Native food systems organizations: strengthening sovereignty and (re)building community

Breann Ashlie Leann Bye

Iowa State University

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Native food systems organizations: strengthening sovereignty and (re)building community

by

Breann Ashlie Leann Bye

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degrees of
MASTER OF COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING
MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

Co-majors: Community and Regional Planning; Architecture

Program of Study Committee:
Tara L. Clapp, Co-major Professor
Clare Cardinal Pett, Co-major Professor
Marwan Ghandour, Co-major Professor
Lynn Paxson
Heidi Hohman

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa

2009

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Preface

Hurricane Katrina changed my life. On the morning of Monday, August 29, 2005 as I was busily preparing for my second week of my second year of graduate school, Hurricane Katrina barreled ashore in southeastern Louisiana. Like many across the country, I was paralyzed by the news reports coming out of New Orleans. In love with the city since childhood, I was immediately concerned about its residents and urban infrastructure. Consequently, when an interdisciplinary collection of students and faculty from various departments from Iowa State’s College of Design coalesced to form a preliminary group dedicated to somehow assisting the region, I knew I wanted to participate. That spring, an option studio was offered and I was among nine students who enrolled. Four faculty members from Architecture and Landscape Architecture guided the group, and our initial task was to study the region’s unique culture and environmental history. One of the faculty members had heard a plea for help from the Principal Chief of a Native American tribe, The United Houma Nation, the majority of whose 18,000 members live throughout the bayou region southeast of New Orleans. While New Orleans captured most of the nation’s media attention, the tribe was struggling to provide vital services for its many members as well as assisting smaller Native Nations in the area.

We quickly learned that Hurricane Katrina and Rita were not merely environmental disasters, but rather were human disasters caused by those struggling to control the region’s rich resources through a long history of environmental degradation and attempted domination. In an effort to control
flooding, levees were built along the Mississippi River. Wetland areas were drained to provide land for urban development and channels cut for navigation and oil and gas pipelines. Without an influx of fresh silt from periodic flooding, the wetlands are not replenished and slowly subside, or sink. Salt water incursion from the Gulf of Mexico further exacerbates the problem as the wetland grasses die, leaving their soil to erode. Without this protective buffer of wetlands, inland communities are exposed to a hurricane’s full force.

Louisiana is experiencing the most significant loss of coastal land in the country (Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Task Force and the Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Authority 1998). Between 1932 and 2000, 1,900 square miles of land were lost to the Gulf of Mexico, and the state could lose an additional 700 square miles by 2050 if the process of wetland erosion is not stopped (Tibbetts 2006). This land loss threatens the safety of New Orleans, disrupts vital marine nursery areas, exposes oil and gas facilities to further damage, and endangers the gulf’s fishing industry. While these remain important considerations, the survival of the United Houma Nation is also at stake. Their oldest communities lie along the bayous that lace through the wetlands, where they settled after being displaced from their inland agricultural lands by European contact and settlement. In these lowlands they transformed themselves from an agriculturally-based culture to a fishing and water-based culture. So as the wetlands disappear, so too do their communities. As the most dramatic example, Isle de Jean Charles, once a vibrant island tribal community,
is now practically a ghost town, with but a few tenacious residents clinging to the landscape in battered elevated homes.

While the tribe works to lobby for the protection of its bayou communities, its leaders also recognize the need to actively plan for the future. They envision a new tribal community on higher, more protected, ground north of the levee system. Working to identify and purchase a tract of land of approximately one hundred acres, tribal leaders hope to create a community that will serve as a cultural center for their many members. While this new community will likely provide living space for the tribal members most dramatically affected by coastal erosion, tribal leaders also seek to create a place where all tribal members can come together, participating in community events and benefiting from community services.

As tribal leaders articulated their vision to Iowa State faculty, the primary project for the semester began to take shape. An initial group traveled to Louisiana to meet with tribal representatives at the beginning of the semester, and by spring break the entire studio was energized and excited about the prospect of generating hypothetical community designs. Faculty and students spent spring break in Louisiana, volunteering on rebuilding projects and learning about the tribe’s culture and history. Our feet slowly sinking into the spongy soil on Isle de Jean Charles, we witnessed firsthand the devastating effects of coastal erosion. One tribal member took us to the remnants of his boyhood home and related memories of once running through the grasses behind his house, where water is now quickly encroaching. Fortuitously, the annual pow wow
coincided with our stay, and tribal representatives dedicated space under their
tent for our table, where we visited with tribal members and surveyed them about
their interest in, and ideas for, a new community. The response was
overwhelmingly positive, with tribal members excited by the prospect of a
gathering place for their people, though not everyone was interested in
personally moving to the proposed community. By the end of the trip, through
conversations with tribal leaders and community members, faculty and students
created a community design “wish list” which included mixed housing, pow wow
grounds, bayou access, school, health clinic, elder care facility, church,
community gardens, seafood co-op, farmers’ market space, and small
businesses.

Using these components as a generative framework, the studio also
identified three likely property types the tribe would encounter in their search: a
parcel with access to a navigable bayou, one with access to a non-navigable
bayou, and one without any water access. The studio’s nine student members
divided themselves into three groups and spent the rest of the term creating
visualizations for these property types. United Houma Nation Vice-Principal Chief
Michael Dardar flew to Iowa at the end of the semester and reviewed the
designs.

The following fall, as part of my graduate assistantship I traveled to
Louisiana several times to present the studio’s work to community members and
gather feedback. In the spring of 2007, one year after the initial studio, two
additional studios concentrated on creating environmentally and culturally
responsive housing prototypes and designing the cultural/community buildings. That semester, as part of a GIS course I examined the erosion of tribal communities through an overlay of census tracts with recorded erosion. Additionally, I sought to identify parcels of land that corresponded with tribal locational preferences. That summer I coordinated a community design workshop at the tribe’s annual youth summer camp whereby participants were able to create their own plans for what their new community might look like.

Although two years of working with the tribe produced a rich collection of community design proposals, these visions will remain hypothetical until the tribe is able to identify and purchase an appropriate property. Without a physical site from which to work, the tribe and ISU Design College students stand to gain little more from continued theoretical exercises. The United Houma Nation is appropriately moving forward, forming relationships with nonprofit agencies who can work with them as they move toward their goal. In the future, it may likely benefit the tribe to once again collaborate with ISU’s College of Design or another university’s design program.

I have been personally enriched by my relationship with the tribe, and as I contemplated my thesis research, I sought to select a topic of inquiry that would be useful to the tribe as they move forward. With familial roots in Iowa agriculture and after a semester spent working with professors researching the potential spatial implications of community food systems in Iowa, I realized that my interest in food systems overlapped with many of the concerns voiced by United Houma Nation tribal members. During our initial research at the tribe’s pow wow, when
asked what kinds of services their ideal community would have, tribal members frequently requested components of a food system, or features which involve health and community well-being. The third most requested item after a church (21 requests) and a tribal school (20 requests) was a grocery store (19 requests). Ten people asked for a health clinic, while a community/recreational center, stickball field, restaurants, gardens, farmers’ market space, fishing pond, and seafood market/processing plant were each requested by several people. In addition, tribal members consistently voiced interest in tribal/community owned businesses, with a focus on those which would support and strengthen their culture.

While I originally considered researching the Houma food system, it soon became apparent that the tribe would initially better benefit from research that explored existing attempts to strengthen Native food systems. Collecting stories of successes and struggles would provide a framework from which the tribe could begin to think about their own food system initiatives. Additionally, I soon realized that to date there has been no coordinated attempt to comparatively examine Native Food Systems initiatives and organizations. While many of the organizations with whom I eventually spoke have been featured in newspaper or internet articles, they haven’t been examined collectively as part of a larger Native Food System movement.

I offer this account as an explanation of how I, a white woman from Iowa, came to research the Native Food Movement. It is with respect for the organizations I’ve studied and the communities they represent that I conduct
such work. Inevitably, my personal subjectivity informs how I’ve approached and understood the topic and perhaps appropriately impacted the amount of access I was able to gain. I encourage the reader to question me at every step.
Chapter One: Overview

Introduction

Eating is an intensely personal, yet inherently political, act. Food not only nourishes the body, its production and consumption shape and sustain social processes and relations and the impact the environment. For millennia, the production, consumption, and celebration of food has anchored people to specific places. In an increasing globalized world, food has emerged as a site of contention around and through which people enact political subjectivities. In the context of an industrialized and commodified food system, the act of growing one’s own food, whether individually or communally, becomes an act of resistance.

As a subject of research and debate, food seems to be on everyone’s lips. Patricia Allen (2008: 157) contends, “never before has there been so much popular interest in food in America – food as culture, food as economics, food as politics.” Within the academy and through nonprofits and private research centers, a bountiful banquet of research is being served and consumed – from analyses of the geographies of food (Winter 2003, 2004, 2005, Watts et al. 2005, Niles and Roff 2008) and social reproduction (Breitback 2007), attempts to define the attributes of an alternative food system (Kloppenburg et al. 2000), considerations of access (Anderson 2007), food justice/democracy (Hassanein 2003, Constance 2008), and economic development (Campbell 1997), to critical reflections on the benefits and drawbacks of intensified localism (Kloppenburg et

The food system is defined as “the chain of activities connecting food production, processing, distribution and access, consumption, and waste management, as well as the associated supporting and regulatory institutions and activities” (American Planning Association 2005).

Presently, food flows into and within communities through four primary routes: the dominant, market-driven system; the charitable food assistance system; the federal food safety net; and community food systems (Pothukuchi 2004). Common examples of community food projects include the following:

**Community Supported Agriculture (CSA):** A CSA is a system that connects consumers and growers in a mutually beneficial relationship. Consumers purchase a share in a growers’ harvest at the beginning of each season and then share in the risks and bounties of farming. Growers then provide a weekly harvest that is distributed to the CSAs shareholders.

**Farmers’ Markets:** Farmers’ markets provide consumers a local place to gather, meet farmers and to purchase a variety of fresh produce and food products.

**Community Gardens:** Community gardens are places where neighbors gather to grow food and plants together. Such gardens provide fresh produce, urban greening and an opportunity for neighbors to get to know each other and improve their community.

**Farm to Cafeteria Initiatives:** Farm to Cafeteria programs are becoming increasingly popular among schools, colleges and other institutions. They focus on creating direct links between growers and institutions in order to increase the amount of fresh, locally or regionally grown products used in the cafeterias, and to provide a reliable source of income to family farms.

**Community Food Assessments:** A Community Food Assessment is a participatory and collaborative process that examines a broad range of food-related issues and resources in order to inform actions to improve the community’s food system. Through such assessments, a diverse group of
stakeholders work together to research their local food system, to strategically communicate their findings, and to implement change based on their findings.

**Food Policy Councils and Related Initiatives:** A food policy council is a group of stakeholders who advise a city, county or state government on policies related to agriculture, food distribution, hunger and nutrition. They perform a variety of tasks, from researching food production and access issues, to designing and implementing projects and policies to address those issues.

**Community Economic Development:** Community economic development initiatives include projects that give people the opportunity to start or enhance food-related small businesses and cottage industries, as well as efforts to bring supermarkets to underserved areas.

**Youth Programs:** The principles of community food security support an appreciation for individual gifts and talents. This is especially true with youth, whose contributions and capabilities are often overlooked. Community food security programs of various types often include a youth aspect to their programs.

(Community Food Security Coalition A)

For Native peoples, resistance against the dominant food system can serve as an act of decolonization (Mihesuah 2003). For the last two hundred years, federal policy towards Native peoples has reduced their control of land, disrupted traditional agricultural practices, and altered diets (Bell-Sheeter 2004). By the late 1990s, nearly one-fourth of Native households were food insecure, meaning that they did not have enough food to meet their basic needs. One out of every twelve experienced food insecurity coupled with hunger (Henchy, et. al., 2002). Diabetes is reaching epidemic proportions in Native communities. While an estimated 6.2 percent of the U.S. population has diabetes, 30 percent of Native Americans are affected by the disease and are 25 percent more likely to develop diabetes than non-Natives (Mihesuah 2003).
While diabetes, obesity and related illnesses threaten the physical health of Native communities, the disruption of Native food systems also damage cultural and spiritual traditions which serve as the foundation for community identity. Revived agricultural practices provide a context for material culture and are often embedded in a deeper understanding of local ecology than those practices which were adopted during periods of forced assimilation (Bell-Sheeter 2004). Practicing a community-based agriculture is a vital component of exercising true sovereignty, and allows for tribal culture to evolve and change (while contextualized within) traditional practices. In addition, locally produced and purchased food can enhance tribal economic development efforts, creating jobs and ensuring that economic assets remain within the community. Ideally, the sense of community and identity among tribal members is strengthened as participants learn about and live their culture and work to advance a common goal (Bell-Sheeter 2004).

Efforts to (re)build Native food systems must be embedded within a broader discourse on Native sovereignty. Native nations are attempting to redefine sovereignty on their own terms and in contrast to conceptualizations of sovereignty which have historically been defined by Western political thought. Increasingly, the focus is directed to cultural sovereignty. Cultural sovereignty “seeks to provide a different context for political sovereignty, one rooted in autonomy of Native people as distinct cultural groups” (Coffey and Tsosie 2001: 13). Linking food and sovereignty through the revitalization of cultural practices represents an attempt to differentiate Native nations and distinguish their cultures.
from non-Native cultures within the United States. Food becomes a tool for this differentiation – of identity, of place, of practices. As a process of (re)connecting Native identity with food identity, these efforts help construct a framework for exerting sovereignty based in Native ceremonies and traditions. Coffey and Tsosio (2001) contend that the process of building community is essential to the exercise of true sovereignty. Though food system initiatives draw from traditional cultural practices, as community building exercises they also provide the foundation for a dynamic, living culture embracing change and innovation.

Sovereignty is rooted in the past but exercised in the present as efforts to affect change and direct cultural development. The ways in which Native Food Systems organizations negotiate tradition and change remains understudied, and while this research begins to reveal a tension between the two, additional research is critical. The notion of sovereignty is the contemporary context is problematic, particularly as individuals are able to construct fluid identities and cultural practices become transmuted. Though more research is needed linking the contestation of Native sovereignty with food practices and food identity (re)creation, at this juncture it is clear that food is being galvanized as a tool for redefining Native sovereignty. Legal definitions of sovereignty and Native nations’ identities as “domestic dependent nations” are obviously important, but asserting cultural sovereignty through food and agricultural practices creates a sovereignty that is rooted within and from Native communities and subjectivities.
Research Questions

This research represents an initial attempt to understand and comparatively examine Native Food Systems organizations and initiatives in the United States. The following questions guide this inquiry:

- How and why do Native Food Systems organizations initially organize? How are they structured? What are key moments of transition for these organizations? How do NFS organizations make decisions and orchestrate changes in their programming? How do they receive feedback from their communities?
- How are NFS organizations structured financially? How do they sustain themselves?
- How important is the concept of “food sovereignty” to these organizations? How do they define it and how do they work to achieve it?
- Does the work carried out by these organizations help (re)build a stronger sense of community among their participants and within their respective tribes? Is community identity and culture also strengthened? If so, how do Native community food systems work to achieve such results?
- How do NFS organizations define success for themselves? What are constraints to achieving that success?
- What advice do NFS organizations have to give other tribes and tribal activists hoping to strengthen their own food systems and food sovereignty?
Three key bodies of literature inform this inquiry: food sovereignty, civic agriculture, and food systems planning. The aforementioned research questions will help determine if the organizations' work can be considered examples of food sovereignty and civic agriculture, and if the organizations are fulfilling a “planning” function within their communities.

**Importance and Limitations**

Research into community food systems initiatives, both Native and non-Native is needed. Campbell (2004) specifically calls for case studies to be conducted, and notes that planning faculty and students can play an important role in helping community food systems collaboratives or grassroots nonprofits document their efforts. She notes that this research can help these organizations attract private foundation and governmental support, as well as support organizational leaders who may feel mired in the day-to-day frustrations and politics of their work, thereby potentially losing sight of how their work contributes to a larger effort to strengthen community food systems. Feensrtra (2002) argues that a valuable tool for conducting such research is the open-ended interview.

With its focus on Native Food System initiatives, the research is also timely and relevant because information about organizations working within the Native Food Movement is limited. Though their focus has now shifted from Native Agriculture to Youth, The First Nations Development Institute (FDNI), once a key funding source for NFS initiatives, is the primary source for this limited information. The organization makes several useful publications accessible from their website, including a brief seven-page overview of six Native Food Systems
initiatives (FDNI A). Several other publications related to Food Sovereignty, including a Food Sovereignty Assessment Tool, are also available on the website (Bell-Sheeter 2004). While the FNDI has conducted internal surveying of their Native Agriculture and Food Systems Initiative (NAFSI) grant recipients, this information is unavailable for public consumption. While additional resources exist for establishing community food systems initiatives (Biehler et al. A, Garrett and Feenstra 1999, Abi-Nader et al. 2009, see http://www.foodsecurity.org/pubs.html#wm for additional useful publications), and while many of the challenges may be similar for non-Native organizations, there is a lack of Native perspective on such work.

This research is not without its limitations, primarily due to scope and financial and temporal research restraints. These are voices from a set of selected organizations working within the Native Food Movement. As such, they provide perspectives on the rewards and challenges of such work but are not an exhaustive study. First, not all identified Native Food Systems initiatives were investigated. Initiatives which had formally organized into a nonprofit; were already part of a tribal nonprofit; or were a consortium within a tribe, thereby receiving tribal funding, were prioritized. In addition, initiatives with websites or an internet presence were preferred as this suggested their interest in sharing their work with others. There is a diversity of rich and valuable work being done in the Native Food Movement, including efforts by the Tesuque Pueblo, the Native Hawaiian Farmers, and many others, and this research is not meant to minimize the importance of their work through exclusion, but rather seeks to support that
work by bringing together various perspectives on Native Food Systems initiatives. Next, these case studies do not include all the perspectives of those involved in a particular organization. Most interviews were conducted with organizers or directors of the organizations, though a few were with staff. As such, together they constitute an initial glimpse into the Native Food Movement from the perspectives of organizations’ leaders. Another valuable study might look exclusively at one organization, with all staff members interviewed. In addition, community members’ perspectives are not present in this study. Another line of research might collect their views on Native Food Systems initiatives. Finally, while there may be differences and similarities between Native and non-Native organizations doing work on food systems issues, this research does not attempt to explore this question.

Methods

Theoretical and conceptual themes emerging from community food systems research remain limited. To best identify such themes, this research utilizes eleven open-ended semi-structured interviews with representatives from five Native Food Systems organizations. Participants were each asked the same set of questions, with follow-up questions asked on an as-needed basis. This flexible interview format allowed each participant to highlight their own unique concerns, but ensured that responses to specific questions could be compared. While similarities that appeared help identify areas for future inquiry, differences in responses are revelatory as well.
The following representatives were interviewed for this study, with the date of their interview noted after their name:

**Oneida Community Integrated Food Systems**
Bill VerVoort, Director | 4.8.2009
Frieda Clary, Grants Office | 5.19.2009
Jeff Metoxen, *tsyunhehkwa* | 2.4.2009
Don Miller, Food Distribution | 1.30.2009
Gary Smith, Pantry | 1.20.2009

**Tohono O’odham Community Action**
Terrol Johnson, Co-Director | 1.30.2009
Tristan Reader, Co-Director | 4.8.2009

**Taos County Economic Development Corporation**
Terri Bad Hand, Co-Director | 5.14.2009
Pati Martinson, Co-Director | 5.14.2009

**Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative**
Ben Yahola, Co-Director | 4.21.2009
Vicky Karhu, Co-Director | 5.20.2009

**White Earth Land Recovery Project**
Kyra Busch, Farm to School Coordinator | 5.16.2009

**Balance of Paper**

Chapter One presents an overview of the research. A review of literature is the focus of Chapter Two. Topic areas covered include food sovereignty, civic agriculture, and food systems planning. The methodology utilized in this research is reviewed in Chapter Three. Chapter Four provides profiles of the Native Food Systems organizations studied in this research. They include the Oneida Community Integrated Food Systems, Tohono O’odham Community Action, White Earth Land Recovery Project, Taos County Economic Development Corporation and the Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative. An examination of the results of interviews conducted with NFS organizers is the focus of Chapter Five.
Chapter Six concludes with a summary of key themes and a discussion of the findings. Several recommendations for enhancing the work of NFS organizations are outlined. It also suggests areas for future research.
Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Introduction

Multiple literatures can inform a study of Native Food Systems organizations, but the most relevant to this research are the literatures of food sovereignty, civic agriculture, and food systems planning. Food sovereignty activists suggest that food systems and their socially (re)productive capacity are key elements of political and cultural sovereignty. Civic agriculture authors call for an integration of community and civic culture into food systems, and finally, food systems planning literature advocates deliberative planning of food systems. The literature in each of these fields is nascent, though burgeoning. Each has seen key texts materialize within the past ten to fifteen years. Thus, while a thematic approach to the review of literature has merit in many situations, a chronological approach outlining major contributions and the development of key themes seems most appropriate due to the recent emergence of these relatively small bodies of literature.

Food Sovereignty

Food sovereignty is a policy framework which offers an alternative to neoliberal agriculture and rural development. It imagines a different vision of what is possible on the land, in contradiction to what is being done to the land and reasserts the centrality of agriculture in a post-capitalist modernity (McMichael 2008). Though the definition of food sovereignty has evolved since its initial articulation in 1996, it can be understood as
the right of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies (NGO/CSO Forum for Food Sovereignty A).

The concept of food sovereignty has been developed in contrast to “food security”, which does not include or emphasize the right to produce food and has been taken up by multinational agricultural companies as a means to continue neoliberal practices of import dependency and agricultural imports (Suppan 2008). In addition, food sovereignty asserts the centrality of food production, distribution, consumption and celebration of food as fundamental components of cultural and social reproduction (Desmarais 2008). It constitutes an epistemological shift from a focus on production to a focus on social reproduction (McMichael 2008). It is “hostile to import and technological dependency precisely because that system condemns peasant agriculture to extinction” (Suppan 2008:113). Rather than rejecting modernity, food sovereignty demands an alternative modernity in which local knowledge is protected and local farmers/peasants use this knowledge to choose the appropriate technologies to develop and maintain indigenous crop and livestock varieties (Desmarais 2002, Suppan 2008).

Under a global Food Sovereignty regime, the World Trade Organization would no longer control agricultural policies, and multinational organizations and limited liability corporations would be banned from agriculture and related
industries (Menser 2008). Rather, ownership must be local as well as
democratized:

Food policy is to be determined by agricultural communities
in conjunction with the nutritional, ecological, and cultural
needs of other communities within each state. First off, what
is produced and how much is produced are determined by
social need – not global market price – while factoring into
account the capabilities and limits afforded by local
knowledges, the labor pool, and ecological conditions.
Agricultural products may be exported, but only after local
needs are met (Menser 2008:32).

Food sovereignty was first articulated as a concept in 1996 at the World
Food Summit in Rome. Two years previously, with completion of the Uruguay
Round, farm production was brought under the multinational trade negotiations of
the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs and later the World Trade
Organization. Globalizing the world’s food trade had three primary components:
easier market access through imports; less domestic support for agriculture, and
export subsidies (Menezes 2001). As food trade was in the processing of
deepening globalization, agrarian organizations and their leaders were preparing
to put forth an alternative vision. These organizations initially convened in April
1992 at the second congress of the Union Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos
(UNAG) in Managua, Nicaragua. The next year, forty-six farm leaders came
together in Mons, Belgium and established La Via Campesina and began
formulating the concept of food sovereignty (Desmarais 2002).

Currently, La Via Campesina (LVC) is a global movement that brings
together organizations of peasants, small and medium-scale farmers, rural
women, farm workers and indigenous agrarian communities (Desmarais 2002). It
is comprised of eight regions: Africa, North America, South America, South East and East Asia, South Asia, Central America, Cuba + the Caribbean, and Europe. As a geographically and culturally diverse organization, LVC strives to be as democratic and participatory as possible. To this end, each region has assemblies where members convene to discuss issues within their organizations and region and to strategize collectively. Each region then selects delegates that meet every three to four years at the International Conference. At this conference, two representatives from each region, one man and one woman, are chosen to sit on the International Coordinating Commission (Menser 2008). Over 145 organizations from sixty-nine countries are members of La Via Campesina, representing millions of farm workers and rural peoples worldwide, making La Via Campesina the largest umbrella organization working at a global scale to protect peasants’ right to productivity. La Via Campesia is comprised of national-level organizations, the majority of which existed at the local and/or provincial level and converged into national organizations as agricultural and rural policies nationalized (Desmarais 2002). La Via Campesina directs actions at all levels - local, national, regional and international and utilizes “three traditional weapons of the weak – organization, cooperation, and community” (Desmarais 2002).

Beginning with her 2003 doctoral dissertation, *The Via Campesina: peasants resisting globalization*, Annette Aurelie Desmarais has studied La Via Campesina for over ten years. Initially a technical specialist for the organization, she offers a first-hand account of its development and evolution. Her work reveals that one of the most important strategies through which LVC works is the
(re)building of peasant subjectivity as a revalorized collective identity. Despite the fact that both Neoclassical economic theory and traditional Marxism have relegated the peasantry to extinction, “peasants are stubbornly refusing to go away” (McMichael 2008, Desmarais 2008: 136). This re-peasanzation is occurring as rural people embrace the term “peasant” and its various iterations: paysan, paysanne, capesino, campesina, small farmer, agricultor, agricultora, productor, productora, rural worker or indigenous peasant (Desmarais 2008:140). Once pejorative, identifying as a peasant is an act of political resistance in response to capitalists and national and development planners who wish for their disappearance. As a politicized identity,

It reflects people who share a deep commitment to place, people deeply attached to particular piece of land, people who are a part of a particular rural community, people whose mode of existence is under threat. This place-bound identity, that of ‘people of the land,’ reflects the belief that they have the right to be on the land. They have the right and obligation to produce food. They have the right to be seen as fulfilling an important function in society at large. They have the right to live in viable communities and the obligation to build community. All of the above form essential parts of their distinct identity as peasants; in today’s politicized globalization articulating identity across borders based on locality and tradition is a deeply political act”(Desmarais 2008:140).

Philip McMichael argues that this constitutes a “unity of diversity” politics, and cautions that the transformation of subjectivities is not given, but rather is locally textured and varies by spatio-economic and cultural history (McMichael 2008:222). Reflexive subjects must understand their own struggles in relation to global struggles. He explains,
While micro-politics are the substance of the movement, macro-politics constitute the social and world-historical frame through which to situate, and develop, new subjectivities. By the same token, macro-politics are filtered through particular, or localized, experiences (McMichael 2008:223).

Considering La Via Campesina’s work and the articulation of food sovereignty in relation to the history of capital and accumulation, McMichael offers a contextualized understanding of the theoretical foundations of food sovereignty. The strength of McMichael’s thesis lies in his ability to describe these efforts as unveiling a “politics of circulation”. For McMichael, the food sovereignty movement reveals the capital/state nexus as a global force for generating a labor reserve of dispossessed peasants required for corporate development and capital accumulation (McMichael 2008: 212). “Cycles of dispossession” through trade in food surpluses remove peasants from the land, which in turn make them available as “swelling ranks of casual labor” for the world labor market. He contends that the global accumulation of capital as presently configured relies on these cycles of dispossession. The power of La Via Campesina rests in its ability to combine a politics of production with a politics of circulation. As food moves around the world, so too are people forced to increasingly circulate. While existing teleological assumptions consider class and accumulation from a productivist understanding of capital, LVC reveals capital as a relation of both production and circulation. For LVC, “accumulation is not simply about the concentration and centralization of the power of capital, but also is about dispossessing alternative practices and foreclosing options for alternative futures.” He continues, suggesting that the ontology of capitalist
modernity “rules out a place for peasants, physically expelling them from the 
land, and epistemologically removing them from history” (McMichael 2008: 213).

He contends that this is an ongoing violence against extant forms of social 
reproduction. La Via Campesina demands the right to produce society through 
the re-territorialization of states through the revitalization of local food ecologies. 
Food sovereignty seeks to reverse cycles of dispossession and reclaim the right 
to farm as an act of social and ecological reproduction. Rather than merely 
existing as a commodified input in globalized trade, food “embodies social, 
cultural and ecological values over and above its material value” (McMichael 
2003: 218).

Menser (2008) identifies several conceptual challenges which food 
sovereignty faces as an organizing framework for action. First, proponents have 
failed to identify or define the sovereign unit responsible for creating agriculture 
policy. While “local community” is often the initial response, La Via Campesina 
also utilizes the terms “nation” or “state” in their discourse. In addition, current 
food sovereignty proposals ignore the possibility of conflicts among communities 
or between communities and the state. Next, the role urban/nonagricultural areas 
play beyond the role of consumer remains unclear. Finally, LVC suggests no 
course of action for dealing with communities that only implement part of the 
program and fails to reveal how maximal democratic practices are best 
determined and instituted.

While Native Food Systems organizations in the United States have long 
been practicing and championing the concept of food sovereignty before it had a
name, many now formally recognize it as a defining principal of their work and seek to express their own definition. In February of 2008, a Principals of Food Sovereignty Forum was held in Taos, New Mexico (Tohono O’odham Community Action 2008). Participants officially endorsed the Declaration of Nyéléni adopted at the Forum for Food Sovereignty in Sélingué, Mali, 27 February 2007 by approximately 500 delegates from more than 80 countries. The declaration states:

*Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers. Food sovereignty prioritizes local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just income to all peoples and the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage our lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations.*

In addition, the group drafted the following principles to further elaborate their conceptualization of food sovereignty:
• **Native Food Sovereignty is a means to protect our peoples and communities and to provide a foundation from with to build and/or rebuild** - Native Food Sovereignty is a means to protect our peoples and communities, not to further someone else’s agenda.

• **Native Foods for Native Peoples First** – Native foods support Native health, culture, values, communities, language and families. They should first be used to feed and support Native peoples with surpluses made available to a larger community.

• **Native peoples need to be the ones to define a “Native Foods Movement” and “Native Food Sovereignty”** – The principles, goals, needs, priorities and strategies of Native Food Sovereignty need to be defined by Native peoples for Native communities.

• **Native Food Sovereignty is essential to tribal sovereignty** – Tribal communities cannot assert broader sovereignty without also addressing sovereignty in the production, processing, distribution, nutrition and consumption of food.

• **Native Foods are more than commodities and must be valued for all of their qualities** – Native foods must not be defined “monetarily” and commodified. Native foods are essential to cultural revitalization, health and wellness, language, spirituality, community, family, the environment and all aspects of life.

• **Native Food Sovereignty addresses food systems not just food production** – Production, processing, distribution, nutrition, cultural expressions, cooking and eating are all essential aspects of Native food systems.

• **Work between Native communities and non-Native organizations and individuals requires true collaboration based upon honesty, equality and engagement** – Non-native organizations must develop projects with Native communities, not for Native communities. Native people need to be actively engaged in determining the what and how of projects from the very start, not brought into projects whose priority and design was determined outside of Native communities. The non-Native food movement’s gatherings and events should begin with recognition and thanks to indigenous peoples for the keeping of plants, foods, medicines, diversity and seeds that feed and contribute to wellness world-wide.

• **Native communities have the responsibility to maintain, protect and revitalize cultural resources, including our ecosystems, seeds, water and foods** – We must plan for future generations in a changing world
while drawing upon and respecting the wisdom passed on to us from previous generations.

(Tohono O’odham Community Action 2008)

At this juncture it is also critical to note the impact traditional Native foods and agricultural practices have had on global food culture. In Indian Givers, Weatherford (1988) explores the revolution in food and cuisine prompted by contact with American Indians. Through case studies of the tomato, spices, pecans, avocado, peppers, zucchini and other Native foods, Weatherford (1988: 115) concludes that, “despite all the plant improvements brought about by modern science, the American Indians remain the developers of the world’s largest array of nutritious food and the primary contributors to the world’s varied cuisines”. Most importantly, he also contends that the impact of Native food and culinary influence is not relegated to the distant past. Native peoples and food continue to shape and influence non-Native food culture, and their (agri)cultural practices and food knowledge have much to offer the global community.

Civic Agriculture

While the literature on food sovereignty emphasizes the right to production and the right to land and focuses on changing subjectivity, civic agriculture calls for an integration of community and civic culture with agriculture. “Civic Agriculture” is a term originally coined by Cornell University Professor of Sociology Thomas A. Lyson ten years ago at the Rural Sociology Society Annual Meeting. While its meaning continues to evolve, Lyson’s focus on civic agriculture originally grew out of research he had conducted with Charles M.
Tolbert and Michael Irwin (Tolbert et. al, 1998) on local capitalism and civic engagement and their association with positive socioeconomic outcomes – higher income levels and lower levels of poverty, income inequality and unemployment. In this study they drew on the work of Walter Goldschmidt (1978), and C. Wright Mills and Melville Ulmer (Mills and Ulmer 1970). Goldschmidt had studied agricultural communities in the Central Valley of California while Mills and Ulmer had focused on manufacturing communities in the Northeast and Midwest. They had found that “communities with an economic base made up of many small, locally-owned firms had higher levels of well-being than communities where the economic base was dominated by a few large, absentee-owned firms” (Lyson 2000: 44).

Lyson’s interest in community-centered agricultural initiatives deepened and in 2000 he published a short article “Moving Toward Civic Agriculture.” In this article he articulates his first visions of what a “civic agriculture” could be. Rather than a “challenge to the conventional agriculture and food industry”, Lyson suggests that civic agriculture offers innovative methods of food production, processing and distribution whereby communities can take back some control over these systems. “A comprehensive civic agriculture, characterized by complete local or regional self-sufficiency, is neither practical nor desirable in the United States or elsewhere,” he stresses (Lyson 2000: 45). His primarily focus is on the economic benefits communities can obtain by relocalizing these systems, suggesting that they might “gain greater control over their economic destinies” (Lyson 2000:44). Although the economic potential of localized agriculture
seems his primary consideration, he also surmises that communities can “enhance the level of interaction among their residents in order to contribute to rising levels of civic welfare, revitalize rural landscapes, improve environmental quality, and promote long-term sustainability” (Lyson 2000: 42). Continuing, Lyson argues that producers and consumers will come together, thereby solidifying “bonds of community.”

Lyson further articulates his thesis with the publication of *Civic Agriculture: Reconnecting Farm, Food, and Community* (Lyson 2004: 63) where he defines civic agriculture as the “embedding of local agricultural and food production in the community.” He suggests that it is characterized by “networks of producers who are bound together by place” and that it “embodies a commitment to developing and strengthening an economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable system of agriculture and food production that relies on local resources and serves local markets and consumers.” Six primary features characterize civic agriculture:

1. Farming is oriented toward local markets that serve local consumers rather than national or international mass markets.
2. Agriculture is seen as an integral part of rural communities, not merely as production of commodities.
3. Farmers are concerned more with high quality and value-added products and less with quantity (yield) and least-cost production practices.
4. Production at the farm level is often more labor-intensive and land-intensive and less capital-intensive and land-extensive. Farm enterprises tend to be considerably smaller in scale and scope than industrial producers.
5. Producers more often rely on local, site-specific knowledge and less on a uniform set of “best management practices.”
6. Producers forge direct market links to consumers rather than indirect links through middlemen (wholesalers, brokers, processors, etc.).
In his book Lyson argues that civic agriculture will naturally expand in scope, with localized farms and processors filling the geographic and economic spaces passed over or ignored by industrial agriculture. Additionally, his concern with the community-building and social aspects of localized agriculture seems heightened and more developed in the text, but specific examples are not provided.

In Civic Agriculture and in his 2005 article, “Civic Agriculture and Community Problem-Solving” Lyson suggests that civic agriculture fundamentally supports a community’s problem-solving capacity. The organizational, associational, and institutional components of agriculture form the foundation of the social ties within civic agriculture. Lacking in this work as well are concrete examples of specific case studies of communities coming together to solve problems related to agriculture and food systems. Rhetorical and idealistic, the work fails to identify those situations which enhance a community’s problem-solving capacity and those which do not.

While Laura DeLind (2002) finds civic agriculture to be a potentially liberating tool by which to focus public attention on the contradictions within the neoliberal industrial agriculture and food system, she takes issue with two dominant themes that have emerged within the civic agriculture literature. First, she finds that civic agriculture presupposes a reliance on traditional market relations. Second, civic agriculture revolves around private enterprise, private ownership, and private accumulation. Rather than truly focusing on “civic”, civic
agriculture conflates civic with local and merely supports an alternative
individualized food system. As she explains, this individualism is typically
expressed in the following ways, “I want to farm,’ and ‘I want to know my food is
safe’; and ‘I want my food to be convenient and cheap’. ‘I want my kids to be
able to inherit my farm,’ and ‘I want my kids to eat whatever they want’“ (DeLind
2002: 218). She suggests there is a serious danger in equating production or
consumption, whether alternative or conventional, with citizenship. Recalling the
three “Es” of a sustainable system (economic, environmental, equity), DeLind
contends that while theoretical claims of civic agriculture include environmental
and social equity concerns, in practice it is the economic which overshadows all
else. She writes, “the logic of civic-ness is still a wished for second thought,
something, it is assumed, that will spontaneously fall into place once our many,
personal, green needs have been met” (DeLind 2002: 219). Furthermore, the
making of commodities and their consumption are not a priori “civic” activities.

In their 2008 piece “Place and Civic Culture: Re-Thinking the Context for
Local Agriculture”, DeLind and Jim Bingen focus on the importance place has in
a truly civic agriculture. They write, “Place is the ground that integrates the
natural and the cultural, the individual and the collective, the sensual and the
political” (DeLind and Bingen 2008: 131). The concept of place is a recursive one
– as spatial and social practices and institutions help create places, so too do
places themselves define practices and institutions. The authors focus on
Hegel’s concept of “continuing ownership” and David Nickell’s “cultural property”.
Cultural property “embodies a community’s values and orientations within a
specific place, and thereby allows for coherence through ‘reference points’ or stories and artifacts that are shared and transmitted to successive generations” (DeLind and Bingen 2008: 132). They contend that the concepts of “place” and “civic” suggest the importance of the process over the final product, and argue that by integrating the two with agriculture, communities can revitalize themselves in powerful ways.

**Planning + Food Systems**

The Native Food Systems organizations considered in this research are actively engaged in planning for their communities’ health, safety and welfare. All are deeply committed to building healthier and more sustainable communities. While none are affiliated with any tribal and/or municipal planning department, they are community-based grassroots organizations committed to systems change. The literature on community food systems planning can therefore help inform their work. This literature suggests reasons why communities haven’t formally planned their food systems and offers ways in which community planners and activists might engage in building safer, stronger, and environmentally, socially and culturally sustainable food systems.

The field of community planning hasn’t paid systematic attention to food system issues since Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City –a proposal which addressed the production, distribution, collective preparation, consumption, and waste recycling of food (Pothukuchi 2000). Until its first white paper on the food system was completed in 2005, planning had effectively ignored the issue since 1902, a period of over one hundred years. As a discipline, planning claims to be
comprehensive in scope; however, among the basic necessities of life – air, food, shelter and water; only food has been overlooked by planning (American Planning Association 2005). Economic development; environmental and natural resources; transportation; open space; energy; water resources and quality; neighborhood revitalization; and public health are all impacted by the food system and the food system is impacted by them. Thus the food system is an appropriate topic for planning attention. In addition, the food system should be an important consideration for disaster planning and preparedness, with many communities only having a few days’ supply of food available (American Planning Association 2005).

Professor Kameshwari Pothukuchi of Wayne State University has been an early and sustained voice for increased attention to food systems by community planning (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 2000, Pothukuchi 2004, 2007). Working with Professor Jerome Kaufman of the University of Wisconsin, Pothukuchi conducted an initial study (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 2000) surveying twenty-two planning agencies. Their work reveals both reasons for planners’ lack of attention as well as areas that could particularly benefit from planners’ involvement. Pothukuchi and Kaufman discover several reasons for planners’ lack of attention to the food system. First, planners surveyed suggest that the food system is not on planners’ “turf”. Next, these planners contend that food systems planning is a rural issue and does not impact the urban communities in which they work. They also assert that the food system is driven primarily by the private market and therefore isn’t appropriate for intervention. Planners surveyed also reveal a belief that the food
system isn’t broken, so why fix it? In addition, planners surveyed suggest they do not know with whom to work to address food systems issues and they do not know enough about the food system to make an effective contribution.

However, participants in this initial survey suggest four key areas that could immediately benefit from planning attention: agricultural land preservation; land use and zoning related to food access; integrating food issues into economic development activities; and documenting and mitigating the environmental impacts of the food system. Pothukuchi and Kaufman then advance five primary ways planners can strengthen their food systems:

1. Compile data on the community food system;
2. Analyze connections between food and other planning concerns;
3. Assess the impact of current planning on the local food system;
4. Integrate food security into community goals;
5. Educate future planners about food system issues

(Pothukuchi and Kaufman 2000: 120-121)

In her 2004 article “Building a Common Table: The Role for Planning in Community Food Systems”, Professor Marcia Campbell expands this initial call. She suggests that planning practitioners should collect and analyze data on local or regional food systems; participate in community food projects; revise local land-use plans and regulations to promote the local food system; facilitate the development of local food policy councils as a means for creating food policy and for stimulating public participation in food democracy; and work with other municipal and nongovernmental agencies to develop local food policy. In
addition, she encourages planning academics to expand upon initial community food systems theorizing, conduct more empirical research, and publish in scholarly planning journals (Campbell 2004:349-350). She also argues for the inclusion of food systems as a topic during planners’ education. Next, Campbell calls for planners, both practicing and academic, to become engaged in public service related to food systems. She recommends that planners participate in local food systems projects, community collaborations and community-university partnerships. Finally, she notes that planners should assist community food systems collaborations or grassroots nonprofit organizations in documenting their efforts (Campbell 2004: 351-352).

By 2004, interest in the food system had dramatically increased among planners. The year witnessed a keynote address by Kaufman at the American Planning Association (APA) National Conference in Denver where he encouraged planners to become engaged in their food systems (American Planning Association 2005). That year also marked the publication of two journals editions devoted entirely to food planning issues: the Journal of Planning Education and Research (Summer 2004) and Progressive Planning (Winter 2004). The following year eighty people responded to calls for papers for a special track of sessions on food planning at the APA conference in San Francisco. From this, a white paper on food planning was prepared in 2005 which provided the foundation for an APA Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning, formally adopted in April of 2007.
As interest in the food system escalates, planners and community organizers and activists look for tools with which they can begin to understand and strengthen their food systems. The Community Food Assessment (CFA) provides a framework through which the food system can be assessed and community members’ voices heard. Diverse stakeholders work together to “research their local food system, to strategically communicate their findings, and to implement changes based on their findings” (Community Food Security Coalition A). Potential benefits of conducting a CFA include involving and empowering the community, improving existing programs and creating new ones, developing advocacy skills and changing public policy and improving access to healthy foods (Pothukuchi et al. 2002).

Pothukuchi’s 2004 study of nine cases of community food assessments finds similarities and differences between CFAs developed and implemented by planners and those developed and implemented by non-planners. In addition, she suggests how a planning approach might strengthen future CFAs and discusses lessons from non-planning based CFAs for better community food security planning. Rather than being critical, her assessment is aimed at strengthening future CFAs.

Five characteristics of CFAs consistent with a traditional planning approach include a focus on the needs of low-income individuals, a concern about the sustainability of the food system, the recognition of the community as a unit of solution to food system problems, a focus on assets in addition to problems, and the utilization of a variety of data from multiple sources.
Pothukuchi reports six main differences between planning and non-planning CFAs. First, planning-based CFAs incorporate space in complex ways, often utilizing mapping of assets and links. Next, planning-based CFAs reference local government as a focus for systems change. They also include more and broader links to community concerns, a broader range of research methods and a wider distribution of results to other planners and decision-makers. Finally, planning-based CFAs help planners take on leadership roles in community food issues, which Pothukuchi suggests is critical for long-term systems change (Pothukuchi 2004: 362-371). As planners and planning faculty and students become sensitized to food systems concerns, future community planning may more likely integrate a food systems focus.

Pothukuchi’s research also reveals ways in which planners might want to learn from non-planning CFAs. She finds that these CFAs more systematically incorporate the health impacts of community-food linkages. They also focus more on relocalizing food systems as an approach to community planning. Building participant skills and implementing participatory action research methods are also strengths of CFAs conducted by non-planners. Finally, they also better utilize the community visioning process and link local planning efforts with state and federal policy (Pothukuchi 2004: 372-373).

Questions raised

The literatures on food sovereignty, civic agriculture and community food systems planning each provoke a set of questions when considered with Native Food Systems organizations in mind.
Food sovereignty literature initiates the following questions: What are the visions Native Food Systems organizations have for food systems and food sovereignty within their communities? How do they define and enact food sovereignty for themselves? How do their visions differ from the industrialized and globalized models of food production and consumption? Are these organizations working to (re)building tribal subjectivity with respect to tribal identity? How so? How do these organizations work against cycles of dispossession or federally imposed control and create spaces for production within their communities?

The literature on civic agriculture suggests questions concerning the degree to which NFS organizations’ activities attempt to integrate civic culture and agriculture. Could they be advanced as actual examples or case studies of civic agriculture which heretofore remain absent in the literature? Do they represent an attempt at community problem-solving? How can we understand the concepts of “continuing ownership” and “cultural property” in reference to the work being undertaken by NFS organizations?

Finally, food systems planning literature conjures the following set of questions: First, how are NFS organizations engaged in planning for the future of their communities’ food systems? What arguments do they give for the importance and necessity of their work? What are the ways in which these food system “planners” are strengthening their food systems? Are they similar or different from the roles Pothukuchi, Kaufman and Campbell suggest for planners? What tools do NFS organizations use to assess their food systems
and garner participation and feedback from their communities? Have they utilized Community Food Assessments? How do they compare to the CFAs studied by Pothukuchi?
Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures

Participants in this research were leaders or organizers of Native American community food systems organizations that appeared to have a community building/identity component. After my research proposal and protocol were approved by the Iowa State University Institutional Review Board, I identified Native community food systems case studies and their representatives by purposive sampling through a web-based search. This search included, but was not limited to, the following key search terms: “Native food systems”, “indigenous food systems”, “Native community food systems”, “Native local food systems”, “Native food systems and community building”, “Native food systems and community identity”, “Native food sovereignty”, etc. Examples of Native American community food systems were identified for inclusion in the study after reviewing on-line documentation. Specifically, I sought to include Native community food systems, programs and policies which have community building and community identity (re)creation as an identified goal. After speaking to representatives from several initiatives, I chose to include those which had formally organized as a nonprofit organization or defined group within the tribal government structure – thus suggesting their long-term commitment to food systems change. After identifying a key informant from a particular community food systems project, I utilized snowball sampling to locate other leaders and representatives of that project who should be included in the study. In addition, these key informants also helped identify leaders from other Native Food Systems organizations who might have interest in participating in the research. I included all but one
organization suggested by these key informants, and neglected to include this sixth organization after its organizers only briefly addressed my questions through email and seemed uninterested in a telephone interview. While a number of tribes are working to (re)build their food systems, appropriate organizations for inclusion in this research remain limited, so the case study sample is small with five organizations studied.

Participants were interviewed using an open-ended semi-structured interview format. This method was most appropriate given the sparse conceptual development in the literature on this topic. In addition, complex concepts and subjective meanings were best revealed through a flexible interview structure and highly situated and specific examples. Respondents were informed about the nature of the research and about the voluntary nature of their participation. Each interview was conducted over the phone and for transcription purposes, with the interviewee’s permission, I placed them on speaker phone and audio recorded the interview with a cassette tape recorder. Every participant agreed. Interviews typically lasted between thirty and forty-five minutes, with several lasting over an hour. After the interview was complete, I transcribed the conversation word-for-word and sent the transcription to the participant for review. Any errors in transcription or interpretation were corrected.

Following Hsieh and Shannon (2005) I employed “directed content analysis” to analyze my interview transcripts, where information coding and sorting started with categories and a theoretical framework derived from current literature in the community food systems literature. Though I looked for themes
which coincided with previous studies, I also allowed new themes to emerge from
the data as the pre-existing literature (and subsequent theoretical/conceptual
framework) is rather sparse to date. Themes were expressed in single words,
phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or perhaps in the entire interview.

Content analysis began during the course of my data collection, rather
than as a series of procedures conducted at the end of the data collection
process. This early involvement and engagement with the data allowed me to
move back and forth between concept development and data collection, which
directed subsequent data collection in more meaningful ways.

Following Lincoln and Guba (1986) I used four criteria to evaluate the
research’s “trustworthiness” (validity, reliability and objectivity for quantitative
research): credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. To
determine the credibility of my interview and field notes, I asked each interviewee
to “member check” or review their interview transcript and correct any
inconsistencies in interpretation or transcription. Suggested changes were made,
and transcripts re-sent for verification when necessary. In all but one case, data
was triangulated by interviewing more than one member of the organization.
Themes in the data were triangulated by interviewing representatives from
multiple organizations. I sought to utilize a negative case analysis, whereby a
community food system project failed to promote community (re)building and/or
community identity (re)formulation or failed to continue altogether. While I was
successful in identifying such a project, representatives from the project declined
to participate “on the record” and as such their story is not a part of these findings.

To the extent possible, transferability was assured by noting previous research that has explored processes of community (re)building within a food systems context. I sought to make my description of previous research detailed enough to allow other researchers to make their own judgments about my work’s transferability in a similar research context. In addition, I attempted to provide a “thick description” of the data, whereby the reader has access to a rich and detailed account of the interviews.

To establish dependability and confirmability I compiled an audit trail during the research process. My instrument development information, raw data, field notes, interview transcripts, theoretical notes, coding book and process notes were available for review by my thesis committee chairs. If inconsistencies in historical accounts or situations arose between interviewees of the same Native Food Systems project, I verified the data with each party.
Chapter Four: Profiles of Native Food Systems Organizations

The five Native Food Systems organizations studied in this research reveal a diversity of approaches to the (re)building of food systems in Native communities. While they do not provide geographic coverage of the entirety of the United States, they represent several regions – two in the northern midwest, two in the southwest, and one in the south central. These organizations also range in age – the oldest was established twenty-two years ago while the most recent was established in 2005. Though the ways in which they were founded vary, all are focused on strengthening their communities’ physical, social, and cultural health and vitality.

Oneida Community Integrated Food Systems

Established in 1994, the Oneida Community Integrated Food Systems (OCIFS) is a collaboration of five tribal entities of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin: Oneida Nation Farm | Apple Orchard, Food Distribution Program, tsyunhehkwa Center and Cannery, Oneida Health Center, and the Oneida Grants Office. The mission statement of OCIFS reads:

The Oneida Community Integrated Food Systems entities are committed as a team to assist low-income families by institutionalizing an economically based, community food system that will incorporate indigenous, traditional food products and create a local economy that will provide employment opportunities, self-reliance of low-income community members, promote comprehensive responses to local food, farm and nutrition issues and encourage long-term innovative solutions to hunger on the Oneida Reservation.

Essentially, OCIFS works to meet unmet needs – reduce diabetes, reduce poverty within the tribe, increase low-income community members’ self-esteem
and capacity, provide training for community members in retail and agriculture-related businesses, and develop small businesses within Oneida. OCIFS has already worked to establish a Farmers’ Market, 4-H club, a Youth Day on the Farm, and conducted a Community Food Assessment. Its current projects include organizing a Food Policy Council, creating an OCIFS Activity Book to be utilized in the elementary school curriculum, and establishing an Agricultural Learning Center for tribal youth.

With input from all its members, OCIFS developed a strategic plan and in addition to clarifying each member’s respective mission statement and goals, put forth the following goals and phases for the organization:

Primary goals of OCIFS:

Phase I: Development of a strong organizing and managing core

Phase II: Private sector and Intertribal market development and expansion

Phase III: Extended expansion (New Markets/Global Markets)

Secondary goals of OCIFS:

1. Provide agricultural employment opportunities for community youth
2. Improve health through nutritional/organic food production
3. Educate community members on diet and healthy foods
4. Produce meats, fruits, and vegetables not only for profit, but also to promote lower prices

OCIFS grew out of an initial task force created to address the developmental issues associated with poverty and health problems on the
Oneida Reservation. Initially, only the four previously existing “food-related” entities were part of the organization: the Oneida Nation Farm | Apple Orchard, the Food Distribution Program, tsyunhehkwa and Cannery, and Centralized Food Purchasing. In 2001, Centralized Food Purchasing was restructured and became part of the Purchasing Department of the tribe and was thus no long a part of OCIFS. As time passed, the members of OCIFS recognized the need for a health and financial component of the team. The Oneida Health Center and the Oneida Grants Office then joined OCIFS with representatives from the respective entities.

**Oneida Nation Farm | Apple Orchard**

The mission of the Oneida Nation Farm | Apple Orchard is to “continue the Oneida Agricultural Operation and to provide USDA approved meats and other quality products to the Oneida Tribal members, businesses and future generations while remaining efficient in the land use and vertical integration within the Oneida Tribal Structure.”

The farm, originally known as the Iroquois Farm, was established in 1978. It initially consisted of one hundred fifty acres and twenty-five head of cattle and over time has grown into three primary components: Oneida Cash Crop Operations, Oneida Natural Beef/Bison Program, and the Apple Orchard. The farm now encompasses 8,000 acres, 4,000 of which are under tillage while the remaining 4,000 are held in conservation programs and wildlife restoration. Crops include soybeans, high moisture corn, alfalfa hay, wheat, and white corn. Some of the harvest is sold to local grain markets and dairies while the remaining
is used to feed the cattle and bison. Tribal members and employees and the general public can purchase the farm’s Prime Black Angus Beef in quarters, halves or individual packages. Tribal members and employees can pay for their purchases through payroll deduction plans. The Oneida tribal school also purchases beef and bison from the farm.

In 1994, the tribe purchased a 3,100 tree apple orchard as part of its strategy of recovering lands within the boundaries of the original reservation. Now, the orchard boasts nearly 4,200 trees and forty acres of land. The tribe operates a store at the orchard site which sells the tribe’s beef and buffalo along with roasts, hamburgers, pork, chicken, fish, seafood and other grocery items. Local fruits and vegetables are available seasonally. Produce is also donated to the Food Distribution and Food Pantry.

**tsyunhehkwa**

In contrast to the Oneida Nation Farm, *tsyunhehkwa*, translated as “the place that provides for us or sustains us”, focuses on organic production and sustainability. Its mission is to reintroduce “high quality organically grown foods that will ensure a healthier and more fulfilling life for the *Onyota'^a:ka* and being facilitators of positive dietary and nutritional change throughout the community and Turtle Island.” *tsyunhehkwa* is made up of four components: Traditional Wellness, Commercial and Community Agriculture, Commercial Food Production and Community Food Preservation. Staff research and develop diet and wellness strategies based on Indigenous knowledge and tradition. They offer classes on holistic wellness and traditional ways; provide essential oils and herbs for
medicinal and ceremonial uses; and facilitate workshops on compost making, pruning, animal care, indoor seed starting, cold frame construction, landscaping, edible landscaping, vegetable gardening, berry/herb gardening, seasonal cooking, backyard livestock, health awareness, salve making, and reflexology.

**Food Distribution Center**

The mission of the Food Distribution Center is to “provide a nutritious food package for eligible households and nutrition education to improve the quality of life in our community.” Established in 1980, it gives food instead of food stamps and is funded by the USDA which supports 75% of its administrative costs and 100% of its food costs. The number of tribal members receiving assistance has ranged from 400 to 1,000 people in recent years. In addition, the Food Distribution Center holds classes on nutrition and budgeting, and encourages in-need community members to volunteer their time at the Food Pantry in exchange for food.

**Grants Office**

As the fiscal member of OCIFS, the mission of the Grants Office is to “ensure that the Oneida Tribe maximizes external forms of revenue to secure monies in order to meet the Seventh Generation goals and objectives of the Oneida tribe.” The office monitors the external funding environment. Sources of funding include intergovernmental transfers through grants and contracts, public and private charitable foundations, and private or corporate charitable organizations. Specific grants secured for OCIFS initiatives include United Way/Emergency Food and Shelter Program, United States Department of
Agriculture, Fighting Hunger in Wisconsin, Department of Health and Human Services/Social and Economic Development Strategies, Intertribal Bison Cooperative, First Nations Development Institute Native Agriculture and Food Systems Initiative, United States Department of Agriculture Rural Business Development Initiative, United States Department of Agriculture 2501 Grant Program, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Honor the Earth and Tides Foundation.

Health Center

As local experts on tribal health and diabetes prevention, the Health Center is “committed to provide the highest quality of health care to individuals and families using the most efficient and affordable business practices.” Established in 1973, the Health Center recently opened its new facility in 2002. The 65,405 square feet center is has dedicated space for a medical clinic, dental clinic, pharmacy, and community health department with expanded services including increased access to optical and dental services, podiatry, pediatrics, diabetes care, OBGYN services, prenatal care, reproductive health, WIC & nutrition services, ear, nose & throat, radiology and mammography.

Tohono O’odham Community Action

Tohono O’odham Community Action (TOCA), established in 1996, serves the communities within the Tohono O’odham reservation in the Sonoran Desert in Arizona. 20,000 of the tribe’s 28,000 members live on the main section of the reservation. Presently, the organization has four program areas: Tohono O’odham Basket Weavers Organization; Tohono O’odham Food & Wellness System; Tohono O’odham Community Arts and Culture Program; and the
Youth/Elder Outreach Program. TOCA functions as “a community-based organization dedicated to creating a healthy, sustainable and culturally vital community on the Tohono O’odham Nation”.

As described on their website, four principles guide TOCA’s decisions about program goals and strategies:

1. **O’odham Himdag: Wisdom from our past creating solutions for our future** – The O’odham Himdag (Desert People’s Way) guides us as we seek to develop culturally appropriate solutions to the challenges that confront our community. By drawing upon our heritage and cultural traditions we are able to create lasting solutions and a stronger community.

2. **Community Assets: See our resources, not just our needs** – Our community already possesses many of the assets that are necessary to create a healthy and sustainable community. TOCA encourages people to take stock of our various community assets in order to develop indigenous solutions, rather than focus on the problems while importing “solutions” from the outside. The wisdom of our elders, the enthusiasm of our young people, the richness of our land, the centrality of our extended families, and our desire to create a healthier community all contribute to the capacity to create solutions that will be culturally-based and sustainable.

3. **Encourage community self-sufficiency** – Social programs on the Tohono O’odham Nation have too often created dependent relationships which destroy the sustainable structures that have previously supported the people. Programs have led to destructive dependency where self-sufficiency had previously existed. In response, TOCA attempts to re-empower the community to become increasingly self-sufficient.

4. **Context is crucial: Strengthening the material roots of O’odham culture** – It is not enough to simply preserve cultural activities, such as ceremonies, songs and stories. The material basis out of which these cultural practices grew must also be maintained. A ground blessing loses much of its power when it is performed for an audience rather than the fields where the O’odham have planted for generations. TOCA works to redevelop the material foundation of the O’odham culture.

The Nation faces several significant challenges. It has the lowest per capita income of all United States reservations; more than 50% of all adults have Type II diabetes, the highest rates in world; fewer than half of adults have completed
high school, the lowest of all United States Native American tribes; and cultural traditions and ceremonies are threatened with extinction. TOCA contends that the “most significant factor in the creation of these social problems is the loss of the traditional Tohono O’odham food system.” The food system once served to support a local economy, maintain the people’s physical well-being, and provide the material foundation for Tohono O’odham culture.

Seeking to address these issues, thirteen years ago Co-directors Tristan Reader and Terrol Johnson collaborated to found TOCA. From the beginning, food systems issues were important to Reader and Johnson. Moving to the reservation with his wife who was assuming a job as a local minister, Reader soon established a small community garden to engage youth in food production, with a focus on traditional plants. Johnson, a member of the Tohono O’odham tribe and an artist and basket weaver, witnessed the success Reader was having in reaching the youth and approached him about starting a summer arts program. As the two planned the arts program they sought to incorporate the community garden and traditionally harvested foods into the curriculum. Following the success of the program and recognizing the need in the community for positive opportunities, the pair then founded a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit corporation to focus on combining health, cultural revitalization and economic development.

TOCA started with a half-acre community garden and several youth activities for gathering foods and soon expanded their land holdings and started revitalizing traditional, ak chin farming utilizing the flood waters that accompany the summer monsoons. Now the organization boasts approximately 120 acres
and utilizes rains and floods with supplemental irrigation. In the process of trying to rebuild their community food system, TOCA first worked on increasing supply and production. In addition, one of their most significant achievements has been to document the loss of their food system as well as those cultural practices that remain.

TOCA points to five primary reasons why their food system was damaged. First, in the early part of the 20th century tribal members took jobs through federal work programs as field labor in the large cotton farms which surround the reservation, leaving them unable to work their own lands. Second, federal food programs and commercial outlets provided cheap, processed foods which altered diets and decreased the amount of traditional foods consumed. Environmental factors, partially attributed to surrounding development, left the Sonoran Desert even drier, with water particularly scarce for farming. In addition, Tohono O'odham youth were forcibly placed into boarding schools focused on assimilation and were thus not allowed to practice their culture. Finally, during the Second World War, young O'odham men were recruited into the military and were not able maintain farming and associated cultural practices.

As these factors damaged the food system, they also subsequently impacted the material basis of the Tohono O'odham's culture. TOCA contends that virtually all elements of traditional culture – ceremonies, stories, songs, and language – are directly rooted in the system of food production. Theirs is truly an agri-culture. Through their efforts at revitalizing the food system, they hope that cultural practices will be reconnected with their material foundation and will once
again take on a central role in the community. TOCA seeks to integrate food system redevelopment, promote physical fitness, and revitalize culture in a holistic manner. While the food system strengthens material culture and cultural practices, TOCA also points to the health benefits traditional indigenous foods provide. The organization cites studies conducted which have shown that foods such as tepary beans, mesquite beans, acorns and cholla (cactus) buds help regulate blood sugar and reduce the incidence and effect of diabetes. In addition, harvesting and celebrating traditional foods through dance positively impacts physical fitness, helping prevent Type II diabetes. Native bodies evolved in relation to indigenous foods and were thereby even more susceptible to the negative effects of a Western diet (Mihesuah 2003). TOCA maintains that “in a very real sense, the destruction of the traditional food system is literally killing thousands of Tohono O’odham”.

In keeping with their holistic approach, TOCA initiated a Food, Fitness & Wellness Collaboration in mid-2007. Beginning with a two-year community wide strategic planning process, the Collaboration is now moving into a multi-year implementation phase. The ultimate goal of the Tohono O’odham Food, Fitness and Wellness Initiative is to create a community in which:

- All community members have access to, and regularly use the traditional, locally produced foods that promote physical and cultural wellness.
- All community members regularly participate in culturally-appropriate forms of physical fitness.
- The built environment supports a dynamic local food system, physical fitness and cultural vitality.
- Nonprofit, Tribal, Federal, educational and other programs cooperate to promote a common vision and strategy for food system development, promotion of physical fitness, cultural vitality and community wellness.
• The rates and impacts of Type II Diabetes and related health problems have been reduced significantly, and community wellness (physical, cultural, emotional and spiritual) has been increased.

Currently, TOCA is initiating projects aimed at economic development based in the sustainable use of natural, cultural and human resources. Broad goals of projects are:

1. Increase the infrastructure of TOCA and the broader community to take advantage of health, economic and social opportunities based in the O’odham Himdag;

2. Support culturally-based economic development for members of the Tohono O’odham community; and

3. Increase TOCA’s program generated income to improve long-term organizational sustainability.

Specific projects include the recent opening of the Tohono Ki Community Development Center in November of 2008. While this constitutes a significant facility expansion, it also allows for the expansion of programming. 100% of the initial capital costs were financed by the Tohono O’odham Nation Economic Development Authority, to which TOCA then pays rent. Features of the facility include a commercial kitchen for food-based business and classes, a café serving traditional Tohono O’odham foods, a gallery for Native basket weavers and artists, classrooms, and staff offices.

**Taos County Economic Development Corporation**

The Taos County Economic Development Corporation (TCEDC) is a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization serving the peoples of Taos County, New Mexico. Founded in 1987 by Pati L. Martinson and Terrie Bad Hand, the organization seeks to “support the food, land, water and cultures of the people of Northern
New Mexico.” Perhaps TCEDC’s most significant accomplishment is the development, construction, and continued operation of a 24,000 sq. ft. business park and community center which features the Taos Food Center, a 5,000 sq. ft. commercial food processing facility. The nonprofit also supports a community garden and greenhouse, operates a small business direct services program and a 14,000 sq. ft. small business incubator. Over 40 local processors utilize the facility for their small food-based businesses. Community members also benefit from a meeting space and resource library, with preschool and daycare located on site as well.

Bad Hand and Martinson established TCEDC after working together at the Denver Indian Center where they had collaborated to form a community development organization aimed at addressing the challenges of the urban Native community. After eight years in Denver, the Taos Pueblo invited the two to move to New Mexico, where they each have family, to establish a community development program. However, as the tribal administration changed and priorities shifted, the new administration chose not to focus on community development. Soon thereafter, Bad Hand and Martinson responded to an advertisement in the local paper for an economic development director and went on to found TCEDC, serving not only the people of Taos Pueblo but also the other land-based people in the area as well. After founding the organization, Bad Hand and Martinson sought to discover what was important to the people in the area. By going house to house and engaging in conversations with community members they soon realized that their economic development programming
should focus on protecting the land, water and cultures of the area. Bad Hand and Martinson then initiated a more formal Ford Foundation feasibility study, which confirmed their findings. The pair focused first on the creation of a small business incubator by taking over an abandoned supermarket. Connections between economic development and the food system were a primary consideration from the beginning.

TCEDC utilizes a “Medicine Wheel Model for Organizations” (Figure 1) and operates through a “kinship model” in which everyone involved is considered part of a family. The wheel represents the balancing of the four peoples (red, yellow, black, white), the four directions (N,S,E,W) and the four basic elements (earth, fire, water, air). Their food systems model is graphically depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 1. A Medicine Wheel Model for Organizations
In addition to the Taos Food Center, another significant achievement for TCEDC has been the development of a Mobile Matanza Livestock Slaughtering Unit (MLSU) in 2006. One of only three in the United States, the MLSU was funded through a $200,000 grant awarded by the New Mexico Legislature. The goal of the MLSU is to “assist small, limited-resource, underserved Hispanic, Native American and female ranchers” by allowing them access to markets in Northern New Mexico. With only eight remaining state-certified slaughter facilities, it seeks to augment the disappearing meat processing infrastructure of Northern New Mexico. The semi-tractor trailer dramatically decreases processing costs by reaching the ranchers directly and thereby reduces the need to sell
animals at auction, where producers get the least value for their livestock. Driven to the producer’s location, the truck can process up to 10 cattle, 80 lambs, and eight buffalo on site, with every step state-inspected. The refrigerated truck then distributes the meat directly to local stores and restaurants.

Other programs offered by TCEDC include a Kids Cooking Camp, where children venture into the gardens at the Taos Food Center, discuss from where food comes, pick fruits and vegetables, and then use that fresh produce in the Center’s kitchen classroom where they make smoothies and pizza. As part of TCEDC’s Diabetes Prevention Program, elders prepare and share a meal twice a month at the Food Center, where a local nutritionist provides information about the ingredients and helps the participants design healthy meal plans. The NxLevel Program helps local farmers begin to reinvent their agricultural business practices by teaching business planning, marketing, and financial management skills. Classes are instructed by local businesses leaders and experts, and participants can create a business plan that is ready for a lender’s review. The Comida Para La Vida Program was implemented in 2008 and provides healthy cooking classes by local chefs for in-need community members. A six week pilot project reached 109 participants. The Food Sector Opportunity Project is a 30 hour, week long course designed to provide answers and information about all phases of food production including recipe development, food safety, and marketing. The course assists community members as they seek to start their own food-based business. Finally, WIC recipients can harvest fresh fruit and vegetables from TCEDC’s garden, greenhouse and orchard.
Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative

The Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative (MFSI) “works to enable the Mvskoke people and their neighbors to provide for their food and health needs now and in the future through sustainable agriculture, economic development, community involvement, and cultural and educational programs.” A grassroots, nonprofit 501(c) 3 organization established in 2005, MFSI is located in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, capitol of the Mvskoke (Creek) Nation, and is co-directed by Ben Yahola, a member of the tribe, and Vicky Karhu. As the organization’s name suggests, MFSI is committed to food sovereignty. Recognizing the right to self-determination, they advocate for the establishment of tribal and national policies for the protection of indigenous knowledge and biological resources and are working to establish a tribal Food Policy Council “responsible for protecting the health, security and general welfare of the Mvskoke Creek Nation.”

Key successes for the young organization include organizing the first local farmers’ market in Okmulgee since the 1930s; working with the Tribal Elderly Nutrition Services Program to implement policy to purchase fresh and locally grown produce for 18,000 meals a month; and creating a MFSI Seed Bank to preserve and restored endangered seeds culturally linked to Native gardens. MFSI has effectively restored Sofkee corn which was nearly extinct. In addition, through the Community Outreach for Producer’s Empowerment Project the organization assists farmers and ranchers in pursuing loans, grants, cost shares and incentive programs available through federal, state and regional sources.
MFSI coordinates a “Meals and More” program in which MFSI staff prepare traditional Mvskoke dishes for various organizational meetings throughout the community. MFSI staff travel to the site of the meeting and prepare, serve and clean the facility. While the nutritional benefits of the food is a primary focus with MFSI utilizing fresh, seasonal, organic, and locally grown produce, the events also serve as educational experiences. MFSI staff conduct presentations at each meal, sharing knowledge about Native American food heritage and the nutritional benefits of a traditional, indigenous diet. Participants receive recipe cards and instructional information so they can prepare the meals at home. MFSI has coordinated meals for groups as small as ten and as large as 400. Next, a Youth and Elder Sharing program helps cross-generational participants share knowledge and work together to revitalize the local food system. Other recent activities have included a poster contest, contest to design the MFSI Mobile Resource Unit, and events to revitalize traditional athletics. MFSI also broadcasts live streaming online radio with a mix of music, gardening tips, Mvskoke language lessons and stories, and Native and non-Native news.

Roots of the organization trace to Karhu’s previous employment with the Mvskoke Creek Nation in the Trade & Commerce Department. With a personal background as an organic grower, Karhu was looking for sustainable agriculture projects to initiate for the tribe and found a call for Community Food Project grant proposals online at grants.gov. Karhu felt that the grants program would support many of the objectives she was trying to accomplish and began putting together a team to apply for the grant. Pulling names of potential participants from a tribal
directory, Karhu brought together a diverse group of people from various departments and invited the manager of every tribal organization that listed a cook including the Daycare, Elderly Nutrition, Sanitation, Indian Health Service, and Diabetes Program.

Utilizing the Food Sovereignty Assessment Tool provided by the First Nations Development Institute (Bell-Sheeter 2004), Karhu challenged the assembled group to consider the following questions: “How many traditional foods are being used in your community?” and “Where is your family getting your food?” and “Where is your community getting food?” As participants became engaged in examining their food system, a one hour meeting turned into three. For internal structural reasons the group decided not to pursue the grant but continued meeting informally as a group once a month. The group considered creating a tribal program but chose not to for political reasons. Karhu’s position was discontinued, but shortly thereafter the remaining participants decided to organize as a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit organization, the Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative. Initially the organization was more like a discussion group, but incorporating as a nonprofit allowed them to pursue appropriate grants as they developed initiatives. After Karhu’s discontinuation with the tribe, she worked for a year to secure funding for the fledgling organization while on unemployment. The donation of this year of work was one of the key reasons the organization was able to be initially sustained.
**White Earth Land Recovery Project**

Founded in 1989 by Anishinaabeg activist Winona LaDuke, the White Earth Land Recovery Project (WELRP) seeks to facilitate the “recovery of the original land base of the White Earth Indian Reservation, while preserving and restoring traditional practices of sound land stewardship, language fluency, community development, and strengthening our spiritual and cultural heritage.”

The organization’s founding traces to LaDuke’s return to her father’s native home in northwest Minnesota after graduating from Harvard in 1984. Fighting for the return of thousands of acres of land to the Anishinaabeg, LaDuke was awarded the 1989 Reebok Human Rights Award in recognition for her work. LaDuke then utilized the $10,000 to found WELRP. Presently, the 501 (c) 3 organization provides comprehensive programs advocating and teaching Native self-reliance and emphasizing sustainable communities.

WELRP has recently completed a strategic planning process initiated to prepare for the next twenty years. The organization’s stated goals include: 1. Produce enough food in the next two years to feed at least 1000 tribal members. 2. Protect the genetic integrity of wild rice and sacred seeds. 3. Determine the value of the food economy on the reservation, re-localize it, and capture the value added for premium lake harvested, wild rice on national and international markets.

WELP has established various programs to strengthen the Anishinaabeg community food system and their food and seed sovereignty. First, the Mino-
Miijm (Good Food) Program was created to address the diabetes epidemic on the White Earth Reservation. Over 30% of Native adults in Minnesota have been diagnosed with diabetes and Native people are nearly five times more likely to die from the disease than white people. WELRP maintains the traditional belief that food, good food, is medicinal. As WELP maintains on their website, “our cultural traditions provide a powerful mechanism through which we can address the issues of diabetes. Our teachings tell us that traditional foods are medicines: they provide both nourishment and healing for our people. When we harvest and eat these foods, we become connected to the cycle of the seasons and the rhythm of the earth”. Thus, the Mino-Miijm Program works to support health by focusing on traditional foods. Though the program is currently being restructured, in the past it has offered home deliveries of bags of food to diabetic individuals and their families. Each month approximately 180 homes received buffalo meat, hominy corn, chokecherry or plum jelly, maple syrup, wild rice, mazon and other seasonal offerings. Challenges for the program include the high cost of gas and the need to deliver across large distances.

In order to proactively prevent youth obesity and diabetes, as part Mino-Miijm WELRP created a Farm to School Program in 2007. Breakfast and lunch menus have been redesigned to remove foods containing high fructose corn syrup, artificial dyes and ingredients, and those that are heavily processed commodity foods. As much as possible, these foods are replaced with local foods, sustainably grown and harvested, which are culturally appropriate. The program includes an education and community building component featuring a
cultural curriculum which focuses on a different traditional Anishinaabeg food each month. Students participate in cultural, creative, physical, and educational activities. They travel into the community and visit local rice mills, orchards and farms where they learn how to save and select for seeds and other production skills. WELRP also conducts cooking classes throughout the month to teach skills which the students can then take home and share with their families.

Friends, family members and elders are then invited to a monthly community feast at the school where students showcase what they are learning. The Pine Point Elementary School on the reservation, which has the highest rate of child poverty in Minnesota, is currently the pilot project for the program, though WELRP staff now hope to expand to other reservation and regional schools.

WELRP's Sustainable Communities Program serves as the production unit for the organization’s agricultural output. It consists of a certified organic farm with berries, a three sisters garden (an intercropping system consisting of corn, beans and squash), and a produce patch which grows much of the produce used in the Minwanjige Café and some of the produce used for the Farm to School Program. The farm also grows tobacco, sweet grass, and sage which are all sacred Anishinaabeg plants. Eight acres of heritage Bear Island and White Flint corn are also under cultivation. In addition, it works to raise greenhouses in various tribal communities and plows gardens for tribal members.

As a subsidiary business bringing in revenue for the organization, WELRP operates Native Harvest, producing and selling a selection of traditional foods including wild rice, hominy, maple syrup and jellies. Much of the food is grown
and harvested locally and processed at a new building housing the facility. With the help of the Midwest Minnesota Community Development Corporation, in 2006 WELRP acquired the former Callaway Elementary School and centralized its administrative, production and distribution activities. The building also accommodates the *Minwanjige* Café, a commercial kitchen focused on job creation within the community, and spaces for community meetings and workshops. Native Harvest makes its products available through an online store and catalogs that are available by request.

WELRP is an active voice calling for the protection of sacred wild rice from genetic engineering and genetic contamination. It has recently worked to successfully secure passage of a 2008 law requiring an Environmental Impact Statement on any proposal to genetically engineer wild rice in Minnesota. WELRP also works with other Native communities to fight against genetic manipulation and licensing of indigenous seeds. As the organization contends, “one of the largest issues is who controls the seeds, the irrigation systems and the production systems. Increasingly this is a huge issue as the ownership of seeds, which have belonged to communities and families for generations becomes patented and owned by major corporations. We are also deeply concerned about the potential for genetic contamination of our food by genetically engineered seeds”. Travelling to Hawaii, WELRP staff have joined with Native Hawaiians who are trying to protect Taro from genetic contamination and from genetic manipulation by the University of Hawaii. WELRP also seeks to share and gain knowledge about sustainability and healthy food systems. To that
end, they have hosted the Annual Great Lakes Indigenous Farming Conference for several years and send delegates to other Indigenous conferences across the country.

Significant similarities exist among the five organizations studied for this research, though their differences are revelatory as well. An analysis of these similarities and differences, in addition to a reflection on their various strengths and weaknesses, will form the introduction to the final chapter.
Chapter Five: Results

Introduction

As an initial attempt to explore the similarities and differences between the Native Food Systems organizations and to determine their relationship with other food sovereignty, civic agriculture, and food system planning initiatives, this chapter provides an analysis of interviewee’s responses to questions regarding their organizational culture; financial operation; community relationships; measures of success; challenges; community, culture, and identity (re)building; and advice for other organizations. While the previous chapter provided an overview of each organization’s unique programming and history, this chapter seeks to uncover relevant themes which transcend organizational differences.

Organizational culture

Five of the Native Food Systems organizations participating in this research operate outside of their tribal governmental structures. Only one, the Oneida Community Integrated Food Systems operates as a distinct entity within the Oneida tribe. The other five organizations have 501 (c) 3 status as nonprofit organizations. Bill VerVoort contends that the primary motivations for operating within the tribal structure center on the availability of funds and the cooperation and credence given OCIFS as a tribal entity. He asserts,

As a group we have gotten cooperation where as individuals we couldn’t have within the Nation. I firmly believe that. Because some departments [within the Nation]—there’s always going to be animosity between them. The farm might be having trouble with a department, but if you bring a proposal or a project or a thought before that department as OCIFS, it’s given much more credence.
In contrast, Vicky Karhu, Co-Director of the Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative, suggests that the downside to operating independently is the lack of consistent financial support. “The tribe has money,” she notes.

Key reasons for organizing outside of the tribe include the flexibility and speed with which tasks can get accomplished as well as the ability to remain apart from tribal politics. Terrol Johnson, Co-Director of the Tohono O’odham Community Action explains,

We all know that when the tribe gets involved, when politics get involved, you’re restricted. There’s a lot of red tape that you have to deal with. There’s just a lot of politics. Things can’t get done as fast. Things don’t get done properly. In order to send a memo out or put up posters you’ve got to get, months in advance, approval. For community grassroots members it’s just a matter of finding a printer, some paper, and going out and finding someone to hang them up outside.

He stresses that any joint venture between an organization or group of community members and the tribe should be a true collaboration, with both parties sharing the workload and contributing resources and skills.

Nearly all of the NFS organizations interviewed for this research emphasize the importance of listening as a step in the decision-making process. For TOCA, organizing staff “do a huge amount of sitting and listening.” Staff then interpret that community input and make decisions about programming. Co-Director Tristan Reader says, “We have a staff that’s pretty empowered to make decisions and we have a strong, vocal group of community members who will tell us what they want and when they have concerns or ideas.”
VerVoort maintains that it is crucial to attempt to build consensus in the group. As OFCIFS is a collaborative entity comprised of five separate tribal programs, decisions that affect individual entities are made by their respective managers while decisions that affect the group or are a reflection of the group are decided collectively. VerVoort notes that issues are put to a vote with himself as moderator and tie-breaker, and when parties don’t agree they attempt to work through their differences because future work depends on a respectful and supportive atmosphere.

Financial Operation

Regardless of the status as a nonprofit organization or a tribal entity, each NFS organization requires revenue to achieve their goals. While each maintains a food production component of their operation which in some cases brings in revenue for the organization, a substantial portion of the funding is provided through external support. External support comes either from the associated tribe or from foundation (Native and non-Native focused), state, or federal sources.

For OCIFS, only five percent of their program costs are covered by grants and the rest are supported by the Oneida tribe. During his first four years, VerVoort’s position as Director was entirely grant-funded though separate grants from the Kellogg Foundation, First Nations Development Institute and the Administration of Native Americans. He notes that he initially spent a significant amount of time just trying to secure future funding to keep his position, which he says “is like painting a bridge to turn around and paint the bridge again.” Tribal authorities recognized the value of his work with OCIFS, and in order to stabilize
his position and allow him to focus entirely on programming, VerVoort went on tribal payroll in his fifth year.

All interviewees stressed the necessity of utilizing a diverse array of funding streams, with substantial support coming in the form of grants. Karhu reveals the importance of circulating within the broader community food movement to get an initial sense of how the money flows. She spent much of her first year researching other organizations and projects and getting her organization’s name “out there”. While MFSI is currently grant-driven, Karhu echoes VerVoort about the instability of grant funding saying, “we’re grant driven and we’re trying to change that.” TOCA operates through a mixture of grants from private foundations and federal sources, along with donations from private individuals. Pati Martison, Co-Director of the TCEDC, reveals that they’re “in the worst financial crunch” since they established their organization twenty-two years ago. She attributes this to “the nation, the stock markets, the foundations not funding, and government programs becoming more urban-focused.” Typically, TCEDC has been financed through 1/3 income generation, 1/3 private foundations, and 1/3 government funding. Martinson stresses the importance of a small staff and a lean budget. WELRP also operates through several diverse income streams including federal grants, foundation support, donations from private individuals, and sales income from their café and subsidiary business, Native Harvest. Kyra Busch also notes that as an activist, WELRP’s Director LaDuke “has quite a name out there in the world”, and the organization has
leveraged her notoriety through donations from celebrities and revenue earned from LaDuke’s speaking events which “help bring in a lot of money.”

While all organizational representatives conceded the importance of focusing on funding, Reader also cautions about putting institutional survival ahead of the mission. He explains,

Our goal is to create a sustainable community, not a sustainable organization. That’s pretty important because that keeps the focus not on putting the organization first but putting the community first. Once you put the work secondary to the funding then you’re already losing. You’re not going to be able to be successful. That doesn’t mean you don’t seek the funding and the things that we need to survive but you have to keep the vision and the plan in place and then try and get the resources.

Though the continued need for external financial support might put the long term sustainability of such organizations and their food systems in question, these organizations are operating in a precarious context. Decades of food system degradation will require time and resources to rebuild. As nonprofits or tribal organizations focused on this task, they seem to be primarily concerned with restructuring their food systems through public education and outreach, with a secondary focus on productive profitability.

**Community relationships**

While financing their operations is a significant concern, garnering substantive community feedback is also a top priority for the NFS organizations studied. As grassroots organizations, they exist and evolve through community member participation. Tools utilized include conducting Community Food Assessments, administering surveys, facilitating community food planning
workshops, and communicating with the community through the publication of websites and newsletters and articles in tribal newspapers.

TOCA Directors note that the kitchen table is an important location for receiving honest feedback. Staff strive to visit with community members in their own homes where they are comfortable. They also maintain an “open door policy” at their offices. Johnson underscores the importance of listening, saying of their office,

> It was always just that safe, comfortable area where they could express themselves or their concerns in a place where we were listening. We weren’t passing judgment; we weren’t saying any kind of thing except for listening. And I think people felt comfortable enough just to come. People who had never even met us or heard of us would come and say, “I heard you guys do this, I heard you guys do that. Let’s sit down and talk.’

TOCA has also has employed a tool provided by the Healthy Native Communities Partnership, a nonprofit organization that supports capacity building, leadership development, partnerships and networking so that Native communities can build their own visions of wellness. This “Community River of Life” workshop allows for community members to draw an illustration of their community’s wellness history. Workshop participants are asked to consider what factors are impeding the flow of wellness in their community, and are encouraged to graphically depict these impediments and community assets on long sheets of butcher paper. As Reader describes, “we end up with these amazing drawings and then people will share about the drawings. So that gets them talking in a way
that they may not if you just said, ‘So what would you want to see for wellness in the community?’ You’re going to get a lot of silence.”

For several of the NFS organization studied, print media serves as a vital tool for building relationships between the organization and the community and for securing feedback. OCIFS regularly publishes a page in the tribal newspaper Kalihwisaks in which it announces events and provides information about services and staff. Readers are encouraged to contact the organization with comments, questions and concerns. The MFSI creates a monthly newsletter with organizational updates which is available from their website in PDF format. It boasts a circulation of 700, half of which are digital. As Karhu notes, “the newsletter has been a huge tool in promotion.”

Finally, staff can help to facilitate feedback through their personal behavior and communicative strategies. Johnson reminds his staff at TOCA that they are always representing the organization. He explains,

> People always knew what we were doing. Even in our private lives – people looked at us and held us accountable for what we’ve done. That’s what we tell our staff. Work is work and play is play but remember we’re in this small community and people look at you and judge you by your actions for everything.

MFSI Co-Director Ben Yahola underscores the importance of utilizing “plain dialogue” when communicating with the community. Staff should strive for language free of jargon, and must be open-minded and non-judgmental. Yahola finds that successful feedback is a “matter of being able to talk to them on their
level and to sit with them and work with them and show them that you are one of them.”

**Measures of Success**

While community responsiveness and feedback could be an indicator of success, to date, standardized indicators measuring the successful impact of community food systems initiatives have not been developed. However, standardized indicators may not be appropriate due to initiatives’ varied goals and methods. Likewise, each of the NFS organizations studied has differing goals; so too their measures of success differ. Evaluating whether or not these organizations are successful by their own standards is beyond the scope and intent of this research. However, inquiry into the types of measures of success that they utilize can be helpful for other tribes and community food systems organizations as they seek to develop and implement their own initiatives.

Though measures of success differ among the organizations, key themes emerge. First, successes can be achieved at the individual, personal level. Next, there are community-scale measures of success. Finally, a systems focus characterizes the third set of measures, with attention paid to how the local food system connects to food systems at other scales and how programs seek to impact or alter the food system at multiple scales.

Respondents repeatedly stressed the importance of individual impact. Many related stories of being approached by community members who wished to thank them for their hard work and to express how the programs had impacted them personally. This not only provides affirmation for NFS organizers, but also
reflects the changing subjectivities of the participants. As TCEDC’s Co-Director Terrie Bad Hand explains, “It’s not what you can put on paper or anything like that, it’s the smiles. It’s somebody who’s really happy, it’s the elders who might even break down and actually cry because they thought something was lost….The bottom line is the people.” For Johnson, it’s someone coming up to me and saying, ‘I love the beans. I love the tepary beans. I want to start growing them.’ Or ‘I took my family out picking traditional foods’ or ‘I actually started walking and going to the gym and exercising’. Those kinds of things are success stories. Or a staff member who comes and cries because they’re really happy that they got through to someone or someone came up to them and said, ‘Thank you for coming and teaching us or showing us.’ I look for the individual or personal kind of success stories and when people come and say thank you for doing the things that you’re doing. Those are successes.

Success is also felt when the community members begin taking responsibility for the projects and for the resources within the community. OCIFS’ Jeff Metoxen speaks about agriculture as a “responsibility.” People are tied to the land, to the seeds, and to the cultural practices and are responsible for their care and maintenance. Speaking of his tribe’s sacred White Corn, he reflects,

It’s not sweet corn. It isn’t something you can just throw in a pot or eat off the cob necessarily at any time. There’s some responsibility that comes with it. And those are things that we share with people...to say, this is something we have here that we need to take care of. It’s not going to be here just because we plant it.

Native Food Systems organizers see themselves as stewards of these resources and as facilitators for their continuance. However, growth, both figurative and literal, must occur by and through community members’ own participation.
Yahola stresses, “We have the seeds, we can get you started, but you have to take care of it.”

At the tribal and/or community level, success is experienced when other departments or the tribal government recognize the value of the work these organizations are accomplishing. For OCIFS, this has meant increased funding; for TOCA, increased interest on the part of tribal government officials in collaborating on projects. However, while increased coordination is valued as a measure of success, Johnson contends that disrupting the “established order of things” is also useful. Although never explicitly stated, it seems as though these organizations perceive it as part of their mission to make people slightly uncomfortable, to reveal to them the failures of the status quo, to challenge them to educate themselves about food systems issues, and to mobilize them into action and participation. Busch suggests that amplified dialogue within the community is also an important measure. Additional measures of success at the tribal level, as in the case of TOCA, include an increased or renewed focus on cultural revitalization on the part of the tribe or local community. For the MFSI, another key measure of success has been the passage of tribal legislation and the establishment of a tribal Food Policy Council.

While individual and community change is important, the NFS organizations studied understand their work as embedded within a larger movement to effect systems change. As Reader elaborates,

What we’re really ultimately looking at in terms of gauging success is, and one of the things we really focus on is creating systems change, not just creating programming or
that change within individuals. As important as personal or individual decisions are, all of those choices that individuals make are constrained by systems.

Strengthening the sovereignty of their own food systems contributes to more sustainable global systems. The degree to which they are achieving food sovereignty is also a measure of success. Bill VerVoort explains, “Success for me, the ultimate success would be a comprehensive food system in Oneida. That isn’t as complicated as it sounds. I’m talking basically from farm to plate. A distribution center, a processing facility…that we can actually feed the Oneida people.” For Karhu, having access to affordable, good, healthy food in the contemporary context, “just about dictates local production.”

**Challenges and constraints**

Like their measures of success, the challenges that NFS organizations face are conceptually diverse and exist at multiple scales: organizational, community and systemic. For nonprofit NFS organizations, challenges are similar to nonprofits with different foci. The challenge most often cited is the need to constantly look for funding. Tristan Reader reveals that working as a grant-driven organization often requires a reactive, rather than proactive, approach to programming. He explains,

Right now it’s still this kind of reactive approach to things rather than a real approach that focuses on saying, ‘Here’s what the community vision is. First you start with a vision, then you begin to create a strategy to realize that vision and then you seek the resources to implement that strategy.’

In addition, all organizations must effectively communicate their financial needs to external funders, or in the case of OCIFS, to the tribal government.
Finding funding, communicating need, and implementing programming all require effective staff, which interviewees noted is another key challenge. They find that a variety of staff personalities and skill sets are important to successful operation, but that there must also be harmony between co-workers. Johnson elaborates,

We don’t want people that are always going to be a stick in the mud or always giving out negative energy. I never want to be part of that or be around that. When we find people that are, we need to let them go because it’s like a disease that can spread and spoil the organization.

Metoxen also agrees and says, “It’s very important to recognize that, it’s not to say that everyone has to get along or anything like that, but we’ve got to be able to keep moving and work on that communication part.” Johnson also finds it is sometimes a challenge to find staff with the self-confidence to assume leadership roles. “A lot of people are really afraid to really step up and do those things. It’s really frustrating sometimes,” he concedes. Continuing, he says, “People will say, ‘Oh, I don’t have an education. I don’t have a degree. I don’t have a diploma.’ Well, I never had that. I’m an eighth grade drop-out and look at the stuff we’ve done.”

Finding a balance between planning for the future and moving forward at the appropriate time is also cited as a primary challenge. Negotiating the needs of the organization and the community can also be quite difficult, reveals Busch. She explains it is often a challenge to balance time spent in the office performing administrative tasks with time spent out in the community assisting with programs and communicating with the participants. Busch also finds having the technological equipment of computers, copiers, printers, and fax machines in a
central location a minor challenge to the decentralized work of being out among the community. Karhu finds the lack of money for “hard resources” including tractors, fencing, tillers, and other equipment an additional impediment.

Systemic challenges faced by NFS organizations center on the current structure of the global food system. Several of the interviewees suggested the availability of cheap, commodity food is a significant impediment to their communities’ health and to achieving their goals as organizations. When asked about the challenges to OCIFS’ work, Gary Smith replies,

The people of the community. You have people…it’s so easy to go to the store now and buy a can of beans or soup or instant potatoes or things like this and what we’re trying to bring to the community is community gardens…grow your own vegetables.

MFSI’s Karhu also contends that the USDA commodity program for Native tribes also presents challenges to their success. As a structured system of continued oppression, the community members have “free health care, they’ve got free junk food, you know….and it’s all sponsored by the U.S. Government. Yahola explains that this is has created “learned oppression” or a politics of an oppressed group of people. He suggests that community members must actively struggle to reframe their consciousness and to recondition their minds away from a westernized worldview. “It’s the spirituality of the people that we have to nurture back to connecting with the earth,” Yahola argues.

**Community, culture, and identity (re)building**

Although the literature on food sovereignty and civic agriculture suggest the important role that community food systems have in (re)building a sense of
community, maintaining and protecting culture, and strengthening identity, the NFS organizations studied provide concrete examples of this function.

Organizers identify four primary foci for their community building work. First, food is utilized as an organizing tool. Additionally, the engagement of youth ensures the continuance of knowledge and cultural practices. Revitalizing the food system also provides a venue through which local knowledge of agriculture and cultural practices can be re(built). Finally, building food sovereignty strengthens the overall sovereignty of their communities.

Yahola reveals the power of food as an organizing tool. He shares,

> Whenever our community gets together – the only way to bring them together at meetings or functions is to say that there’s food. So at that time while they’re eating my wish is always to talk during that time. To catch them during that euphoric moment when there’s food going down their system.

The importance of youth involvement was repeatedly stressed during interviews. Strategies for youth involvement include the development of a 4H club, the creation of an activity book for children, youth participation at farmers’ markets, and classes and workshops geared toward their interests and education. However, Johnson notes that the youth must also be allowed to express themselves in their own, unique ways to feel truly empowered. He explains,

> when the youth...when you instill that pride and that sense of belonging and you really build up that foundation of who they are a lot of the stuff will just come out naturally. With the youth you really need to understand that they have a voice and they have things that they do differently. If you have a poetry slam or an artist's contest that’s not necessarily
‘culturally related’, it is though. A lot of people think, ‘Well, if you’re just reading poetry and spitting out foul language…’ but that’s the voice of the youth. It’s not necessarily that it’s foul language it’s just the language that they know and how they can express themselves about how they’re feeling now.

Bad Hand and Martinson emphasize the importance of agriculture and food systems to community and cultural practices. Bad Hand reminds,

It all – the food – for native people and land-based people…the whole ritual of growing, preparing, harvesting and consuming foods are all ties to your culture so you lose those things when you’re buying everything from SuperSaves and KingSupers and in some cases, the little corner gas stations on the reservation, you lose all the cultural ties to your tradition.

Martinson continues, “The ceremonial aspects of being able to even live your culture very often depend on certain food being there.”

Food sovereignty is a goal expressed by many of the NFS organizations studied including TOCA, OCIFS and MFSI. Yahola reveals that this sovereignty begins with the body itself. As sovereign tribes, he says,

We need to be able to provide good, quality food. For any mind to be thinking rationally, it has to have good nutritious food to feed it. Mind, body, and spirit. I learned this from the colonizer himself…in order to keep a people healthy and to thrive you give them a good source of food, of energy. In order to get rid of them you give them junk, junk food.

VerVoort reveals the ways in which issues of food sovereignty have touched Native communities. Noting that food sovereignty is OCIFS’ ultimate goal, he argues,
go around reservations like water around a rock. And if it’s from the outside, they don’t generally really take well there, in many reservations. I’m not saying in all, but in many reservations. Having an internal movement has really brought Oneida forward as far as food.

Finally, while community and culture (re)building can be facilitated by food systems work, they should be treated as goals, not the inevitable by-products of such activities. A number of interviewees mentioned their frustration with low attendance and/or participation levels in some of their initiatives. Busch underscores that the community-building aspect of food systems initiatives is perhaps overstated. She notes that “you actually need to get to a level where there’s a lot of community involved in a project for that project itself to be the factor that builds that identity or helps strengthen that community.” In addition, she suggests that the food systems initiatives must be tailored to the community’s history, identity and unique culture to be truly effective as community-building tools. For the Anishinaabeg, a community garden does not help maintain established networks of individuals involved in food and food related cultural practices as much as does “ricing”, where rice is collected from over two hundred harvesters every fall. Busch explains, “That is already part of the identity and culture and already a communal effort and it has been for generations.” She notes that as new initiatives and cultural practices like community gardens are undertaken, the knowledge base will develop and, over time, these too may help build community.
**Advice**

While there is a growing body of research concerning community food systems, it remains difficult to find advice given by those actively engaged in the field. Advice is important for community activists as they seek to establish their own food systems initiatives. For the NFS leaders interviewed advice centers on two key areas; trusting and valuing the skills and capacity of the community, and looking to external resources and examples for guidance along the way.

Karhu and OCIFS’ Frieda Clary both emphasize the importance of conducting a Community Food Assessment to serve as a baseline for programming. Metoxen also suggests that it is critical to know what is important to a community’s culture before beginning and that “starting small” is advisable in order to get a sense of the responsibilities involved. OCIFS’ Don Miller underscores this point,

> There are a lot of great programs out there and we can learn from them but we initially wanted to make sure that what we did was compatible with meeting the needs, the immediate needs and the relevant needs that this tribe, our tribe, was experiencing the most.

Involving diverse segments of the community and educating about food systems issues and empowering community members to make decisions were also common themes. In particular, interviewees routinely noted the importance of involving the youth and elders. To start strengthening a community’s food system, Johnson suggests finding a passionate community member to organize efforts, supporting them financially and just letting them “really go for it.”
Having confidence in oneself and the community was another theme to emerge. Bad Hand clarifies,

I think tribal governments and small communities tend to not value what they really have to offer, what they know, what their elders know. I think if tribal communities would really look more to their own communities for the answers and utilize whatever resources are out there to continue growing from within it would be much more sustainable. Because when those businesses leave, and those companies go, when they extract everything — and they will — and history shows that, you’re left without.

While respondents emphasize the importance of focusing inwardly initially, they also find that learning from existing initiatives and organizations (both Native and non-Native) and experts is critical. Smith, Metoxen, Johnson and Karhu all spoke to the value of asking for help from others and for utilizing existing tools and resources. As Metoxen says, “There’s no need to reinvent the wheel.” The MFSI have utilized their state’s extension agents who have offered courses in organic gardening, seed saving and other food and agriculture related topics. Karhu describes,

We’ve been getting people that come free to teach and they’ve got PhDs in horticulture and they really know what they’re talking about. They have field experience. There’s a lot available if you start looking around and you’ll find, especially with the land grant colleges in a lot of places, most of them have received some kind of grant money where they’re supposed to be “building diversity”. And they love to help a Native American community. It looks good on their report. They’ll come take pictures and do everything because it shows that they’re helping a Native community. And they really are, in our experience. The people who have come and helped us out, they’ve been extremely helpful.
The importance of networking with other tribes and tribal organizations was also discussed. Not only does this provide a knowledge-base from which to work, it also creates spaces for innovation and cross-cultural community building.

Interviewees also recommended meticulous documentation. For TOCA, documentation in the form of photos, stories and events utilizing audio and visual technologies allows them to both record elders’ knowledge and chronicle their own initiatives and efforts. This documentation will then serve as a repository for future generations.

Finally, interviewees advised community organizers to be patient and to appreciate the spiritual importance of what they’re trying to achieve. Reader cautions, “These things don’t happen overnight in the same way that they weren’t lost overnight.” Yahola finds that “the key is establishing a spiritual connection to the food source.” He challenges people to recognize that “the earth is what gives life and we are earth in the end” and to “remember the other species and how they relate to you.”
Chapter Six: Summary and Discussion

A consideration of the profiles and responses given by NFS organizers reveals certain differences and striking similarities. As this research is in its infancy, efforts to further elucidate these similarities and differences will be necessary.

Differences between the organizations studied center on organizational age, relationship to the associated tribe(s), the degree to which the organization attempts to contextualize their work within the larger history of their food system, and efforts to link food systems strengthening with related issues of sustainable living. In terms of organization age, time since establishment ranges from twenty-two to only four years. Naturally, older organizations appear to have more entrenched and broad-based programming, though the Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative is able to boast many of the same successes as the older organizations. The Tohono O’odham Community Action is particularly strong at contextualizing their work within the history of the tribe, and this allows them to make particularly cogent arguments for the continuation of agri-cultural practices by linking cultural practices with material culture. Though the other organizations obviously have an understanding of how their food system has been shaped by, and can conversely shape, historical events and cultural continuity, TOCA is keenly adept at making this nexus transparent. Co-directors Reader and Johnson stress the same themes and arguments which are expounded on their website, giving an overall clarity of focus. Other organizations, both established and
emerging, would do well to look to their leadership at linking tribal history with contemporary food system efforts. Finally, a few of the organizations studied attempt to very clearly connect food system (re)strengthening with related issues of sustainable living. Both the White Earth Land Recovery Project and the Oneida Community Integration Food System, through its tsyunhehkwa program, work diligently to link the strengthening of food systems with sustainability in general. Linking food system sustainability to other forms of sustainable living may provide a way to educate and entice individuals who are interested about sustainability and have heard of more mainstream sustainable practices but may not be familiar with the concept of sustainable food systems.

Though differences exist, similarities between the organizations and their mission and programming remain quite significant. Each attempts to (re)strengthen their food system as a means of cultivating culture, identity and community. In addition, each appears to attempt to connect the vitality of their food system with a broader vision of community health and wellness. OCIFS includes the tribal Health Center as a component of its organization while TOCA and MFSI have each attempted to revitalize traditional exercise and physical activity through games and wild food gathering. Each also explicitly mentions the reduction of the incidence of diabetes as a definitive goal. The five organizations studied also strive to utilize food system (re)strengthening as a means to promote community economic development and grow employment. To support these efforts, TCEDC, TOCA and WELRP have gone so far as to construct and maintain buildings which house community kitchen and spaces for education and
outreach. Engagement with youth is also a strong similarity. OCIFS has developed a 4-H program which WELRP has initiated a Farm to School program. Next, though much of their contemporary focus is on strengthening production and distribution and little mention is made of waste or recycling, each organization appears to have a long term goal of strengthening the entire food system. Finally, the four organizations explicitly associated with a particular tribe contextualize their work within efforts to enhance tribal sovereignty.

At this point, several of the questions prompted by the literature review can be initially answered, while others require additional investigation and will be discussed in the “areas for future research” at the conclusion of this chapter. First, Native Food Systems organizations present visions of the food systems and food sovereignty which are grounded in an appreciation and understanding of community culture and tradition. Future research might seek to more explicitly reveal the similarities and differences of these visions and definitions of food sovereignty between tribes and organizations. While it seems apparent that their visions of food sovereignty differ substantially from the industrialized and globalized models of food production, there remains a tension between negotiating these two models – particularly in those communities who have established conventional/industrial agriculture and food production initiatives. How do visions of food system relocalization (and here relocalization might be better thought of as “re-tribalization”) exist alongside the tribal commodity production ventures?
It remains unclear the degree to which the Native Food Systems organizations are working to (re)build tribal subjectivity with respect to tribal identity. Certainly all focus on instilling pride in cultural traditions and practices. TOCA, MFSI and WELRP seem the most successful at directly linking a tribal identity with a “food identity”. As organizations committed to expanding their food sovereignty through food system (re)development, the organizations studied may be working against McMichael’s “cycles of dispossession”. Increased food production and distribution may stimulate the creation of jobs within these communities and allow members to engage with their land in culturally meaningful ways. Certainly, the organizations studied are attempting to reduce federally imposed control and influence, though their initiatives continue to exist alongside the USDA’s food distribution system. Further research might more closely consider this relationship by looking at how the USDA system might be altered in response to Native Food Systems initiatives and their call for increased access to local and culturally significant foods.

The programs and initiatives of these Native Food Systems organizations provide definitive examples or case studies of an attempt to integrate civic culture and agriculture and create a civic agriculture. Explicitly focused on (re)building community, culture and identity, they may also represent an attempt at community problem-solving, though the degree to which they initiate communal activities of problem definition and solution identification remains unclear. Activities such as community visioning and Community Food Assessments indicate these organizations are committed to involving diverse segments of their
populations. DeLind’s focus on “continuing ownership” and “cultural property” finds an ally in the work being conducted by these organizations. They strongly emphasize the importance of educating youth and the transference of cultural practices from one generation to the next. In addition, they view seeds and land as community resources that need to be protected.

Finally, many of the questions initiated by the food systems planning literature can be addressed. Native Food Systems organizations are deeply engaged in planning for the future of their communities’ food systems by building production, processing and distribution systems and supporting communal consumptive activities. As noted previously, attention to the recycling and waste management portions of the food system seems lacking. By focusing on community policy through the establishment of Food Policy Councils, these organizations are also attempting to shape the regulatory environment in their communities. Arguments for the importance and necessity of their work center on their initiatives’ ability to (re)connect food with cultural practices. Organizations also emphasize the importance of food to the health of the community, particularly in terms of diabetes and obesity. Hunger, mentioned explicitly by OCIFS, is also a related concern. Organizational leaders are acting as food system “planners”, and are engaging in most of the activities Pothukuchi, Kaufman and Campbell suggest for planners. They collect and analyze data about their food systems; not only participate in, but create community food projects; develop Food Policy Councils; and work with other municipal and nongovernmental agencies to develop food policy. It is unclear if any of the
organizations have attempted to revise local land-use plans and regulations. Again, this might form an interesting avenue of future research. Tools utilized to assess their food systems and garner participation and feedback from their communities include the Community Food Assessment, the Community River of Life, print media, radio and websites.

**Recommendations**

In order to support the efforts of Native Food Systems organizations, five recommendations are respectfully offered and outlined below. These recommendations were developed through reflection on the interviewees’ responses and an understanding of their organizations and programming, while attempting to situate this knowledge within the context of the literature reviewed for this research. While several of these recommendations are already being implemented or considered by varying degree in the organizations studied, the five organizations considered in this research and other emerging NFS organizations should consider their potential benefits.

1. **Organize a Native Food Systems coalition or alliance.**

   Though Native Food Systems organizations routinely interact through symposiums and conferences, no coordinated alliance, coalition or network has yet been sustained. In February of 2006, First Nations Development Institute’s Native Agriculture and Food Systems Initiative (NAFSI) grantees met in Hawaii for three days of reflection and training (Balbas 2006). Grantees expressed a strong desire to create a network to strengthen and coordinate their efforts. Participants cited the following significant benefits of a network: the ability to
create position papers and school curricula that make a case for returning to traditional diets, the ability to support each other and connect through collaborations, enhanced opportunities for funding, and the ability to share their resources and experience. Participants cautioned, however, that it is difficult to know who is already doing food systems work within Native communities, but that this was a prime reason for creating an alliance. The convened group chose to call themselves the Native Food Sovereignty Alliance (NFSA) on a temporary basis until they could reach consensus on a more culturally appropriate name. The vision of the Alliance was “a locally-based, nationally-active network whose purpose is to serve and be accountable to local communities, affording respect for sovereignty of resources and cultures.” Participants suggested that the NFSA form an advisory council to advise policy-makers and other communities wanting to begin a resurgence of traditional food systems. Additionally, the group voiced the need for asset mapping of current Native food systems. Member organizations could gather assessments and combine them for a mapping of assets throughout Native lands. The group noted that for future success they must secure funds for coordinators and an organizational budget, and must communicate throughout the year.

While participants were enthusiastic about creating such a network, and an account of this meeting was published on the First Nations Development Institute’s website (Balbas 2006), it appears that coordinated action has not continued. One participant in this research who wanted to remain anonymous suggested that there are those within the movement who are still attempting to
coordinate such an alliance or coalition, and that the creation of this type of umbrella organization is critical for the movement to effect systematic change in the food system. The interviewee noted that the First Nations Development Institute’s funding for its NAFSI has run out and that the W.K. Kellogg Foundation has shifted its focus to children, making it more difficult to identify funding sources for an alliance.

Rubin (2008) suggests the following conditions as conducive for coalition building: member organizations agree on ideology or share similar problems of why problems occur, organizations are led by those equally skilled in administration, similarity in organizational culture and decision-making, frequency of routine contact, leaders or professional organizers know one another and have shared experiences, and the presence of a common enemy. Considering only the organizations covered in this research, of all the aforementioned conditions the geographic distance between Native Food Systems organizations appears to be the only primary deterrent to routine contact. However, all organizations appear savvy with respect to internet technology, and physical distance could perhaps be overcome with sustained digital contact. While differences exist between the organizations researched, they seem to quite easily fulfill Rubin’s other conditions for successful coalition building.

Rubin identifies three key benefits of participating in a coalition. First, organizations can create power through numbers and expand the number of people involved in an action. Next, organizations can increase their power and knowledge through information sharing. Finally, groups can collectively voice
concerns over particular policy issues which affect their mission and organizational livelihood (Rubin 2008: 370-371). Though benefits of participating in a coalition can be significant, problems can arise due to philosophical differences, disagreements over peripheral issues and tactics, and issues of recognition as each organization seeks to claim credit for the coalition’s success. A key issue remains the enormity of administrative overhead required to sustain effective coalitions.

If coalitions are able to address the hurdles to coordination and can identify funding or provide resources, Rubin suggests forming a “support coalition organization” – a separate organization which has its own staff to focus on the shared issues of member organizations. Such an organization can engage in policy and advocacy work, provide information to member organizations, research and examine data, coordinate conferences to convene representatives, and disseminate stories of success and struggle between member organizations. Rubin stresses that the assistance provided by a support coalition organization helps individual member organizations concentrate on local issues. Reid (1999: 307) contends that “networks and coalitions are particularly important to small groups because they connect their mission to a larger vision, their members to other people, and their resources to additional resources for political influence”.

Though it remains to be seen whether or not Native Food Systems organizations will successfully establish a coalition, network, alliance, or support coalition organization to coordinate their efforts, organizational leaders and staff remain committed to rebuilding Native food systems. While the existence (and
web presence) of such an alliance might help other Native communities gain information and insight as they struggle to begin their own initiatives, nearly every participant in this research offered help and guidance to any community wishing to do so.

2. **Network with and/or join La Via Campesina to situate the organization or coalition’s work within a larger field of struggle.**

   With or without the existence of a larger coalition or alliance, Native Food Systems organizations are striving to effect change and strengthen food sovereignty within their communities. Tristan Reader, Co-Director of the Tohono O’odham Community Action underscores the importance of food sovereignty, asking,

   How can a community claim to be really sovereign if it's 100% dependent for its food system, for its economy, for everything from outside sources? What does sovereignty really mean in that context? There may be sovereign governmental decisions but is the community really able to exercise true sovereignty without power over the systems that regulate our lives and really define our lives, whether that's food or housing or economics or health?

   While an alliance or coalition organization between these organizations could facilitate collaborative efforts and a shared knowledge base, networking within the international food sovereignty movement could also help situate their work within a global field of struggle. Native Food Systems organizations should consider forming ties, whether informal or formal, with La Via Campesina.

   Desmarais (2008: 142) outlines the protocol by which an organization joins La Via Campesina:
When an organization seeks to join La Via Campesina its application is considered by current members in the region where the prospective member is located. The region then informs the International Coordinating Commission (ICC) of the new member’s entry. The ICC provisionally recognizes the new member while official recognition is received at the International Conferences. If necessary the ICC can intervene and overrule a region’s decision. However, the ICC rarely intervenes since this might well create tensions around existing regional consensus. This entry process places greater decision-making at the national and regional levels. It respects the fact that current members, especially at the national level, are more familiar with the history and politics of the applicant organization and thus better able to judge whether it truly embodies the ideals of La Via Campesina.

Though differences certainly exist between struggles for food sovereignty in Native communities and those in other contexts, particularly in terms of identity and land ownership, networking with a global organization committed to food sovereignty might offer critical opportunities to connect Native efforts with global attempts to secure food sovereignty.

3. Consider engaging in policy/advocacy work at the federal level.

Increasingly, there is recognition among food system advocates of the need to lobby and act at highly significant policy junctures, including participation in shaping the U.S. Farm Policy Bill (Hinrichs and Lyson 2007). While many grassroots organizations hesitate to devote their scarce time and resources to policy work, “it is only by engaging with policy to some extent that these organizations will gain the insight necessary in order to devise solutions to persistent impasses in the larger food and agriculture policy arena” (Hinrichs and
Lyson 2007: 350). While Native Food Systems organizations are engaging in critical advocacy and public education work within their communities, systematic change will require a coordinated effort at higher levels of policy making. As federally recognized tribes are disallowed from informing policy at the local (outside the reservation) and state level, advocacy at the federal level is the most appropriate site for affecting broader systems change. Ben Yahola, Co-Director of the Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative explains,

> Today’s work, in this season, is to document all these things….to let the legislators know that there’s more people out there and that we’re continuing to educate them about the need to become actively involved in the politics in local governments so that they can make things happen for themselves.

Policy advocacy is broadly defined as “any attempt to influence the decisions of any institutional elite on behalf of a collective interest.” (Jenkins 1987: 297). The W.K. Kellogg Foundation suggests that advocacy may or may not aim at changing the law and encompasses a broad range of activities that identify, embrace, and promote change through planned efforts to shape public opinion and public policy (W.K. Kellogg Foundation A). The Foundation lists the following as types of advocacy: public education; policy education; nonpartisan research, analysis and study; media advocacy; voter and candidate education; organizing and mobilizing; judicial advocacy; executive (or administrative advocacy; case advocacy; and legislative advocacy (e.g., lobbying). According to the Foundation, “effective advocates target the arenas of policy influence that have the most power to bring about desired changes, using the most appropriate
type of advocacy.” Reid (1999) notes that the line between advocacy work and organizational work is often muddled because advocacy is at the core of many nonprofits’ mission statements. For nonprofits, she suggests, “the greater the integration of service, advocacy, and public education, the greater the opportunities to use organizational resources effectively for raising their agenda and concerns in the development of public policy” (Reid 1999: 297).

While policy advocacy and lobbying work can consume resources, successful work can also be stymied by a lack of understanding concerning the amount of lobbying an organization may conduct. According to the Alliance for Justice (Alliance for Justice A), a nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting other nonprofits with their advocacy and lobbying efforts, while nonprofit 501(c) 3 organizations can lobby within the limits allowed by federal law, the degree to which they can do so depends on which of two sets of rules the organization chooses to utilize: the “501(h) expenditure test” or the “insubstantial part test”. The first, the 501(h) expenditure test, can maximize an organization’s lobbying activity. Under this test, the organization only counts lobbying activity that it spends money on. Additionally, 501(h) status sets a clear dollar limit on the amount of money an electing 501(c) 3 organization can spend on lobbying depending on the size of the organization’s budget. The organization may spend up to a quarter of its overall lobbying limit on “grassroots” lobbying or up to the entire amount on “direct” lobbying. Finally, with the 501(h) expenditure test, the organization can take advantage of exceptions for activities that might otherwise appear to be lobbying including writing reports that fully discuss the pros and
cons of a legislative proposal. To elect the 501(h) expenditure test to govern its lobbying activity, a 501 (c) 3 organization must file Form 5768 with the IRS only once. The “insubstantial part test” allows for lobbying activities as long as they do not become a “substantial” part of the organization’s overall activities. The Alliance for Justice recommends that a 501(c) 3 organization should consider creating an affiliated 501(c) 4 organization if it wishes to engage in more lobbying than is permitted for 501(c) 3 organizations. 501(c) 4 organizations can engage in unlimited amounts of lobbying.

Though an organization must deliberately consider the legal parameters of policy and advocacy work, engaging in such work can facilitate enhanced political consciousness-raising. Reid reveals, “People learn grassroots skills and build relationships in community, religious, and workplace associations in ways that are transferable to politics. Nonpolitical activity may increase public confidence about what can be accomplished through collective action” (Reid 1999: 292). She cites a study by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) which discovered that citizens feel more effective when they work as a group on policy issues than when they act alone. Nonprofit organizations engaged in policy and advocacy work become spaces of resistance- sites of collective engagement where future community leaders develop skills and build social and culture capital as they learn to negotiate political terrain and agitate for change. Yahola underscores the importance of supporting, strengthening and respecting participants’ unique skill sets. On political engagement, he describes,
Some people sing long songs, pretty songs and others just a short one but they become awakened by these short spurts, sounds. It’s encouragement that we have to give to our people because many of our people shy away from the camera and privately they say some really good things but when it comes down to the camera they back away.

4. Form relationships with tribal and/or non-tribal academic institutions. Utilize faculty and students to help study the effectiveness of the organization and to conduct research on the local food system.

Several of the Native Food Systems organizations studied already have relationships with academic institutions. The Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative coordinates with area extension agents and academics who provide classes to the community on food system related topics. The Tohono O’odham Community Action has collaborated with the Tohono O’odham Community College to publish “Community Attitudes Toward Traditional Tohono O’odham Foods” (Tohono O’odham Community Action and Tohono O’odham Community College 2002). With proper planning and facilitation, strengthening these relationships and forging new ones can help these organizations more effectively provide services and community programming.

Blouin and Perry (2009) contend that service learning courses have become increasingly popular in colleges and universities across the country. While the benefits to students are much touted and researched (Mooney and Edwards 2001), it is important to ensure that relationships between academic institutions and community-based organizations are mutually beneficial (Lewis 2004). Blouin and Perry note that while little systematic research has investigated the potential impacts on community-based organizations (Cruz and Giles 2000),
the implicit assumption remains that such relationships both enhance student learning and provide positive services to the community.

Through their interviews with representatives from twenty community-based organizations that have engaged in service-learning courses with Indiana University, Blouin and Perry find that most community-based organizations experience the following benefits. First, they value the skills, commitment, fresh perspectives and energy of student participants. Motivated and creative students are able to inspire staff and can offer innovative ideas to improve organizational operation. Additionally, they help expand organizational service provision through their labor. Community-based organizations are also able to benefit from campus resources including faculty expertise, increased grant access, and libraries and other facilities. Challenges to successful collaboration include students’ unreliability and lack of motivation and commitment. Organization leaders felt frustrated with short term commitments, scheduling hassles, unprepared volunteers, and the lack of time available to train participants. Recommendations for facilitating stronger relationships between academic institutions and community-based organizations include the need to communicate and form the partnership well before the course begins to collaboratively develop the service component of the course. Next, course and organization leaders need to share course objectives and define the community-based organization’s role in the course. Participants should share goals, objectives, teaching methods and the organization’s leaders should operate as co-instructors, responsible for sharing in the tasks of student assessment and evaluation. Finally, the authors suggest that
all expectations and goals should be clarified in writing to avoid misunderstandings.

Baum (2000: 234) also recognizes the importance of clear purposes, but stresses the need for partnerships to “accommodate ambiguities and changes in partners’ identities, their relationships, and their separate and common purposes.” The need for “tight structure and explicitness” must be balanced with the benefits of “looseness and indeterminacy”. Fantasies and exaggerated expectations about what university-community partnerships can accomplish abound, and funders also contribute to the creation of unrealistic goals. While Baum notes that funders, academics and community members must be ambitious about what they can accomplish, they must also avoid making inflated claims, ignoring difficulties, and failing to properly plan or evaluate such relationships or else “dishonesty, cynicism, and blame will inevitably follow” (Baum 2000:242). Positive long-term relationships may take years to establish, and if such relationships are to persist in reality, versus fantasy, “its changing members will need to keep re-creating it” (Baum 2000:243).

5. Consider utilizing social networking to attract, educate and involve youth and other interested parties in virtual spaces in which they are already active.

Each of the Native Food Systems organizations studied have created significant internet presences through their websites, e-mail lists and e-newsletters, but may further benefit from utilizing the potential of Web 2.0 applications. Wikipedia, itself a Web 2.0 creation, defines Web 2.0 as a
“perceived second generation of web development and design, that facilitates
communication, secure information sharing, interoperability, and collaboration on
the World Wide Web. Web 2.0 concepts have led to the development and
evolution of web-based communities, hosted services, and applications; such as
social-networking sites, video-sharing sites, wikis, and blogs…” (Wikipedia 2009).
Community planners are beginning to recognize and harness the benefits Web
2.0 applications have to offer. As “one piece of an over-all participatory process”
(Evans-Cowley 2009), these tools will not replace or substitute traditional
planning processes, but rather can augment them. The Native Foods Systems
organizations studied in this research are already engaging their communities in
the planning process in multiple ways, but venturing into Web 2.0 spaces may
help them reach populations, particularly youth, who interact and form
communities online. The Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative is already pursuing
this method of engagement with an active Facebook page with over 150 fans and
daily postings on issues related to Native food and culture.

In a 2009 survey of 980 nonprofit professionals representing nonprofits of
varying sizes and disciplines, researchers found that 74.1% of respondents
maintain a presence on Facebook, the most popular commercial social-
 networking site (Nonprofit Technology Network, et al. 2009). Staffing and
budgets allocated for such outreach remain small, but significant, particularly as
these organizations are faced with various demands on their resources. Four-
fifths of the respondents surveyed report committing at least one-quarter of a full-
time staff person to these activities. Like Native Food Systems organizations,
respondents also utilize traditional marketing tactics and continue to prioritize their websites, email lists, newsletters and events over social networking sites to help build their communities.

The ability to utilize Facebook or other social-networking sites to raise funds is currently limited. Of those nonprofit representatives utilizing Facebook, while 39.9% of respondents were able to raise money via fundraising, 29.1% have only been able to raise $500 or less over the past twelve months. More than 25 million of Facebook's 2000 million worldwide members have signed on as supporters of at least one cause, but only 185,000 members have ever contributed funds through the site (Hart and Greenwell 2009). According to the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, research reveals that internet and email are considered the least successful nonprofit fundraising tools. The most significant application of Facebook and other social-networking sites for nonprofits lie in their ability to inform online communities about events and related news, to share photos of projects, launch contests, and engage with community members in dialogue via discussion threads (Kapin 2009). In addition, the “viral” capabilities of these sites allow like-minded people to find the nonprofit organization, thereby exposing all of their “friends” to the organization. As Smith, Costello and Brecher (2009) from “The Nation” argue, “What is new about tools like Facebook is that they make more varieties of group formation possible. Now, totally on their own, millions of people are finding others who care about the same things they do, whether it be around oyster farming, workplace complaints or radical politics.”
On Facebook in particular, food systems related organizations and initiatives already have a significant presence. The Community Food Security Coalition has an active fan page with over 700 members as of November 2009 and utilizes the site to share relevant news, conference updates, and to incite discussions about policy and projects. A search for “farmer’s markets” garners over 600 relevant pages, and while a future research project might more thoroughly investigate the benefit of such outreach activities, Facebook and other related sites may have the potential to reach, inform and build a stronger community base for the organizations.

Though utilizing Web 2.0 capabilities should be, and likely is being explored by NFS organization leaders, it is important to note the dearth of internet access in many Native communities. A 2004 report by the U.S. Department of Commerce revealed that only 10% of Native Americans have access to the Internet in their homes while only 10% have personal computers (U.S. Department of Commerce 2004). Although this represents a significant barrier in reaching community members digitally, youth and other target populations may have access to the internet through local schools and libraries. In addition, a Web 2.0 presence may aid organizations in their ability to network with one another and educate non-Natives about the importance of their efforts.
**Areas for future research**

While each of the recommendations discussed above suggest avenues for future research, other significant opportunities exist. First, specifically identifying and analyzing features and initiatives of Native Food Systems organizations that haven’t proven successful could be very valuable, both for the organizations themselves and for other organizations working, or beginning to work, within the Native Food Movement. Pothukuchi (2007) notes that it is a challenge for new projects to get started, and existing “hotbeds” of community food activities are able to better attract funding from foundations and other sources. In-depth case studies of existing initiatives’ strengths and weaknesses could help newcomer organizations learn from previous struggles, particularly so they do not “over-sell” the impact of their proposed projects to funders. Pothukuchi (2007: 36) continues, “More research is therefore needed that presents rigorous, accurate, and fair assessments of what works and what does not and why, especially in newer approaches to community food security. Universities and nonprofit research institutes may offer the requisite skills, resources, and distance from grassroots pressure to conduct such research.”

Next, the intersections of race, class, gender and power within Native Food Systems organizations and projects needs to be more deeply explored. Non-Native leadership within the organizations is prevalent, with three of the Co-Directors and one of the staff interviewed non-Native. While this was not a primary topic of inquiry, discussions touched on this point, with interviewees generally positive about such collaboration. Vicky Karhu, a non-Native Co-
Director of the Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative, stresses, “We, all of our programs are open to all kinds of people. And I’m non-Indian. Everybody else is Indian and I’m non-Indian. But I’ve worked for the tribe and I’ve been around for awhile so I have a trust relationship. It takes a long, long, long time in Indian Country.” Native himself, her Co-Director Ben Yahola adds, “We have a diverse group and we’re not all Native Americans in this organization, which requires that particular conditioning to be somewhat…I say we address these racial, we cross racial barriers when we begin to include others in our work.” Yahola also commented on the political and networking benefits of having non-Natives active within the organization and its leadership. Speaking frankly of the foundations and organizations with which the MFSI interacts, Yahola contends that many “would not allow someone with dark skin to sit comfortably at their table.” Rachel Slocum’s (2006, 2007) work on racialized food spaces provides a valuable first look into the dynamics of race within the community food movement. She contends that “relational processes have constituted the movement as white and middle class and resulted in the positioning of people of color materially and discursively outside community food such that they must struggle to get in” (Slocum 2007: 343). She suggests that anti-racist practices at the organization level would involve changing the internal culture of community food nonprofits and their conceptual framework and diagnosis of food systems problems, with particular attention to the racial history of the American food system. While many community food systems organizations, Native and non-Native, are invested in expanding access to healthy and culturally-appropriate food among economically
marginalized people, issues of class and participation can arise. Even in tribal communities, the most disadvantaged community members may not have the requisite skills or confidence to participate in food system initiatives or in planning processes. As Reid (1999: 295) suggests,

> People with more education and income are more likely to participate because they tend to have accumulated useful participatory skills early in life – in active, affluent families and in good schools. These skills are reinforced at work, in social networks, and in nonprofit organizations.

Studying the relationships between class, power and participation in Native community food projects would potentially help community organizers to better serve and involve all segments of their communities.

Slocum (2007) also suggests questions regarding gender and participation in Native Food Systems initiatives. Three of the five organizations studied boast a woman as either director or co-director. Slocum points to research which has thus far revealed that women are more active in “alternative” agriculture and food systems activities than in conventional agriculture (Jarosz 2006, Trauger 2004). Her survey of 66 North East community food organizations found that women enjoy 59% of the Executive Director positions, 66% of staff with authority positions, 87% of the non-authority positions and 50% of board members. She contends that “there is a gendered dimension to alternative food practice that may be more than women’s historical association with food, other than women’s prospects in the labor market and less than any essential connection” (Slocum 2007: 529). Further research into the staff component and gendered authority and community participation levels could be quite provoking. Is there a higher
participation among women? Why? If so, how does this correspond with levels of women’s participation in conventional agriculture/food systems work in these communities? Are there differences between programs and initiatives constructed and led by women versus those led by men? How does their identity as *Native* women inform their work?

Additional fruitful avenues of inquiry might include research on youth engagement with Native community food systems initiatives. While little has been published on Native Food Systems organizations in general, this line of research might first draw from successes other organizations have had in involving youth. Next, through the collaboration and coordination of the Native Food Systems organizations studied in this research, a comparative study could be made of the Community Food Assessments undertaken by these organizations. Any other Native communities which have also completed a Community Food Assessment should also be included. Drawing from Pothukuchi’s 2004 study of Community Food Assessments, this research might seek to uncover and analyze the strategies which Native organizations utilize to assess their food systems. This research would be valuable for other Native and non-Native communities preparing to conduct an assessment.

As noted in the introduction, another valuable study might concentrate on exploring only one Native Food Systems organization, creating a richly detailed case study utilizing interviews with all staff members. Next, research focused on tribal members who have participated in projects and the organization’s planning processes would likely be quite revelatory and would provide a more rich
understanding of Native food system (re)strengthening. How do community members’ assess the success of programming? How do they understand the food system, - global, local and in between – and their role within it before and after participating in such programming? What are their visions for their food system? How do these visions diverge or converge with those of the organization? Another line of inquiry might focus on the tribal government’s perspective. How do they view their relationships with these grassroots nonprofits in their communities? When and why do they choose to allocate resources for community food systems work? Next, another line of research might focus on those private foundations and governmental funding agencies and programs which support Native Food Systems initiatives. Interviews could be conducted with staff involved in making the decisions as to which organizations receive resources in a given funding cycle. How do these agencies determine which project proposals are successful and which are not? What criteria do they use? Finally, a study might be conducted on the communicative strategies which Native Food Systems organizations utilize. How do they present themselves to their communities? What tools do they use to communicate? While the present research touches on some of these themes, a more exhaustive study might reveal which strategies are most effective and highlight changes in methods over an organization’s history.

Conclusion

Native Food Systems organizations provide powerful case studies of food systems planning, and food sovereignty and civic agriculture enacted. This
research adds to a growing body of literature on food systems planning, and offers concrete examples of civic agriculture. In addition, it imparts lessons on the struggle for food sovereignty in North American Native communities, whereas heretofore most research has focused on the global south or “developing” nations.

These organizations share similar visions of food sovereignty – vibrant, economically and culturally resilient communities where residents are able to connect with their food system in culturally appropriate and meaningful ways. They strive to protect material culture, cultural practices, and seeds, indigenous plants and animals for future generations, as evidenced by their strong focus on youth education and involvement. They seek to connect tribal identity and community spirit with foodways. As such, they work to create spaces for production and consumption within their communities to work against McMichael’s “cycles of dispossession” – keeping people on the land and instilling pride in tribal identity in order to combat the loss of a sense of self and community which can threaten Native communities. They are sites of resistance against continued colonization – of mind, body, spirit and community. By working to ensure their people have access to healthy and culturally appropriate food, they help cultivate a new generation of Native activities and leaders. As the quotidian phrase observes, “You are what you eat.”

The United Houma Nation and other Native communities interested in strengthening their food system can look to these organizations as leaders in the struggle to preserve and redefine Native sovereignty. Though the challenges are
significant, the successes experienced by these organizations should give hope to us all. While monocultural agricultural production threatens the genetic diversity and resiliency of plants, mono-culture, or the erosion or destruction of cultural practices associated with agriculture and food production, threatens our ability as a global community to draw from a rich collection of millennia of responses to environmental contexts.
Appendix: Iowa State University Institutional Review Board
Research Decision

DATE: November 6, 2007
TO: Breann Marsh-Narigon
    1219 SE Village View Lane, Ankeny, IA 50021
CC: Tara Lynne Clapp
    377 College of Design
FROM: Jan Canny, IRB Administrator
      Office of Research Assurances
SUBJECT: IRB ID 07-531

The Chair of the Institutional Review Board has reviewed the project
"The United Houma Nation: (Re)Building Community through Local
Food System Initiatives" and determined that the project does not
meet the definition of human subject research according to the federal
guidelines, 45 CFR 46.

Because this project does not need IRB approval, you can proceed with
the project. We do, however, urge you to protect the rights of your
participants in the same ways that you would if IRB approval were
required. This includes providing relevant information about the
project to the participants. Best practices would include in the e-mail
recruitment message a statement of the voluntary nature of
participation. However, this is up to your discretion.

Any modification of this project should be communicated to the IRB to
determine if the project still meets the definition of not being research.
If it is determined that approval is needed, then an IRB proposal will
need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data
collection.
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Acknowledgments

I have had the profound pleasure of researching and writing this thesis while experiencing my son’s first year of life. Though an amazing journey to help these two very different “children” develop, it has not always been easy. While pregnant, I had visions of rocking my sleeping son’s bassinet with my foot as I typed. I was unrealistically optimistic. However, I have been fortunate to have many supporters as I’ve traveled this path….

First and foremost, thanks must go to my husband, Steven, and my parents, Susan and David, for their unending support. I am not an “easy” person to live with and love in the best of circumstances (i.e. I’m passionate, demanding, stubborn and perfectionistic), and these months have presented unique challenges. My husband gets a gold star for his patience through the double trouble of hormonal fluctuations and the trials of qualitative research. My parents provided the foundation for my love of research and learning. They taught me to always question, to demand the best from myself and to be sensitive and sincere. My mother deserves particular mention for her many hours of freely-given babysitting services. Thank you. Without the three of you, I would be a much lesser version of myself. Your love and support allows me to do what I do and be who I am. To my sister Whitney, I love you and wish you were closer but hold you in my heart everyday. I’d also like to thank my grandparents for their continued support and perpetual nagging. After months of hearing, “How’s your thesis going?” I can now say, “Done!” I love you for your persistence and dedication to education.
Next, I am deeply indebted to the inspirational people who agreed to be interviewed for this research. Thank you for your time and passion – for educating me about what you do and for allowing me to ask sometimes challenging questions. If this research helps you in any way, or assists other communities wishing to strengthen their own food systems, I am honored and proud.

I am also incredibly thankful to the members of the United Houma Nation who I’ve come to know over the course of these past few years. I am particularly grateful to Principal Chief Brenda Dardar-Robichaux and Vice-Principal Chief Michael Dardar for their presence in my life. Your leadership and vision for your people’s future is nothing short of amazing. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of your process.

I cannot thank my thesis committee enough. You’ve had patience with me through months of research and child-rearing, and your guidance and support is greatly appreciated. Each of you has touched my life in ways that go far beyond thesis advising. I am happy to count each of you among my friends and will continue to be inspired by who you are and what you do. You’ve challenged me—in coursework, in research and writing, and in striving to be a better human being. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Finally, I want to thank my son Jasper. You are a gift and I love you more than you will ever know. Each day with you I see the world in new and wondrous ways. I cared about making a difference before I had you, but now I endeavor to
make this world a more suitable place for you to grow and learn. Juggling spending time with you and spending time with this research has been challenging, but I thank you for your patience and for demanding that I take time to dance, sing songs, go on walks, read silly stories, and have fun making duck and monkey noises. You’re the best, pumpkin.