Five Decades of Community Food Planning in Detroit: City and Grassroots, Growth and Equity

Kameshwari Pothukuchi

Abstract

Food planning in Detroit has matured over the last fifteen years, but it is not without links to past food-related initiatives or broader planning in response to the city’s decline over five decades. Occurring mostly in community networks, it encompasses a greater variety of activities than that sponsored by public or quasi-public agencies. Because of food planning’s links to place and politics, the continuity of institutional structures and their logics, and the persistence of socioeconomic conditions, it is crucial to understand food planning in historical context and as a specific response to the conditions faced by the community. The article investigates city- and grassroots-sponsored food planning over fifty years, and discusses the implications of each for a just food system in the city.

Keywords

community food planning, food justice, urban agriculture

Detroit is recognized widely as a hotbed of food planning—commonly understood as a comprehensive approach to strengthening the links between food systems and the community to achieve particular goals. Initiated mostly outside of government and within local networks, it has engaged more sectors of the community than ever before over the last fifteen years. Urban agriculture, neighborhood farm markets and retail grocery, and community-based food entrepreneurship have taken hold; initiatives exist to foster racial justice in and cultivate black ownership of the food system in a city that is overwhelmingly African American; and a food policy council provides comprehensive attention to community food issues. These efforts have engaged traditional antihunger networks and other community sectors—such as community development, social and environmental justice, K–12 public education, and public health—in broad food system-related goals, and engaged groups who were previously unfamiliar with food planning. Together, they seek to increase access, opportunity, power, health, and other desired outcomes to benefit the city’s residents and create an alternative food system that is more responsive and accountable to the community. Although the last fifteen years have seen much ferment, specific initiatives derive their origins or inspiration from the 1960s and 1970s.

At the same time, there is also evidence of city-sponsored food planning, whether through Farm-A-Lot program’s support of urban agriculture in the 1970s, the recently adopted urban agriculture ordinance, or public–private partnerships developed to attract supermarkets to the city. While the number and variety of activities in this category is more limited than those led by community-based organizations, city-led food planning has arguably dedicated more resources aimed at larger, corporate interests. Goals of these initiatives overlap only partially with those undertaken by grassroots organizations, and target conventional supply chains involving traditional corporate investors and developers.

Regardless of its City Hall or grassroots origin, food planning seeks to improve community conditions as well as the food system in contextually contingent ways. The continuity of place, people, organizations, land, community, and ideas; continuing impacts of past political and economic processes; persistence and in some cases the worsening of socioeconomic conditions; and the deployment of strategies learned from the past, all suggest the locally and historically specific nature of food planning, even as many elements are re-created (and new ones created) as a result of the national food movement and in response to new political and economic realities. This article places food planning activities in their context...

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1Department of Urban Studies and Planning, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI, USA

Corresponding Author:
Kameshwari Pothukuchi, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, Wayne State University, 3198 Faculty Administration Building, Detroit, MI 48202, USA.
Email: k.pothukuchi@wayne.edu
historical context; examines goals, procedures, and outcomes comparatively for planning by grassroots organizations or city agencies; and traces continuities and discontinuities over time as well as the possible contradictions that result. Learning about similarities and departures in food planning helps us understand the stable elements of the working (or failures) of the city as well as its food system. It offers insights about the relationships of food planning to other forms of planning and outcomes related to growth and equity in community food systems. It offers a way to outline food planning’s future, even if tentatively.

By focusing on urban agriculture, food retail, and black community responses to institutionalized racism in the food system, and through a historical lens, this article demonstrates that food planning is not dissimilar to or disconnected from planning in general: Both seek to respond to depopulation, economic decline, poverty, and regional polarization by race and class. Furthermore, contemporary community-based food planning, in many respects, seeks to continue, or finds inspiration from, past food planning efforts. At the same time, it manifests new forms and derives support through connections to the national food movement. Finally, it is no accident that city-led food planning mirrors in many ways city-led planning in general.

A discussion of the theoretical frameworks that inform this study’s methods and analysis is followed by a review of the city’s recent history of urban agriculture, changes in retail grocery over this period, and efforts to develop a food system by and for the local community. A concluding section traces the implications of the historical links between city and grassroots approaches to food planning in the context of the history of redevelopment planning more generally.

**Food Planning in Historical Context: Rationales**

The argument for comprehensive planning attention to the local food system and its many linkages to communities and regions is relatively recent (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 1999). However, specific issues such as food production, markets, and the organization of consumption were scarcely invisible to planners throughout history even if the extent and content of public sector involvement have varied. For example, Vitiello and Brinkley (2013) trace the historic relationship between specific sectors of the food economy and land use and physical planning, economic development, and public health. They showcase planners’ struggles to manage the challenges posed by the industrializing food system and suburban sprawl. Lawson, similarly, documents planners’ ambivalent responses to community gardens for over a century of their existence (2004). Tangires (2003) discusses the development of public food markets to deliver a variety of civic purposes, the impacts of local politics and bureaucracy, and markets’ decline.

Recent planning analyses of food systems, for the most part, take on issue- or sector-specific questions, typically using cross-sectional approaches even if they, by necessity, attend to relevant aspects of their urban context. For example, recent papers in this journal address issues associated with urban agriculture in three cities (Thibert 2012); the neighborhood food environment (Raja, Ma, and Yadav 2008; Raja et al. 2010; Short, Guthman, and Raskin 2007; Leete, Bania, and Sparks-Ibanga 2011); and open air markets (Morales 2009, 2010). They investigate food system issues implicitly or explicitly from the perspective of urban food security, nutrition and health, entrepreneurship and economic development, social equity, place improvement, and democratic governance and offer specific implications for theory and practice. However, none is an inquiry into community food planning more comprehensively, and only Morales offers a historical review of his topic, Chicago’s Maxwell Street Market. Systematic investigations of the links of elements of a community’s food system to the history of its place and politics are of relatively recent vintage, taking off only in the last decade or so (e.g., Donofrio 2013; Fairfax et al. 2012; McClintock 2011). From an international perspective, Wiskerke and Viljoen (2012) offer valuable insights as does the special issue of *International Planning Studies* examining the rise of urban food planning (Morgan 2013).

Besides Santayana’s famous admonition to attend to history to avoid being condemned to repeat it, why is it important to locate efforts in a specific, historical context? One, as a practical matter, food planners on the ground continually trace their connections to past leaders, visions, and programs. They do so to gain legitimacy, showcase history’s lessons, mobilize resources, inspire participants, define and redefine community, and imagine alternative futures. Two, historical analysis can guide effective practice. It helps place actors, organizations, policies, and communities in the context of change and continuity and to examine the presuppositions underlying analogies and forecasts (Brooks 1988; Abbott and Sadler 1989; Neustadt and May 1986; Mandelbaum 1985). Asking questions about the past will inform a situation even if specific answers are elusive. Three, analyzing the past also has predictive value. Specifically, by looking back at critical junctures to trace the trajectory of a movement or an organization as shaped by external and internal forces, we can start to identify corrective actions to achieve desired goals (Brooks 1988; Neustadt and May 1986).

Finally, a review of the historical context—“relationship between economic base, social structure, ideas, and governance; what role conscious policy played in producing urban form and social structure; how the system of power relations shaped policy; and the ways in which structures of power are malleable”—can help diagnose and guide equity-oriented actions (Fainstein 2005, 127). Food planning seeks to transform a community (and its food system) in particular ways that are, in some measure, “better” than before. Many such
activities are guided explicitly by equity-oriented rationales. In the effort to understand how planning may produce a better city for all, Fainstein (2005, 121) urges going beyond an examination of planners’ role and strategies to explore the field of forces in which planners function. These questions are relevant for cities such as Detroit, where postwar urban renewal and later planning efforts created displacement and raised concerns about other impacts, especially on poor communities and those of color. These planning processes also elicited specific responses from the community, including as they relate to meeting food needs and achieving other important objectives. Detroit’s history of redevelopment planning—detailed in a later section—offers a lens to food planning, and a way to trace implications for social justice now and into the future.

**Historical Analysis: Methods**

This article poses the following questions: What responses does food planning offer to the city’s problems created by depopulation, loss of wealth, and general decline? What relationships exist, if any, between the histories of redevelopment planning and food planning in Detroit? Specifically, how does one understand the relationship between food planning initiated by grassroots organizations and that by public or quasi-public agencies? Finally, what are the possibilities for social justice outcomes from food planning in Detroit?

The methodological approach adopted by Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulson (2000) informs this paper. By rehabilitating notions of character and tradition, Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulson analyze the historical formation of place distinctiveness in their comparison of two California communities: how places achieve coherence and how that coherence repeats itself. They draw from actor-network theory to explain the first and from structuration theory, the second. By reformulating character as the mode of connection among unlike elements, and tradition as the mode of perpetuating these links, they explain how place differences develop and persist. Persistent hierarchies of wealth and ideological control in places result in durable configurations that local actors draw upon even as they make adjustments (Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulson 2000). Places thus exhibit a rolling inertia that enables a stable mode of operations while also allowing for continuous flux. Their research strategy consists of studying the usual economic and social conditions, but also such other institutional realms as voluntary associations and nonprofit organizations, and physical trace material in the form of the built environment and nature.

History occurs across all the realms all the time, Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulson (2000) argue, with no time out. Locating character and tradition, they argue, requires keeping the agenda open, rather than focusing, for example, on the economic versus the political versus the ideational versus the natural. Since all elements are part of what people put to use in taking action, they must all be available simultaneously to any analytic story of what those actions might “add up to” as they move through time. This article adopts this framework to trace the stable features of Detroit’s food planning, its relationship to redevelopment planning, the impact of each on the built environment and vice versa, and actions and impacts through time.

This article analyzes historical and contemporary media reports, policy documents, commentaries, and research on planning in Detroit to answer the questions raised earlier. It draws also on my participation over fifteen years in Detroit’s food planning efforts, wearing multiple hats that constitute varying relationships with community food leaders, organizations, and initiatives. This article is informed, for example, by discussions in six years of a graduate seminar class I teach, in which community food leaders lecture; groups organized around food security policy, urban agriculture policy, and fresh food marketing leaders lecture; and collaborative programmatic activities I direct on campus and in the community. These interactions facilitate continual discussion on questions raised in this article, which have been documented through class, meeting, and program notes, and, albeit less often, audio- and video-capture. They are supplemented with informal one-on-one conversations with key players over several months preceding the paper’s development and revision, as well as email correspondence seeking elaboration and clarification where necessary.

The study adopts Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) translation to qualitative research of key criteria to assess quality in more quantitative, positivist forms. Attention, wherever possible, is given to historical work already done (Teitz 1989), both on city’s development planning as well as that related to food systems. Data and analyses gathered from various sources were organized to answer specific questions of the paper and are presented here with thick description. Urban agriculture, retail grocery, and antiracism efforts were selected as they have seen the most action over the last ten years or so, have historical linkages, and enable a discussion of outcomes and public sector roles (or their absence). For each issue, I have traced its specific history (Neustadt and May 1986), going back to the 1960s and 1970s. Because significant political and economic developments continue to occur, 2012 is used as the cut-off year for general city governance-related changes, and mid-2013 for food-related ones if the latter’s roots existed prior to 2012. For example, the adoption of the urban agriculture ordinance and the opening of the Whole Foods store in 2013 are included because I am familiar with their related deliberations prior to 2012, as are candidate responses to a food policy voter’s guide. On the other hand, details related to the Emergency Manager, mayoral and city council election victories, etc., are omitted because of uncertainty about their implications for the questions raised by the paper, and to avoid the trap that
“expectations for the future are often colored too much by the immediate past” (Isserman 1984, cited in Abbott and Sadler 1989, 472). Also omitted are proposals such as Detroit Future City as their concrete implications for food system change in the near future, and if they constitute departures from past patterns (Neustadt and May 1986), are yet to emerge.

What follows sets out in broad brush strokes Detroit’s economic and political landscape since the 1950s, when the city started to deindustrialize, depopulate, and become regionally fragmented socially, politically, and economically. It introduces food-related actions taken in response to these forces—both actions originating in City Hall as well as at the grassroots.

**Detroit’s Decline and Food System Impacts**

The past six decades in Detroit are characterized by deindustrialization, economic disinvestment, loss of population—particularly of whites, but also of African Americans in recent years—increased regional polarization along racial and economic lines, and a shrinking tax base, all of which have resulted in a predominantly African American central city with high rates of poverty and unemployment. Basic needs for urban and social services go unmet (Bomey and Gallagher 2013; Galster 2012; Farley, Danziger, and Holzer 2000; Sugrue 1996; Darden et al. 1987). In 1950, Detroit had 1.8 million people and about 296,000 manufacturing jobs. By 2010, the city’s population had shrunk to 713,777, while manufacturing jobs plummeted to fewer than 27,000 in 2011 (Church, McCarty, and Fisk 2013). In a state where African Americans made up only 14 percent of the population, more than four out of five city residents were African American (US Census 2010). About 40 percent of the city’s residents are officially unemployed and nearly as many (36 percent) live in poverty (US Census 2010). In six decades, the city’s total property value shrunk from $37 billion to $9.4 billion, in 2012 dollars (Kurth, Wilkinson, and Aguilar 2013). Despite increases in taxes and borrowing, the city’s actions fell far short of the magnitude of response needed to avoid indebtedness.

The Detroit metro is among the most racially segregated in the country. Black southern migrants flooded to Detroit to work in auto plants before and during World War II, but experienced discrimination in all aspects of life, including as they moved into previously white areas (Sugrue 1996; Darden et al. 1987). Beginning in the 1950s, the city demolished the predominantly black neighborhoods of Black Bottom and Paradise Valley to build highways and urban renewal projects, and displaced hundreds of thousands of residents. Black community frustration over police tactics, unemployment, discrimination, and general disenfranchisement erupted in violence in 1967 in Detroit and other cities. Detroit’s civil disturbance left 43 dead, 1,189 injured, and 2,000 buildings destroyed (Kurth, Wilkinson, and Aguilar 2013).

While Detroit was 55 percent white according to the 1970 census, by 1980, whites made up only 34 percent of the population. Although overtly racist tools used to discriminate in residential location, employment, unions, and schools are now illegal, barriers for poor and black residents remain and have become more subtle. For example, municipal fragmentation, exclusionary zoning, racial steering by real estate agents, and inadequate regional transportation continue to create significant barriers for black residents (Galster 2012; Thomas 2008). The 2008 recession exacerbated losses for black families as a result of unemployment and housing foreclosures. That year, some four thousand homes went into foreclosure per month, the most in the nation (Kurth, Wilkinson, and Aguilar 2013).

Redevelopment efforts during the second half of the last century shaped primarily by the need to attract investment to the city and create jobs typically were deemed too little, too late, and did little to revitalize neighborhoods. From the industrial and urban renewal projects in the 1950s and 1960s, to the Renaissance Center and Joe Louis Arena in the 1970s, to the Cobo Center expansion and Poletown Plant in the 1980s, and the casinos and sports arenas in subsequent years, these efforts not only failed to stem the loss of people and money but also reinforced perceptions that development was designed to serve outsiders rather than residents. These efforts are blamed for giving business elites disproportionate influence—effect that is “pervasive, visible, and overwhelming” according to two commentators (Hall and Hall 1993, 19; see also Sugrue 1996). Detroit’s downtown and the riverfront were privileged over the city’s neighborhoods for investments (Eisinger 2003), and planning was systematically undermined (Thomas 1988). To survive, meet real neighborhood needs, and defend against the manipulations of City Hall, community development organizations banded together and developed collective strategies, an approach that continues to this day. They collaborated on a daily basis, courted private funding sources, and cultivated champions in City Council (Bockmeyer 2000). Even today, as Dewar (2012, 187, 192) documents, a governance culture exists in which community development actors feel the need to cultivate personal relationships with city officials to get attention to their needs.

Over the last thirty years, along with broader economic trends, the food sector became more suburban, global, and concentrated (Hendrickson and Heffernan 2007; Guptill and Wilkins 2002; Coggins and Senauer 1999). Grocery chains developed large-footprint formats in greenfield locations served by trucks on highways and large suburban warehouses and, with a few notable exceptions, tended to withdraw or reduce investment in smaller urban stores. Inner-city neighborhoods, where many of the metro’s poor residents and those of color were increasingly concentrated, were systematically disadvantaged (Pothukuchi 2005).
documented factor in grocery store availability and quality in the region (Zenk et al. 2005). With greater vertical integration in the grocery sector, wholesale trade also declined as did the smaller and specialty stores that depended on it. In Detroit, wholesale trade in grocery and related products dropped from 629 establishments in 1967 doing more than $12 billion in sales to 101 businesses doing just under $3 billion forty years later, both in 2013 dollars.²

Postwar Detroit was home to scores of successful grocery stores in independently owned chains such as Chatham, Great Scott!, and Farmer Jack. In subsequent decades, Chatham folded (Henderson 1992); others were acquired by national chains such as A&P (Farmer Jack, in 1988) and Kroger (Great Scott!, in 1990) (Drug Store News 1990). By early 2000s, Farmer Jack struggled to compete with the newer and larger suburban formats of Meijer and Kroger and later Wal-Mart, and their innovative practices, as well as lower-price urban formats such as Save-A-Lot. In 2007, A&P shuttered all metro Detroit Farmer Jack stores and sold several off to independent operators (Smith and Youssef 2007).³ In this period, the city also lost two large public markets—Western Market, which was torn down in 1965 to make way for Interstate 75, and Chene-Ferry Market on the eastside, which closed in 1990 (Deeb, n.d.). With increasing vacancy nearby, the city-managed Eastern Market district fell into something of a funk until the city was pushed to transfer operations to nonprofit management in 2006, upon which the market saw a significant influx of funds from several national foundations (Gallagher 2010). Today, Eastern Market is a regional “food hub,” in current parlance, and a key driver of local food system development in the city, sponsored largely by corporate and nonprofit donors. This shift notwithstanding, the steady loss of food stores and public markets went unaddressed for decades by city government and redevelopment authorities.

**Food and Agriculture Responses, 1960–1995**

**Food as a Strategy for Community Survival and Empowerment**

The Black Power movement of the 1960s signaled a shift from more integrationist civil rights goals for growing but beleaguered African American communities to the imperative to mobilize greater political and economic strength (Brown and Hartfield 2001). Related political organizing helped elect Detroit’s first black mayor—Coleman Young—and several city council members—Barbara Rose Collins and Kenneth Cockrel Sr. among them—in addition to state and national victories (Brown and Hartfield 2001). More importantly for the purposes of this paper, food and agriculture were embraced as key elements of the movement’s overall strategy for survival, self-determination, and empowerment. Local Black Nationalist leaders insisted on the development of home-grown institutions organized around co-operative rather than capitalist principles (Lee 2008a⁴). The first co-operative businesses of and for the black community, including the Black Star Market, a grocery co-operative, were developed about this time. Led by Pastor Albert Cleage, founder of the Central United Church of Christ—later renamed the Shrines of the Black Madonna of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church—this group offered both a vision and a program for a self-reliant community food system that continues to inspire grassroots efforts today—especially those led by the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network.

In December 1967—the same year as the civil unrest—the Black Star Market,⁵ conceived by Pastor Cleage (later known as Jaramogi Agyeman), opened its doors on Linwood, a block from the church he led (see Figure 1). A poster for the Detroit co-op read, “We are asking every member of the Nation to contribute at least $2 to the Black Star Co-op on Sunday. Or buy a $25 share if you can.” It was one of several co-operatives piloted by Agyeman’s organization. Also included were a gas station, clothing and book stores, and low-cost housing, all designed to give black people a sense of ownership and the possibility of economic and political independence (Lee 2008b). For a variety of reasons—inexperience of management and staff, inventory costs, high prices, and lack of broad-based patronage from within the black community—the store closed within two years. Black Power organizations also experienced opposition from many segments of the city, including main-stream civil rights organizations (Lee 2008b).

The church had acquired a farm in Belleville, Michigan, which supplied the food co-op.⁶ The housing co-operative also facilitated weekly bulk purchases from Eastern Market, shared by households that paid $5 each. The social intentions of the housing co-operative, however, fizzled in time, and it became more of a conventional residence, according to Malik Yakini, Executive Director of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network. Nevertheless, “it is impossible to understand the history of the struggle for Black empowerment in Detroit and nationally without understanding the role Rev. Cleage played” (private communication, 2012).⁷

Responding from within City Hall to the growing land vacancy within neighborhoods, but not entirely unrelated to the grassroots responses of Black Nationalist activists given his own background, Mayor Coleman Young (1974–1993) created the Farm-A-Lot program. Developed in 1975, Farm-A-Lot provided gardeners with seeds, fertilizer, and tilling assistance, and even loaned pressure canning equipment to residents from neighborhood city halls. In 1974, 34 lots were leased.⁸ In 1975, the number grew to 525 and several gardeners were able to purchase the lots they farmed; five even won blue ribbons for their produce at the state fair (Bearre 1976). Described by Bearre as the “mayor’s hip-pocket project,” Farm-A-Lot was integral to Young’s narrative of survival.
and self-reliance for the city’s increasingly African American population. The program lasted nearly a quarter century. Some of Detroit’s older community gardens can be traced back to the Farm-A-Lot program. However, budget cuts crippled the program and because it was not a formally organized activity of the Recreation Department where it was housed, it faded away at the turn of this century (Guyette 2001).

Although infinitesimal compared with the scale of Mayor Young’s redevelopment efforts over two decades—efforts that engendered vigorous opposition from many neighborhood advocates—the program made two important contributions to laying the foundation for future food planning in Detroit (and nationally), thereby constituting tradition a la Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulson (2000). First, even though Farm-A-Lot was by no means the first case of local government support for urban agriculture—Mayor Hazen Pingree’s allocation of land owned by wealthy patrons to unemployed Detroiters to enable subsistence production in the 1890s is well-known—it should be credited with fostering the idea of urban agriculture as a formal city response to land vacancy stemming from neighborhood abandonment. Second, Farm-A-Lot offered a framework for later conceptualizing support for urban agriculture as a citywide project, in contrast to the more neighborhood-specific ways typical of the later generation of nonprofit organizations formed nationwide to support urban agriculture. Farm-A-Lot therefore offered a model first in 1997 for the Detroit Agriculture Network, and again in 2004 for the Garden Resource Program, as the groups sought to replicate the program’s services before it ended.

Yet another link to the Civil Rights and Black Power era is offered by Grace Lee and her late husband, James (Jimmy) Boggs, union and community organizers.9 The Boggs fought Mayor Young’s efforts to bring casinos to Detroit. When Young challenged the casino development naysayers to offer alternatives to the city’s problems, Jimmy Boggs argued in 1988, “We have to begin thinking of creating small enterprises which produce food, goods and services for the local market, that is, for our communities. . . . In order to create these new enterprises, we need a view of our city which takes into consideration both the natural resources of our area and the existing and potential skills and talents of Detroiters” (Guyette 2001). In 1992, they
founded Detroit Summer, a program that sought to reenergize neighborhoods with community gardens and art murals built by young people. They also inspired new, community-serving businesses, including a bicycle repair shop and a bakery (Rhea 2004). Established in 1997, the still extant Avalon Bakery is a beacon of small business development that also integrates care for community, workers, and the environment (Collins 2002).

Thus, we can see in the second half of the twentieth century, Detroit’s nascent decline facilitated by racial conflict, and the impact of these dynamics on land and retail within neighborhoods, but also responses from City Hall and the grassroots. These responses were motivated by diverse goals: (1) to develop black community solutions to meet food needs while building wealth and power for the community (Pastor Agyeman); (2) to minimize the impact of exodus on neighborhoods by encouraging the farming of vacant lots in neighborhoods, while offering subsistence in a context of increasing unemployment and price inflation (Mayor Young); and (3) to harness neighborhood resources—young people included—to meet residents’ needs while also offering a more relevant education and cultivating leadership for change (the Boggs). In contrast to the mega-projects that characterized much of downtown and industrial redevelopment, these efforts were small-scale, distributed spatially and in terms of leadership and implementation, and represented diverse food system activities. Despite the real conflicts that developed between City Hall and the grassroots, within all these collective responses is a strand of thought and practice associated with the civil rights and Black Nationalist movements that provided the seedbeds for much contemporary food justice organizing. All were offered as responses to a corporate, white-led economy that failed to meet the needs of African American neighborhoods in a declining city. To the extent that such efforts relied on outside resources, mostly from private philanthropy, and they all did at a lesser or greater extent, efforts waned as resources dwindled. Black enterprises also suffered from a lack of broad-based patronage, and sometimes active opposition, from the community at large.

Contemporary Food System Planning in Detroit

Urban Agriculture

In 1994, a national coalition made up of sustainable agriculture, community development, and antihunger activists, the Community Food Security Coalition, or CFSC, lobbied successfully for funding under the aegis of community food security. The subsequent 1996 U.S. Community Food Security Act provided federal funds in several renewals of the Farm Bill through the Community Food Projects (CFP) Competitive Grant Program for growing and marketing food in cities, nutrition education, and different forms of linkages between urban and periurban growers and low-income families. Later years saw funding increases for programs related to farmers markets, farm-to-school programs, urban grocery stores, etc. A definition of community food security adopted widely is: access at all times to high quality, affordable, and culturally acceptable food through means that maximize social justice and environmental sustainability (Hamm and Bellows 2003).

Several Detroit projects received funds from CFP and related federal programs. Hoping to reinstate services provided by the now greatly downgraded Farm-A-Lot program, the Detroit Agriculture Network (1997), or DAN, was among CFP’s first grantees. The project provided resources and educational assistance to gardeners, developed a youth leadership component, and created a citywide network of gardeners. To increase awareness and mutual learning, DAN initiated garden tours that continue to be offered today by a separate nonprofit of the same name. Destinations included gardens that showcased significant community-food linkages such as to education, food security, nutrition, and youth and neighborhood development. They included projects started at about the same time as DAN: the Earthworks Urban Farm started by Capuchin friar, Rick Samyn, in 1996, and the Catherine Ferguson Academy farm for pregnant and parenting teens started by biology teacher Paul Weertz. Later CFP projects include the Garden Resource Program or GRP (renamed in 2013 as Keep Growing Detroit) developed in 2004, with similar objectives as the by then defunct DAN; and GROW, an entrepreneurial agriculture and food retail project in 2006. In 2013, the GRP network consisted of 1,244 gardens, including 748 family, 55 school, and 76 market gardens. Scores of gardeners in the network sell produce as part of the GRP’s Grown in Detroit Cooperative at Eastern Market and the Wayne State University Farmers Market. Several city growers earn significant portions—a handful, all—of their income from sales at markets and to other retail outlets.

The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network’s (DBCFSN) D-Town Farm was founded in 2006 as a garden on a vacant neighborhood lot. Since 2008, DBCFSN was able to secure a long-term lease to seven acres on Rouge Park, a city park, thereby making D-Town Farm the city’s largest. DBCFSN also operates the Ujamaa Co-operative, a collective buying club for members, organizes youth-development activities through school-based nutrition education and farm-based agricultural internships, and convenes antiracism dialogues with the Uprooting Racism, Planting Justice program. The organization drafted the Detroit Food Security Policy, which was adopted by City Council in 2008.

DBCFSN’s organizing was motivated by both the abandonment of neighborhoods by grocery chains and as well as in resistance to white dominance of the alternative food and agriculture movement (Yakini 2013; White 2011a, 2011b).
DBCFSN’s operations, like other urban agriculture operations, are supported predominantly by grants from private foundations—especially the W. K. Kellogg Foundation—and federal programs; also, similarly, they rely extensively on volunteers. DBCFSN also collaborates with food justice organizations nationally, including Growing Power, with whom they have a formal relationship as a Regional Outreach and Training Center.

Two related recent developments include the 2013 adoption, following more than three years of work, of an ordinance legalizing and regulating agricultural activities in the city, and the controversial sale the same year, of 1,500 city-owned lots (about 140 acres) to Hantz Woodlands for $520,000. The urban agriculture ordinance development was prompted by the need to respond to Hantz’s proposal (then called Hantz Farms) to develop a large-scale commercial agricultural operation (see Thibert 2012 for background). The draft ordinance received widespread input and support from community gardeners who welcomed its legitimation of agriculture, and it is, in turn, broadly permissive of operations smaller than 1 acre. Nevertheless, the extent to which the ordinance will facilitate the growth of grassroots-led agriculture, or be enforced given extensive staff reductions, remains unclear.14

To conclude this subsection, Detroit’s urban agriculture displays themes of continuity as well as innovation. Consistently valued for its contribution to subsistence, neighborhood stability, sociability, and as a symbol of self-determination, more recently, it has embraced additional goals. Inspired by the growing national movement, urban agriculture is framed variously in terms of food security, the local creation of wealth, the cultivation of community leadership, justice, and food system sustainability and sovereignty (for a discussion of the last two categories, see Holt-Gimenez and Wang 2011, and Alkon and Norgaard 2009 for a discussion of food justice). More actors and institutions too are involved today: from schools, churches, and universities, to large downtown employers and investors. However, despite the real possibilities of entrepreneurial urban agriculture supported by an ordinance, and after the city disposed of more than a thousand lots to Hantz, many politicians offer only grudging recognition of urban agriculture, reflecting ambivalence documented more broadly (Vitiello and Brinkley 2013; Thibert 2012; Lawson 2004).15 Now, as before, most of the city’s urban agriculture is supported primarily by neighborhood sweat equity, and more tenuous private philanthropy or federal support, rather than local public funds.

**Food Retail**

As older, independent grocers closed down in the 1970s and 1980s, few community-wide efforts to attract new stores were developed. The first Kmart store—a Super Kmart developed in partnership with Hartford Memorial Baptist Church—opened in 1998 at 7 Mile and Meyers. The store lasted only about five years. A second store opened at Telegraph and 8 Mile in 2001 (Kmart 2001).16 The same year, Kroger opened in northeast Detroit but lasted only about three years (Brooks 2001). Prospects for national chains thus seemed bleak as the city hemorrhaged population and wealth, although several independent stores, such as Honeybee Market in southwest and Metro Foodland in northwest Detroit, operate successfully.17

In the mid-2000s, interest in inner-city grocery stores was rising within the community food security movement, with a growing literature on food deserts and their health and equity implications, and strategies community actors could implement (see, e.g., Pothukuchi 2006). Several studies showed significant retail demand as well as need in the city.18 The closure of Farmer Jack stores in 2007 hit the city particularly hard. Observing the success of the Fresh Food Financing Initiative in Pennsylvania,19 that year, the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC)20 convened a task force to address the city’s grocery gap. Stakeholders from the retail grocery industry, the trade associations for grocery and convenience stores, banks, community development advocates, academics, and others participated. The task force’s report called for, among others, (1) improvements to the business climate, including tax incentives for developments; (2) a grocer attraction and retention program to provide market information, assist in site selection, streamline permitting processes, and provide grants and loans; (3) workforce and grocer training; and (4) partnerships with community organizations (DEGC 2008).21

Over the last few years, thanks to growing foundation support for inner-city food access initiatives, fresh food retail in Detroit’s neighborhoods also has expanded through the efforts of food-nonprofits and neighborhood organizations. The city now boasts 10 seasonal neighborhood farmers markets.22 Eastern Market sponsors 18 seasonal, weekly farm stands in neighborhood and employment locations.23 The DBCSFN is developing the Detroit People’s Food Cooperative.24 Low-cost Fresh Food Share produce boxes distributed at 35 community locations,25 efforts to support food microentrepreneurs,26 and local sourcing by restaurants are other linkages to local agriculture, although few data exist on impacts. Many of the fresh food marketing initiatives offered by neighborhood nonprofits, however, are fragile given their newness, labor-intensive, reliance on grant support and volunteers, smaller scale, seasonality, and modest revenues. A couple of the larger neighborhood farmers markets—such as in midtown and northwest—face an uncertain future as grocery supermarkets are developed or proposed nearby.

Detroit’s supermarket scene receives divergent reviews depending on the observers’ standpoints, experiences, and biases. For some, Detroit merits the “food desert” appellation for lacking top-tier national grocery chains, while others employ it as a rhetorical shortcut to call attention to the health impacts of poor diets and other food system
disparities. Many, though not all, neighborhoods, indeed, do lack decent grocery stores. A comprehensive empirical assessment does not yet exist of the city’s grocery stores.27

Whole Foods opened its doors to national media fanfare in 2013 in midtown, with public subsidy at a level that few other stores in the city can claim to have received.28 With less fanfare, homegrown Meijer opened a 190,000-sq.-ft. store at Woodward and 8 Mile, the city’s northern boundary. Yet another Meijer is proposed in northwest Detroit.29 This $22-million project will feature a retail, grocery, and garden center. The Michigan Economic Development Corporation committed brownfield tax credits worth $3.3 million and local government committed another $6.5 million to the project (Zemke 2011). The proposed store is about two miles away from Metro Foodland, the city’s only African American-owned supermarket. “I wish someone would give me a lot of money to open a new store,” lamented James Hooks, the owner of Metro Foodland, an independent grocer of 27 years, “instead of the company that’s already making lots of money” (Cox 2012). Today, this store is the hub of community activism on the part of Uprooting Racism Participants who rally to support it.30 Others similarly resent the public subsidies to outside chains (Skid 2011; Finley 2011).

Thus, despite the vast, documented need that exists in the city for retail grocery, and although these latest supermarket developments are welcomed by many—including some community food advocates—city-supported corporate chains in a few high-traffic neighborhoods nevertheless raise concern for the survival of farmers markets and independent stores already operating there. Current critiques also echo those of earlier era subsidies to outside corporate elites: disproportionately high public expenditures relative to anticipated equity-oriented benefits, locations in better off neighborhoods that already have choices, and possible negative impacts on locally developed initiatives.

Still, these new supermarket developments are puzzling in light of the early demise of other chain supermarkets at the turn of this century: what is different today? Differences relate to community as well as corporate factors. These include (1) visible efforts by the city’s development agency, DEGC, to recruit and subsidize grocery developments as never before; (2) a food-aware community whose food desert discourse was snatched up albeit without the nuances of community goals that are sought in return for subsidy; and (3) Whole Foods’s intentional outreach to community food advocates and a savvy location choice targeting a mix of residents and commuters. At any rate, while city involvement in retail grocery development is undoubtedly new, it follows arguably familiar paths in terms of the means and targets of subsidy.

**Undoing Racism in Detroit’s Food System**

DBCFSN-led food planning efforts in Detroit derive inspiration from Black Power discourse of community self-determination, demand for accountability and justice in the operations of mainstream institutions, and skepticism about capitalist markets’ and governments’ intent, let alone ability, to create meaningful progress for the black community. The writings of Black Nationalist leaders—locally and nationally—and past community efforts to achieve political and economic empowerment through agri-food activities have left their mark on much of today’s community food leadership. Monica White (2011a, 2011b) specifically documents Detroit’s black elders’ agricultural activities as resistance to the exclusionary dynamics of the mainstream food economy.

In response to abandonment by grocery supermarkets and the white dominance of community food security leadership, a phenomenon documented elsewhere as well (Guthman 2008; Slocum 2007), DBCFSN’s leaders areadamant that the black community’s problems be resolved through self-determination rather than the charity of outsiders, however well-intentioned it may be (Yakini 2013). Food justice, specifically, requires not only that members of communities of color are treated with respect and fairness as consumers and workers, but also that the system create wealth, ownership, and prosperity for and in the community rather than profiting outsiders. The group started D-Town Farm as a black community-led response to the lack of access to fresh and healthy food in neighborhoods. In addition to projects discussed earlier, DBCFSN also collaboratively leads dialogues in which multiracial groups of participants critically examine the roles of race and privilege in questions of who has access to, and who profits from, the conventional food system, and how. These dialogues and trainings seek to educate activists to work more intentionally to empower participants rather than simply providing services (Yakini 2013).31 Other DBCFSN accomplishments include the city’s food security policy, unanimously adopted by City Council in 2008. The policy discussed a variety of impacts of the food system on the community as referenced earlier in this article and offered recommendations, important among which was the creation of the Detroit Food Policy Council (DFPC). The Detroit City Council blessed this recommendation with a resolution in 2009, paving the way for the DFPC to be seated later that year (see Pothukuchi 2011 for details).

Despite ongoing frustrations in dealings with elected officials and agency administrators, the creation of the food security policy and the DFPC nonetheless offer evidence for the group’s belief in a role for local government to advance food goals envisioned by grassroots organizations. They also signal the presence of champions within City Hall with shared movement links and values. The DFPC has accomplished much since its founding, including organizing annual food summits that received broad community participation, publishing several reports, convening a community “land sale” listening session and related meetings with city officials,32 and publishing a voter’s guide on food issues for the
ings and dialogues are additional critical elements inspired by the alternative food movement. Of course, urban agriculture and related equity outcomes. Fears that a big box Meijers in Northwest Detroit will put the only African American–owned grocery store out of business is one example. Another is the prospect that the Hantz land sale will serve as a precedent for the large-scale transfer of land to elite private interests with urban agriculture serving as a pretext.

The experiences of the Black Star Market, Kmart, and Kroger stores might suggest a bleak future, respectively, for DBCFSN’s proposed grocery cooperative and the newer Whole Foods and Meijer stores. However, DBCFSN’s outreach to the broader food community and Whole Foods’ strategies to ingratiate itself with the local food community (as well as to target midtown commuters and not just residents) suggest a possible departure from past trajectories of supermarket failures. Time will tell if they are enough of a departure.

**Lessons from a Historical Lens on Food Planning in Detroit**

What answers to this paper’s questions does this historical review offer? Returning to Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulson, let us review the formation of lashups among unlike elements, their persistence over time and the enlisting of new elements in community food planning. To fight structural exclusion and violence suffered by the black community and to build greater political-economic power, movement activists created separate, collectivist, and autonomous institutions of, for, and by the community. Food, along with other survival needs, was an integral component. Mayor Young’s leases for vacant lots to southern migrants from agricultural backgrounds drew on such attempts and narratives—albeit from within City Hall—to secure self-reliance for community members. Thus, unlike but proximally located elements were lashed up through a design for black community self-reliance with urban agriculture and cooperative food buying as vehicles. Contemporary gardening programs, working later from the alternative food system activities. They link intentionally to broader struggles for justice and offer programs for self-reliance. They enter into strategic collaborations across race, albeit in ways specific to their history and makeup. Today’s food policy frameworks are innovations, even if the city has yet to capitalize on the promise of grassroots-led food planning. Also new is the effort to engage the broader food community in justice struggles, through antiracism dialogues. By helping put race and privilege front and center, these groups showcase black leadership and work to keep the food movement and its leaders accountable to minority-race communities.

Still, programmatic solutions implemented or inspired by these groups are at a modest scale relative to the great need that exists in the city, and relative to the scale of public investments underwriting corporate supermarket developments or large-scale land transfers to elite investors. The groups’ significant reliance on grants also leaves them vulnerable to shifts in the economy and funder priorities. They experience other structural challenges as well. DBCFSN leaders, for example, acknowledge challenges related to getting broad-based buy in and participation from African American community members.

To summarize this section, fifty years ago, as now, grassroots organizing occurred in the face of the city’s impotence to respond meaningfully to abandonment, and apathy by regional political and corporate elites to neighborhood needs and demands. Grassroots, neighborhood-based collaborations, therefore, are born out of need and complementarities of mission and resources. These efforts were fueled by ideas related to community self-determination—with community understood racially as well as territorially—as well as food security, justice, and sovereignty. Although food-related organizing was a component of the larger movement for black power in the past, more recently, its frameworks, rationales, and energy are integrally and mutually linked to the national food justice movement. In this more modern association, antiracism trainings and dialogues are additional critical elements inspired by a national food justice movement resisting white dominance of the alternative food movement. Of course, urban agriculture initiatives would not have flourished in any era without the increasing availability of vacant land within neighborhoods, and federal grants and private philanthropy (see Figure 2 for a map of land vacancy in 2014).

The historical linkage is also characterized by low levels of city hall support for community-led activities, Farm-A-Lot notwithstanding. It is fair to note that such support, where it existed or exists today (through land leases for urban agriculture, or renovation loans for smaller grocery stores, for example), is modest relative to subsidies offered to elite or corporate-initiated projects such as Whole Foods and Meijer supermarkets and Hantz Woodlands. Thus, food planning by city agencies and in public–private partnerships tends to advance growth in the city’s conventional food sector. Although these activities undoubtedly increase choice in grocery outlets, support local food producers in small ways, and offer local employment, nevertheless, they also create concerns about negative impacts on grassroots-led activities and related equity outcomes. Fears that a big box Meijers in Northwest Detroit will put the only African American–owned grocery store out of business is one example. Another is the prospect that the Hantz land sale will serve as a precedent for the large-scale transfer of land to elite private interests with urban agriculture serving as a pretext.

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within nonprofit organizations and with the help of federal grants, sought to replicate Farm-A-Lot’s citywide framework through community collaborations woven by mutual need and capacity. Thus, the program’s structure and purpose constituted local tradition even if its particulars—leaders, implementers, institutional location, and design—shifted over time. As many of the city’s grocery stores shuttered in response to neighborhood abandonment and regional restructuring, grassroots actors developed agriculture, small-scale food businesses, and neighborhood markets in the absence of a systematic, meaningful response from City Hall, and in opposition to redevelopment that seemed blind to real needs within neighborhoods. These efforts spanned the two eras examined in this study, each deriving their impetus from similar contextual realities and guiding frameworks of autonomy and self-determination. Today’s opposition from some sections of the community to the city’s decisions to sell large tracts of land to Hantz Woodlands and to subsidize Whole Foods springs from a familiarity of the consequences of similar approaches in a previous era. Contemporary black activists, similarly, find themselves drawing on both old and new social movements to resist both abandonment by grocery supermarkets and white-dominated alternatives.

After decades of silence and inaction following steady grocery store closures, the city’s redevelopment agency finally undertook a plan with two, large, visible outside stores coming on line in 2013, and much smaller projects aimed at improving extant local independents. Inspired and informed by the national community food security movement, the initiative nonetheless targeted the vast bulk of its attention and resources to conventional supply chains rather than grassroots efforts. Thus, past programs and practices embody traditions that are actively continued in later eras by new actors and institutions—at the grassroots or in city hall, each drawing on experiences and discourses, or character per Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulson (2000), specific to their locations from previous eras—but also incorporating new ideas and initiatives. Through this historical analysis, food planning is thus documented as a specific response to the city’s experience of decades of population loss and disinvestment, and links are made between food-related organizing decades ago and more recent food planning, food planning and broader redevelopment planning led by the city, and local food organizing and national movements for racial justice and food security/justice. They offer the following lessons, especially for equity.
One, while it is by now—several years after the American Planning Association adopted a Community and Regional Food Planning Policy Guide—perhaps redundant to claim that food planning indeed is planning, this article underscores food planning’s intimate connections to the everyday institutions and processes of planning regardless of how the activity is defined at any given place or time. Furthermore, as is the case more generally, food planning too has implications for justice and equity, and therefore, is subject to resistance, active contestation, and ongoing struggle.

Two, contemporary food planning has links to past food planning. Through the continuity of people, community conditions, organizations, programs, institutional processes, and ideas, this article demonstrates both the locally and historically contextual nature of recent efforts to organize urban agriculture, food retail, and antiracism initiatives. These efforts also borrowed from and are boosted by (and, in turn, give strength to) national organizing around similar objectives. Hence, although the alternative food movement seems trendy, historical analysis shows that attention by community institutions to food issues is hardly new even if it was organized under different rubrics and had varying impacts depending on the institutional origin of actions. New programs draw from and build on old movements, programs, ideas, and policies. At the same time, new efforts seldom simply mimic old ones; innovations in food planning abound. Thus, old frameworks are transformed, and new national movements are translated to specific places through local tradition.

Three, tensions exist in food planning led by the city and that by the grassroots. To elaborate, greater city involvement in food systems is not unproblematic from justice and grassroots development perspectives. Not only have city-led actions disproportionately targeted elite and well-resourced actors in Detroit, they also create concerns that while increasing choice in the marketplace, they may also render the playing field more uneven for smaller, local producers and retailers that have displayed longevity and more or less congruence with progressive goals. Thus, as with planning more generally, the neoliberal thrust in food governance may create or exacerbate uneven development in the local food system. Although neoliberalism is by no means specific to the latter era described here—indeed, the entire time period covered in this study is also one in which Detroit has suffered from systematic disinvestment, increased regional competition, and lower federal involvement in central cities—it could be argued that the present moment of austerity represents an intensification with, among other things, the appointment of an Emergency Manager, and moves to privatize public utilities, and renegotiate public employee and retiree benefits (Peck 2014). As a consequence, redistributive and equity agendas seem even more remote than before. Community food advocates—especially those who are enthusiastic about a leadership role for the city in fostering the community’s food system—may need to be more vigilant about the range of outcomes sought and realized in return for public sector investment, especially as they relate to equity.

Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulson (2000) note that transforming places requires more than a collection of individual investments or superficial manipulations. Because urban tradition arises through interactive layering and active enrollments over time, developing such complementary elements all at once can be difficult. They urge closer study of processes in places—such as Bilbao, Spain, and Aspen, Colorado—that experienced such a decay of social infrastructure and economic base that underpinnings of prior lashups withered away, paving the way to transformations. These speculations are intriguing for their implications for food planning in Detroit and merit closer analysis given recent significant changes in the structure of local governance (a shift from at-large election of council members to elections based on districts and the 2012 revision of the City Charter, among other things). Might any of the actual or potential discontinuities represented by these recent developments represent a withering of lashups of the kind that Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulson suggest presage a transformation toward especially greater food justice? While a definitive answer remains elusive, the contextual realities described in this article—city–grassroots relations, neoliberal economic and political responses to demands for equity, and tenuous sources of support for initiatives, among others—suggest that the answer, for now at least, is in the negative. Grassroots food justice efforts will likely continue at least into the foreseeable future alongside more conventional food system developments, separate and unequal.

Conclusion

Detroit’s food planning history, read together with the larger, neoliberal political economy, suggests that grassroots movements, especially those that emphasize equity and justice will continue to struggle to gain and retain legitimacy or policy or funding support over projects that are led by the corporate sector or privileged groups that propose more conventional alternatives. A food system that serves the community and builds wealth and power for historically disadvantaged groups, though, continues to be an imperative even if efforts appear at times to tilt at windmills, and even as more mainstream developments, in particular, attractive neighborhoods, threaten to dilute gains. The city’s development culture continues to be oriented to facilitating a “normal” and mainstream food system even if better-off pockets of the city gain more choices. Some grassroots food planning gains likely will persist into the future to a lesser or greater extent: community collaborations in food system planning, multifunctional linkages to the food sector, diverse leadership, food antiracism discourse, and links to local and national networks. To the extent that funders continue their commitment to the place, the local food sector, and justice as a goal, these gains will multiply. They promise to mobilize participation, creativity, and collaborations and offer new models and inspiration.
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Notes
1. The city cleared a 465-acre parcel in the face of community protests, displacing 3,438 residents. Despite a clearance cost of $200 million, the city sold to General Motors (GM) the land for $8 million and gave the corporation a twelve-year 50 percent property tax abatement at an estimated worth of $60 million (Bukowczyk 1986). In the end, GM employed just over half of the promised 6,000 employees (Thomas 1990).
3. Several of these independent stores, including four Mike’s Fresh Markets, have the look and feel of more suburban stores when compared to the city’s older independents, which are typically located in older facilities and experience lower levels of upkeep (Pothukuchi, Mohamed, and Gebben 2008).
4. Paul Lee is a historian for Detroit’s Pan African Orthodox Christian Church.
5. The name was inspired by the corporations founded by Marcus Garvey, who advocated separatist economic and political institutions through his Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities’ League of the World (UNIA-ACL) (Shipp 1996).
7. E-mail communication, February 23, 2012.
8. Traverse City Record Eagle 1975, July 21, p. 7 (on file with the author).
9. The Boggs were early participants in the Black Power struggles in Detroit. Grace Boggs, an Asian American, describes her early intellectual development influenced more by Malcolm X than by Martin Luther King Jr. (Putnam 2009). But she found herself revisiting the words of King as he struggled with what he saw in the cities after the 1960 rebellions. “He proposed that young people ‘in our dying cities’ needed programs that were designed to change themselves and their society. . . . We wanted to engage young people in community-building activities: planting community gardens, recycling waste, organizing neighborhood arts and health festivals, rehabbing houses, painting public murals” (Putnam 2009).
11. Following several attempts to maintain it after Detroit Public Schools put it on a closure list in 2011, Catherine Ferguson Academy was shut down in June 2014. The gardens described here are among the larger ones. Over the last few years, several neighborhood gardens have created networks of their own. These include Freedom Freedom Growers, Georgia Street Garden, Brightmoor Community Garden, Growtown Farm, and SEED Wayne’s gardens on Wayne State University’s campus. Lafayette Greens downtown is underwritten by Compuware, a software company. More recently, Detroit Public Schools kicked off an initiative to develop gardens in forty-five schools, paid by a grant from the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.
13. Browse detroitblackfoodsecurity.org/. The organization’s mission is to build self-reliance, food security, and justice in Detroit’s Black community by influencing public policy, engaging in urban agriculture, promoting healthy eating, encouraging cooperative buying, and directing youth toward careers in food-related fields.
14. The ordinance development was initially stymied by the state’s Right to Farm law, which preempts local policies governing agriculture. In 2012, city representatives were able to negotiate an administrative waiver to the law from the state’s Agriculture Commission and the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Some community advocates fear that the ordinance paves the way for more elite-led, large-scale operations that threaten to create negative impacts and define an urban agriculture more impoverished in terms of community linkages than hitherto is the case.
15. Twenty candidates for mayor and City Council in 2013 were asked to respond to questions in a voter’s guide produced by the Detroit Food Policy Council. Five chose not to respond. While a handful of candidates offered concrete support of urban agriculture and land access for neighborhood-based gardening, it was also clear that others had not given the issues much thought.
18. For example, Social Compact put the city’s grocery leakage in 2009 at $200 million, capable of supporting aggregate supermarket square footage of about 0.6 million sq. ft. (Social Compact 2010). It also showed that “on average, residents travel an estimated 0.59 miles to reach the nearest full-service grocer, yet in some neighborhoods, the average distance to a full-service grocer is three to four miles” (p. 9).
20. The Detroit Economic Growth Corporation is a quasi-public agency that handles larger development deals for the city. The agency’s chief reports to a nonprofit board rather than the city’s elected officials.
21. As of December 2012, DEGC offered more than thirty instances of permitting, regulatory, or other assistance to grocers; work with ten grocers in improvements; and assistance with the opening the Whole Foods (20,000 sq. ft.) and Meijer (100,000 sq. ft.) in 2013 (Mimi Pledl, Green Grocer Program manager, lecture to Cities and Food class, WSU, January 23, 2013).
References


Abstract

This paper explores how urban food planning is used to address food deserts in Detroit. The purpose of this research was to identify the factors that have shaped food planning and planning education in Detroit and to examine how these factors have influenced the development of a local food system. This paper is based on a case study of Detroit, a city that has faced significant challenges in the development of a local food system due to its history of economic decline, racial segregation, and poverty. The paper discusses the role of planning in shaping the development of a local food system and the challenges that planners face in addressing food deserts.

Keywords

Urban food planning, Detroit, food deserts, planning education, sustainability.