Managing household food and feeding: gender, consumption and citizenship among Community Supported Agriculture members

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Managing household food and feeding: Gender, consumption and citizenship among Community Supported Agriculture members

by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Program of Study Committee:
C. Clare Hinrichs, Major Professor
Sharon R. Bird
Karen L. Kessel

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2004

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Graduate College
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This is to certify that the master's thesis of

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has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy
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ABSTRACT

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) links consumers and farmers through a sustainable, direct-marketing method that makes consumers participants in food production. CSA brings consumers to the place where their food is grown and creates relationships between consumers and the farmers growing their food. Synthesizing literatures on gendered food and feeding work and theories of consumption, this thesis analyzes consumer-members’ experiences with Community Supported Agriculture in Burlington, Vermont, USA. This research focuses on participants in two CSAs, based in an urban greening project called the Intervale, located near downtown Burlington. Utilizing qualitative research methods, the research addresses two main questions: How does CSA food affect the gender politics of food and feeding management in members’ households? And, how does the CSA experience shape members’ scope of concern and their identities as consumers? The findings are based on data gathered from face-to-face, in-depth interviews conducted with 18 CSA members in August 2003. CSA food is shown to shift some of the gendered expectations of food and feeding work, in ways that often minimize the drudgery of food work for women and can encourage men’s participation in household food work. Yet, these CSA members’ experiences show that the management of food and feeding is strongly influenced by other household factors, such as childcare responsibilities and social living situations as well. Members’ impetuses for consumption are also investigated to examine the construction of identity as affected by CSA involvement. The data demonstrate how the pick-up procedure of a CSA shapes members’ relationships to the land and their CSA. Furthermore, the data suggest that CSA members’ concerns can potentially move beyond reflexive consumption, focused primarily on self-benefit, and embrace broader notions of citizen responsibility.
through food consumption. CSA offers consumers an alternative to industrialized food production, shifting notions of gender and consumption in a way that begins to rework some of the social inequalities embedded in the food system.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Food in industrialized agriculture often has a long life cycle, beginning as an agricultural product, being distributed, and most often processed, and eventually arriving on the fork of the consumer. This thesis explores an alternative type of food production-consumption chain, that of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). CSA differs from industrialized relations in conventional American agricultural production and distribution, in that food moves directly from the grower to the consumer with no intermediary. Moreover, CSA generally utilizes organic production techniques on a small scale making it an environmentally sustainable method of farming. CSA has proven to be economically sustainable for farmers as members pay farmers in advance for a regular share of the farm's harvest. Farmers can anticipate the needs of their members and plant accordingly, meanwhile knowing that members will share the risks involved in growing food, such as bad weather or unanticipated pests.

Community Supported Agriculture is sustainable agriculture, as it is an economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable method of food production and consumption. This thesis focuses on CSAs in the urban setting of Burlington, Vermont. Urban agriculture is a practice of renewed interest in the United States (Michael Butler and Maronek 2002); it holds much potential for increasing the sustainability goals of CSA, puts consumers closer to their food source, and farmers closer to their customers. The urban setting also provides constant interaction among citizens that makes it different from rural or suburban communities. I argue that, as agriculture in an urban setting, the CSAs I study in this thesis may provide great potential for changes in the use of and attitudes toward food for CSA members.
Community Supported Agriculture appears to be a viable solution for keeping small-scale farming alive in the face of giant agricultural corporations. With trends showing that Americans have recently reduced their restaurant patronage, eat more dinners with their families, are using more products and dishes to prepare meals, and are less concerned about making fast, convenient meals (NPD Group 2003), we may anticipate the potential for CSA to fit into the lives of more consumers. We need to know what impact CSA food is having in the household and what consumption of CSA food means to a CSA member. This thesis addresses these issues by looking closely at how CSA members manage food and feeding work and how the CSA experience shapes members' scope of concern and their identities as consumers. In this chapter, I begin by introducing the circumstances out of which the CSA movement grew, characteristics of CSA as it relates to the food market, and the definitions of terms important to this thesis.

**CSA in the Context of a Political Economy of Food Systems**

Inequality stems from a finite supply of material resources and a systematic distribution of resources that is perpetually differentiated; a political economy approach frames such differentiation as a perspective of inequality. The political economy framework highlights the inequality in social structures that is often obscured in daily life because it is perpetuated through the societal norms of social practices. The political economy framework examines the structural elements of social organization that may lead to contesting notions of power and agency (Friedmann 1995). This lens, when applied to food systems and agriculture, provides an explanation of the context from which CSA has emerged. CSA
maintains a niche that embraces consumer agency, in the midst of the stronghold of agribusiness.

Consolidation in the food and agricultural system has put power in the hands of a few corporations while many Americans lack choices in the food they consume today (McMichael 2000). Large agribusiness corporations control everything from laboratory creation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to the marketing of highly processed foods; vertical and horizontal integration characterizes the food system in the United States (Heffernan 2000). Yet, the consolidation and globalization of the food system has also opened niches and created new opportunities for local food system projects (Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002).

CSA is one model for local and often organic food projects in the United States. The concept of community supported agriculture emerged in Japan during the 1960s, initiated by a group of women who asked a local farmer to grow their food, agreeing to pay the farmer in advance for his produce and service (Henderson 1999). This movement was called teikei, philosophically translating, as Robyn Van En writes, to “food with the farmer’s face on it” (Henderson 1999: xvi). The CSA concept was first implemented in the United States during the 1980s; the 1999 National CSA Farm Survey enumerated more than 1,000 CSA ventures throughout the country (Lass, Stevenson, Hendrickson and Ruhf 2003: 5).

Community Supported Agriculture offers consumers an alternative system of procuring food, where farmer and member relations function at the forefront. CSA farms (CSAs) involve a number of shareholders (or members) who pay farmers in advance for the products of the harvest. Depending on environmental conditions, members receive a share of food (vegetables, fruits, poultry or other products) on a weekly basis throughout the growing
season. CSAs vary in cost of membership, length of season, delivery method (member pick-up or farmer delivery), and the division of foods harvested. While some CSAs only grow specific foods, such as tomatoes or poultry, many grow a wide variety of vegetables and fruits through diversified farming operations. CSA members are different from other consumers in that they step outside of their conventional food outlets to procure at least some of their food; CSA members literally buy into an alternative system of procuring food when they join a farm.

CSA yields a different food and feeding experience for CSA members, although the amount of social involvement may depend on the particular structure of the farm. On many farms, CSA proves to be “an economic form where marketness and instrumentalism might be creatively reconciled with social embeddedness” (Hinrichs 2000: 300). While CSA is founded on the notion of directly linking producers and consumers, the structure of the CSA may provide a great deal of face-to-face interaction or very little. There is not a uniform model for CSA farms; they incorporate a multitude of practices and models. The social element is important as Groh and McFadden (1990, 1997) point out, and a definite contrast to conventional farming:

at all of them, far more people are working regularly per 100 acres than in conventionally run farms; and generally there are just many more people around participating in all the dimensions of agricultural life: working, relaxing, storing, shopping, celebrating. This human element is of enormous importance. It shows that these farms have something to offer beyond good food. They embody educational and cultural elements that draw the interest of many people (Groh and McFadden 1990: 6-7).

The community involvement and the decommodification of food in CSAs are what set them apart from conventional agricultural models. Indeed, it is the idea of shared responsibility between member and farmer that is embodied in CSA.
Community Supported Agriculture can be perceived as a support for farmers. But as Groh and McFadden (1990) suggest:

the term community supported agriculture or CSA is slightly misleading. It implies that the problem is special support for agriculture. As important and necessary as that may be, it is secondary. Although it may seem a fine point, the primary need is not for the farm to be supported by the community, but rather for the community to support itself through farming. This is an essential of existence, not a matter of convenience (Groh and McFadden 1990:6).

Many argue that the call for civic responsibility and personal involvement in the food system has fueled the desire to participate in CSA (DeLind 2002; Lyson 2000). Lyson (2000) proposes the notion of civic agriculture, defining it as a local agriculture and food production system that opposes the global food system and its potentially harmful effects on community.

Civic agriculture is more than an alternative system of agriculture functioning within the larger global system of food and agriculture; it involves turning social equality and democracy into praxis through agriculture. Hassanein brings agency to the forefront and suggests that: “to speak of the pressure to democratize the food system is to recognize that there are spaces of resistance and creativity in which people themselves attempt to govern and shape their relationships with food and agriculture” (Hassanein 2003: 79). Hassanein invokes the notion of “food democracy” in calling upon citizen contributions to solve the problem of the food and agricultural system. In this thesis, I look critically at how CSA members manage food and feeding work and negotiate their consumption patterns between the alternative, civic agriculture of CSA and conventional food outlets.

Because of the structural differences between industrial food production and CSA, the structures of food production are germane to analyzing the effects on an individual. In this thesis, I look critically at how particular CSA farms are structured and the effects of
differences in structure on CSA members. Wendell Berry asks in *The Unsettling of America*: “if human values are removed production, how can they preserved in consumption? (Berry 1997: 79). CSAs present an alternative to industrial food production, but to what extent do CSAs create change in the lives of CSA members? Are the values of democracy and goals of civic agriculture apparent in CSA members’ households? While this thesis specifically addresses gender politics and the politics of consumption, implicitly it is framed by the juxtaposition of social structures and individual agency. The struggle between structure and agency is revealed on the micro-level in how CSA members manage food and feeding work in their households and on the meso-level negotiate roles of citizenship through food consumption.

*Definition of Terms*

*Food and feeding work*

Food and feeding work is a particular type of housework. I use the notion of “food and feeding work” as a way to broadly address how food is managed by the consumer. DeVault (1991) has used the term “food provisioning” in reference to shopping, as well as gardening or trading food items. In contrast, I expand the use of this term to extend beyond shopping and other ways of procuring food. Food and meal planning, shopping, growing, preparing, cooking, feeding, eating at home, eating at restaurants or outside the home, snacking, cleaning up, composting, managing waste and disposal are all included in my definition of food and feeding work. I seek to capture the range of activities that are balanced and socially negotiated in the process of getting food from the finished state of production through the final stages of consumption.
Primary food provisioner

My research specifically addresses the individual who does most of the food and feeding work, the primary food provisioner. The literature suggests that food and feeding work is largely the work of one household member, providing food according to the household structure (Charles and Kerr 1988; DeVault 1991; Mennen, Murcott, van Otterloo 1992). Thus, I define the primary food provisioner as the individual who is responsible for the majority of food and feeding work.

The household

This study is based on knowledge communicated by the primary food provisioner in a household. With regard to examining the social living situation in which food and feeding work occurs, I use a terminology that allows me to include a variety of household situations. I define household as a unit, embracing the idea of the family, but extending it to non-traditional living situations.

Drawing upon DeVault (1991), I “bracket” the household in the way that she brackets the family. This approach “focuses attention directly on understandings of ‘family,’ and thereby displays the operation of an ideology of family life in contemporary urban households...At the same time, this strategy provides a way to think about ‘family’ as a form of social organization that is not inevitable” (DeVault 1991: 18). My treatment of the household embodies DeVault’s notion of ‘family,’ while also including non-family household arrangements and the social construction of such households. Research on the social structure of households show that the household does not represent a homogenous unit,
rather the household (even for nuclear families) consists of different actors that negotiate different household activities and choices (Weismantel 1989; Dwyer and Bruce 1988). I approach my research with an understanding that households are complex and often fluid entities. Furthermore, Barlett’s (1989) break-down of the household structure into the categories of: “personnel and household composition, production activities and the division of labor, consumption activities and inter- and intra- household exchange, and patterns of power and authority” guides the information gathered in this study (Barlett 1989: 4). This understanding of the household facilitates an inclusive focus on myriad social relations in the household. More discussion of how household relations shape food and feeding work is in Chapter Four.

_CSA member_

I use the term CSA member to identify individuals who participate in CSA food and feeding work. While the CSA member can be described as a _consumer_ who accesses food at various food outlets, I describe this individual as a _member_ to highlight the individual’s participation in the alternative food and feeding activities of CSA. I do recognize, however, that CSA members may not always be engaged in activities as CSA members; for example, members are not actively participating in CSA food activities during the winter. A further discussion of what being a CSA member signifies and how it relates to differing practices of consumption is in Chapter Five.
Organization of the Thesis

Drawing upon these definitions, this study looks at how the CSA experience shapes members' food and feeding management within the household and the community. In Chapter Two, I review relevant research on CSA members, food and feeding work, and consumption. I develop my theoretical framework by synthesizing literatures on gendered food and feeding work and theories of consumption, then present my research questions that emerge from this background knowledge. In Chapter Three, I describe my study location and research methods. Chapter Four presents my findings on CSA food and feeding management within the context of gender and household politics. Chapter Five presents my findings on CSA consumption as it relates to members' other consumption practices in the community and their identity as CSA members. In the final chapter, I discuss the implications of my research and the contribution this study makes to the understanding of CSA food and feeding management both in the household and within a community. Working from a standpoint of the CSA member as a dynamic actor, a dialogue between household life and community life, the micro level and the meso level, emerges to offer a clearer picture of how households manage CSA food and feeding.
CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To explore my research questions, I first examine the literature from three intersecting perspectives. I draw on studies of Community Supported Agriculture members, gender and food and feeding work studies, and recent social science research on consumption. The literature on CSA members reveals a need for answers to the questions I ask. A gendered analysis of food and feeding work in the household offers the lens that shapes my research. Consumption studies focus attention on the consumer as an important, although until recently little recognized, actor in food systems. My aim is to provide a coherent understanding of how each of these parts connects to the other and how the ideas form the base from which my research stems. As yet, research on CSAs has not merged with existing literatures on the gendered division of household labor. I pose two research questions that grow out of this literature, as CSA members cannot be understood without addressing the gender politics of food and feeding work in the household or theoretical knowledge of consumption patterns. This chapter offers a backdrop suggesting how these three perspectives position the questions that drive this study.

CSA Members

CSA members are supporting a regional food system, securing the agricultural integrity of their region, and participating in a community-building experience by getting to know their neighbors and who grows their food (Van En 1995: 31).

CSA is different from other forms of direct marketing in that it involves members who act collectively to support food producers. As Robyn Van En puts forward, academics
studying CSA perceive cooperation and a heightened level of involvement as characteristic of CSA food production (Van En 1995). With a focus on the consumption level of the food chain, it is necessary to explore research that has focused on the CSA member. The literature presented below explores reasons members join CSAs, the role women play in CSAs, and socio-economic class considerations as a reference points for CSA consumption. A review of the existing literature suggests a need for more research focused specifically on the CSA member and members’ relationships to CSA farms.

Reasons for joining CSA

CSA members explain why they join CSAs with reasons such as: obtaining organic and/or fresh produce, supporting local farmers and food enterprises, and addressing health concerns (Ashiabi 2000; Cone and Kakaliouras 1996; Cone and Myhre 2000; DeLind and Ferguson 1999; Hinrichs and Kremer 2002; Perez, Allen, and Brown 2003). Community activities may be a draw for some members (Ashiabi 2000), but this finding is not always significant (Cone and Kakaliouras 1996; Cone and Myhre 2000; Hinrichs and Kremer 2002). Likewise, CSA food is seen as economically affordable and a good value by members in some studies (Hinrichs and Kremer 2002), yet the perceived affordability or the reasonable price of the CSA share is not as much of a motivator as other factors (Cone and Kakaliouras 1996; Cone and Myhre 2000). My research takes a closer look at what CSA contributes to members’ lives and their households.
Women and CSA

While our understanding of the CSA member remains preliminary, some studies have found that women play a vital role in Community Supported Agriculture in the United States (DeLind and Ferguson 1999; Wells and Gradwell 2001). Many CSA members are women and CSA is generally viewed as providing a supportive and inclusive environment for both women farmers and women members (Wells and Gradwell 2001). This finding makes sense in comparison with the average food provisioner. Women are the most frequent grocery shoppers, and as such are purchasing food for their families and with special attention to their children (DeVault 1991). While DeLind and Ferguson (1999) shy away from calling CSA a women’s movement, there appears to exist a gendered orientation within this alternative food and farming system.

CSA members and socio-economic class

Community Supported Agriculture farms are often characterized by upper class members and consumers in higher income brackets (Cone and Myhre 2000; Hinrichs and Kremer 2002; Perez, Allen, and Brown 2003). The CSAs in Burlington also follow this pattern. CSA members have high-income levels relative to the general Burlington population (Neuman and Sokolofski 2004). Yet this data does not reflect the goals of many CSAs, and farmers attempt different ways to make CSA membership more reflective of social justice goals. Often, CSAs work to overcome income barriers to CSA participation by offering reduced share rates supplemented by working on the farm or through other members’ financial donations. The Intervale Foundation’s research suggests that despite the financial burden of a lump sum share fee that many CSAs are structured upon, over the course of the
season, CSA members save between 25-35% of retail prices they would otherwise pay in grocery stores (Intervale Foundation 2004). While there is potential to overcome the homogenous socio-economic characteristics of CSA membership, my research focuses on the potential for change CSAs present even within the middle/upper class boundaries.

_Gender Politics of Food and Feeding Work_

When men and women divide household labor, such as food and feeding management, they are essentially “performing” gender and producing or reproducing gender roles (West and Zimmerman 1987). Most people are not cognizant of gender on a daily basis; however, gender is a structure that organizes and defines our society and its character (Bird and Sokolofski 2005 forthcoming). Gender may be founded on sex differences between men and women (West and Zimmerman 1987); yet in today’s society gender is not only an assumed public form of identification, but also a structure of inequality. Men and women engage in interaction that reflects or expresses gender, and they perceive others in the same way (West and Zimmerman 1987). Gender is, in part, _achieved_ through interaction around how food and feeding is managed. Food and feeding work from this perspective is embedded in gender politics, as it “does not have a neutral meaning but rather its performance by women and men helps define and express gender relations within households” (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, and Robinson 2000: 194).¹

What is characteristic of the management skills involved in food and feeding work, as I call it, is that it is gendered knowledge. “Gendered knowledge” is knowledge that is

¹ Bianchi et al. use this description to refer to “housework.” I utilize their description with reference to food and feeding work, as food and feeding work is part of housework.
constructed through social interaction as an appropriate and desirable way for women (in this case) to understand the social world (Smith 1990). By and large, women pass knowledge of food and feeding management skills on to younger generations of women. Although men do learn some of these skills, men lack the support of social norms that facilitate an open acceptance of teaching and practice of such skills. Food and feeding management as gendered knowledge could be perceived to serve as an agent for change. Yet precisely because food and feeding work is reproduced within a gendered structure, cooking is unlikely to stir a revolution. A closer look at how men and women manage food and feeding work separately and together can set the stage for understanding how a division of food labor is created in the household.

Women's role in food and feeding work

While the home is often viewed as a place of leisure for men, women typically do most of the housework (DeVault 1991) and are responsible for the majority of the meals and food preparation (Charles and Kerr 1988). As Beardsworth and Keil (1997: 77) suggest, “gender differentiation within the family in respect of food provisioning responsibilities and food consumption patterns can work to the disadvantage of women.” Women are socialized to learn about food, nutrition, and cooking at a young age, while men often enter adulthood never having touched a frying pan (Mennell et al. 1992; DeVault 1991). Food and feeding work requires a multitude of tasks including: food budgeting, menu planning, nutritional considerations, timing, peeling, chopping and cooking. How these tasks are negotiated within the home gives much insight into gender and family dynamics, highlighting the social context of food and feeding work. Even in this age of technological advancement, household
technologies have not liberated women from their traditional home responsibilities; instead, the standards for home cleanliness and food and feeding work have increased and technology continually fails to reduce the time spent on these tasks (Cowan 1983, Wajcman 1991). The construction of kitchen technologies historically has paid little attention to the desires of women, reinforcing women’s role as the servant (Wajcman 1991).

Much attention has been given in the literature to the meal, specifically the concept of the proper meal (Charles and Kerr 1988; Murcott 1983). I expand on the notion of the “proper meal” here as it offers a well-documented example of the expectations that primary food provisioners must live up to. Women who are most often the primary food provisioners are expected not just to provide food, but also to provide highly, nutritious balanced meals. The notion of the proper meal implies standards that women must live up to as they prepare certain types of meals that are viewed as acceptable. “The meal that typically represents ‘proper’ cooking is, of course, the cooked dinner. Its composition and prescribed cooking techniques involved prolonged work and attention; its timing, for homecoming, prescribes when that work shall be done” (Murcott 1983: 83). Murcott (1983) provides an exemplary study of the emotional work and negotiation of gender roles involved in food and feeding work, detailing the social characteristics of meals and the expectations for the women who prepare them invisibly. The contrast between the unacknowledged work and the demands for perfection is a striking example of gender inequality transmitted through material and power relationships.

In many ways, women have carried both the physical and emotional burden for providing food for their families, despite the multiple other obligations they may maintain. However, recent research suggestions women may be doing less of this work (Bianchi et al.
In the past twenty years, there has been a shift in who takes on food and feeding work as more people dine out at restaurants, pre-prepared foods fill supermarket shelves, and the average hours of housework that men and women do are increasingly similar. Yet despite these trends, the emotional burdens and ideals of food and feeding work persist in women’s sphere. While this is problematic for women, it also disadvantages men. A closer examination of men’s role in food and feeding reveals the disadvantages of persistent stereotypes.

Men’s role in food and feeding work

Men’s relationship to food and cooking is distinct from women’s. Women are viewed as responsible for food and feeding work on a regular basis, but that is not to say that men do not play a role in the kitchen. Men’s role in managing food and feeding takes on multiple forms. Men are often behind the scenes, as providers of income that facilitate women’s ability to purchase food and feed the family. Yet, men cook too, as Neuhaus shows in her research examining men’s cooking in the 1940’s-60’s (Neuhaus 2003). Men often cook in ways that are showy, infrequent, and special (Neuhaus 2003). Because men generally do not acquire the knowledge of food management that is taught to (whether directly or indirectly) and socially expected of women, men who do cook are left without models. As a result, men who cook do so in a manner that is characterized as creative, improvisational, and with infrequent use of recipes (Neuhaus 2001; Neuhaus 2003).

Oftentimes, men’s food preparation contributions are not even found in the kitchen, but outside the house at the grill. Men grill, embodying both masculine space in the outdoors and hearty foods such as meats (Neuhaus 2003). In addition, men also cook in public spaces
as restaurant chefs. These sorts of food activities are patterned around specific meanings and interactions, possessing a public display quality that reaffirms men's role in the public sphere. Thus, daily cooking is maintained as women's work and men's cooking is merely a superfluous task.

Men and women doing food and feeding work together

While most studies show food and feeding management as work divided along gendered lines (Charles and Kerr 1988; DeVault 1991; Mennell et al. 1992), in some households, men and women break this pattern. Kemmer (1999) in her study of newly married and cohabiting couples without children shows different ways in which food and feeding labor is divided. Of special interest is that couples "who shared food preparation tasks also tended to shop together and to make joint decisions regarding what was purchased and what was eaten, suggesting that an equitable division of labour and equal power over food choice went hand in hand" (Kemmer 1999: 578). Kemmer's research is evidence of a division of labor that splits management of food and feeding between two partners in a household; this finding counters other research on household labor division that puts all the work in the hands of one primary food provisioner. Nonetheless, in my research, I found most food and feeding work to be the responsibility of one household member, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.
Managing food and feeding the family

The focus on gender in this analysis considers family structure. Family plays a critical role in how feeding takes form and likewise how feeding affects the constructed ideals of family (Devault 1991: 236).

Between the work of sustenance and service – 'feeding a family' is also a project of bringing people together, of constructing sociability and companionable comfort, of attending to particular tastes and desires. It is part of what produces a household group with a shared history, attention to the worth of unique individuals, the humor and celebration of sociability. (Devault 1991: 240-1)

Eating is often shared with family members living in the same home; less frequently, people eat with co-workers or friends. Still about half of all meals are eaten alone (Sobal and Nelson 2003). It is important to “unlock the ‘black box’ of the family and to understand that the household does not consist of a single unit of consumption,” but rather of multiple actors with different interests and obligations (Campbell 1995: 107). Weismantel (1989) furthers the notion of breaking down the family in her study on bread consumption in an indigenous community in Ecuador. What she finds is that even within the family, individual actors within a household motivate different consumption patterns. The household may be both a site for eating and sharing meals, but the family structure is neither unchanging nor is it always a determining influence. It is important for research to recognize myriad household arrangements and how different living situations shape commensality or shared food experiences.
Food Consumption: The Consumer and Beyond

Food beliefs are extraordinarily diverse and complex given the cultural content of food and, especially, how food is experienced. It is not simply a matter of taste and reflection but how we buy, prepare, eat, dispose of and socialize around food (Fine 2002: 220).

Structuralist approaches embraced by Murcott (1983), Douglas (1974) and Bourdieu (1984) examine the social construction of taste; developmentalist approaches embraced by Mennell (1985), Mintz (1985) and Goody (1982) acknowledge how the symbolic meaning of food shapes social practice (Mennell, Murcott, van Otterloo 1992). Structuralist and developmentalist approaches have largely divided the theoretical standpoints of the sociology of food (Wood 1995), though their distinction is arguably different (Mennell, Murcott, van Otterloo 1992). Still, relatively little sociological research has focused on food consumption practices and how they relate to social organizations and processes. Recently an interest in consumption has brought sociological interest to food studies on a macro-sociological level (McIntosh 1996: 16). As food studies provides an opportunity for sociologists to connect applied and theoretical pursuits, I find the micro- and meso- levels of consumption to be fruitful areas for sociological research.

Drawing upon an economist’s perspective on systems of provision in cultural systems of consumption (Fine 2002) and sociological notions of reflexivity (Lash and Urry 1994), I focus on two theories of food consumption that are relevant to providing a picture of CSA members’ consumption behavior as it is negotiated in a network of activities. Fine (2002) ties consumption to systems of provision and networks of culture systems. DuPuis (2002) presents the idea of a reflexive consumer, addressing the individual’s consumption behavior.
in response to a network of influences. These approaches to food consumption reveal a more fluid and dynamic perspective.

*Systems of provision and cultural systems of consumption*

Fine (2002) incorporates the idea of multiple levels of consumption (also Fine and Leopold 1993) through an understanding of commodity-systems, looking at one particular commodity. Fine (2002) utilizes the term “systems of provision” to describe his perspective. This approach views consumer choice being determined with respect to a specific historical time – therefore subject to change – and in relation to other variables in different systems of provision (Fine 2002: 83). As such, Fine’s approach suggests “the possibility that consumer behavior has played a more determining role in some periods of history and in some commodities than in others” (Fine 2002: 83). Fine further relates systems of provision to cultural systems, exploring the relationship between the two systems. “Cultural and material analyses can be integrated or, more exactly, integral, specifically rejecting the idea of a circuit of culture in favor of a cultural system” (Fine 2002: 101, emphasis in original). In this cultural system, meanings and products are being created, contested and recreated in a processual manner. The cultural system in this sense is similar to DuPuis’s notion of reflexivity. But, Fine’s perspective of systems of provisions and the cultural system is particularly appropriate to understanding consumption through CSA because CSA foods embody a distinct system of agricultural production. Consumption is not possible without production, and the methods of production stretch the repercussions of consumption as much as they impact the choices the consumer ultimately possesses.
Reflexive consumption

Because food creates a material connection between the complexity of social relations within a community and relations to the land, politics are germane to food consumption. “A consumer who is not a member of a social movement can still act politically if she or he takes into account various political claims about a product in the process of making a purchase. These claims take place in the public sphere but also in a consumer’s community of practice” (DuPuis 2002: 228). DuPuis calls this individual the “reflexive consumer.” A reflexive consumer listens to the discourse surrounding, in this case, food issues in the media, political community, activist community, medical community and other arenas. This consumer also factors in neighbors’ and friends’ opinions. In making consumption choices, a reflexive consumer reflects the surrounding discourse back on himself or herself, asking: what is best for my family and me? A reflexive consumer maintains a primary focus on needs and preferences of the individual, while placing the individual in a network of relations that informs consumption choices. “These networks form a part of the ‘community of practice’ in which a person performs acts of consumption” (DuPuis 2002: 228). So it is through these networks that the consumer acquires knowledge and then acts upon it through purchasing a product in a store.

The reflexive consumer, while tied to networks of other actors, is not isolated from the material basis of the political economy.

The work of provisioning involves social relations that are both public and private, as we typically understand these terms. The work connects ‘public’ and ‘private’ realms but since it is largely invisible, the connections go unnoticed. Instead, people do shopping, and use their purchases, to produce ‘personal life’ and thus, actually to construct the boundary between home and market (DeVault 1991: 60).
Bringing together the perspectives of DuPuis and Fine, consumption is not a linear process, but instead a contextual experience. Production is tied to consumption through networks of knowledge that can create reflexive consumers within cultural systems. The process is one of contestation and change. The reflexive consumer may be concerned about health after seeing the evening news report on pesticide use, and he may buy organic produce the next day. But if he is busy and preoccupied, he may opt for a quicker, conventional foods purchase a day later. Consumption is not a static given. It is a complex process that creates and remakes culture, identity and knowledge through the consumer.

The consumer is part of a system, at times an agent of change and at other times a respondent to change. The CSA structure makes producer-consumer connections transparent; at the same time CSA members are also contributors to other systems of consumption where relations of producer and consumer are obscured. Notions of systems of provision, cultural systems, and the reflexive consumer provide a backdrop for understanding the consumption practices of CSA members. In Chapter Five, I will argue that CSA members are not only reflexive consumers, rather they embody the idea of the “citizen consumer.”

Social Construction and Gender Construction as Organizing Frameworks

From a social constructionist perspective, culture is constructed through the actions and knowledge systems of individuals. Individuals are actors who create the world and its representations around themselves, and also contest and recreate their surrounding culture. Embracing a social construction approach in understanding CSA food and feeding management, I see the CSA member as an actor with agency, nonetheless existing in a web
of relations and responding to various communities of association. This approach provides
the framework for analyzing consumer behavior and how CSA members participate as
consumers within the food system.

The gender construction framework incorporates the social construction of relations
and the underlying notions of gender that guide our actions in daily life. It is through the
gender construction framework that household interactions and food and feeding work are
understood as connecting mundane actions with gender inequality.

The perspective of gender construction allows us to discover new paths to achieving a
fairer division of household labor, reaching toward greater gender equality. It is this
perspective that incorporates notions of “doing gender” as gender is created and roles
affirmed through daily interactions (West and Zimmerman 1987). Housework is viewed as a
“symbolic enactment of gender relations” and not a time trade-off of unpaid and paid labor
for men and women in co-habiting or marriage household relations (Bianchi et al. 2000:
194). The gender construction perspective emphasizes that “housework does not have a
neutral meaning but rather its performance by women and men helps define and express
gender relations within households” (Bianchi et al. 2000: 194). Thus, the theoretical
approach of the gender construction perspective nicely fits as a lens for my focus on the
micro-level of household interaction around food and feeding work.

Research Questions

I address two focused research questions in this thesis. First, how does CSA affect
the gender politics of food and feeding management in members’ households? Second, how
does the CSA experience shape members’ scope of concern and their identities as
consumers? The first question looks at the impacts of CSA, as an alternative method of food and feeding management, on household politics. It probes the extent to which participating in an alternative food outlet creates differences in household life. My inquiry into food and feeding work focuses specifically on whether or not CSA changes the gendered negotiation of food and feeding responsibilities.

The second question looks through the eyes of these CSA members to understand how they make food choices, and specifically how they negotiate CSA food and membership with food from other food outlets. This study focuses on these CSA members as participants in an alternative food system, exploring what drives members’ food and feeding management and how the CSA experience influences the concerns and identities of members.

Conclusion

Drawing on the literature on CSA members, gender and food and feeding work and consumption theories, I have set the groundwork for analysis of research on CSA food and feeding management. Couching my study in previous research provides a terminology that supports an inclusive understanding of social relations in the household and the many facets of food and feeding work that often go unacknowledged. In the next chapter, I lay out the methodology that is founded upon these research questions with attention to the background knowledge provided by previous research.
CHAPTER THREE
STUDY LOCATION AND METHODS

With an understanding of the theoretical framework and literature from which this research stems, I now turn to the particularities of the research methodology. This chapter describes the study location and the methodology I used. I present a detailed account of the CSA farms where members' food comes from to paint a picture of how the CSA farms are organized. This methods section explains why I chose to conduct in-depth interviews, how I selected interviewees, the process of data collection, my analysis of the data, and my position as a researcher.

Study Location

The field research for this study took place in Burlington, Vermont, a small city in the northeastern United States. Burlington is located in northwestern Vermont on Lake Champlain. The population of the metropolitan Burlington area is 169,391 (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). While the population of the city of Burlington is 38,889, the urban area is home to a diverse array of business and cultural activities as well as the main campus of the University of Vermont (U.S. Census Bureau 2000).

I chose to situate my study in Burlington, Vermont because of the Intervale, a multi-use urban green space that is owned and managed by the Intervale Foundation. The Intervale, a 700-acre floodplain located on the outskirts of downtown Burlington along the Winooski River, is home to a variety of environmental education, ecological research, and alternative agriculture projects. "The Intervale Foundation was established in 1988 as a
model of sustainable land use, emphasizing agricultural education and economic enterprise” (The Intervale Foundation 2002).

The Intervale Foundation maintains a commitment to urban agriculture that has served as a keystone of the organization since its inception; as part of this commitment, the Foundation owns land that it leases to farmers who commit to small-scale organic farming. These farms supply an urban food market and sustain small-scale organic agriculture operations within the city. Intervale farmers operate both delivery and pick-up CSAs, as well as grow for farmers’ markets and wholesale distribution to Burlington grocery stores and specialty food shops. Poultry, baby vegetables, tomatoes, honey, berries, flowers, and wintergreens are niches for some farm operations. The Intervale is currently home to 13 farming operations; there are five CSAs that offer a diversity of vegetables, fruits, and herbs to a committed group of consumers (The Intervale Foundation 2003).

Selection of CSA Farms for Study

I chose two particular CSAs to study because of their similarities and differences: City Harvest Farm and Growing Greens Farm2. City Harvest Farm is in its thirteenth working season at the Intervale. City Harvest had about 475 member households during the 2003 season and maintains the largest membership of the five produce CSAs at the Intervale. City Harvest members come to the farm to pick up their share once a week. City Harvest Farm is organized as a not-for-profit farm and it is member-owned. The farm’s Steering Committee, comprised of a core group of members, monitors and actively participates in

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2 The names of the farms have been changed by the author to preserve the anonymity of study participants.
farm activities. The Committee allocates funds to employ the farmers and interns and guides and supports decisions about the farming operation.

City Harvest offers a parking area for members during two pick-up times (Monday and Thursday afternoon/evenings) one of which is chosen by members as their pick-up day. City Harvest pick-ups offer members some choice in what foods they receive each week, choosing for instance between different root vegetables or greens. Members arrive at the farm and move to a pole barn, under which the week’s offerings are laid out on tables. Signs are posted designating what quantities the small-, medium- or large- share member should take. Additionally, City Harvest leaves some labor-intensive produce such as green beans, herbs and flowers as “pick-your-own” items. Members can pick these items on their pick-up day or return at another time to harvest. Aside from the items grown on the farm, City Harvest also offers shares of cheese, beef, poultry, bread, and eggs from local producers. If members sign up for these shares at the beginning of the season, they will receive a weekly share of that item in addition to their produce.

On the farm, City Harvest maintains an area for members to congregate and children to play, including a sandbox, benches, picnic tables, a tetherball game, a climbing tree, a drinking fountain and chairs. Musicians often play at pick-ups and there is frequently a food sampling highlighting the week’s harvest. Copies of recipes are put out for members to take copies and are complied in a recipe book that can be purchased. There is also a board under the pole barn where members can post announcements or advertisements.

The second farm that I worked with is Growing Greens Farm, which is in its third working season at the Intervale. Started in 1999 as a seed production and market garden farm, Growing Greens entered its second season at the Intervale in 2003. Growing Greens is
managed collectively as a market production operation by four farmers. The farm produces food for its CSA members in addition to selling at local farmers’ markets and to wholesale accounts. Growing Greens had 50 CSA member households during the 2003 season. Food is delivered to Growing Greens CSA members in two ways: through pick-up sites throughout Burlington or members can opt to pay an additional fee and have their share delivered directly to their home. In the 2003 season, the farm operated four pick-up sites at conveniently located members’ homes. On two designated pick-up days (Monday or Thursday), members pick up their share in a pre-sorted, labeled box. Members can choose to leave the box at the pick-up spot or to take it home with them, as the farm rotates two boxes for each member household. Members find a list of the weekly harvest items, as well as newsletters, recipes, and other information from the farm. Growing Greens members choose either a small or large share at the beginning of the season and can also opt to receive weekly cheese, meat or dessert shares from local producers, in addition to the farm’s harvest.

Methodology

My specific interests in understanding how and why members manage food and feeding as well as the meaning of Community Supported Agriculture for members are best achieved through qualitative research. The utilization of open-ended in-depth interviews provided me with answers to my particular concerns and permitted my interviewees to

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3 This research was conducted in tandem with my peer Emily Neuman, Graduate Program in Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University. The Intervale provided an ideal setting to combine our independent research projects to answer broad questions about the impact of local food. This thesis represents the findings of my individual research. In addition to our separate, independent theses, we also produced a report to the Intervale community, summarizing our findings and providing answers to questions that were on the minds of the consumers, farmers, restaurant owners, and Foundation staff that we worked with (Neuman and Sokolofski 2004).
suggest their concerns and share their experiences. I chose the in-depth interview methodology, as I wanted to gain an understanding of the negotiation involved in food and feeding management.4

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews provided me an understanding of the process involved in feeding and managing family and individual nutritional, emotional and social needs. I asked CSA members about their overall experience, food preparation and consumption patterns (both through the CSA and other means), situational changes that impact food preparation and consumption, and food use and waste (see interview questions guide in APPENDIX A). In-depth interviews allowed me to collect a substantial amount of qualitative data within a relatively short time, fitting into the constraints of my academic program and the demands of the distant location of my research site.

Selection of interviewees

My study contacts were initially made through the Intervale Foundation. A contact at the foundation supplied me with names, addresses and information about the Intervale farmers. Neuman and I contacted each Intervale farmer to inform them of our research activities over the course of the 2003 summer (see letter in APPENDIX B). I followed up on that letter, calling two CSA farms and asking for their help and participation. Both farms agreed to help me by distributing fliers at either their pick-up site or in members’ pick-up baskets. The distributed flier provided an introduction to my study and its purpose and asked individuals willing to participate in an interview to write in contact information (name,

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4 The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University approved the research methods used in this study.
address, phone number) and mail the return-addressed, stamped flier (see distributed flier in APPENDIX C). I sent 75 of the informational, return-addressed, stamped fliers to each of the two farms with an explanatory letter (see letter in APPENDIX D) and a presentation box stand in June of 2003.

By the end of July 2003, I had received 37 completed fliers from one farm. From the other farm I received zero fliers. In late July I contacted the farm from which I had received no fliers and was informed that the farmer had forgotten about the fliers. Although the farmer was still interested in participating and requested more fliers, I decided that because of time constraints it was not practical to collect potential interviewees through the flier recruitment method. So, I pursued getting direct contact information from the farmer. This proved to be a slow process and never materialized.

Due to the lack of responsiveness from this initially chosen farm, I contacted and met the farmers of an alternate CSA farm at the Intervale: Growing Greens Farm. Growing Greens was very interested in my research and willing to let me contact their members. The Growing Greens farmers provided me with the phone numbers for their members, and in return, I added some questions to my interview guide that would provide information desired by these farmers. I telephoned Growing Greens members, explaining who I was, the purpose of my research and the nature of the interview process.

When I telephoned an individual to set up an interview, I confirmed that she or he was the person primarily responsible for food and feeding work in their household. I again asked about food responsibilities to measure involvement in food and feeding work during the interviews. In one case, an interviewee stated that food responsibilities are shared in his household; in all other cases, I obtained information from the sole food provisioner. I am
confident that this research reflects the perspective of household relations to food through the eyes of the primary food provisioner.

In early August 2003, I arrived in Burlington having arranged five interviews. As I engaged with the Intervale and Burlington communities, I paid careful attention to community announcements and farm activities. While some CSA members were highly active, judging from how their names were associated with local panels and community-building activities, I made a note of those individuals and tried to contact as few of them as possible. In this way, I looked at the returned fliers for the least prominent names, in an effort to recruit study participants with a range of CSA involvement. I also chose my sample with an explicit attention to gender. Although I selected interviewees from a list without knowing their gender, I did attempt to recruit individuals whose names appeared to be men’s names and others whose names appeared to be women’s names. For the most part this proved successful, though overall I had a smaller number of men to choose from, and I interviewed one woman whom I had selected with the presumption that she was a man, according to her name.

In my selection of interviewees, I did encounter refusals to participate. Two of the CSA members who filled out the flier through City Harvest declined to participate when I contacted them to arrange an interview time, due to time constraints. When I contacted the Growing Greens members, five members declined to participate. There were some members of both farms that I was simply unable to contact via phone and thus could neither accept nor refuse participation.

In total, my sample consisted of 18 interviewees through 16 in-depth interviews, as two of the interviews were done with man-woman couples. I conducted nine interviews with
members of the City Harvest Farm. In addition, I was given access to past newsletters, farm-conducted surveys and member information, talked with the head farmer and interns, and conducted participant-observation for eight hours during four pick-up days. I ultimately conducted seven interviews with Growing Greens members. In addition, I spent eight hours working on this farm with working members on two Wednesday mornings.

Interview guide

I constructed the interview guide with attention to two primary topics: the CSA experience and food and feeding management (see interview questions guide in APPENDIX A). I also asked interviewees questions about: situations that changed food patterns, their food use and waste, and their personal background. Interviewees were asked to talk me through some of their daily food management activities and I inquired about how they met different needs of the household while fulfilling their role as the primary food provisioner. I used the interview guide to create a comparable database for each interviewee, though the interviews were only semi-structured and allowed interviewees to share their stories and perceptions with me. Thus, I found that not all the questions I asked were germane to the interviewees’ experience. Furthermore, the interviewing technique used brought the interviewees’ most salient issues to my attention.

In addition to the questions I posed and the topics that interviewees suggested, I also incorporated questions requested by the CSA farmers into the interviews. In return for their willingness to help me in my research, I talked with the farmers about my interview guide and asked for their input. One farmer was particularly interested in how members perceived the value of their share and thus I added a few questions that addressed that topic.
Data collection

Over the course of three weeks, I interviewed a total of 18 people in 16 interviews. Of the interviews I conducted, two were man-woman couple interviews, four were interviews with individual men and ten were interviews with individual women. The interviews lasted between 45 and 80 minutes. Twelve of the interviews were conducted in the homes of the interviewees; one interview was conducted at a public beach; one interview took place in the office of the interviewee; one interview was in a bookstore café; and one interview was conducted at a locally-owned downtown coffee shop. While I offered to meet at the most convenient place for the interviewee, I also suggested meeting at their home, if that was desirable. The two individuals who lived alone and one individual who lived alternately with family and his girlfriend, not claiming a permanent residence, all chose to meet in public places. The interviews that I conducted in interviewees' homes mostly took place either in their kitchens, or in an adjacent room where the kitchen was easily visible and accessible. Most often we sat in the common eating area, which provided me with visual information about the space and layout of the kitchen and dining areas. In addition to the interviews, I conducted participant observation through attending pick-ups, working two mornings at one farm, visiting farmer’s markets, grocery stores and restaurants where local foods are sold in Burlington.

I tape-recorded all of the interviews with permission and transcribed them into word processing documents. Field notes were completed after each interview and participant observation activity and were also transcribed into word processing documents. The original recorded tapes were erased after being transcribed. Notes as well as the word processing documents are kept stored in a locked location in accordance with Iowa State University IRB
requirements. I paid explicit attention to ethical issues in designing my research methodology. The interviews were confidential. The interviewees’ names are erased in publications, and the CSA farmers were not informed which farm members I contacted or interviewed.

Analysis of the interviews

As I transcribed the interviews, I created a list of themes that emerged from the data. Once the transcriptions were completed, I read through the interviews and coded them by these general themes and adding a few in the process. After I had the interviews coded according to broad themes, I read through the data again, breaking down the broad themes into more specific topics. During the topical coding, I wrote notes in the margins that identified the significance or meaning of the data. I then used a cut-and-paste method to organize electronic copies of the transcriptions into word processing documents, arranged according to the themes and topics. I arranged large amounts of text in these files to allow for a depth of information and the potential to understand causality. I placed this data arrangement into a binder organized by theme and topics listed under those themes. I then read through the binder of data and again wrote notes in the margins. Deeper significance and meaning in addition to some sub-topics emerged from the data during the final stage of the analysis.

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5 Understanding causality in qualitative studies allows one to “get inside the black box” and to “understand not just that a particular thing happened, but how and why it happened” (Huberman and Miles 1998: 191).
Characteristics of the sample

A summary of study participants’ attributes appears in TABLE 1. The average age of these members is 41, and 14 of the members are in their 30’s or 40’s. One member is in her 20’s and three members are in their 50’s and 60’s. Judging from the appearance of their homes, the members I interviewed are of middle or upper middle class status. All of the members I interviewed are Caucasian.

### Table 1. Attributes of study participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CSA Member</th>
<th>CSA</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Household (HH) Structure</th>
<th>Children in HH</th>
<th>Age of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>Growing Greens</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Entrepreneur/Computer analyst</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Lives w/ girlfriend</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Growing Greens</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Stay-at-home parent</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
<td>1 Infant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Growing Greens</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>Growing Greens</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Editorial assistant</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
<td>1 Preschool</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>Growing Greens</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Computer systems analyst</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Lives alone</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Growing Greens</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Dietician</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
<td>2, 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>Growing Greens</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Program Manager at UVM</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
<td>2, 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharie</td>
<td>Growing Greens</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Lives w/ roommates</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>City Harvest</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>UVM faculty member</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meghan</td>
<td>City Harvest</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
<td>1 College</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>City Harvest</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Stay-at-home parent</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
<td>2 Infant, 3-1/2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>City Harvest</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Stay-at-home parent</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
<td>3, 5, 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>City Harvest</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Stay-at-home parent/Consultant</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
<td>1 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>City Harvest</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
<td>1 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>City Harvest</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Stay-at-home parent</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
<td>2 9, 11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>City Harvest</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Education director</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Lives alone</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>City Harvest</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Stay-at-home parent</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
<td>2 Infant, 2-1/2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>City Harvest</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Stay-at-home parent</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
<td>2 Infant, 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: CSA Members’ names listed are pseudonyms.

With regard to educational background, at the highest level of education attainment, three of these members have high school degrees, nine members have bachelor’s degrees, three members have Master’s or Law degrees, two members have doctoral degrees and one
member’s educational background is unknown. Six members (five women, one man) are stay-at-home parents; three members (two women, one man) are parents who work only part-time.

The time these CSA members had been living in Burlington ranged from two months to 35 years. When they were growing up, four members lived in rural areas. Nine grew up living in suburban areas, and five lived in urban areas.

In terms of CSA experience, four member households had participated in one previous CSA; for 12 households, their current CSA was their only CSA membership experience. Of the households that had previous CSA experiences, two had participated in CSAs in the Washington, D.C. area and two had been members of other Intervale CSAs no longer in existence. Years of membership range from this being the first season to 13 years of CSA membership. On average, the households have been members for 3 years, though eight of the households are new members and four of the households are in the second or third years of membership with their current CSA.

All of the interviews were conducted with either the primary food provisioner in the household or with one (or both) of the food provisioners if food and feeding work were shared responsibilities. Three of the members are primary food provisioners, yet they cook only for themselves, as they live alone or in a situation where unrelated household members cook independently. Eleven of the households also provide food for dependent children (ranging in age from a few months to 20 years old).

Five out of the sixteen households are vegetarian, two of which had been vegan (practicing a diet of no animal product consumption) in the past. The other eleven households eat meat to varying degrees, i.e. a few expressed they eat little meat, others eat
meat regularly. Eleven of the households are in Burlington city proper; the five others are in surrounding areas, all less than a 20-minute drive from the Intervale.

**Reliability**

Although I made efforts to avoid this, there is a risk that the individuals I interviewed are the most positive and enthusiastic members of CSAs. Out of the flier responses I received, I attempted to choose an even split of men and women. Though there was no way for me to know from the fliers how long individuals had been CSA members, I did determine from other publications and announcements and farm newsletters that some individuals were more involved than others, which provided an ad hoc basis for comparing some of my potential interviewees. While there were no interviewees that were totally unsatisfied with their farm shares, members suggested a variety of concerns and advice for the coming season.

**Position and interests of the researcher**

I recognize the influence that I may have had on the data, both during the research stage and during the analysis stage. I am a white woman in my early 20s, about 5’2” with short brown curly hair. Having grown up in Chicago, I tend to carry a Midwestern accent and consider myself familiar with urban and suburban lifestyles. When conducting interviews, I most often wore a long beige linen dress and sandals. When conducting participant-observation, I most often wore shorts or jeans and a t-shirt. Judging from what other Burlington residents were wearing during these hot, humid weeks in August, I felt my
attire was appropriate. I did not hide my identity, and presented myself as a graduate student from Iowa State University doing research about Intervale CSA members.

I believe that my gender did influence my research, as interviewees related their experiences within the gendered context of the interview (Williams and Heikes 1993). As a woman, I may have filled the stereotype of possessing more knowledge about domestic activities and food. I appear young and most accepted that I was a graduate student who studied food, yet was not deeply immersed in the life of a household and food and feeding responsibilities. Still, I found that interviewees were just as likely to be open with me regardless of their age and gender. Other women researchers have found similar responses in talking with men respondents about stereotypically feminine topics (Rubin 1976). Because of the stereotypically feminine topic of food and feeding, men may have been particularly open in talking with me.

Although CSAs are touted for being community builders and providing fresh, local organic produce to their members, I entered this research with a critical eye. I grew up in the suburbs of Chicago, and have always been fascinated by the differences between urban, suburban, and rural life. When I was in junior high school, my mother joined a CSA that delivered produce to Chicago area residents from a rural farm north of the city. As the primary food provisioner, my mother struggled with fitting the CSA into the lifestyle of my family. Thus, although I saw potential benefits of CSAs, I could not help but wonder: what is really going on within the homes of other CSA members? How is this working for other people? I bring to this work an understanding that while the method of CSA food and feeding management breaks down for some members, CSA still works for others. My research therefore explores how the CSA experience affects the negotiation of food and
feeding management within the household and how it influences the concerns and identities of members.
CHAPTER FOUR

GENDER AND HOUSEHOLD POLITICS OF CSA FOOD AND FEEDING WORK

Cooking is really disappearing . . . It's a greater loss than anyone realizes. If
you don't share food around a table, preferably cooked at home, you won't
know who you are or where you came from. (Marion Cunningham\(^6\) quoted in
Burros 2003)

Though cooking is not always envisioned as a social experience, food and feeding
work is socially constructed. CSA member households offer an understanding of the
negotiation of food and feeding work and how it is divided along gender lines and in
response to the household structure. Given my socially constructed characterization of CSA
food and the social inequality perspective of the gender politics in food and feeding work
outlined in Chapter Two, my research asks: How are the gender politics of food and feeding
management manifested in CSA members' households? I question the salience of gender in
determining the division of food and feeding work. In order to investigate this research
question, I evaluate CSA food and feeding management with a gendered lens to discover:
what CSA members are doing with their shares, how foods are prepared and cooked, and
how members overcome some of the hurdles of CSA.

In this chapter, I focus on the primary food provisioners' work and the factors that
influence CSA food and feeding management. I first present accounts of how these men and
women learned to cook, then I show some of the ways that primary food provisioners have
put this knowledge to use, with special attention to the use of CSA food. Finally, I discuss
how gender politics emerge or dissolve in the household context of CSA food and feeding
management. These findings focus on the construction of gender inequality through the

\(^6\) Marion Cunningham is the author of *The Fannie Farmer Cookbook* and numerous other cookbooks and
articles about food and cooking.
primary food provisioner, illuminating management of food preferences, the balance of food chores with other household chores, and fulfillment of family roles as related to feeding.

*CSA Food and the Primary Food Provisioner*

Although not all food and feeding work takes place in the home, food management is defined by the family structure. The primary food provisioner is most often a mother, and thus food and feeding work carries stereotypes that are strongly associated with maternal responsibility in American culture. Despite this historical pattern, I make a purposive effort to include non-mothers who are primary food provisioners (fathers, men without children, and women without children) in my study. Today, the primary food provisioner’s role is not always clearly defined. Although education about food and feeding work activities such as cooking, shopping or peeling potatoes is traditionally acquired by women, an increase in overall education and literacy in society, as well as the prevalence of recipes and cookbooks has broadened the potential to access knowledge about food preparation across gender lines (Mennell et al. 1992). Often food and feeding work is divided between men and women or eliminated with patronage of restaurants.

Because CSA food requires the management of fresh produce most often conducted in a household setting, I maintain a focus on food and feeding work within the household and investigate households where the majority of food is consumed because of the management of a primary food provisioner. In this section, I look closely at who these CSA food provisioners are. What is the role of the CSA primary food provisioner? Who influences how the primary food provisioner manages CSA food and feeding? And how did she or he learn to cook?
Gender stereotypes and the role of the primary food provisioner

As the literature presented in Chapter Two reveals, gender plays a critical role in understanding food and feeding work as women have usually been socialized to be the primary food provisioners in their households. Although I interviewed more women food provisioners than men, in my sample of CSA members, I talked with men who were primary food provisioners, evidence that there are households where food work is being divided non-traditionally. Societal stereotypes remain, though traditional divisions of labor may or may not. In one household where the food and feeding work was split between husband and wife, the man I interviewed mentioned that dividing tasks probably still falls along some traditional gender lines. For example, Kevin explained:

I would generally do 95% of the grilling. I just like to grill, to stand outside and [my wife] doesn’t. [My wife] is very good at thinking about a meal, going through recipes and selecting a meal, and developing a menu. Planning ahead and then cooking it right from the menu. I’m much more of an organic cook, in that I’ll kind of loosely go off an idea I have in my head and make it up. And we both agree that they always come out very well. Not just mine, but hers.

Men may participate in food and feeding work, though often their style of cooking may entail less of the unseen work of meal planning or managing food supplies.

Food and feeding work typically falls on the shoulders of the stay-at-home parent, regardless of gender; yet, the structure of work and family in American society still supports the model of the stay-at-home mother. Carol described how she took responsibility for food and feeding management after she had children and stopped working.

Our days were structured so differently. We would both come home from work and my husband would cook that night or I would cook that night. We didn’t always plan out who would cook. But, we probably went out to eat more often, too. And since I’ve had kids, I’m the one that’s home. And it’s
not that it necessarily falls on me because I’m home, but... it’s easier for me, because it’s just part of our home life. Shopping for food, caring for food, preparing food. Sometimes I’ll start things earlier in the day while the kids are napping... otherwise we wouldn’t be eating until 8 o’clock at night.

When both parents work, women are still more likely to take on food related tasks (Hochschild 1989). A few women mentioned that at times they do not like cooking, or would prefer if their husbands did occasional food and feeding work. Nevertheless, women feel that their household labor is divided by chore preferences and reflects an equal division of labor when both paid and unpaid work is taken into account. Said Victoria:

[My husband] would be really happy with an apple, a carrot, some tortilla chips, and a bowl of cereal. And that’s not a meal to me, because I want a green vegetable and a main [dish] and some nice fresh bread from the bakery. I’m willing to have him make something like an apple or a carrot once in a while. But because I’m the one who wants the more well-rounded meal, then I just need to accept that that’s more my job, you know. And like I say, I do enjoy it... Whereas he would rather play with the kids and go swimming and do this and do that, and then grab something quick. And for me, it’s more important to have a sit-down meal. So in the end, you just have to divide the labor. Not just based on absolute equity and fairness, but what you’re good at, what you like to do, and what’s important to you. Not to say he couldn’t do it once in a while, but I think I’m happy, mostly, with things.

This example illuminates a very gendered attitude toward food, as Victoria is concerned about enjoying a more traditional meal and the man is happy to have food on the go. But it also highlights how the division of labor is negotiated based on food preferences and the importance men and women place on food. This finding suggests that women perceive an equal division of labor, although in reality the food and feeding work which women are socialized to excel in and receive praise for creates an unequal division of labor by making women responsible for the most constant and drudged work.
Food preferences: Serving the family and maintaining roles

Food preferences help to distinguish the identity of one eater from another. In the household, the primary food provisioner's food preferences can influence the foods that are prepared and consumed. Who gives in to the food preferences of other household members reveals when gender plays into food and feeding management. Health concerns, food prices, and seasonal and regional availability of foods do affect how these CSA members make choices; while gender roles and the context of the household in which primary food provisioners live helps us to understand the relative influence of different actors on what is served at the dinner table.

Primary food provisioners negotiate what to prepare for a meal based on both their personal preferences and the food preferences of those who will be eating the meal. The meal is not uniform, but rather is increasingly diverse. *The New York Times* ran an article entitled “The Family that Eats Together...May Not Eat the Same Thing” (Hesser 2003) which illuminates just this point. While dinnertime may be a shared meal, it is not typically the same food that is shared by everyone at the table. In contrast to studies that have found families, though not necessarily without struggle, eating one designated family dinner meal (Charles and Kerr 1988), my research supports a family meal model that is differentiated for each family member based on food preferences. This is not to say that a notion of ‘the family meal’ does not exist, but rather that the food choices made at the dinner table actually create distinctions in food and nutritional intake among family members.

Primary food provisioners manage food preferences in multiple ways. CSA members living alone or without children did not emphasize a negotiation of food preferences, because they primarily feed themselves or cook for friends who have similar palates. Differing food
preferences are, however, crucial in managing food and feeding in households with children. CSA members in this study express either catering to their children’s different tastes or not catering to them. In two interviews, Kevin and Theresa, both parents, talked about the main dinner meal as being relatively unchanged by their children’s food preferences.

Kevin: We don’t plan around [my son]. We don’t prepare a special meal for him. He eats what we have. Now having said that, there are three or four things on the table and he may tend to eat one of them. Like I said, he kind of picks. But, he selects from what we prepare. Every two weeks or so, we’ll do a very quick, fast meal, like a macaroni and cheese or something like that. We’re all in the mood for that and we want something quick and we’ll ask him and that’s usually what he wants. So, that’s the extent of the meal planning around him.

Theresa: [My daughter] usually does not eat what we eat. We usually like sort of spicy foods and she doesn’t. She’ll try some of the stuff that we have, but she has her own kind of basic things – four or five things that we pretty much come back to. So those are her dinners that I make separately . . . The most flavor intensive would be pancakes, for a stretch!

The children’s food choices are more bland and simple, perhaps less gourmet than the meals the parents eat for dinner. Still, despite the parents’ perception of their child’s influence on the family meal, the children are prepared different foods, or pick and choose from what is offered. April explained her family’s food preferences:

We have a three-, a five-, and a nine-year old. So, everybody doesn’t like something. We’re lucky in that my oldest and my youngest eat almost everything that we like; my middle one is the picky one. But I was a really picky kid, so I just try not to stress about it too much and figure eventually he’ll probably learn to like to most anything. I mean, there’s still things I don’t like . . . There’s things that never get prepared in my house. Like cauliflower. I hate cauliflower. So every once in a while, we’ll end up with some – one way or another – and my husband is completely delighted. And I’m like, “Oh yeah, I forgot that you liked this.” (Laughter) So, most of it’s driven by my preferences ‘cause I do the shopping and the cooking. With the kids, my middle one won’t eat chicken and he won’t eat potatoes unless they’re French fries or potato chips. We still make them and he just has the other things. I have friends who when their kids were little made like three
different meals. You know, one for one kid, one for another, one for
themselves. I'm like, "Oh God, I'm not doing that." It just seemed like a
really bad precedent and I didn't want to do that, for lots of reasons. But we
try not to make food a big issue, as far as, you have to eat everything on your
plate or anything like that. We don't agree with that philosophy, so it's: "This
is what's for dinner." ... Then breakfast definitely, and lunch sometimes is
sort of, "Here's your choices." We don't necessarily all have the same thing
for those meals. So I guess dinner is a little easier to say, "Well, this is what
we're having." Because you get some more choice over your other meals.

In this household, parents and children end up eating different meals, but the meal that the
primary food provisioner prepares is understood to be the standard from which stem
individual preferences. As April suggests, dinner is a less individualized meal to promote the
experience of a shared meal and food. She also suggests that she leverages her position
because breakfast and lunch are specifically catered to her children's individual preferences.

Negotiating is a useful tool when it comes to children and food. How primary food
provisioners manage the choices they have already made at the CSA or grocery store when it
comes to mealtime can be difficult with children. For one thing, children's diets change as
they grow. As Matt said, "every year things change. Partly because we've got this person
that's growing up and his food tastes are changing -- what he'll eat and won't eat changes.
And so some of it is just figuring out, 'Okay, what's working this year, or this month.'"

Many parents find that it's easier to give children what they want and will eat. As
Carol said:

It's evolving. It's becoming more the same. For a while it was really
different, ... there was a time when I really didn't want [my son] to eat what
we were eating. Not because it was so bad, but it just wasn't maybe as good
as it could be for him ... And so if we had steak or if we had red meat, ... I
would make him a veggie burger. Or if there was something spicy that we
were eating that I just knew he wouldn't really like, then I would make him
something different. I try to incorporate as much of what we're eating in his
meal. And now it is getting easier because you know his repertoire is
expanding and he’s more willing to taste different things . . . But he definitely has days where there’s just a very small window of things he likes. And I don’t want to have a big argument. So, I’d rather just give him what he likes, and he’ll eat it.

Lauren expressed a similar sentiment:

[My children] go to a school where they don’t get lunch. So they pack a lunch everyday, the Oreos in one corner and the fruit in the other. And they’ll eat both. I’m definitely a weak-minded mom. I know that because they come home and say, “Oh you know, Lizzy only gets sweets on Thursday.” And I think, “Well, what a good idea.” And they’ll say, “Don’t you get any ideas!” (Laughter) So I don’t balance it very well. I know what I should do, but we go through it all the time.

Children’s food preferences are often determined by influences outside the home, such as friends or advertisements. Extended family members also play the role of an external influence. Sally, whose immediate family maintains an almost entirely vegan diet, talked about how her son adopted some of his grandmother’s eating patterns. “My mother was eating eggs before. And now, ‘when [Grandma] has eggs,’ [my son] has little eggs. And that’s okay. But we don’t really even eat eggs.”

Children are not the only ones whose food preferences affect primary food provisioners’ choices of what to make for dinner. In my interviews, a few women noted that they take into consideration their husband’s preferences or dietary needs. Lauren cooks low fat foods especially for her husband who struggles with his weight. Carol described her dinner meal in this way: “We had salad greens, carrots, veggie burgers, and then the last thing – my husband’s into tatertots. So, we had tatertots.” While these examples do not necessarily point to women serving their husbands, they do suggest that traditional expectations for food and feeding work remain. At the same time, Denise, who struggles
with her weight explained that, though her husband Matt is the primary food provisioner, she
takes it upon herself to plate her food up in the kitchen in order to maintain portion control.
Victor, the primary food provisioner in his household, explained to me that everyone in his
family likes corn a lot – except for his wife Sally – and so they eat corn frequently when it is
in season. These examples of male’s habits and attitudes as primary food provisioners
suggest that men take into account food preferences differently than women do when
managing food and feeding. Murcott’s (1983) findings on women’s food and feeding work
as serving husbands is a model that holds on some level in these CSA member households.

Learning food and feeding management skills

In conducting my interviews, I asked these CSA members how they learned to cook.
In general, these men and women learned cooking skills from cookbooks and family
members, but their life experiences and circumstances have determined how those skills
emerged and are utilized. As primary food provisioners, the CSA members I talked with
exhibited a fair amount of knowledge about cooking and food preparation. Of the family
members mentioned as cooking teachers, mothers were most frequently cited. Grandmothers
were also cited, and one father was mentioned as an influence. In this interview, Kevin
expressed the different cooking skills he inherited from his father and his mother.

The willingness to try new things comes from my father who was always
making “concoctions,” as our family called them. They were never very
good. He was always trying, which was nice. He had a couple dishes we
liked. My mom is an outstanding cook and has always been one . . . I think I
pretty much learned from my mom. Being in the kitchen, watching her cut
things. To know how to cut food right to bring out certain flavors.
Gendered constructions of food and feeding work may influence how or what cooking skills are learned, but as life circumstances and household demands change, men and women are increasingly crossing traditional gender lines. Theresa even mentioned that her husband had taught her cooking skills.

While some CSA members had cooking mentors, others learned how to cook entirely on their own, utilizing cookbooks as guides or attempting to replicate restaurant foods. In separate interviews with Daniel and John, each explained how he achieved his cooking skills:

Daniel: My mom was a terrible cook. Her idea of cooking was: “Here [Daniel], here’s 10 bucks, go get some Chinese food.” You know, that sort of thing. Which works; she wasn’t neglectful. But, my mom has just no interest in cooking. I’m totally self-taught. Following instructions in a cookbook is easy enough, and if you do it long enough, you start to get a feeling for it.

Leah: Well, how did you learn how to cook?
John: I never learned.
Leah: You never learned?
John: I just tried it. I probably watched my mother and my grandmother. As we started going to restaurants, I can remember saying to myself, “This place is too expensive. And I can do this myself. I can do this myself.”

John’s example suggests that there are two levels of cooking skills: one that is professional and one that is functional. All of the men I talked with refer to ideas of experimental cooking or being adventurous and self-taught. While level of cooking ability may inhibit some from purchasing new foods or trying new recipes, both men and women suggested that the process of experimentation with new foods through their CSA allows them to be creative and enjoy food preparation.

One of the attributes repeatedly mentioned by members is the creativity in cooking stimulated by participation in Community Supported Agriculture. While the unexpectedness of each week’s food share results in some trials of food management, members appreciate
cooking in a new light because of their CSA participation and the new foods it brings into their households. As Daniel offered:

At least for me being the stay at home parent, I find it inspirational in terms of cooking. We live in a market society where the consumer goes into the place of business and chooses what he or she wants. With [the CSA] mechanism, you sign up and then you get whatever they give you. And then it's left to your own creativity and energy and devices to make do with what you've been given. Which is a little bit of a twist on the usual.

Surprisingly, I did not find members overwhelmed by unusual vegetables; members are excited to try new recipes and figure out how to prepare new foods. The combination of "regular" foods such as tomatoes, lettuces, carrots and corn is nicely balanced with more unusual foods such as lemon cucumbers, kale and garlic scapes. As a result, members view the CSA as providing a welcome variety of produce that makes food management surprising and exciting.

CSA members do rely on cookbooks to varying degrees. Some members seem to suggest that closely following recipes is too regimented for their lifestyle and attitude toward cooking. Recipes are often used for an idea of what to cook, but the actual steps, ingredients or amounts are improvised. The notion of experimental, self-taught or adventurous cooking is referred to, in contrast to the idea of closely following a recipe. Trying new foods may also be accepted because, for many, learning how to cook is a lifelong process involving multiple influences. Through the CSA method of food procurement, members may be less intimidated to try cooking something new precisely because they find both a vegetable and the recipe idea in their share basket.
The notion that food is socially constructed comes to the forefront in this section as the role and actions of the primary food provisioner are understood in the gendered context of the household and the family structure. Four topics emerged as strong themes in my research: the proper meal, making food flexible, the unseen work of food and feeding, and social living situations. Each topic sustains, constrains, or determines the interplay between food and feeding work and the household politics. Meals, especially different habits surrounding breakfast, lunch and dinner, define the expectations for food consumption and thus the work required by the primary food provisioner. The explicit focus on the CSA share presents a twist as there is little choice of foods procured; I explore the management of CSA food and how CSAs may actually eliminate some of the unseen work of food and feeding. Finally, I examine the impacts of the household living situation on the primary food provisioners and the role of CSA food in the household. Because I look at primary food provisioners in a variety of living situations, I find some differences in the sociality of food based upon who the primary food provisioner lives with and their relation to those people. I do not propose that these are the only ways in which food is social in the household; rather, these findings represent the most often expressed understandings of the social conditions defining food and the ways in which gender is or is not significant to the role of these primary food provisioners.

The proper meal?

There are a number of ways in which the meal is defined and configures the meaning of food in the households. Meals vary; furthermore, there are glaring differences between
breakfast, lunch and dinner. In my interviews, I focused primarily on the dinner meal, and less on other meals or snacks. CSA members chose to discuss all meals and I was able to understand the flow of their daily activities and the role of food and meals.

Breakfast and lunch are less structured meals than dinners. This finding mirrors other research concluding that dinner is the most shared meal for household members; breakfast and lunch are often eaten alone, in the company of one or two family members, or with co-workers (Sibal and Nelson 2003). Generally breakfast and lunch are simpler, less planned meals. Breakfast might entail preparing cereal or cooking an egg but there is less work involved in the food preparation and it is more likely to be a ‘get it yourself’ meal.

Lunch often involves leftovers taken to the workplace or warmed up at home. Children’s lunches involve varying degrees of preparation. One interviewee and her husband share the responsibility of preparing lunches for their children and make them each sandwiches and vegetables, including their children in the process of choosing what foods they will prepare. Sandwiches or macaroni and cheese are simple meals for kids lunches that involve little preparation time. Since many of the primary food provisioners I talked with are also stay-at-home parents, lunch is a daily activity negotiated with other household activities. Steve, a non-parent primary food provisioner, suggested that breakfast, lunch and snacks are highly negotiable meals, often eaten quickly or on route to an engagement.

While breakfast and lunch are often organized so that they require less active engagement from the primary food provisioner, dinner typically involves more planning and organization. Victoria described the two strategies she uses to prepare dinner meals.

I have two types of meals . . . One is the “slap-dash.” It takes me ten minutes to just look in the fridge and see what’s there and come up with something. So, an example of that: after picking up at the CSA, everything’s so fresh, so
great. The other night we had corn on the cob – threw it in the pan, steamed it for three minutes, fresh sliced bread from the farm, cherry tomatoes just as is, baby new red potatoes... and maybe we had some sliced fresh cheese on the table. Just a super simple summer supper... And then my other style is to get recipes together at the beginning of the week, especially in the winter... And then in the winter, when I'm going to the store, I shop with a list. And so I tend to go through my cookbooks, pick out three or four recipes, write down what I need, and go and buy that stuff.

One could argue that notions such as that of the 'proper meal' provide criteria for unpaid food and feeding labor that requires women's gendered food knowledge and enables the perpetuation of inequality. Yet, for the CSA members I interviewed, dinner was a positive meal that was not held up to standards such as that of the “meat and two vegetables” model (Charles and Kerr 1988), particularly during the CSA growing season.

Dinner is a meal that most CSA members, in all living situations, value as a time to come together and enjoy a more elaborate meal. Steve talked about eating dinner with his girlfriend. “When we eat together or I eat with somebody else, it’s usually about being with the other person... it’s not about nutrition. It’s about enjoying company and enjoying conversation and enjoying the meal, really savoring the meal.” In some households with families, meal time is a period of teaching meal manners, for others, meal time is more focused on the adults, simply providing the children with nourishment, and for others, it is a circus of managing food, trying to promote manners and catch up on the day’s activities all at once. The households that include children were particularly illuminating in this sense. The CSA members I interviewed universally view food as a vehicle for bringing people together; mealtime therefore is a valued activity that brings people to a specific place at a specific time, with only loosely structured expectations.
Making food flexible

The harried, time-starved American who craves kitchen convenience above all else is at least partly a marketing creation of a food industry eager to sell its profitable, but often unhealthy, prepared and processed products. The weekly vegetable subscription that comes from participating in a C.S.A. club, they say, short-circuits that marketing pitch. Vegetables, in short, are not always convenient (Johnson 2003).

Community Supported Agriculture presents a unique situation for members in that it delivers a relatively fixed basket of fresh produce to members weekly throughout the growing season. The vast majority of members are not attempting to survive solely on this basket of vegetables, yet most do not otherwise purchase the equivalent quantity or selection of vegetables that they get from the CSA from supermarkets or other food outlets. Primary food provisioners manage food according to their needs and preferences. One woman consciously plans her shopping lists and dinner menus to enable her to cook only every other day, heating up the leftovers as meals on alternating days. As Lisa explained:

Sunday is usually when I look through the flyers. I figure out what is on sale, figure out what meals I’m going to need to cook and what our schedule is like, and then I usually do it on a piece of paper with a ‘Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.’ And I try to cook for two meals. If I cook a meal on Monday, Monday’s meal is going to last me Monday and Tuesday. So I don’t have to cook on Tuesday. So I’m usually cooking every other day, a large meal. So I write it all out and then I pick the ingredients from that and I put it on a grocery list.

Many manage food by cooking larger meals less frequently and then having the leftovers for dinner meals. Others prepare different dinners almost every night, consciously cooking more food than would be eaten during the dinner meal to provide lunch for some or all family members the following day. Theresa commented:

I usually try and make, I would say, more or less twice as much as we need. Because then [my husband] will take the leftovers to the hospital and it’ll be
lunch then. We don’t usually use them as another dinner; it will be lunches for another day.

With this understanding, food use is highly flexible and a constantly negotiated and altered activity. The ‘mystery’ of what will be in the CSA share basket each week can make it difficult to cope with, once it comes time to plan a dinner. The skills acquired and practiced by CSA primary food provisioners are a response to the social demands of the household.

Leah: So then what happens when you bring the food home? When you walk in the door, what’s going on? What do you do?
Victoria: It depends on how everyone’s doing. But I like to unpack right away. Put the flowers in a vase. Put the refrigerator items away. And start thinking a little bit about dinner, based on what we have there.

While CSA members may get the same produce in their basket share each week, the decisions they make regarding their food, once home, are often very different. Some members wash all their produce right away, some make sure to wash their lettuce and properly store it so that it lasts longer, some are less concerned and may leave their produce out for a day, or put it in the refrigerator unwashed. Yet what all these members’ patterns have in common is that the choices they make in their home are negotiated in response to the demands of other household members and responsibilities.

Food and feeding management choices that primary food provisioners make are not determined by the produce alone; rather, men and women manage CSA food according to what their living situation allows them to do. Primary food provisioners who live with children are also responsible for the children. These men and women often give attention to their children first and then put the food in the refrigerator or store it later. Other parents place more emphasis on the need to take care of the food as soon as they get it home. And
still others negotiate time between children and food – being interrupted in storing food and then reverting to aiding their children in whatever way necessary. Lisa described her food management technique as such:

Since the summer happened and the vegetables started coming, I kinda do it a little looser than I used to before. I’ll plan out meals. If I do the grocery shopping on Sunday or Monday, I’ll plan out the meals for Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Thursday is the farmshare pick-up and then I have Friday, Saturday and Sunday. We really don’t go out to dinner much; I do almost all the meals. And, I usually make sure I have ingredients to make things with whatever it is that I’m gonna get. I make sure I have a dozen eggs in the fridge. A quick farmshare meal: if I get zucchini that week and onions, I can chop up the zucchini and onions, sauté ‘em and make an omelet or a quiche out of that. So I do make sure I have ingredients to go along with whatever it is that I got. One day, I just took some chicken out of the freezer, cooked that on the grill, made a salad, and we were done. So, it is having the other things in your house to make a meal out of what you’re gonna get in the share.

CSA members often deal with unknown vegetables, a share of produce that does not fill their household’s needs for all vegetables and/or fruit (and therefore must be supplemented from other food outlets). Some members recognized differences in food from the CSA and food from the grocery store that result in distinctions in food management. Steve notes that the CSA broccoli must be washed very well, as it is “different” from broccoli from a grocery store. Kevin commented on insects and food pests that came with the farmshare, stressing the need to keep a clean kitchen because of the additional fresh produce from the farm.

Another influence on food management is the special concern about wasting food. Their concern for waste may result in freezing or preserving foods to enhance their shelf life or in managing food use so that perishable produce is eaten before it spoils. Because of the structure of CSA and the food it provides, many primary food provisioners see distinct differences in how they manage food and feeding.
The unseen work of food and feeding management

One factor of food and feeding work that is often overlooked is the invisible time and effort put into the process of planning and organization. Planning and organization occur at a number of stages in the process of feeding. What food to procure, what meals to make, and how much to serve are negotiated every day, usually three times a day. The first step of deciding what foods to procure, where to procure them, and how to negotiate costs, needs and other household labor is organized explicitly by some and internally by others.

What is unique about the CSA member is that procuring their share of food involves little, if any, choice in what foods are received. While at one CSA, members make choices about what root vegetables to take or whether to give some of their share to the food pantry, the pick-up is strikingly different from a grocery or market shopping experience in that cost and choice of foods is hardly negotiated. This understanding allows us to see one way that CSA is an enjoyable experience – it reduces work in food and feeding management.

The CSA share may indeed involve less work in the process of planning and organization. Members still may plan out meals, however, as the farm share is not a complete grab bag. As Carol pointed out, she has a pretty good idea of what will be coming based on the previous week’s share. In addition, members of both CSAs feel they are well informed about what to expect and what the status of their share will be from week to week. Newsletters and postings on notice boards at the pick-up location are helpful for consumers to know what to expect in the coming weeks. Whether or not consumers actively incorporate this knowledge into their food management is uncertain, yet the awareness of the farm and their share suggests that members are able to anticipate receiving some foods and take time to plan accordingly.
It is also relevant to consider the general patterns of how food is procured in CSA members’ households. These members are not only occasional food shoppers; my interviewees make a couple of trips to the grocery store in the course of a week. This suggests that the CSA pick-up is more a matter of substituting a trip to the grocery store than making an extra, inconveniencing trip. Said Matt:

What I find is that adding the farm to the routine of a Monday, almost every single time I’m thinking, “Ugh, I gotta go to the farm. I gotta go get our food. I’ve got these other things I’ve gotta do. I’ve gotta hurry back. I’ve gotta do this, that, or the other.” And so before I’m headed to the farm, it feels like it’s a burden. And then I get there and I park and I get out of the car. And within about fifteen minutes, my life is slowed down again. And so then I’m stopping and I’m chatting with people and I’m picking out in the field. And by the time I’m leaving, I’m thinking, “Oh, this is okay, you know. This is the perfect thing.” So it’s a funny world, in that it feels kind of far away and separate from our world that we mostly spend time in. And when I’m there, I realize that the distinction is not just in the distance, but it’s sort of the attitude there. It really is for me. And I think for a lot of people, it’s about slowing up to pick some of your own food and to chat with the farmers and to chat with your neighbors who are there. So in distance it’s probably only three or four miles, but in mental distance it feels a lot further.

In CSA, members actively decide to participate in the system, providing farmers with a monetary commitment, and most enter into the agreement understanding how it works and what they will receive for their investment. Members actively seek ways to organize food usage and meals to minimize their work as primary food provisioners. At the same time, the food procurement method of CSA puts much of the invisible work in the hands of the farmer and nature, possibly making food management a simpler process for CSA members.

Social living situations

CSA is a focal point of life for some member households, and less central for others. However, most members expressed the importance of the role CSA played in their
households, creating a feeling of excited anticipation on pick-up days throughout the growing season. As Lisa said:

I just love it. I can’t wait until Thursdays. Thursday is when I pick up my vegetables . . . And I’m gonna be cleaning my vegetables in the afternoon on Thursday. And I love that. I get giddy on Thursday thinking about what is gonna be in the basket this week.

Still, the level of excitement expressed by Lisa is not every member’s experience. John plainly stated that the farm is not the center of his household activities: “I mean this is something that goes on in our lives that is not the sort of thing that we focus on. Thursday comes, you get your stuff, and you go on about your business.” One of the prominent factors in determining food habits and use of food is the social living situations of my interviewees. Whether living alone or living with family, differences in schedules determine when people eat and who eats together. In understanding the impacts of living situations on food and feeding work, I first look at CSA members living in a family situation, then I address characteristics relevant to members living alone or with non-family members.

In the family context, different schedules often inhibit families from sitting down to a regular dinner meal at the same time. Children’s needs and work schedules can make it difficult to manage food and family priorities. Lisa talked about how her husband’s schedule — his arrival home from work — determines their dinner patterns. She tries to routinize dinner by eating a small snack or feeding her daughter early so that she can always share in the dinner meal with her husband, regardless of when he arrives home.

My husband works so late that a lot of times we don’t eat until after [my daughter] goes to bed — which means that I actually have kinda like two dinners. Because I’ll snack on her food, and then I’ll eat again when my husband and I eat.
April also determines the character of the dinner meal based on her husband's schedule. If her husband will not be home, she will prepare a quick and easy meal for herself and the children. If her husband will be home for dinner, April puts more effort into the meal and creates a more elaborate dinner.

I don’t tend to do the full production if he’s not going to be around, probably because the kids are just as happy with whatever. And, I try to watch what I eat pretty carefully. So if he’s not here, I’m like, “Fine. I’ll just have veggies and a Boca burger or something.” And he’ll eat that stuff, but for some reason, I just feel like if we’ve got everybody here then it's more an event, more of an effort to have to cook.

Time schedules and hunger levels are the two main factors that motivate meal times and who shares a meal. Many family meals involve young children eating an earlier meal or couples eating separately from their children. As Daniel discussed his family’s mealtime patterns, he commented “ideal versus reality, right?” Enjoying a meal may be a priority, but it is not always achieved because of different household interests or needs. So while there may exist general trends and patterns, there is a daily negotiation of priorities, choices and options that characterize meals.

Nonetheless, dinner is not always perceived as a regular, social occurrence for single interviewees. For the single men and women (most though not all of whom lived alone), food is a social activity sometimes, though a routine sit-down dinner is not as much an every night occurrence as it is in family households. Food is much more flexible for the single men and women, who might snack throughout the day in lieu of anticipating a full dinner meal. As Nicole says,

A lot of times my office hours are really funky. And I’m pretty flexible where I am, but I’m also responsible for a project and so sometimes I’ll eat lunch late and then I’m really bad to my system and I don’t really eat [dinner]. Sometimes I might even have a Ben and Jerry’s for dinner... But there are
times when I just prefer to come on home, and like the other night, I had fresh tomatoes from the garden and some blue cheese and a glass of orange juice. And, I went up on the deck and read a book. I'm okay with doing that.

This woman who lives alone is not as concerned about dinner as a social meal, and often is more interested in another activity such as reading a book, than preparing a meal for one person. In contrast, Susan, who lives alone, frequently invites friends over to share dinner. Her positive attitude toward food and sociality motivate her to have regular shared dinners with her friends to enjoy food, conversation, and political discussion.

Leah: And the meal that you were describing with the stir-fry, who was present at that meal?
Susan: I had friends over. Young, professional friends of mine. We’re all sort of yuppies, I hate that word, but I guess that’s what we are.
Leah: What were people doing or talking about?
Susan: Well, the big thing is . . . Howard Dean. We’re all very politically interested and we’re all like, “Yay, Howard.” I’m pretty liberal politically, and I’m so excited that he’s doing so well. I would say [we talk about] social issues, politics and then just stupid day-to-day stuff.
Leah: How would you describe the mood of the meal?
Susan: Positive.
Leah: Positive?
Susan: Yeah. I have a pretty positive personality. I like to see things in a good light and I try to share that with my friends when they come to my home to have a meal.

Sharie, although living in a house with five other roommates, finds that conflicting schedules lead her to frequently eat alone or on the go. A shared dinner meal is created because of the work of the primary food provisioner; and while those in family and non-family living situations value sharing meals, dinner involves more elaborate cooking and focuses more around commensality for family-structured households.

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7 During the summer of 2003, when my interviews took place, former Vermont Governor Howard Dean was beginning his presidential campaign.
Conclusion

The activities of feeding a family are of course not really instinctual; they are socially organized and their logic is learned. However, comments like these emerge from actual practice. They point to real characteristics of the work of feeding: its invisibility, its improvisational character, and its basis in a tacit, rather than fully articulated kind of knowledge. (DeVault 1991: 48)

This chapter explores how food and feeding work is socially constructed in the household. From interviewing CSA members, it is apparent that CSA does influence how primary food provisioners manage food and feeding work. In a sense, CSA makes food provisioning easier because it takes away the unseen labor of planning and organization that constantly is on the mind of primary food provisioners. CSA food may not be that different from other food once it is in the house, but the almost prescribed routine of CSA food procurement offers a pattern that can reduce food management demands and perhaps be an effective way to reduce gender inequality. CSA also breaks down many traditional characteristics of cooking that are associated with women. In this way, the demands created by the weekly distribution of fresh, abundant CSA food may invite men into a kitchen setting that is less intimidating. On the flip side, women may embrace CSA precisely because it is reminiscent of cooking obligations and responsibilities of motherhood.

Through the role of the primary food provisioner, their management and use of food, and the social situation of the household, gender does at times play into the negotiation of CSA and other food choices. Yet, gender is not always the only motivating factor. Children's food preferences, possession of food management skills, and the social living situation of the household often take precedent in why one is the primary food provisioner and how he or she manages food and feeding work.
CHAPTER FIVE
REFLEXIVE CONSUMER AND CITIZEN CONSUMER

Part of what makes Community Supported Agriculture different from conventional agriculture is the directness of the social relations involved in the process of production and distribution. Through face-contact, members know who is producing their food; through visiting the CSA, members know where their food comes from. CSA draws a direct connection from the land and the grower to the eater. The community of members involved in CSA also provides connections. There is an explicit recognition of the communality that characterizes CSA membership.

CSA members in this study connect to a community of members and farmers influencing consumption practices not based on the traditional model of “the consumer,” but on the model of the reflexive consumer. Drawing upon the consumption literature groundwork in Chapter Two, I analyze the notion of a “reflexive consumer” (DuPuis 2002) with respect to particular concerns of these CSA members. How does the CSA experience shape members’ scope of concerns and members’ identities? Relating the notion of the reflexive consumer to CSA members’ practices, I apply the concept of a “citizen consumer” to CSA members. I ask: when and under what conditions do CSA members make the shift from “reflexive consumers” to “citizen consumers”? In this chapter, I show how particular concerns when coupled with a CSA structure that connects members to a place-based community drive a broader consciousness of citizenship.

First, I will revisit the idea of the reflexive consumer, addressing the connections CSA members maintain and negotiate through food consumption. Next, I look at economic, environmental, and social impetuses that drive CSA members’ consumption patterns. I then
take my analysis a step further, looking at the structural differences of these CSA operations on the CSA members and how they shape members' connections to the farm. Finally, I explore the idea of citizenship and highlight how and when CSA members may be examples of *citizen* consumers.

**CSA Members as Reflexive Consumers**

In *Nature's Perfect Food*, DuPuis uses the term “reflexive consumer” to describe the consumer's negotiation of different influences ultimately leading to self-identification and driving the consumer’s choices (DuPuis 2002). The notion of the reflexive consumer is one that gives much agency to the consumer and highlights the diversity of sources that inform the consumer. In my research, I find CSA members to be particularly conscious of their role as consumers who negotiate family desires, food values, community impact, and structural constraints. CSA members are also conscious of the results of their choices in food and feeding management.

Most CSA members negotiate buying foods at a variety of food outlets, in addition to their CSA share. These members represent reflexive consumers who articulate perceptions of the benefits of smaller, more specialized food outlets over larger, regional or national chain grocery stores. Two members related that perceptions of food quality, prices, ownership, and location play into making conscious choices in food management.

Susan: I'm not a vegetarian; but I shop at Healthy Living, which is a health food store right over here. I try to give them the business because it's locally owned versus the big chain. But, I do a lot of my regular shopping over at Hannaford's, which is the chain store here. But that's for (sighs) like meat, poultry, fish. I usually get a lot of cheeses there. I think their prices are better than Healthy Living's and the cheese is just as good. But whenever I can, I like to spend my resources at Healthy Living. I get vitamins, I get chips, I get
fruit there. The food is good. So, I divide my time evenly between a national chain store and then a local vegetarian market.

Steve: I go out to eat like most people do. Locally. I usually don’t do chain restaurants. I like small local places. [As far as grocery stores,] if I’m going down Route 7 or coming back up from Route 7 and I need something, I’ll stop in Price Chopper. But for the most part, it’s the Co-op because it’s close and it’s community supported and it’s I think it’s better than most chain grocery stores. There’s much better selection in all the departments, even though it’s smaller and they don’t have as much. There’s a different type of selection. It’s more diverse, I think. And it’s small – it’s not a big conglomerate. So, I like supporting it.

These CSA members negotiate attitudes derived from personal experience as they make food choices in the grocery store. Lauren commented on her decision not to buy into a meat share at the CSA because she has always bought meat at a particular grocery store. Lauren’s background, growing up on a farm in Iowa and being close to beef and hog production, confirms her faith in the meat production industry, despite her understanding that it most likely creates negative impacts on the land.

It’s funny because I haven’t lived in Iowa for 40 years, so we’re far from that part of farming. But it’s hard to relate to the whole animal rights issue if you grew up on a farm in Iowa in the fifties . . . I think chemical fertilizers have done terrible things to a lot of the watershed in Iowa particularly. And it’s also so poor here . . . We own land in Iowa still and I don’t even want to think about what it’s doing. And so, [I have] not very consistent views.

CSA members do not subsist only on the food received from their farmshare. Rather, they combine their share and other foods procured from grocery stores to create a diet they perceive to be balanced and desirable. As Meghan shared, she enjoys living in tune with the farm, yet also values conventional conveniences available to grocery store shoppers.

Meghan: Well, you know this is real farm life. So there’s a point in time when I feel like I’m force-feeding salad, but that’s good. And there’s a time when I wish there was more of something. But in general, I think it works well. And if you sort of rework your expectations from the ways we’ve come
to: what kinds of food and how much food we should have around based on constant access to supermarkets with the same produce available 12 months out of the year. Well, things grow seasonally. And so, you rejoice in that. And you structure your life, you structure your eating around it, and you learn to process food when there’s an abundance of things . . .

Leah: What do you do if there’s not enough food one week, if you don’t receive enough?
Meghan: Well, at the beginning of the season and the end of the season, that’s always the case and so then you’re in the grocery store for food.

Consumption patterns, even for CSA members in this study, are varied and involve much negotiation between different food sources, based on the perceived needs of the household. Consumption patterns have the potential to form links between farmers and members, grocery stores and patrons, farmers markets and community members; it is relevant to question the nature of those connections and the meanings they embody.

**CSA as Alternative Practice**

Community Supported Agriculture, as an alternative source for food procurement, is surrounded by an ideology of change. There are two patterns related to change that I propose are embedded in these members’ involvement in CSAs. In one pattern, the member’s involvement in CSA spurs a lifestyle change. In the other, change is motivated by another source that leads the member to become involved in CSA, as it supports the new or alternative lifestyle of the member.

Examples of both of these types of change were apparent from interviews with members of the two CSAs. For one member for whom the CSA created change, the change was welcome. Kevin related:

When we did the farmshare, our consumption of vegetables and fresh fruits increased dramatically . . . We became more cognizant of [organic foods]. So
we started to try to match things a little better to that; we would often cook tofu or tempeh with some of the vegetables. We started to eat less meat.

While some members mentioned cooking different foods, they simultaneously noted how CSA pushed them to become more creative and adventurous in the kitchen – aspects of CSA that they considered positive.

The other pattern of CSA participation involved lifestyle changes motivating members to join a CSA. Although the pattern was not the result of a direct cause and effect, what members did experience was that their CSA involvement had a positive, supportive role in relation to their lifestyle. These members had made conscious decisions to maintain healthy, active lifestyles as well as to act upon their values and beliefs of supporting local food systems, local businesses, and organic food production.

The commonality of beliefs was an idea expressed more strongly by City Harvest members than by Growing Greens members. The two Growing Greens members who did discuss notions of a community with similar values and lifestyles connected through the CSA are both working members who regularly connected with the farmers and the farm itself. A number of City Harvest members suggested that other members have similar values to theirs. As Lauren remarked on the political views of other CSA members:

Lauren: There is a certain sort of political view. The members of the garden are more homogenous...you see a lot of Bernie Sanders bumper stickers, and are not likely to see many Bush/Cheney bumper stickers. And so, it's that kind of political.
Leah: Why do you think that is?
Lauren: Boy, that's interesting. I actually don't know. 'Cause I don't really know what makes people put a Bush/Cheney bumper sticker on their car. Because the truth is, [CSA] has no real political implications at all. But it

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8 Congressman Bernie Sanders is the longest-serving Independent in the House of Representatives and former Mayor of Burlington, VT.
really is definitely something that people are more comfortable with. A little more true left statement.

The similarity of political viewpoints among members suggests that CSAs may bring together members with common values. The farm may reinforce a material connection to an alternative system, solidifying values and giving them agency and expression. Simultaneously, it brings people together in space that creates interrelatedness with others participating in the same activity and fosters the feeling of a common value system.

The concept of participation in an alternative movement also resonated in how members from both CSAs viewed the farms and the greater social and environmental purposes they served. Connecting with a CSA gives many individuals a feeling that they are participating in creating positive change in the world. In this articulation, we see that CSA is not merely a structure of food management, but that it also represents the beliefs, embodies the values, facilitates the connections and provides an outlet for the agency of these members in better knowing their food.

CSA Member Concerns: Responding to the CSA Method of Food Procurement

The CSA member embodies the concept of the reflexive consumer, embracing particular concerns. CSA member concerns are specifically characterized by economic, environmental, and social impetuses. I argue that the impetuses driving CSA member consumption practices are conditioned by the character of their alternative food procurement structure, which is built upon the pillars of a sustainable food system with attention to the economic, environmental and social ramifications of consumption. My research shows that CSA members’ consumption is motivated by these economic, environmental, and social
concerns on two levels: the household level and the community level. In displaying reflexive consumption, the CSA member seems to approach food and feeding management asking: What is best for my household? And, what is best for my community?

**Economic concerns for households: Economic value**

The economic value of Community Supported Agriculture was a topic addressed by many CSA members. Most members feel that they are getting a good value for their CSA food, yet few calculate the real costs of the CSA membership. Members do, however, place caveats on the value of the share. Some commented that it is an economic value if one is an organic buyer, eats a lot of vegetables, or participates as a working member.

In addition, members talked about value not just in cost rhetoric. Interviewees noted that the CSA is a value because of the entire experience, thus calculating into the cost the ability to go down to the farm or the freshness of locally produced food. Members' responses also analyzed the averaged share value over the entire growing season, understanding that there are differences in the share from the beginning of the season to the end on a week-to-week basis. Daniel conveyed a carefully calculated value of his share, highlighting how he uses the food and the comparative grocery store cost. Daniel's analysis of pesto, made with basil from the farmshare, illuminates and clarifies how the value of a CSA share is extracted.

We use the basil to make pesto, mostly. Pesto is expensive to buy in the store. For a 7-ounce container, it's five dollars. They basically allow you to pick unlimited basil [at the CSA]. So in theory, one could make enormous amounts of pesto for basically free. There are other ingredients in pesto: there's the olive oil, the pine nuts and the Parmesan. But those are relatively insignificant costs compared to basil. Because if you buy basil in the store, for a little pack, it's about $1.25. And you need lots of basil to make your
basic seven or eight ounces. So in terms of that, one could in theory make
back your entire cost of your farm share just in basil, if one was industrious
and made a lot of pesto. And pesto is freezeable, so if you had a freezer, you
could freeze it all and use it throughout the winter. Really extract a lot value
out of your farmshare.

The notion of directly extracted value should not, however, be overstated; a number
of members commented that they would not have necessarily chosen many of the vegetables
that arrive in their share. So while there is a great direct value, the caveats members
addressed are important to consider. CSA works best for households that consume many
vegetables, appreciate fresh, local and/or organic foods, and are willing to put in the time and
energy to prepare food.

*Economic concerns for communities: Supporting local businesses*

Economic repercussions are not just realized by members at the household level;
members are also conscious of how their economic choices impact their community.
Members discuss impacts connecting beyond their household and even beyond their city.
CSA is seen as a way to connect to the Intervale, to Burlington, and to Vermont. Theresa
shared:

There’s something about Vermont. I don’t know if it’s because it’s a small
state, but people are very big on community. And people are big on buying
Vermont made products... it’s part of the whole feeling about the Intervale
and buying and having a farmshare. It’s sort of a community thing and you’re
helping someone whose business is in Vermont. And the Intervale itself is a
very community-oriented project all together. It’s not that we go there every
week or anything, but we just like it. We just like the whole feel of being part
of the Intervale.
Being a part of CSA can build a sense of agency within a member and connects members to greater goals and processes.

Supporting small, local businesses appeals to many Community Supported Agriculture members, and many mentioned that CSA was a way to support small, local businesses. In addition, members talked about how they exhibit their values in other shopping venues.

The dialogue surrounding local foods in Burlington is particularly at the forefront of residents' minds as a result of recent development of the downtown grocery store. A few years ago the bid for the downtown grocery store space was acquired by a local co-op, The Onion River Co-op, and raised a much publicized debate over the cost of foods, types of foods available and clientele served by different grocery stores. Daniel responded with notions that the Co-op, while he shops there, is too expensive and that he is considering changing his shopping patterns in the future when his schedule would allow it. “Our grocery bills are like double what they should be. That’s because we go to the Co-op. It’s called City Market, but the nickname’s ‘City Mark-up.’ But, I love the atmosphere there and they have high quality stuff, and it’s good for that reason.” Other CSA members who shop at the Co-op are very supportive of the grocery store and feel it provides a great asset to the community, as a venue for their interest in promoting local business and community cooperation. Denise goes out of her way to shop at the Co-op whenever possible, combining it with her walking exercise routine or bike rides.

However, not all of my interviewees shop at the Co-op. Lisa searches the Sunday paper advertisements and builds her shopping around the weekly specials, dividing her shopping based on the best deals at different supermarkets. A number of respondents also
shop at various grocery stores, based on habit, convenience, likeability of the store or the
store layout, and perceptions of which store has better prices. Still, most CSA members
mentioned an awareness of local business ownership and an interest in supporting such
terprises. Members see their CSA involvement as a manifestation of supporting small,
local farming initiatives and extend these values into other community businesses, especially
locally owned food outlets.

Environmental concerns for households: Home gardens and composting

One impact of CSA, regardless of whether construed as negative or positive, is the
change in gardening practices. Members who are avid gardeners generally shift what they
grow in their garden with respect to the CSA share. Favorite foods, such as tomatoes, are
still grown, but the garden does not serve the role of providing a substantial amount of food
in most CSA households. As Carol explained,

I always grow tomatoes because you can never have enough tomatoes. So I’m
sure we’ll grow tomatoes again. I may grow peas again. Peas are fun and
again you can freeze them . . . I was thinking of actually expanding [my
garden], and maybe planting something else but I’m not sure what yet. We’ll
have to see how the year finishes out at the farm. If there’s something that we
felt like we wanted more of, then I’ll try that.

At the same time that members mentioned building their garden around the CSA share, some
also commented on their appreciation for the CSA because it provides fresh vegetables
without having to do all the work involved with gardening. Said John,

I just plant some tomato plants and the rhubarb is just there. I’m more
interested in flowers and shrubs and that kind of thing . . . You don’t do it for
food. You do it for pleasure – growing your own fruits, vegetables, and
tomatoes, out of a garden.
CSA members are conscious of creating a balance between their CSA share and what their garden produces. Still, this finding should not be misconstrued as a decline in gardening activity. Rather, members change their gardening patterns and shift what foods they are producing to supplement or enhance their CSA share.

In my research, I asked CSA members about the entire process of food provisioning, including the post-meal clean-up process. The majority mentioned composting as a part of their clean-up process. Composting serves as an environmentally sound way to decompose food scraps and waste, simultaneously creating a fertilizer for garden beds or backyards. Members talked about composting in the context of a concern about waste. Waste is undesirable to most CSA members and they take action to avoid wasting food. As one couple explained:

Matt: Typically anything that was out to be served but didn’t get used, goes back into the fridge. If it was on someone’s plate but doesn’t get eaten, it goes in the compost. All the other tidbits from preparation go into the compost.
Denise: I think the three of us, certainly [my husband] and I have been this way, and [my son] is really learning to be this way, is that there’s food on your plate. If you take something, you take what you can eat.

Nicole commented on how she utilizes salad greens to reduce waste both in the kitchen and in the garden.

I do eat a lot of salads in the summer mostly. Because I get this pile and it all gets washed and it gets put into a big bin in the refrigerator. Otherwise, I won’t eat it, and then I don’t waste it. Anything that I do waste, I have a composter. And my composter gets used quite a bit.

Composting is viewed as a positive solution for waste. In a way, composting gets the primary food provisioner off the hook. If waste is bad, but compost is good, then any waste that gets composted turns into a positive action. The primary food provisioner is still being
environmentally and socially responsible by composting waste. Kevin commented on how composting fits into his household's food management patterns:

We don't consume all the food from the Intervale. Sometimes we feel inundated, like we just don't get to those last two zucchinis and they sit at the bottom of the fridge and they'll get a little mealy. Generally we try not to salvage those things. We just compost 'em.

Composting also extends the life of food in the ecology of a place by decomposing it and using it to fertilize personal gardens. Most of the CSA members have their own personal composting systems that they use to fertilize their gardens and flower beds. The Intervale also runs a composting business and community members are invited to bring their compost and drop it off at the facility. Sharie, who lives in an apartment where she cannot compost, mentioned taking her compost down to the Intervale with her when she goes to the farm. Whether or not composting reflects broader CSA member patterns, the consciousness of the cycle of food and feeding management and its ties to the environment represent a greater social and environmental responsibility and holistic conceptualization of the food system.

*Environmental impact concerns for communities: Eating locally grown food*

CSA members expressed a distinct environmental consciousness and clearly articulated an understanding about linkages between food and the land. These connections are expressed in terms of a desire to lessen the environmental impacts of food and feeding management. CSA members discussed issues of seasonality and the impacts of eating seasonally as connected to environmental impact. Eating local food is important to all farm members as it embodies connections to land, environmental benefits and attributes of fresh food. The clear articulation of how members perceive locally-grown food and feelings of
doing something positive for the environment was expressed by Angela. “The thing that I love about the Intervale is that my food is a mile down the road.” Meghan expressed a similar sentiment:

In season, I can pretty much eat food that was produced within 30 miles of right where I live. I know all of the farmers. And that just feels really good. It’s really important for me, in addition to the quality of living, that I am continuing to support food production at that scale, close to where I live, using organic methods.

Seasonal changes initiate a connection between the individual and land for a number of members. Meghan specifically remarked on how eating with the seasons provides a “better food experience” by creating a connection between place and self.

I love four seasons. I love the rhythm that it gives life. I really like that in the summer I’m eating all kinds of greens and in the winter I’m eating lots of root vegetables. And I’m trying more and more to observe those seasons in my own eating habits. It’s so easy now to behave as if there aren’t seasons in terms of your eating. Because when it’s winter here, it’s summer in Chile. And they fly everything up from Chile . . . It also means that when something is in season, it’s very special and you appreciate it more. If you only eat something that’s in season that was grown locally so it wasn’t shipped a long distance and it wasn’t stored for a long time, the flavor is so much better. So, it gives you a better food experience to observe the seasons.

The freshness of local foods is seen as a great attribute of CSA food, and connected to the environmental and economic impacts of where food is grown. As Susan commented:

Well, I love fresh. Whenever I can get fresh, I will buy fresh, even if it costs more money. Because I just think it’s so much healthier. And, in the summer obviously, I get it all from here. It’s all grown right in my own backyard versus in February, when I buy a tomato, it’s been raised in a hothouse out in California and shipped to Vermont. It just doesn’t have the same taste. But whenever possible, I use fresh, and that’s why [the CSA] has been so appealing to me. Because, I’ve got it. I know it was picked that morning. And that’s really positive for me.
Members articulate the minimized environmental impact of CSA food as a result of eating locally and seasonally.

The environmental impacts of CSA are also articulated by these members as improving the land and facilitating environmentally friendly transportation. The land on which the Intervale is located was formerly a site for city garbage disposal but has been transformed over time by the Intervale Foundation and revitalized as organic farming land. This transformation and the role CSA members play in supporting it is not overlooked by CSA members. As Lauren remarked:

One of the nice things about being a member of the Intervale farm is seeing the Intervale change in the last 15 years. It had obviously stopped being a garbage dump by the time we joined the farm, but certainly, the farm was pretty much the only thing down there when we started. And now there’s a whole band of growers of various sizes. The Gardener’s Supply [a retail business] was there, but it has grown and taken over that whole area. So it looks amazing.

Playing a supportive role in urban renewal is not the only activity that CSA promotes. City Harvest Farm has initiated a carpooling program which provides benefits to members who carpool to pick-ups. Carpooling participants receive half an egg share if they carpool with other farm members. Denise explained her enthusiasm for the program and the change it has created in the way her household gets food via CSA pick-ups.

The CSA has had a difficulty around parking. And because people are trying to do alternative transportation, they’ve been giving credits for folks who either carpool or bike or walk there. And it’s embarrassing to me, but that has really changed our behavior. And so we carpool there now with our neighbor, which is great. It’s pathetic that we didn’t do it until there was an incentive program. Because we believe in walking and biking a lot, but we’re now carpooling with the neighbor.
Initiating programs such as City Harvest’s carpooling program benefits the farm and promotes alternative forms of transportation that have less detrimental impact on the environment than personal vehicle transportation. While the impact may not be enormous, the conscious effort made to lessen environmental impact demonstrates another way in which CSA members become environmentally conscious as they draw connections between food management activities and their environmental impact.

**Social concerns for households: Sharing food**

CSA members share food with non-household members during two phases of the food and feeding process: during the procurement phase and after the cooking/preparation phase. Interestingly, households do not share non-CSA food with others in the same ways that characterize the sharing of CSA produce. This may be due to the quantities of produce received from the CSA, yet this results in CSA food serving as a vehicle for socialization around the sharing of food. Susan talked about sharing excess produce with her neighbor:

I have this phenomenal 98 year-old neighbor who still lives independently across the hall from me. And I bring her my leftovers [i.e. excess produce], because she doesn’t get out very much. She’s thrilled. She’s like, “Oh, what did you bring me this week?” So, I share with her and she then always goes into the whole story about raising vegetables on the farm in North Dakota as a child.

As members try to manage planning around CSA food and purchasing food from grocery stores and farmers markets or grown in gardens, many experience an excess of produce and make efforts to distribute the CSA food to friends, family, neighbors, babysitters, and co-workers so that it is not wasted. In a few cases, interviewees stated that they share CSA food because they feel it is a shame for “good food” to go to waste. Aside
from the social distribution of food, this suggests that CSA food is particularly valued by CSA members, in a way that they do not perceive other foods in their household.

CSA members may also share excess food that has been prepared or cooked. One member talked about how he was compelled to invite friends to join his family for dinner. Said Daniel:

If we do get a lot [of produce], often we end up being somewhat inspirational. [We’ll say,] “Oh, let’s have somebody over for dinner.” So somebody comes over, and this way it motivates us to be social. We make a big salad and we use it up.

Concern about creating social connections through food at the household level is manifested by these CSA members in how they share food, particularly excess produce with others.

Social concerns for communities: Community awareness

Connections to community take place through CSA on a few levels. Members connect to other members, to the farmers who grow their food, and to a more regional community. In addition, the transparency of these connections allows members to draw other lines that instill a feeling of connectedness to humanity and the environment. While notions of community may not be realized in a concrete sense, the feelings embodied by members suggest that whether community is imagined or real, it remains a powerful force that reassures members and drives their commitment to CSA.

CSA members frequently invoke notions of community, yet when pressed on the topic, they articulate a less than concrete network that might come to mind when one hears the word “community.” Members stated that there is a feeling of sociability at CSA pick-
ups. Although people may not know others personally, there is a sense of community created around common beliefs and values. As Matt commented:

There are a lot of people that I don’t know at the farm, because it’s a pretty large membership. On any given day, there’s 200 households out there. And I don’t necessarily know most of them. But there’s always people that I do know and I stop to chat with while I’m there . . . It’s a very social place.

Part of the feeling of community may also be generated because members know other members from other venues and activities, such as children’s schools, other shopping experiences or community activities. Denise and Meghan expressed their connections between the CSA and other places in the community:

Denise: Even people from other places seem to connect [at the CSA]. There’s a lot of overlap circles in Burlington community places that seem to end up there. And every now and then I’ll talk to someone and they’ll say they’re a farm member. And I’m like, “I’ve never seen you.” And they’re like, “Oh we’re on Thursday.” So there’s definitely a lot of people from different circles that we’re part of.

Meghan: Burlington’s a pretty small community. I’m also a member of the Onion River Food Co-op, and I think there’s this rut in the road worn between the farm and the Co-op. Because, it’s people looking for those kinds of foods – provisioning a lot from those two sources. [It’s people who are] a little more interested in Community Supported Agriculture and in many cases have a set of shared political and social interests.

CSA members discussed two ways in which they connect to farmers as people. In one interview, Sharie, a working member, commented on the esteem in which she held farmers:

At first, I was really kinda nervous to go down. ‘Cause I idolize them. They’re doing it, they have their own little farm. And they know so much about what they’re doing. I was like, “Oh okay, I can weed.” But I’ve learned about how it works. And they’re all fun guys, now that I’m more comfortable with them.
Most members, however, are not working members of their CSA and thus have less regular interaction with the farmers. Still, the relationship forged between the farmer and member has much to offer. In particular, April noted how much she likes talking with the farmers and the wealth of information about the food they provide.

[The CSA farmers] are just such nice people. It’s okay [to ask], “Okay, what’s the difference between the bumpy cucumbers and the smooth ones?” And [the CSA farmer] always knows. And he’s always very happy to share it with you. It’s a very nice atmosphere. And I think that adds to sort of the whole process.

The connections between other community members may be less concrete than the visible relationship between member and farmer. Nevertheless, there exists a sentiment of community created amongst members founded upon their communal ties to where their food comes from.

Notions of either communal or individual participation in an alternative movement were evident as most interviewees told me that their involvement in the CSA was part of an effort to procure foods outside the conventional food system. Being part of a counter-culture community was a unique and enjoyed aspect of CSA that Lauren, a member of City Harvest for 14 years, commented on.

For those of us who were in the early years, it was more kind of counter-cultural, political. So we all laugh about the bok choy year when there was tons of bok choy and all the Chinese vegetables, and not too much of anything else... It made us all adventurous cooks. But you know, it’s gotten to be more of something that has exactly what we all love and then some things that are all new to us. Gets us all headed in a new direction.

Lauren has become accustomed to the way the farm works; but, the CSA has changed over time as well. For Lauren, after years of membership, the CSA is an integrated part of her life
and family. At a time when many Americans are disillusioned by war, economic recession, and the political process, the opportunity to participate in an activity with a supportive, positive community instills in its members the possibility to help in creating change. Denise articulated this larger vision: “I just feel like there’s not one level where you can say, ‘Oh this is really the wrong way to go.’ All these steps are the right way to create sustainable change in the world. And that’s huge, to go from a little farm to big change.”

Effects of Different Pick-up Procedures in CSA Operations

Members of both CSAs expressed the particular economic, environmental, and social concerns that suggest a more explicitly defined consumer than the reflexive consumer. In this section, I move beyond the three categorical concerns of CSA members to look at another aspect of CSA participation: varying degrees of connection to the CSA farmland. I will discuss the affect of procedural differences on CSA members and how differences in operations influence members’ connections to the farm. This section explicitly looks at how the procedures involved in picking up CSA food shape the CSA member experience.

In my research, the difference between the pick-up procedures of the two CSAs proved important in understanding how the CSA experience affects members’ identities through their connection, or lack there of, to a place-based community in an urban setting. With Growing Greens Farm, members pick up their weekly share at one of four members’ homes in the Burlington area. Most members choose a pick-up site close to their home, yet at least one interviewee mentioned arranging her pick-up site close to the home of her daughter’s friend. In this way, Growing Greens works for a variety of members’ pick-up needs. In addition, members can pay an extra fee and have their share delivered to their
house. I talked with one woman who had her share delivered, and then split it with a neighbor. Growing Greens pick-ups are highly efficient and involve relatively little time commitment from the member. Multiple boxes are used for each household’s share by the farm and so members can simply swap boxes each week. One member explained the pick-up routine. I asked about the sociality of the event, and Victor responded: “we say ‘hi.’ And it’s really expected to just come up on the porch and grab your basket and get on your way.” While members do not generally socialize at pick-ups, the convenience and ease of the food distribution system certainly makes it easy to balance various household labor activities simultaneously.

City Harvest Farm has a different food distribution system from that of Growing Greens. City Harvest pick-ups take place right at the farm. The farm is organized with a small parking lot, a pole barn where the majority of activities take place, a play area for kids, a water fountain and chairs to sit in, and lots of explanatory signs. The pick-up days involve a flurry of activity and the farm serves as a very social meeting place. While farm members do not necessarily create intimate bonds or friendships with other farm members through the pick-ups, the pick-ups serve to strengthen existing ties in the community. The City Harvest pick-up feels like a market filled with activity and energy. Members help each other with childcare, sample foods prepared from the week’s share ingredients, select copies of recipes to take home, listen to live music, and play with their kids in the sandbox or participate in an art project. All of this activity makes the City Harvest pick-up feel like a big event that is a desirable place to be and an outdoor environment where it is acceptable to just hang-out and enjoy the beauty of the farm.
Family members' relation to the farm

The majority of my interviewees with children talked about the ways that CSA affects their kids. Many interviewees joined their CSA because they want their children to experience the farm and understand where food comes from and how it is grown. Carol explained how the City Harvest CSA had indeed shaped her child's understanding of where food comes from. “Now when we eat dinner Gordon will pick up his bean or something and say, ‘Fresh from the farm!’ So you know I really like that he’s seeing the food chain and seeing the fields grow.” Children’s hands-on experience with food production through CSA is particularly educational in an urban setting, where children may otherwise not have exposure to agricultural settings.

CSA involvement also influences the diets and food preferences of members’ children. Many members’ children have developed favorite foods that they look forward to getting from the farm. Participation in “pick-your-own” produce creates a link to favorite foods for some children, yet not for others.

At City Harvest Farm, the age of the child or children has a large effect on participation in farm activities and relation to the farm. As I talked with members who have infants, young children, middle school aged children, junior high students, and young adult children, a pattern of involvement and relation to the farm is apparent. Infants often are more difficult for parents to manage at the pick-up, sometimes inhibiting them from picking. Younger children likewise occasionally prevent parents from picking but are also easier to manage in conjunction with other members’ children through ad hoc babysitting. Middle school aged children enjoy the rope swing and tetherball games and also aid their parents in picking activities. Junior high aged children engage in some modeling behavior as they are
able to take on more active food and feeding management roles in their households and are interested in ways they might cook with certain foods. At the same time, one parent notes that his junior high aged child is mature enough to opt out of the farm pick-up, exercising his freedom from his parents and his ability to engage in his own activities instead of being dragged along with his parents to pick-up the CSA share. Meghan, who has children in their late teens and early 20s, commented on how her children choose to actively participate, and how the farm experience is one in which everyone can play a part.  

Because they’re older, they’re also completely free to opt out of it. And they rarely do opt out when given the opportunity. They usually opt in. Even when it’s really hot and going out in the field and bending down and picking stuff is not the most appealing process. So, I think they must genuinely like it. I never have any trouble getting them to do the pick-up because I’m traveling and out of town.  

The age of the children seems to be the biggest factor in how kids relate to the CSA, though there are other attributes. Some interviewees noted that other children from their school were also farm members. Children’s schedules and other activities also dictate their relation to the farm and their level of participation. While a few members mentioned the difficulties they face shopping in grocery stores with their children, none of the same experiences are found at the CSA pick-up. Though members are not always able to ‘pick their own’ as fully as desired, they are less concerned about food management and child care activities being mutually exclusive – rather, members appreciate that the CSA pick-up accomplishes both tasks simultaneously. This finding is especially true of Growing Greens pick-ups where the short time period needed to pick-up a wide variety and large quantity of food delivered in one’s basket is minimal. Therefore, although children’s relationship to City
Harvest Farm is especially interactive, the pick-up procedures for both Growing Greens and City Harvest make the CSAs kid-friendly food outlets for parents.

While both pick-up procedures have benefits for members, they create different relationships between the CSA members and the land. Members who go down to the farm for pick-up each week were more likely to express their connection to the physical place where their food is grown. The members of City Harvest related their connections to a community of members that Growing Greens's members did not participate in, due to the procedural differences in operations. As I expand upon the notion of the CSA member as a reflexive consumer, the connection to place and the conceptualization of a community based around socialization on the farm are the critical elements that seem to make CSA members 'citizen consumers.'

*From Reflexive Consumer to Citizen Consumer*

To begin the global task to which we are called, we need some particular place to begin, some particular place to stand, some particular place in which to initiate the small, reformist changes that we can only hope may some day become radically transformative (Kloppenburg, Hendrickson and Stevenson 1996).

The evidence of how structures of operation affect CSA members and the particular concerns that drive consumption for CSA members leads to consideration of the CSA member as a 'citizen consumer.' The CSA member as 'citizen consumer' is one who plays an active role in the community through making conscious consumption choices. The understanding of CSA members in this study suggests that they are highly engaged members of society who exercise economic, environmental, and social awareness through food and feeding management. With reference to the connection between community and
environment requiring responsibility and co-reliance, CSA members move beyond the reflexive consumer and embrace CSA participation as an act of citizenship. I argue that CSA members are ‘citizen consumers’ with respect to their CSA participation as they turn their economic, environmental, and social concerns on both the household and community level into action.

Focusing on the citizen in the food production-consumption chain evokes DeLind’s (2002) conceptualization of civic agriculture. Civic agriculture functions “not only as an alternative strategy for food production, distribution and consumption but also as a tool and a venue for ‘grounding people in common purpose’ – for nurturing a sense of belonging to a place and an organic sense of citizenship” (DeLind 2002: 217). The notion that citizens are actors in how agriculture is structured resonates with many of these CSA members, as they described their scope of concerns and their connection to a place-based community. DeLind perceives a sense of place and ties to a community that remise individual actions and hold each member by “the bonds of inconvenience” as an essential element of civic agriculture and civic engagement (DeLind 2002: 222). This may be idealistic as even the most devoted CSA members do not solely eat food from their CSA; rather, they engage in interactions and acts of consumption at various food outlets.

This study demonstrates how CSA members embrace their agency and consume in a way that helps support a more sustainable food system. Nonetheless, CSA members negotiate various household and community interests that may conflict. Thus, while these CSA members can move from being reflexive consumers to becoming citizen consumers, food and feeding management is subject to the demands of other household members and social constraints that may not always allow CSA members to act as citizens.
Conclusion

CSA members are enmeshed in an intricate web of relations: social, economic, and environmental. In this chapter, I demonstrate how these CSA members are indeed reflexive, negotiating the influences of the web of relations to which they are connected and places in which they live, and consider the notion of the CSA member as a 'citizen consumer.' These CSA members convey a concern with social, economic, and environmental relations which appears to be uniquely defined by the context of CSA food, characterized by transparent connections between producer and consumer, a weekly scheduled distribution of whole foods and produce, limited choice of food products received, and concrete relations to site of food production. Food and feeding management cannot be understood without attention to the networks of relations in which the CSA member is embedded. CSA intertwines particular social, economic, and environmental relations; yet, CSA members likewise negotiate consumption patterns with regard to personal perceptions and experiences. Although each CSA member maintains distinct connections within the food system, CSA food procurement is a way in which social, economic, and environmental relations are made visible and reflexively negotiated by CSA members, at times acting as citizens in a community based in place.
CHAPTER SIX
DISCUSSION

Community Supported Agriculture offers an alternative to industrialized conventional agriculture. For urban CSA members like those in this study, CSAs not only facilitate a direct connection between farmer and eater, but also bring where food comes from to the awareness of members. The sustainability of urban CSA is apparent from the members’ perspective. It is an economic value for fresh, organic produce. It is environmentally beneficial as the food is produced locally and travels few miles to get to members’ households. And it is socially constructive as it highlights farmer-member dependencies and creates a sense of citizen responsibility that is largely absent in social communities of upper class residents.

As evident through interviews with CSA members, food binds together institutional social structures and the experiences of daily life. Food is important because of how it is prepared and by whom, what it is prepared with, why it is prepared and for whom it is prepared. While historically cooking has been a gendered activity, and surely it retains many gendered notions today, men increasingly participate in food and feeding work. Although the nourishment we receive from a meal may leave our bodies quickly, the lessons and knowledge gained from interaction around food stay with us and continue to impact the quality of our lives. The social processes and cultural motivations that are embedded in food and feeding work indeed help to define food, and may allow us to restructure systems of food production. The food industry is rapidly consolidating, with vertical and horizontal integration in almost every arena, but alternative niches are also proliferating, as evidenced by farmers’ markets, cooperative grocery stores and Community Supported Agriculture
initiatives. Despite the precedent set by the history of capitalism, pockets of revolution are creating real change. By changing the ways we procure, use and think about food, we can in small ways contest the pervasive inequality that surrounds us. Food is one way that we may find the agency within our actions to create the change we wish to see.

_The Importance of Gender Politics and the Citizen Consumer_

This research presents relationships and interactions that often go unseen. Visible in both the construction of gender and the domination of agribusiness, inequality is pervasive in our society. Yet, it is the precise subtlety of how inequality is expressed and perpetuated that disengages the oppositional potential of “alternative” actions. As a result, CSA members participate in an alternative network of production and consumption in conjunction with conventional networks. Indeed, CSA members perceive their participation as an alternative action that is intermingled with various other acts of consumption. While this participation is unlikely to debunk or reinvent the system, the collective action embraced in CSA is exactly the kind of consciousness that may initiate steps leading to a more fair food system.

_Assessing the Gender Politics of Food and Feeding Management_

In _Gender Vertigo_ (1998), Risman’s study of distribution of household labor and its impacts on children’s understanding of gender roles, she calls for us to move toward a dizzying state of our conception of gender, “without gendered selves and interactional expectations to give meaning to our lives” (Risman 1998: 151), thus enabling us to move toward deconstructing gender. Relative to food and feeding work, Risman’s analysis
suggests that women may need to give up the gendered primacy of food skills knowledge in order for men to taking on responsibilities in the kitchen.

Deconstructing gendered notions of the primary food provisioner roles may be already occurring in society as a result of the deskilling of consumers. There has been recent attention to the deskilling of food consumers (Jaffe and Gertler forthcoming). Technological advances in food preparation such as the microwave have also made cooking more accessible to both men and women as little knowledge about the actual process of cooking is necessary (Wajcman 1991). These trends suggest that men, while not traditional recipients of food knowledge and skills passed down from the previous generation, may be able to easily acquire the skills and know-how necessary to actively participate in household food management and perhaps accept their fair share of the division of home labor.

Perhaps a lack of food and feeding management skills may not be hindering men's participation, but rather they are socially restrained from participation in food and feeding work. In this sense, while social constructions of food and feeding labor place greater expectations on women, men are systematically deterred from contributing to food work. Faludi (2000) suggests that indeed men have been constrained by gender inequality, as have women, in that activities are not crossed over. Because men's cooking is not perceived as an acceptable norm, men do not participate in the majority of the food and feeding work, and women remain enslaved to the kitchen.

We still expect men and women to eat different things, and many of us still expect women to do most of the cooking. Of course, a great many women and men truly enjoy cooking meals for their families and experimenting with new recipes. Some couples enjoy cooking together, or exploring their local farmers’ market. And many find cooking, out of all the household chores required to keep a home running, the most pleasurable and fulfilling task. Cookery clearly offers innumerable Americans the opportunity for creative
expression, for demonstrating care and affection, and for sensual, satisfying pleasures (Neuhaus 2001: 267).

Whether feminists protest their social role of primary food provisioners, or embrace it as a form of women's knowledge, attitudes toward and actions surrounding food and feeding management need to change in order to break down the barriers gender reinforces.

The findings in Chapter Four question how and to what extent CSA affects the gender politics of food and feeding work in the household. The CSA members in this study show that an "alternative" way of procuring food does not necessarily create an "alternative" division of food and feeding labor. In some ways, CSA food and feeding management demands easily play into women's role as the primary food provisioner. Yet, as more and more men are participating in food and feeding work, it is significant that men are engaging in CSA as members. The manner in which men stereotypically do food and feeding work corresponds with many of the skills employed by CSA members (regardless of gender) suggesting that CSA food can be an entrée or welcome atmosphere for men, because of the different demands of CSA food. Gender may not always be the primary influence on food and feeding management in households, as children or social living situations often determine food needs and responsibilities. But, in the households of the CSA members in this study, the politics of gender roles in relation to CSA food reveal sites of unexpected shifts in food and feeding management.

Assessing CSA Members as Citizen Consumers

The findings in Chapter Five show that the notion of the reflexive consumer is a valuable lens for viewing CSA members in this study. Still, these CSA members do not act
purely according to particular economic, environmental or social concerns, but rather they juggle caretaker responsibilities, work obligations, and structural elements of food outlets such as location and hours of operation. The recognition of myriad influences on food and feeding management suggests that CSA succeeds because it simultaneously fulfills a variety of members’ needs. Clearly an interest in supporting local foods and eating organic drives consumers to become CSA members, although, members realize that CSA is more than just receiving food once they join. These CSA members show that a community-based connection to the place where one’s food is grown creates an identity of the ‘citizen consumer.’ It is evident that the structure of a CSA operation can influence members’ perceptions of citizenship and the role they play as consumers in the food system.

The question of how CSA affects a local food system is important. On a micro-level, CSA certainly works to support sustainability of farming, the land, and the farmers. It provides members with fresh, highly nutritious, organic foods. And for both of the farms I studied, CSA can serve as a network for local foods, providing members with access to other local food producers such as bakers, cheese makers, poultry, egg and meat producers. On the meso-level, CSA can make an impression on a local food system. CSA food procurement still allows members to associate with multiple food outlets – different grocery stores, restaurants, and farmers’ markets – while being active in CSA. As a result, the member passes knowledge between these sources. For instance, a new CSA member impressed by the quality of organic foods received from the farm over the summer may be inclined to question their grocer about organic or local foods over the winter. This distribution of knowledge about local and organic foods spreads to create an environment of awareness that is critical to supporting a thriving local food system. With the endurance of CSAs such as
City Harvest, the opportunities for social learning over time are influential as farms and membership increase and expand.

**Limitations of the Study**

Despite the significance of this study, there are some limitations that might be considered. The research was conducted in Burlington, Vermont, which may possess peculiarities of consumption, or consciousness that may not be representative of other geographic areas. The location of the University of Vermont, a land-grant university, in Burlington may also influence the character of the Burlington community.

The CSA members I interviewed were relatively homogenous: of one socio-economic group and all Caucasian. Although this selection is representative of the larger CSA member population, members of different racial backgrounds or socio-economic classes could offer still deeper understanding of CSA members’ food and feeding management and notions of citizenship through consumption. In addition, the CSA members I interviewed were in part self-selected by their interest in responding to the flyer. It is possible that I did not fully address issues for members who felt disenchanted by or disengaged from the CSA.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

The study of food and consumption is a rich area for further sociological research. Though the discipline of anthropology has a relatively long history of interest in food, sociological interests that analyze the social structures and the individual’s negotiation of food choices and the politics of food systems are newer. As sociologists turn their interests toward consumption, food is an important area of consideration. CSA shifts how members
think about food, use it, and access it. The concept of the citizen consumer that I have
explored will be insightful in understanding how CSA members and others negotiate
corresponds in the local food system. There is a need to explore frameworks that analyze food
systems with the practical goal of fixing problems.

My specific study aims to expand upon what we already know about CSA members,
yet still there is room for further research and utilization of different methodologies. In
reviewing the literature, I found urban and rural CSA members were often collapsed into a
more generic category of the CSA member. Rural and urban members live in different
environments and types of communities and perhaps, negotiate food management differently.
Further research may explicitly address the differences in rural, urban, and suburban food
consumption particularly with regard to their perceptions of agriculture, connection to the
land, and food knowledge.

Conclusion

This is a story about the conflict between determinant structure and individual agency
through CSA membership. It is also a story about the persistence of social structures such as
gender in food and feeding work, dividing society and disadvantaging women more than
men. At times, CSA food and feeding management reinforces the enduring inequalities in
the division of labor in the household. In order to surpass the gender divide, we must take
into account the gendered character of what we study and our perceptions of what we do on a
daily basis. Being conscious, reflexive consumers through monetary means is important in
creating meso-level change, but being conscious citizens in our own households is the key to
creating change at the micro-level.
In almost every part of the United States, an interest in alternative agriculture and CSA is growing (Henderson 1999). As more Americans become wary of food safety and desire to have a closer connection to the food they eat, the local food movement is flourishing. I believe the movement is at a critical point. Sustainable agriculture has emerged in a context of ecological awareness, alternative farming systems, and economic feasibility, yet grounded social approaches to sustainable agriculture have been at the forefront of few initiatives. CSA necessitates social involvement to be successful; furthermore, research suggests that core groups (an active group of members who guide the farm decisions) are the key to CSA success and viability (Lass, Stevenson, Hendrickson, and Ruhf 2003). My research provides an account of urban members who consider CSA a value and greatly appreciate the connection to the land and opportunities it offers their children, in addition to enjoying the fresh, locally grown organic foods they receive. These members are conscious of their consumption patterns and of their city’s food system to varying degrees. In addition, CSA members’ impact is profound in the support they offer to CSA farmers. “A praxis model takes the perspective of the social actor or the social collectivity and examines the relation between agency and structure. The system acts on the individual and the individual acts on the system, providing both micro- and macro- perspectives on the food system” (Van Esterik 1999: 160). It is my hope that in the future CSAs will turn knowledge about social structures and social inequality into praxis in local food systems.

To debunk or rework conventional industrialized agriculture, we must give ample attention to the social elements of food and feeding management and how these elements affect the multi-level outcomes of our food system. CSA food, as an example of such an outcome, links together producers and consumers. Yet we can ask of CSA, who is included
and excluded in the notion of “community?” Is CSA membership accessible to anyone who wants to eat CSA food? We need to look at the social structures and inequalities that persist in conventional agriculture and examine their presence in alternative agriculture initiatives. Then, we may begin to realize an alternative that truly is better for the community and the environment, in a way that will sustain us all.
APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS GUIDE

CSA EXPERIENCE
What CSA do you belong to? (What farm do you get your food from?)

How did you get involved in the farm? How long have you been a member of the farm?
Have you belonged to other CSAs in the past? Why did you decide to join the farm? What
does being a part of the farm mean to you?

How many other people do you know who are members? What activities have you
participated in at the Intervale?

How often do you receive food from the farm? What foods do you receive? What are your
favorite foods to receive? Why?

How do you most often get the other food you eat? (personal garden, from neighbors, Mom
n’ Pop grocery store, farmer’s market, natural foods store, co-op grocery store, supermarket,
restaurants- fast food or sit-down, etc.)

About how many meals do you eat at home each week? How often do you prepare food at
home?

FOOD PREPARATION & CONSUMPTION
*part one*
Tell me about a specific meal you made recently with the food from the farm. Could you
walk me through the process and the experience of making the meal?

How did you decide to make that meal? How long did it take you to make that meal? How
did you feel about preparing that meal?

What else was going on while you were preparing the meal? (music, television, others’
activities, etc.)

What did you particularly like about that meal? Was there anything you didn’t like so much?

Can you describe who was present at that recent meal? What were people saying and doing
while they ate? How did you feel when you were eating the meal? How would you describe
the “mood” of that meal?

*part two*
In general, who usually cooks meals in your home? Who else helps to prepare meals?

How did you learn how to cook?

How do you decide what foods (other than farm foods) to purchase?
How do you feel about the cost of the share? What is the value of the share to you? Is it a good value? What are you paying for? Would you be willing to pay more?

Do you talk about food with others? Who?

Do your family or friends have similar tastes or eating preferences as you? What are they?

What types of kitchen tools or appliances are used to prepare food in your home? How did you acquire your kitchen tools or appliances?

How often do you use recipes when you cook? How do you decide what recipes to use?

**SITUATIONAL CHANGES IN FOOD PREPARATION & CONSUMPTION PATTERNS**
I want to ask you about your eating patterns throughout the year. How do the foods you eat differ across the seasons? How do you feel about those patterns?

Has your involvement in the farm changed the way you prepare food? How so? Has it changed where or what foods you get elsewhere (not from the farm)?

**FOOD USE & WASTE**
How do you feel about the quantities you receive from the farm? Have the quantities that you receive from the farm been enough?

How much of the food that you receive from the farm is wasted? How much of the food you get from other places is wasted?

Do you ever prepare food that is not entirely eaten during the meal? What happens to the food that is not eaten at the meal? How do you feel about that?

**BACKGROUND**
Where did you grow up? Was it in a rural, suburban or urban setting? (If rural, on a farm or not on a farm?)

How long have you lived in the Burlington area?

Do you have a significant other who lives with you?

How many children under the age of 18 have lived with you in the past year?

How old were you on your last birthday?

What is your educational background? What is your occupation?
APPENDIX B. FIRST LETTER TO FARMERS

May 13, 2003

Dear [Farmer 1 and Farmer 2],

Greetings from Iowa! We will be conducting research about the Burlington food system this season and we will need your help in order to do it! In this letter, we simply want to introduce our project and ourselves. We will be contacting you soon with greater details about how you can help us.

Both of us are Master’s students at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. Leah is a Rural Sociology student from Wilmette, Illinois. Emily, an Iowa native, is studying Sustainable Agriculture. Emily was an intern at the Intervale Community Farm in 2000. The research that we will be conducting in Burlington is for our Master’s theses. Although we will write separate theses, we are approaching the work collaboratively.

We will be visiting Burlington in August to conduct the bulk of our research. Leah will spend most of her time conducting in-depth interviews with CSA and farmers market customers. She is interested in learning about how people use Intervale food in their homes. Emily will be gathering demographic data about people who eat Intervale foods. She is also interested in quantifying how much food comes out of the Intervale and tracing where it goes.

We hope this research can benefit you as farmers. We would like to incorporate specific questions that you may have, particularly in regard to who buys your products and what they do with them. If you have a question or an idea, please write it down on the enclosed postcard and send it to us.

While we are aware that not all Intervale farmers run food-producing operations, we wanted to introduce ourselves and let you know that we will be around Burlington and the Intervale during the month of August. You may be hearing from us again soon. If you have any concerns, call Emily at 515-233-6022.

Sincerely,

Emily Neuman          Leah Sokolofski
CALLING ALL INTERVALE FOOD EATERS!

Hi! My name is Leah Sokolofski and I am a graduate student studying Rural Sociology at Iowa State University. I am doing research on WHAT HAPPENS TO INTERVALE FOOD AFTER IT LEAVES THE INTERVALE? Specifically, I am interested in how you (the consumer) make your food choices, prepare food, and with whom you share the food you receive from the Intervale.

I will be in Burlington during the month of August and am looking for people willing to participate in a short interview about their Intervale food experience. If you are interested, please write your name, phone number and mailing address below. (This information will remain confidential and will not put you on any unwanted phone or mailing lists.) I will contact you at the end of July to set up a convenient time to do the interview. Thanks for your help!

NAME: ________________________________

PHONE NUMBER: (_____) __________________

ADDRESS: ____________________________________________
APPENDIX D. SECOND LETTER TO FARMERS

June 10, 2003

Dear [CSA Farm Manager],

Thank you for your willingness to help with my research project. I have enclosed seventy-five fliers to be distributed to [Community Supported Agriculture Farm] CSA members. The fliers include a brief overview of my research interests and what I am interested in learning. They are designed so that a member interested in being interviewed can fill out the requested information, fold and seal the flier, and return it to me via postal mail. Using the information provided on the flier, I will contact individuals to set up an interview later in the summer.

You can place them in members' shares anytime during the month of June or during the first two weeks of July. There may not be enough fliers for each member to receive one, so please distribute them however works best for you. I have also enclosed a box in which to display fliers at a pick-up site, if that is easiest.

If there are other members who do not receive a flier and are interested in being interviewed, they may contact me by email at Leahks@iastate.edu or by phone at 515-451-9424. Also, if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Thanks again,

Leah Sokolofski
BIBLIOGRAPHY


