Chapter 11

Food for Poorer People: Conventional and 'Alternative' Transgressions?

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Introduction

What goes around comes around. Many features of the new generation 'alternative food'

projects arguably mirror the workings of an earlier generation of anti-hunger projects: they

challenge a hegemonic system and seek to transform how people produce and obtain or

consume food in the global North. However, such similarities mask significant differences

not least over 'choice'. In the emerging 'alternative' food initiatives and movements,

deliberative choices by producers, processors and consumers are regarded as essential

counters to the disempowered producers and disengaged consumers implicit in the vertically

controlled, corporate global food system. In earlier anti-hunger projects, in contrast, people

engaged because fundamentally they had no choice: they had to find ways to feed themselves

or perish, socially and possibly literally. The objective of this chapter, then, is to examine the

overlaps and dissonances between these movements, including the ways conventional food

system transgressions into feeding poorer people are growing. We confine our discussion to

post-industrial countries since this is where our recent experiences and research are located.

In this chapter, we consider a number of issues. To what extent are 'alternative' food

movements and practices exclusionary? Do they, by definition, focus on the needs of those

with agency and capacity to engage with different ways of producing or obtaining food –

whether defined in terms of social class or material wellbeing – i.e. are they a 'middle class

niche', and only for those who can afford them? Secondly, how do current 'alternative'

practices, whether within or outwith the corporate food system, engage with the needs of

poorer households and communities, for healthy food choices? How far do they mirror the

anti-hunger movements, past and present? Thirdly, what can be learnt from the history of

such movements, particularly for contemporary poor households' needs? And thus, finally, what is the scope for present and future alternatives to a corporate system which, despite the rhetoric and, to some degree, the reality of 'keeping food cheap', nevertheless excludes the poorest while seeking to provide solutions.

We begin with a brief summary of contemporary food inequalities, and the links to poverty. This is a huge topic, much discussed elsewhere; here we merely comment on the salient relationship with food consumption for those whose incomes are low according to prevailing norms in their society, and/or whose living experiences, whether through employment, schooling or home, are unlikely to enable easy ways to obtain appropriate food. We only address dimensions of social and cultural difference insofar as material conditions are involved.

Contemporary Inequalities

As is widely documented elsewhere, in the UK, US, Canada and across Europe, those who are richer are more likely than those who are poorer to have dietary patterns, nutrient intake and blood levels which contribute to healthier outcomes; they are also likely to be taller, and less likely to be overweight or obese (CSDH, 2008; Dowler et al, 2007). Such differentials are particularly observed when comparison is by household income, economic activity (employed versus unemployed or in receipt of welfare benefits), or household composition; in other words, differences are more marked if indicators of material wellbeing are used than indicators based on occupation or educational level, which are proxy indicators of wealth, cultural and social capital (DEFRA, 2006). Food poverty is linked to other dimensions of poverty such as income and fuel poverty. This implies the critical issues are having sufficient money for food and other necessities, particularly if these household level challenges are compounded by conditions in areas of multiple deprivations, such as job opportunities and food access. Assessing household financial sufficiency is not straightforward, but one method

of assessment is to use budget standard methodologies to establish benchmarks for assessing the potential for wages or welfare levels to enable people to live in ways which meet normative and expert-agreed standards for health and decency (Hirsch, 2011). Consensual budget standards for the UK suggest that those living at or below the minimum wage, or on state benefits, are increasingly unlikely to have sufficient money to meet basic needs, including food, however carefully they budget, shop and cook, and whatever their household composition (Hirsch, 2011; Dowler, 2010; Morris et al, 2000). In practice, food prices vary by retail source, as well as by quality, brands etc. Large multiple retailers (whose prices were used in the budget standards costings) are likely to sustain the lowest prices for basic commodities because of their greater buying power, larger economies of scale and 'loss leader' practices, although traditional markets and discounters can be cheaper for some foods (Machell and Caraher, 2011; Donkin et al, 2000; White et al, 2004). Those who cannot shop in such places and obtain goods for the prices used are even less likely to have sufficient money for the food needed for healthy outcomes. Thus spatial and environmental inequalities contribute to inadequate incomes from wages, pensions and other state benefits, in their effects on food and health (Diez-Roux et al, 2000; Dowler et al, 2007; CSDH, 2008).

Of course cultural capital is also important: food choice is intimately bound up with class and social identities as well as conditioned by the material circumstances discussed above. Thus a daily, embedded, largely unconscious, practice, which acts as a marker of worth and difference (Lupton, 1996; Caplan, 1997), is critical in contributing in the short- and longer-term to health and wellbeing. There is a long history of assumptions about the purported inadequacies in nutritional or housekeeping skills among those who are of lower social class and/or poorer, but their legitimacy is questionable (see Pember Reeves, 1913/2008; Crotty and Germov, 2004), as is the social patterning of cooking skills (Caraher et al, 1999). The latter probably depend on household member age and cultural identity as

much as class; anecdotally younger, poorer mothers are empowered by projects which offer 'cook and eat' and thus increase confidence in their own capabilities (CFH, 2007). Whether poorer people buy more 'ready-meals' than do richer is a moot point; they do buy different convenience foods, and may rely more on 'fast foods' because they are filling, cheap and readily available, particularly for those who work long and unsociable hours, or have difficult caring responsibilities (IOM, 2011). Poorer people are probably more likely to buy familiar foods which offer predictable, affordable and acceptable fillers (Dowler et al, 2007) when they have little economic or social opportunity to exercise the real choices on which the food system is predicated and cannot afford to take chances on food being wasted.

Significantly, recent increases in food prices, alongside rising costs of rent, fuel, travel and local taxes (Evans, 2008; Hirsch, 2011), have all had a greater impact on poorer people's budgets for three main reasons. These items form a higher proportion of total household expenditure than for the better-off; poorer households are less likely to have financial reserves to mitigate their effects; and because they are more likely to be dependent on below-average wages (Levell and Oldfield, 2011). Thus poorer people are even less likely to be able to afford food and nutrient intakes needed for health. In practice, expenditure on food is invariably the item on which savings are made in order to meet other pressing demands, including debt repayments, since technically one can survive on simple, monotonous food even if it does not meet dietary requirements for health. The misery and anxiety thus engendered emerges in qualitative accounts: reliance on cheaper foodstuffs, high in hidden fats and sugars, that contribute to rising levels of obesity and Type II diabetes among the least food secure (Drewnowski and Specter, 2004; IOM, 2011). National surveys, such as the US Department of Agriculture Food Security survey (Nord et al, 2010), annually document the proportion of the population who run out of money for food on a regular basis, and experience hunger. A survey of low income households in the UK, carried out well before the

current food price increases, similarly showed a considerable proportion of those living in material deprivation are worried that food would run out before money for more was obtained (Nelson et al, 2007). In Canada, and many European countries, indications of individual and household food insecurity associated with poverty and/or destitution are drawn from numbers using foodbanks (Köhler et al, 1997; Riches, 2002; Castetbon et al, 2011), although more national survey data sets are now being used to characterise conditions (Vozoris and Tarasuk, 2003).

The recent financial crisis with its cuts in job security and welfare spending has significantly impacted upon the sufficiency of household budgets to meet essential needs, although such monitoring has largely been led by research groups (such as the Minimum Income Standards Group or Institute of Fiscal Studies in the UK[1]). Such work demonstrates that while numbers of the destitute are rising in many rich nations, their social and economic characteristics may also be changing. As well as those whose incomes from wages or state benefits is increasingly inadequate to meet food purchasing needs, there are a growing number of people in Europe and North America who have neither job nor access to welfare, and no hope of either (IOM, 2011). This includes 'people living in extreme situations such as some minority ethnic groups, especially the Roma, immigrants, undocumented migrants, the homeless, and people living in or leaving institutions' (EAPN 2009). While there have been concomitant rises in charitable feeding to help meet immediate needs, civil society and/or small scale state-funded local food initiatives have no capacity to address the structural issues which are driving such rising hunger. Thus, there is a new and growing group of people living in food poverty many of whom are low income working households who have to absorb higher food prices but who are not entitled to benefits. This group is finding help from

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[1] http://www.minimumincomestandard.org/ ; http://www.ifs.org.uk/

food banks and charities which emerged to fill gaps in state provision but which have now become the main sources of food welfare[2]

Locating AFNs Today: Filling or Widening Gaps or Both?

Setting aside these more recent, pressing needs, it is legitimate, nonetheless, to ask to what extent 'alternative' food networks and initiatives help address the conditions of those who are worse off materially and perhaps culturally. We should note that such initiatives are, as discussed elsewhere in this volume, heterogeneous in their means of food supply (some are 'local', variously defined; some are seasonal and some are simply 'different from the corporate'), in what they offer and how, and in their reach and space. However, one consistent critique is that they are by nature exclusionary (e.g. Guthman, 2008): the food for sale is at a higher price than can be afforded by those on low incomes, particularly in recessionary times, and the cultural capital they rely on is less likely to be found among households living in multiple deprivation. Clearly there are circumstances where both of these are the case, and where an intention to satisfy middle-class aspirations is the driver for a given set of initiatives (e.g. farmers' markets may be located in particular neighbourhoods that would be largely inaccessible to a non-car owner who did not live locally, while the regularity of paying for a vegetable box of unknown contents would be beyond many low income household budgets). Furthermore, the 'transgressive' elements of mainstream supermarket retail of food produced (to 'organic' production standards or respecting conditions of good animal welfare) or marketed (named producer provenance) in particular ways usually carries a significant price premium. The own brand/economy lines in supermarkets seldom satisfy these higher standards.

Nevertheless, few 'alternative' initiatives actually directly exclude people: anyone can shop in a farmers' market or Farm Shop (direct sale), buying as little as they want, or even

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[2] See the Trussel Trust website for examples and stories of this new group: http://www.trusselltrust.org/.

join a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) scheme. Indeed, there are examples one of us has encountered in UK based research where, for instance, people on low incomes or in receipt of welfare benefits, specifically joined a CSA, or use a Farm Shop, because they judge the food gives better value for money (Seyfang, 2006; Cox et al, 2008; Kneafsey et al, 2008), and are prepared to eat differently to accommodate costs (e.g. less meat). Motivations and practices for good, healthy and sustainable food can be observed across the income and class spectrum (Donald and Blay-Palmer, 2006; Gribben and Gitsham, 2007). However, such examples are not yet especially abundant and this can be explained by the fact that many AFNs were and are not set up to tackle food poverty as their main objective.

There are, however, a growing number of initiatives which *explicitly* target low income households' needs, and/or are located in areas of multiple deprivations. These are more often conceptualised under the rubric 'local food initiatives', with a basis in a local community and, for the most part, not driven by profit and business. What they have in common is "*food* (its production, preparation or consumption), *local involvement* (management, delivery, paid/unpaid workers) and *state support* (funding, space, professional input, transport, equipment)" (Dowler and Caraher, 2003, p 58, italics in original). 'Alternative', again, covers great heterogeneity in terms of management structure and activity, which can include practical sessions on cooking, food co-ops or transport schemes, community cafés, gardening, and school breakfast clubs. There is also fluidity in practice: for example, the development of social enterprise models has introduced business perspectives, if not profit per se, to what were previously voluntary or charitable enterprises. For example, in 2011, Community Food Initiatives North East (CFINE) in Scotland bought a local family owned fruit and vegetable business in Aberdeenshire in order to expand its operations, under the Social Firms Scotland's Acquiring Business for Good programme and with funding from

the National Lottery[3]. Other UK examples include Growing Communities in London[4], which runs a farm, a market and box schemes on a not-for- profit basis and Salop Drive Market Garden in the West Midlands[5]. Both cases are structured around delivering benefits to local residents, whose participation is not means-tested but who are more likely to be lower income households because of their location. The boundaries are hard to draw: larger, national commercial box schemes or developing local food hubs (such as in Vancouver [Connelly et al, 2011], or Brighton, UK[6]) often grow from smaller, more localised schemes, and can share objectives in sustainability and social justice. Or, often, many of these initiatives simply absorb these costs which are subsidised by the state, and they are not necessarily commercially viable without direct state and other sources of financial support.

As we and others have discussed elsewhere (Caraher and Dowler, 2007; Dowler and Caraher, 2003; Rex and Blair, 2003), 'local food initiatives' such as food cooperatives, community shops and some local box schemes have the potential to address the immediate, day-to-day needs of those either with little money for food and/or living in areas where spatial dimensions of food access are difficult. In this they can offer ways to buy fruit and vegetables and other key commodities for very low prices and without having to pay transport costs to and from shops . However, people's motivations for taking part are likely to be mixed; some, as argued above, share similar ideals to those with more money and cultural capacity, while others are driven by anxieties about hunger and feeding their family. Initiatives which seek to develop skills, through e.g. grow-your-own, community/school allotments, cook-and-eat, or community shops, can offer longer term gain in confidence and scaling up of skills among householders who have been casualties of a capitalist system which educates poorer people inadequately and, certainly in the latter years of the 20th

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[3] see http://scotlandonsunday.scotsman.com/business/First-for-pioneering-project-as.6676955.jp , Scotland on Sunday
[4] http://www.growingcommunities.org/
[5] http://www.sandwellfoodnetwork.org/viewProject.php?id=1
[6] http://www.bhfood.org.uk/

century, saw no need for food provisioning skills within formal education (Morgan et al, 2006; Lang et al, 2009).

What is also the case is that those running local food initiatives which address the needs of poorer households have had to adapt and respond to shifting state and civil society funding streams (Dowler et al, 2007). So as support has changed to reflect different priorities so the 'initiatives' themselves have adapted to reflect these changing priorities and opportunities moving, over the last decade or so, from a focus on social inclusion to 'health' projects, which in turn have gone from 'anti-cancer' (which included many of the Five-a-Day fruit and vegetable promotion projects) to anti-obesity initiatives. In recent years projects have also incorporated elements of more 'ecological health' promotional activities around food (Lang, 2009; Lang et al, 2009), including aspects of environmental and social sustainability. Thus food projects which address aspects of poverty and inequality have also made links to local sustainability agendas, although attention to growing 'local', 'organic' or artisan foods has been a less important motive, particularly for profit or business[7]. But, critically, such projects are often small in scale and very reliant on voluntary labour, as well as intermittent external funding, and they face considerable challenges in scaling up (Caraher and Dowler, 2007; Connelly et al, 2011). The 'anti-poverty' element has seldom been attractive to funders and the voluntary element, so essential to keep many food cooperatives and community shops going, often struggles in areas of multiple deprivation, not least because what people in such places often want are wage-paying jobs.

The kind of local initiatives around food that have been driven by public health and/or sustainability agendas briefly outlined above, have been subject to less academic research by those working on 'alternative food networks', although, as implied, the two strands of activity are merging in some instances. Such activities can have a direct role in improving social

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[7] see for instance, 2012 Growing Spaces/Capital growth: http://www.capitalgrowth.org/

wellbeing and health by enabling all people to access the essentials of life while not being excluded from cultural norms. Thus, people do not have to eat differently from others, or queue in line for rejected food, just because they cannot afford to shop and eat in the same way as everyone else (Köhler et al, 1997; Dowler, 2003). Structural factors and their link to agency are much more important in dietary choice than policy-makers or local practitioners have hitherto allowed, despite the considerable work on structural determinants of health (Marmot, 2010). 'Diet' is still too often located as an individual 'lifestyle choice' and personal taste; a behavioural risk factor which contributes to health outcomes (Dowler et al, 2007). Local food initiatives can contribute to challenging this individualistic focus by addressing, in however limited a way, some structural determinants such as spatial access and cultural capacities.

The challenge to more traditional 'alternative' initiatives is the extent to which they reinforce the individualistic notions of dietary choice and pay insufficient attention to the circumstances within which people live and the structural determinants of food behaviour. Many position themselves as challenging the corporate food system, offering opportunities for 'reconnecting' producers and processors with consumers, and creating food encounters that seek to re-engage people as empowered citizens rather than as passive consumers of market driven activities. Yet we must ask: are all people welcomed as 'citizens' equally included as deserving of the right to food? Much more research is needed here, for it is clear that 'alternative' food initiatives do vary enormously across different classes and circumstances, and that geography is critical in this respect.

Anti-hunger and food poverty initiatives: Are they 'alternative'?

We argued above that across OECD nations there are many living in poverty whose capacity to source food and feed themselves is limited. In addition to the households long recognised as likely to face financial problems (lone parent, older people with inadequate pensions, those

with disabilities, the unemployed, the homeless) there is a large emerging group of 'new poor' among recent migrants, who may have ambiguous status and entitlement to welfare and security benefits in many states, and those in work whose wages are too low to enable the purchase of sufficient food, particularly where jobs are insecure (Dowler, 2001; Köhler et al. 1997; FAO, 2010; Poppendieck 2010). Those with low waged or unstable work may not be entitled to welfare and food benefits and, as food prices rise, are increasingly unable to afford sufficient food for health. Rising poverty is acknowledged in such societies, but the effects on household ability to provision and eat decently are not. 'Hunger' thus exists in many communities in rich nations, exacerbated by the global economic crises and often hidden from national public view and response. It is shameful to acknowledge this fact; also, therefore, it is difficult for professionals and policy makers to recognise the power of fear of hunger as a driver of behaviours (Vernon 2007). Those who are poor and/or live in areas of multiple deprivation may thus take part in food initiatives not so much to improve their health, as to ensure that children and other family members do not go hungry and perhaps also to reduce their isolation.

Throughout the world there is a long history of anti-hunger work emerging from communities; sometimes this responsibility is then taken over, variously, by the state. For example, in her work on food welfare in the US, Poppendieck (1999) documents the development of emergency food in the US through the work of charitable and civil society organizations[8]. This movement, which began by highlighting the problem of hunger, then embarked upon projects that produced and sourced, cooked and distributed food to the needy. Food co-operatives that enabled people to source their own food also grew out of this response to necessity. This huge movement was supported in the US by parallel state developments in food welfare in terms of the federally-assisted food stamp program, and the

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[8] such as Feeding America see http://feedingamerica.org/

state food assistance to poor pregnant women and children (WIC) and rural communities. Over time, the roles of the state and the private sector have morphed and shifted. For instance, early aims in anti-poverty and anti-hunger approaches not only to feed people but to reduce national levels of food waste have been taken up and embellished by many companies. Disposing of surplus food in 'bottom-of-line' packaging and/or by selling food which is near 'sell-by-date', to the large scale food banks run by the charitable sector, has become an alternative to landfill or other means of destruction. Companies can benefit twice from these actions – they avoid landfill taxation and achieve elements of Corporate Social Responsibility (Hawkes and Webster, 2000).

During the latter half of the 20th century, the charitable philanthropic sector has found itself increasingly delivering services which supplement the inadequacy of state welfare provision. Thus the considerable growth in food banks and emergency food provision (Riches, 2002; Cohen, 2010; Poppendieck, 2010) is condoned by governments and citizens alike as appropriate response to increasing numbers unable to feed themselves and their families. In Germany, for instance, food -distribution centres, known as the 'table movement', which began in Wuppertal in 1995 borrowing on the practice of the US 'City Harvest' project, take surplus food from supermarkets and distribute it. Now, over 1000 towns in Germany have so-called 'tables', as the state has redrawn welfare lines and entitlements (Walker 2007). Meanwhile, our own ongoing on-line monitoring of foodbanks in the UK showed an increase of 800 in 2011 from 2010, a finding that is echoed in the regular statements from the Trussell Trust[9].

Garr (1995) and Poppendieck (1999) suggest that community and voluntary groups have the potential to offer succour in a more humane and effective way than large bureaucracies. However, day-to-day problems in institutional survival and limited capacity to

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[9] http://www.trusselltrust.org/

deliver such services mean that these initiatives can seldom move from responsive to strategic mode in addressing long-term food problems (Poppendieck 1986, 1999). Thus, as voluntary and charity food provision rises to the challenge of meeting growing household and individual food insecurity it potentially diverts attention from wider issues of distributional politics and income inequality, and rights to adequate food (Dowler et al, 2001; Caraher and Carr-Hill 2007; Dowler, forthcoming).[10]

Consequently, we might ask: how does this long-standing and growing work from the grassroots, which offers food to those who could not otherwise easily obtain it, mesh with 'alternative' food initiatives as usually understood? There are some obvious links: the US federal assistance programme Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provides vouchers for farmers' markets to eligible participants in many states[11]; and there is evidence that those using the vouchers increase their purchase and consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables, while the uptake of vouchers has had significant effect on producer practices in growing fresh produce (Oliveira and Frazáo 2009; Poppendieck 1999). Of course, those enrolling in WIC are following a means-tested pathway to food support; in practice they have little other choice for survival, and participation requires engagement in health promotional activities. Furthermore, most of the food sourcing is from the corporate system (particularly the infant feeding companies), and although the promotional work is to encourage less usage of processed food high in fat, salt and sugar, for the majority of users, getting food as cheaply as possible from local discount stores to avoid hunger is the key motivation (IOM, 2011).

We have found little evidence that the anti-hunger, emergency feeding work produces significant challenge to the state either in terms of why people cannot feed themselves, or

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[10] However, the Canadian Association of Food Banks produced a report (CAFB, 2003) challenging Canadian society over whether foodbanks were the way to tackle food poverty, an issue Riches (2002) has long highlighted.

[11] http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/FMNP/FMNPfaqs.htm

through the increasing inadequacies of welfare assistance. Current rhetoric easily reverts to the need for people to budget and cook adequately, locating the problem at the individual level yet again. Yet there is a long history of research in the UK, for instance, that sufficiency of income is essential to enable households to feed themselves adequately: from the pioneering work of Rowntree and Cadbury in documenting the extent of food poverty, via Boyd Orr in the 1930s, through NGO advocacy and academic research in the late 20th century (Rowntree, 2000; Dowler and Turner with Dobson 2001; Dowler, 2003). Arguably, this is not well known outside food activist circles and, similarly, among those who work on poverty, few address the food element (see, for example, Bradshaw and Sainsbury, 2000). This matters in that work on poverty and exclusion, and the newer generation of 'food initiatives', are presented in ways which ignore this longer tradition of understanding and response. We might also argue that the need to keep 'rebranding' food poverty work (as social inclusion, healthy eating (5-a-day), obesity prevention and, latterly, sustainability), is a result of this ignorance, which means the underinvestment is not challenged. Perhaps it is correct to argue that neither the older 'anti poverty/hunger' interventions nor the newer 'alternative food initiatives' tackle root causes but simply focus on problematic symptoms of the capitalist food system.

Scope for the future?

Some see contemporary work on the so called 'new austerity' or 'new frugality' as offering new possibilities for tackling hunger and food poverty.[12] For instance, Pollan (2008, 2009) is regarded as a key advocate for this 'new austerity' in food and living as a longstanding critic of the corporate food system (he was instrumental in the production of the widely viewed film *Food Inc*[13]; see also Weber, 2009). In his work he promotes rules for a 'food manifesto'

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[12] Redolent of such arguments is that by Alex James ex-rockstar and now cheese maker says that there is no need for the poor to go without and says that 'even if you're on the dole, you can eat like a king' (The NS Interview by C, Player in *New Statesman*, 27th June. 2011, p 30).
[13] http://www.foodincmovie.com/ (Accessed 8th July 2011)

which typify the 'new austerity' approach, among which are (Pollan, 2008):

- Don't eat anything your great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food;

- Avoid food products containing ingredients that are (a) unfamiliar (b) unpronounceable (c) more than five in number or that include (d) high-fructose corn syrup;

- Avoid food products that make health claims;

- Shop the peripheries of the supermarket and stay out of the middle;

- Get out of the supermarket whenever possible;

- Eat more like the French. Or the Italians. Or the Japanese. Or the Indians. Or the Greeks;

- Regard non-traditional food with scepticism;

- Pay more, eat less;

- Eat meals;

- Do all your eating at a table;

- Don't get your fuel from the same place your car does;

- Try not to eat alone.

Lang and Heasman (2004) produced a similar set of guide-points, and Tudge (2007), in arguing for agroecological approaches to the food system, reduces eating well to '*plenty of plants, not much meat, and maximum variety*' (p57), based on traditional meals the world over. What contribution can such thinking and practice make to addressing food poverty and inequalities? While there might be no intrinsic reason why those with fewer means should find it more difficult to eat in the ways Pollan or Lang and Heasman encourage than those who are richer – indeed, people who are poor probably eat less profligately, throw less away and are less likely to drive to the shops – we should note that, for instance, many in the UK and US who are poor do not have tables or cars; they often have to eat while working or

travelling, and could not hope to emulate traditional cuisines from other parts of the world. They have to eat what they can get, when they can get it and for as cheaply as possible – which very often means the highly processed, bargain foods such writers eschew. Those whose food is provided or supplemented by foodbanks also have to take what is provided, which may be far from ideal from a health or sustainability perspective (despite increasing efforts on the part of foodbank managers to improve it (IOM, 2011). Even Tudge's simple maxim is hard to achieve on a minimum income: lack of dietary diversity is the hallmark of food patterns of poor households the world over.

Thus, advice which is couched in terms of appropriate ways of choosing to live more sustainably and without relying on exploitative food systems can widen inequalities of practice. Where such proposals are framed in terms of individual choice, with little by way of challenge to the structural determinants of behaviour, they are of no help to those with little agency or the resources needed to make such changes and, ultimately, perpetuate disparities. For some, the 'new austerity' is a lifestyle choice; for others, living austerely – but not necessarily well – is a fact of life. Indeed, much of the new austerity movement seems to encourage group action to meet the aims and needs of those individuals working together, unlike earlier anti-hunger movements, where arguably people worked together for the overall benefits of the wider community rather than only those engaged in the activism (Albritton, 2009; O Gráda, 2009). Current movements are often based on assumptions about the power of the individual to make changes happen within the system and thus about individual capacity or agency which may not apply to those who are poor (Belasco 2007).The immediate concern of those in the most precarious circumstances may be survival (physiological and social), however much they may share anti-corporate aims. Not only, then are such movements in danger of being exclusionary, they also tend to reinforce victim-

blaming and criticism of those who are poor for refusing to amend their food purchasing practices.

A more extreme version is represented by the 'freegan' movement that engages in 'dumpster diving' as part of an alternative lifestyle that seeks to draw attention to capitalist over-production and the endemic waste of the current food system (Stuart, 2009). Freegans are 'people who employ alternative strategies for living based on limited participation in the conventional economy and minimal consumption of resources. Freegans embrace community, generosity, social concern, freedom, cooperation, and sharing in opposition to a society based on materialism, moral apathy, competition, conformity, and greed'.[14] However, it is deeply questionable whether this can be a choice of lifestyle for everyone, especially those living in poverty. Raiding skips outside restaurants and supermarkets to obtain food on a systematic basis in fact requires resources of time, transport and storage, and skills in food preparation as well as knowledge of the law to defend practice. For the majority of people in welfare or work related poverty, or even in destitute circumstances, such a way of living is untenable, undignified and impractical, not least because many who are poor have disabilities, or are elderly, or have dependent children; and for those who are new migrants with uncertain welfare or work status, such an activity would be regarded as highly risky. But for those who are single, able-bodied and poor, and who have somewhere to store and cook food, such a lifestyle might conceivably be possible, yet it is likely to be a choice based on principle rather than necessity.

The move to austerity nevertheless also chimes with grassroots movements seeking to change citizens' thinking and practice as a way of solving global problems, including ecological sustainability, peak oil and even the over-industrialisation of the food system and its concentrations of power. The desire to empower communities to tackle these major

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[14] http://freegan.info/ (Accessed 8th July 2011)

problems and make a difference through initiatives such as the Transition Movement is gaining support, and includes challenging corporate, oil-based food production, processing and retailing (Hopkins 2008, Pinkerton and Hopkins 2009). Such 'oppositional' characteristics may not extend to a total abandonment of capitalist ideas and trading, but can lead to new forms of economic engagement. Indeed, Gibson-Graham (2008) argues that 'alternative' does not necessarily equate to 'archaic and regressive' but rather, in the best cases, uses different capitals to create something that is more than the aim of 'economic monism', to act as a transformative force. So, for instance, the Transition Town movement often engages in Local Exchange and Trading Schemes, and places are experimenting with different forms of exchange currency.[15] This can also be seen in the UK in the emergence of a new generation of community owned companies (or community interest companies, CICs), where the focus is on new models of ownership with reinvestment of financial and social surplus back into the community.

There are different complexities here, whose overlapping dimensions are not yet clear, including the values and aims underpinning practice changes. Belasco (2007; see also Goodman et al, 2012) notes that some of the original US 'alternative food networks' were torn apart in the 1970s by disputes over whether an emerging focus on meeting consumers' new ideals was undermining original motivations of more 'oppositional' politics and practices. Such challenges are certainly emerging in places where different approaches are being tried to '*re-build local food systems based on the principles of sustainability and social justice*' (Connelly et al, 2011, p317). In this instance, in Edmonton and Vancouver, scaling up local food initiatives revealed conflicting values and needs in terms of social and physical infrastructure, which are having to be negotiated, not least because '*social justice does not fit well with business plans or development pro-formas*' (Connelly et al, 2011, p318). These

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[15] http://www.transitionnetwork.org/; http://www.letslinkuk.net/practice/transition.htm

issues are being explored in different places and circumstances; perhaps critically, they also need academic researchers to document, analyse and reflect on the experiences. In a way then, from our reading of this landscape, solutions to hunger, food poverty and inequalities cannot be found within the mainstream: a new agrarian food system, based on agroecological principles of production and consumption, with social and environmental sustainability and rights, is the only way forward (Tudge, 2007;). This is emerging in the food sovereignty movement from Via Campesina[16] and nascent groups in Europe (Desmarais, 2008; Patel, 2009; Pimbert, 2010; UK Food Group, 2010) with the possibilities for change discussed in McMichael (2009) and Holt-Giménez and Shattock (2011).

So what is the role for community interventions, such as local food growing, which offer opportunities for reskilling, sociability and improved access to fresh produce and can be located in areas of multiple deprivations? When combined with city-wide approaches seeking different ways of food provisioning (such as, in the UK, Bristol[17] or Brighton and Hove[18]), they can help to challenge structural determinants of access. They do critically depend on communities having access to suitable land, and the space to grow and live safely. Such movements are increasingly city-wide food partnerships and thus appropriately framed for beginning to build resilient, local structures for food provisioning (Steel, 2008), and many include social justice and reduction of inequalities as explicit aims. Toronto[19] has led the way with its ecological food policy that has sought to influence its own food supply hinterland (Straessle 2007, Lister, 2007). Critically, Toronto food policy is embedded in the systems of the state, which, while bringing some disadvantages, enables the possibility of more structural and lasting changes in terms of what can be achieved, including more systematic attempts to address food poverty. Few such initiatives tackle sufficiency of income, from

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[16] http://viacampesina.org/en/ (Accessed 19th July 2011)

[17] http://www.bristol.gov.uk/ccm/content/Health-Social-Care/health-policy/food-news.en

[18] http://www.bhfood.org.uk/index.php . Note that both Bristol and Brighton & Hove are piloting a Landshare initiative.

[19] http://www.toronto.ca/health/tfpc_index.htm

wages or social assistance; work on 'food access' is usually limited to improving provision of subsidized healthy food outlets and creating opportunities to grow food or to develop CSA or food cooperatives. Recent analysis of London and New York as cities with new 'sustainable urban food' strategies points up that work on improving food access in New York is largely confined to *Green Cart* and *Healthy Bodega* schemes (i.e. small 'alternative' provisioning) and in both cities is through improvements to school food (which itself is patchy and subject to funding cuts) (Morgan and Sonnino, 2010).

There is an argument that the new generation of 'alternative' initiatives have contributed to the development of a more acceptable, consumer-friendly, form of capitalism (Fromartz 2006, Pollan, 2008). Albritton (2009) is not alone in claiming capitalism 'creates hunger and obesity'; Tudge (2007) and Patel (2007), among others, argue along similar lines, that these new dialectics of poverty are the result of control of the food system by a small number of global companies right through the food chain. This control, they claim, not only impoverishes poor farmers and producers in the global South, it also impoverishes those working in the food system in rich countries too – small producers, processors, retail workers[20] . In other words, the corporate food system contributes to poverty, as well as claiming to help relieve it through keeping prices down.

Clearly, the issues of hunger and food poverty discussed here have a social – as well as physiological - component which many 'alternative' food initiatives specifically seek to redress (Kneafsey et al, 2008; Morgan et al, 2006). A sense of connection to locality may be as important for those who are poor as for anyone – indeed, for some, it may be critical to recovering a sense of self and possibility for change. As we argue above, such research as exists suggests that those on low-incomes may be as interested in ecological and social sustainability, exhibiting similar values of altruism, caring for nature and local economies, as

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[20] e.g. UK campaign at the time of writing for fair wages for workers in Sainsbury's, a major retailer: http://www.unitetheunion.org/campaigns/sainsbury_s_-_pay_a_living_wag.aspx

other socio-economic groups. Yet what those with less social or economic capital are not so able to do, however, is to act on those values, or envision other ways of living. In contrast to those who espouse the new 'simpler lifestyle' including eating (e.g. 100 mile diets[21], locavore movement etc), beliefs can be put into practice (Kingsolver 2007, Goodman 2010). Thus, it is the task of 'alternative' and sustainable food interventions to ensure that those who lack economic, social or cultural capital or access are not excluded because they 'cannot afford to be green'.

Conclusion: Back to the Food Equality and Social Justice Future?

Our aim here has been to offer a critique based on equity and inclusiveness. There are a number of ways that 'alternative' food initiatives and movements, including 'freeganism', can address poverty and exclusion but there is a need that issues of social justice and equity in the food system must be more broadly embraced. Indeed, as has been found in the city partnerships mentioned above, explicit principles and policies have to be in place to ensure practices do not widen inequalities – requiring almost an 'equity audit' of activities (FEC, 2010). As discussed, this also requires thoughtful negotiation of potentially conflicting aims and outcomes if the needs of those on lower incomes are to be addressed. Moreover, given their heterogeneous circumstances and diverse immediate needs what is also critical is the involvement of those usually excluded on grounds of class or capacity, in the planning and implementation of different forms of 'alternative' ways of provisioning.

The changing nature of food poverty allied to a 'nutrition transition' has to embrace policy solutions beyond a narrow focus on individual behaviour and consumer choice. In some cases 'alternative' networks and movements may exacerbate the problems of those who are food poor, and, perhaps unwittingly, encourage policies rooted in self-help and alterity which do not fundamentally change social determinants of poor food and health inequalities

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[21] http://100milediet.org/ (Accessed 19th July 2011)

and distract attention from the underlying causes to the symptoms. The more radical, oppositional movements which embrace more participative approaches, as well as food sovereignty and rights, hold considerable potential for uniting desires for reconnection, local economic and social sustainability and less exploitative food provisioning. The role of the corporate food sector and potential for 'transgressive performance' is probably considerable here, although less confrontational, process-focussed practices of negotiation are also being explored. Thus, the possibilities of broad alliances between those engaged in food poverty/anti hunger work and in 'alternative' networks need to maximize strengths, find common ground and build, not only on the oppositional, but also in the envisioning of new ways to produce and consume food. Food is not only fundamental to health and functioning, it is a source of pleasure, both for individuals and for hospitality, even for those without much money or capacity; denying this denies humanity. 'Alternative' systems can contribute to challenging parsimonious definitions of poverty and basic needs, and point up possibilities for change. Even the poorest in rich societies, excluded from all that is regarded as normal, who live what might seem chaotic lives, sometimes with no regular address, can be transformed by being enabled to grow, cook and share food, gaining skills, self respect and pleasure instead of living in scarcity and hunger.

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