Salt, to taste

**Method:**

1) Preheat oven to 325ºF

2) Zest fruit, and squeeze about 1.5 tablespoons of juice from the fruit. Set aside.

3) Combine zest, herbs, ½ tablespoon of garlic, and ½ teaspoon of pepper in a bowl. Rub mixture all over outside of roast.

4) Toss potatoes and root vegetables in olive oil, the remaining garlic and pepper and, a sprinkle of salt.

5) Place roast potatoes and root vegetables in the bottom of a roasting pan, and set roast on top of vegetables. Make sure the roast is not touching the bottom of the pan.

6) Place in oven for 90 minutes for a medium rare result.

7) Remove pan from oven, move roast to a dish to rest for 15 minutes before slicing.
8) Remove vegetables from pan with a slotted spoon, and toss with citrus juice before serving.

9) Optional: whisk 1 tablespoon of butter and 1 tablespoon of flour into hot liquid remaining in the pan for a light jus or gravy.