

FOOD INSECURITY AND THE PROGRESSIVE FOOD MOVEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

In the United States, what we put into our bodies has become a highly charged personal and political choice. Since Michael Pollan's 2006 bestseller *The Omnivore's Dilemma* entered into the realm of popular culture, food – and nutritious and sustainable food at that – has become a massive American priority. To buy local, sustainable food is to “cast...a ‘vote with your fork,’” to recall a common movement refrain (Alkon, 2). The progressive food movement, as scholar Alison Hope Alkon notes in her book *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*, tells us that “by transforming our food practices...we can live healthier, more authentic lives while supporting positive social and environmental change” (Alkon, 2). The ostensibly idyllic movement though, often brings along with it unintentionally destructive gentrification to previously low-income areas. The intent of the movement is what is interesting – it not malicious or insensitive in any way, in fact, the ultimate goal is to theoretically help both the individuals directly benefitting from so-called progressive food and also their surrounding communities. This paper will look at the existing gap between progressive food and food insecurity in the United States. The gap between intent and gentrified actuality poses a significant challenge for many communities – this paper will explore the geographic overlap between four areas of high food insecurity with a strong progressive food movement presence. Then, on a case-by-case basis, I will examine enacted ethical and practical solutions for their ability to close the gap between food insecurity and progressive food and make progressive food actually progressive for everyone involved.

Food insecurity and poverty, as Mark Winne in his 2008 critically acclaimed book *Closing the Food Gap* contends, is a classic chicken and egg proposition. Cyclical,

the two are so closely intertwined that we are forced to wonder that if poverty can never fully be eradicated, can food insecurity? Should we, as Winne questions, “focus society’s resources on hunger mitigation as the most humane and practical strategy” (Winne, xix)? Because of their causal link, food insecure individuals in the United States are inherently low-income (but the inverse is not necessarily true). Another important clarification is the one between poverty and low-income. Although related, low-income status and poverty are decidedly not the same, the former is larger than and encapsulates the latter. In the US as a whole, 26 percent of food insecure households live 185 percent above the poverty line (Nord, Coleman-Jensen, et al, 2). This paper will concern itself with those individuals in the US that are food insecure, whether or not they fall below the poverty line.

Food is a particularly compelling subject matter because of its necessary universality – we, as humanity, all need it to survive, thrive, and live healthily. It is thus a natural injustice when we see or hear about people and families in our communities living without an adequate amount or quality of food. By honing in on such a basic necessity such as food, I aim to apply social justice framework to this project and to identify best-fit ethical solutions for the communities explored in this research, as well as larger lessons about where and how the progressive food movement can play a role in reducing food insecurity.

The four communities I will explore in this paper are by no means definitive of the comprehensive food landscape of the United States, but are in many respects regionally representative and helpful in understanding the problematic gap between food insecurity and progressive food and the food landscape of the United States as a country.

Broken down by county, the four areas I will be exploring are Travis County, Texas (Austin and the surrounding area), Chesterfield County, Virginia (Richmond and suburbs), Wayne County, Michigan (Detroit), and Alameda County, California (Oakland). Each area will have a substantive sub-section in this report that will address pertinent questions to the food landscape of each of the different counties.

Specifically, I will discuss the existing “gap” in the food landscape of each of these communities and why it exists. There are many innovative projects and organizations working to “close the gap” and make progressive food actually progressive for whole communities that are being implemented in each of these counties, typically in the form of non-governmental or non-profit organizations. Information, statistics, and personal interviews from organizations and individuals within well-known and established organizations will be included as part of the currently implemented solutions component of each of the county subsections. I will evaluate efficacy of these organizations within their respective communities for their breadth and depth of impact and, if possible, propose ideas to expand upon or modify the work the organizations are doing in the community to theoretically enable their work to be as ethical, sustainable, and effective in closing the gap in the food landscape as it possibly can be. This will serve to form a sort of “best-fit” solution in each of these communities, theoretically and necessarily bridging the gap between the progressive food movement and food insecurity in a practical and ethical manner.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the late-2000s, the captivating wholesomeness of the progressive food movement pushed progressive food into a national spotlight, welcoming those who could pay for the paradigmatic farm-fresh greens and dairy into its ranks. Built on now buzzword-y terms like “local” and “sustainable,” the movement began with and still has the best intentions, but is, as literature suggests, inherently elitist and unable to deal with the socioeconomic issues of inequality at the heart of food insecurity.

Julie Guthman, in her *Weighing In*, provides a much-needed critical analysis of popular discourse surrounding modern day food and the progressive food movement(s). Framing her discussions largely around the so-called “obesity epidemic,” Guthman “explains how the public came to speciously conceptualize obesity as a product of inadequate nutritional education, poor personal choice, and lack of will power” (Coplen, 485). The purpose of her *Weighing In*, then, is to dispel this inaccurate conception. The progressive food movement exalts a particular set of food choices – notably fresh, local, sustainable ones – which “tends to give rise to a missionary impulse, so those who are attracted to this food and movement want to spread the gospel. Seeing their food choices as signs of heightened ethicality, they [progressive foodies] see social change as making people become like them” (Guthman, 141). This leads to a general insensitivity about the inaccessibility of the movement for those who cannot access or afford (or do not want to access or afford) the movement’s prescribed set of food choices.

This issue of economic accessibility has not gone unnoticed – a particular vein of the progressive food movement, deemed the “food justice” movement, “endeavors to change the practices and idioms associated with alternative food to make good food more

culturally and economically accessible” (Guthman, 153). These endeavors are the sort of movements identified as “closing the gap” between progressive food and food insecurity that I will research in this paper. Guthman presciently points out though, that “even though this food justice movement is far more race and class-conscious than the mainstream alternative-food movement, much of its on-the-ground work is more or less the same: educating people to the provenance of food, having them taste food cooked by trained (albeit hipper) chefs, and making it available in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, on the assumption that if you build it, they will come” (Guthman, 154).

In editor Alison Hope Alkon’s collection of essays in *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*, she, along with twenty-four other scholars, explores the various dimensions of global and local food in a world that is increasingly prioritizing it on issues of “access, justice, and environmental and community well-being” (Alkon, ii). She, and the scholars she selects to write chapters for her book, initially focuses on the ostensibly cohesive narrative of the food movement, of the socially- and environmentally-conscious white, middle-class who buys local and organic to support their communities and the environment. Later in the book, she turns to the issues of this movement, of unequal access based on socioeconomic parameters and underlying institutionalized racism inherent in the ideals of the movement. At the end of her book, she finds theoretical means of reaching what food justice should be: a coalition building exercise between environmentally sustainable local systems and those currently suffering from food injustice (Alkon, 331).

In his exploration of urban gentrification with a case study model of Vancouver, “Political Ecologies of Gentrification,” Noah Quastel notes that “Vancouver, like many cities, has seen a growing interest in, and social movements concerned with, food security as part of sustainable urban systems, and the city has worked to increase the number of community gardens” (Quastel, 696). Supporting Guthman’s assertion that the progressive food movement lauds and prescribes a particular set of food choices, the increased numbers of community gardens that accompany gentrification demonstrate the movement’s influence on imposing “new values of local food and reflection on food miles” (Quastel, 702).

Using a more scientific lens on the topic at hand, Phil Megicks in his “Understanding local food shopping: Unpacking the ethical dimension” analyzes shopping in the local food sector in an area of contemporary consumer psychological research. In his study, multivariate analysis techniques were used to identify a set of drivers of and inhibitors to local food buying for the average consumer. Anecdotally interesting, the study identified “a complex range of outcomes which indicate that the ethical sustainability dimension of local food shopping does not positively affect consumer buying in this market” (Megicks, 264). Essentially, for the average consumer, the sustainability and ethical production of a food product does not impact their purchase or consumption of said product.

Mark Winne, author of the aforementioned *Closing the Food Gap*, despite these precautions about the movement, still has hope in the merits of progressive food. Following Guthman’s food justice movement, Winne cautiously lauds the merits of institutionalizing this vein of the movement, using his own anecdotal evidence and

personal campaign for the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program in the late 1990s. The Program was funded by Congress via the USDA and Winne holds: "None of this would have happened without public policy and without the corresponding nexus of political and personal relationships that make government go around. Farmers' markets would not have become available in low-income communities without good ideas springing up at the grass roots, then being nurtured by forward thinking public officials, shared across state lines, and ultimately funded by state and federal government" (Winne, 155).

This model and ones similar to it certainly have their merits. Organizations that start from grass roots and spread, as Winne suggests, certainly have a captivating sort of power that have great potential to inspire change. Organizations like former basketball superstar Will Allen's Growing Power aim for sustainable food production and promote community growth and cohesion through urban agriculture. A project of Allen's post-basketball and business careers, Growing Power grew quickly and substantially and is now involved in more than 70 projects and outreach programs in Milwaukee, across the United States and throughout the world (Allen). Will Allen has trained and taught in the Ukraine, Macedonia and Kenya and Growing Power plans to create community food centers in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Haiti. Domestically Growing Power has set up multiple Regional Outreach Training Centers throughout the U.S, and now stands as a testament to the power of beginning as a grass roots movement.

The literature and projects mentioned in this section have informed my research and the ways in which I think about the forthcoming ethical solutions to closing the gap between progressive food and food insecurity in the United States.

DATA, CASE SELECTION, AND TERMINOLOGY

Data

I am evaluating these communities on a case-by-case basis because that is the most productive way to evaluate ethically complex issues – generalization tend to be overly vague and thus unproductive in creating innovative and sustainable solutions to produce lasting socio-cultural change. That said, I still might find some interesting patterns across cases, worth evaluating on a broader scale. Using public census data and data from the Food Environment Atlas, put out by the US Census Bureau and USDA, I will be able to evaluate the demographic and food landscapes of each county as they are at present. The “gap” I have discussed up to this point will be evident in the evaluation of this data and upon the specific explication of the gap in each of these landscapes, academic commentary and anecdotal sources will be inserted into the larger discussion and evaluated for their causal validity for the gaps evident in the food landscape of each county.

County	Total Population	Percentage Food Insecure	Percentage Below Poverty Line	Number of Farmers Markets	Number of Farms with Direct Sales
Travis County, TX	1,120,954	17.8%	18%	17	94
Wayne County, MI	1,775,273	20.9%	26.3%	31	62
Chesterfield County, VA	327,745	20.5% (Richmond City)/9.6% (Rest of Chesterfield County)	7.3%	10	22
Alameda County, CA	1,578,891	15.3%	13.1%	37	29

Figure 1: Food Insecurity and Progressive Food Census Data
Accommodation and Food Services." United States Census Bureau, 2013. Web. 11 Mar. 2015.

Case Selection

With its county seat of Austin, Travis County, Texas will serve as the “standard” case of the overlap between progressive food and food insecurity. A hip, thriving college town, Austin boasts farmers markets by the dozen, but also has one of the highest urban food insecurity rates in the nation, as well as a host of non-profit and non-governmental organizations attempting to address this confusing disparity.

Just looking at sheer numbers, the independent city of Richmond and Chesterfield County (home to Virginia’s capital city of Richmond) have seemingly embraced progressive food in recent years, jumping from 0 farmers markets in 2009 to 10 farmers markets in 2013 in Chesterfield County and 2 to 12 during the same time frame in Richmond. The disparity in food access and insecurity between the City and the surrounding County though is what is interesting, providing a look into suburban gentrification juxtaposed with urban poverty.

The county seat for Wayne County is Detroit, hit notoriously hard by the 2008 recession and abandoned by many wealthy businesses in that recession. Also, because of its Rust Belt, automotive past, there are many brownfields left in the County and these sites have been targeted by environmental groups as places for development, a lot of times in progressive food. Wayne County will act as a case study from a more environmentally and socio-economically oriented urban perspective.

Oakland is at the center of Alameda County and is demographically similar to Austin, TX, but with a greater physical divide between the progressive food nexus at Berkeley and the neighborhoods of Oakland. The academic and organizational influence from Berkeley on the surrounding area, including Alameda County and Oakland in regard to progressive food and the ethos surrounding food insecurity in the region will be an interesting one to investigate.

Terminology

Food Security and Food Insecurity

In 2006, the USDA introduced new language to describe ranges of severity of food insecurity, created in response to recommendations by an expert panel convened at USDA's request by the Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT) of the National Academies. Even though new labels were introduced, the methods used to assess households' food security remained unchanged, so statistics for 2005 and later years are directly comparable with those for earlier years for the corresponding categories.

The USDA's labels describe ranges of food security: High food security indicates no reported indications of food-access problems or limitations. Marginal food security (old

label=Food security) is typically indicated by anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food in the house, but there is little or no indication of changes in diets or food intake.

Low food security (old label=Food insecurity without hunger) indicates reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet, but there, again, is little or no indication of reduced food intake. Very low food security (old label=Food insecurity with hunger) is reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.

Full-Service Grocery Store

To be considered and licensed as a full-service grocery store, a retailer must be first be licensed as a grocery store and sell at least six of the following categories: “fresh fruits and vegetables, fresh and uncooked meats, poultry and seafood, dairy products, canned foods, frozen foods, dry groceries and baked goods, and non-alcoholic beverages” (ABRA). To qualify for this license, a grocery store is required to dedicate a certain amount of square footage—or selling area—to the sale of these food products, including a minimum of either: “fifty percent (50%) of the store’s total square footage, or 6,000 square feet. Stores also need to dedicate at least 5 percent of the selling area to each of the food categories. In order for the square footage to be considered part of the selling area, it must be open to the public and may not include storage, preparation areas or rest rooms” (ABRA).

SNAP Eligibility

SNAP or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is a federal aid program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, under the Food and Nutrition

Service (FNS). SNAP eligibility varies state to state and jurisdiction for distribution falls under state-specific health and social services departments. To be eligible for SNAP benefits, households must meet certain tests, including resource and income tests that vary slightly per state. The maximum monthly allotment of SNAP benefits varies by household size – for a family of four, the maximum amount of SNAP benefits able to be allotted per month is \$649. In 2014, SNAP supplied about 46.5 million low-income Americans with an average of \$125.35 for each person per month in food assistance (FNS).

WIC Eligibility

WIC or Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children is another federal assistance program of the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) subsidizing the healthcare and nutrition of low-income pregnant women, breastfeeding women, and their infants and children under the age of five. To be eligible for WIC benefits, one's family income must be below 185% of the U.S. Poverty Income Guidelines. Though distribution is unrelated to SNAP and other federal aid, if a person participates in other benefit programs, or has family members who participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), they automatically meet the eligibility requirements for WIC, if they also are low-income pregnant women, breastfeeding women, and/or have infants and children under the age of five. As of 2014, WIC benefits have served 53% of all infants born in the United States (FNS).

TRAVIS COUNTY, TEXAS

With its county seat of Austin, Travis County, Texas will serve as the benchmark urban case of the overlap between progressive food and food insecurity. A hip, thriving college town, Austin boasts local farms and farmers markets by the dozen, but also has one of the highest urban food insecurity rates in the nation, as well as a host of non-profit and non-governmental organizations attempting to address this confusing disparity.

Of the 1,024,266 residents of Travis County, 18 percent live below the poverty line, almost 4% above the national average. 296,491 residents of the county, or 29 percent of the population have low access to full service grocery stores. Full service grocery stores tend to hug Interstate-35, leaving five zip codes (78617, 78653, 78721, 78725, and 78744) without a single full service grocery store, as of 2012 (Banks). There are three major areas in Travis County that have a general lack of accessible food establishments – Jonestown, Lago Vista, and the areas bordered by I-45/I-30, 183, 290, and the county line, all in East Austin.

That said, 189,390 residents of the county, or 17.8% of residents are considered food insecure, or falling into the USDA categories of either low food security or very low food security. This distinction between populations with low-access to full service grocery stores and populations that are food insecure is an important one. Though the two often overlap, there are certainly more people in Travis County with low-access than people that are food insecure, perhaps the more desirable configuration of the two classifications. This means that even though a large percentage of the population in Travis County has low access to grocery stores, a substantive amount of them are able to overcome the issue of access.

Another important distinction to make is the one between poverty and food insecurity. In Travis County, of the 17.8 percent that are food insecure, 34 percent are above the income threshold for governmental nutritional assistance programs (185 percent poverty), 4 percent are in a gray area of 165 – 185 percent poverty, and the smaller majority of those that are food insecure do fall under the 165 percent poverty threshold to obtain SNAP benefits (Weinfeld). A smaller percentage also is eligible for WIC benefits.

Changing gears and jumping to the other side of the metaphorical gap, we turn to the progressive food movement in Travis County. As of 2013, there are 17 farmers markets in Travis County and 94 farms in the county with direct sales, frequently to restaurants and consumers in the County. Austin, in particular, prides itself on a strong local food movement within the larger progressive food movement. The large numbers of farms within county lines are a testament to this – the fact that direct sales from farm to table are happening with 94 farms demonstrates the hold this part of the progressive foods movement has in Austin. And the farmer’s markets just keep coming – from 2009 to 2013; there was an 89 percent increase in farmer’s markets in Travis County, going from 9 to 17 in just 4 years (USDA).

There is clear demand for local food in Travis County. City government in Austin recently began releasing annual reports on “The Economic Impact of Austin’s Food Sector” in 2013, with a heavy focus on local foods with data derived from USDA surveys. A response to the high demand for local food in Austin and Travis County, the report states “studies suggest that the purchase of local food is widespread, and willingness to pay a premium is not limited to consumers with higher incomes, but rather

to consumers who placed a higher importance on quality, nutrition, the environment, and helping farmers in their state” (TXP, 14). This emphasis on a cultural inclination toward progressive food in Austin (as opposed to a socioeconomic one) is an important one and one that allows sustainable, nutritious food to become a priority for all local residents. Beginning with the founding of now-international chain Whole Foods in Austin in the late 1970s, Travis County and Austin have been culturally groomed to be conducive to the more substantive goals of the progressive food movement of the 2000s and 2010s.

The Sustainable Food Center (or SFC) is the leading organization aiming to close the gap between the nutritious, local food of Austin’s variation on progressive food and the high rates of food insecurity in the area. The mission statement of the SFC is to “cultivate a healthy community by strengthening the local food system and improving access to nutritious, affordable food. SFC envisions a food-secure community where all children and adults grow, share, and prepare healthy, local food” (SFC).

I interviewed Carolina Alvarez-Correa, a former intern with the SFC, to ask her a few questions about the mission and impact of the SFC on the greater Travis County community. She enthusiastically told me that the SFC takes a three-pronged approach to carrying out their mission, by growing, sharing, and preparing. The SFC holds a class series, called Grow Local, that provides new gardeners, and gardeners new to Central Texas, with a unique, holistic introduction to organic vegetable and food gardening. The organization also holds school and community garden leadership trainings to guide teachers, parents, and community members through the process of starting and maintaining school and community gardens. Their Spread the Harvest program reduces

financial barriers to food growing by providing free resources to low-income gardeners and to school and community gardens (SFC).

Nutritious, local food is shared with community through four of the largest weekly farmers' markets in the state of Texas, hosted by the SFC. Most compellingly, SNAP and WIC food benefits are accepted in full at these markets. More compellingly, the SFC enacts a Double Dollar Incentive Program, in which SNAP or WIC benefits double for those beneficiaries shopping at their markets (i.e. 10 dollars of regular SNAP benefits would be 20 dollars at the SFC Farmers' Markets).

The Happy Kitchen, the “prepare” component of their approach, teaches people how to make their own food in a healthy, affordable (both with time and money), and tasty way, giving participants free classes and ingredients to make the recipes learned in class, making healthy, local food all the more accessible (Alvarez-Correa). The SFC is supported by HEB, a local grocery store chain, along with various grants and four fee classes from Happy Kitchen and Grow Local that are open to whole community. The farmers markets are also a substantive source of revenue for the operations of the SFC. The SFC serves a lower income population in Austin that tends to very heavily Hispanic and African-American. The organization targets these low-income communities specifically, going to grocery stores in the area and conducting classes at local HEBs, at the SFC office in East Austin, and in apartment complexes in lower income areas.

In 2014, the SFC made and continues to make, quite an impact on the Austin and larger Travis County community. Their Grow Local program served 14,295 individuals and 837 customers at 46 worksites across Central Texas actively participated in Farm to Work. 220,000 different customers visited the four weekly SFC Farmers' Markets and,

from these Markets, total sales attributed to the Double Dollar Incentive Program were \$109,968, including \$68,138 for FMNP, \$26,352 for SNAP, \$5,579 for WIC, \$4,159 for People’s Community Clinic, \$3,290 for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas, and \$2,450 for Superior Health Care. The Happy Kitchen hosted 26 free six-week series of classes serving over 1400 family members, of whom 75% of family members represented are low-income, 85% of cooking class participants are Latino or African-American, and 94% of cooking class participants increased their fruit and vegetable intake and 95% are using the nutrition facts label after taking the 6-week class (SFC).

The model of the SFC is a commendable one and one that works remarkably well for Austin and Travis County. It is a paradigmatic example of what food justice is and should be – it is decidedly “more race and class-conscious than the mainstream alternative-food movement” (Guthman, 154). And while the SFC certainly has an agenda – one that promotes sustainable and nutritious food consumption – it is a very sound one. The SFC has built something great and “they” are coming (Guthman, 154).

The SFC’s model works uniquely well for Austin and Travis County, though, in part because they are feeding (no pun intended) into a pre-existing culture of sustainable and health conscious eating, largely regardless of socioeconomic background. The foundational Whole Foods-meets hip college town vibe of Austin has created strong food awareness even for those lower-income populations who are not directly involved in the movement. The educational barriers to food justice movement success are at least partially broken down by this pre-existing foundational culture in the Travis County area. For this reason, I am skeptical of the replicative action the SFC (and other likeminded organizations) suggests for other areas across the country. In areas where this higher food

awareness does not exist, the model of the SFC certainly would not be as effective or successful.

WAYNE COUNTY, MICHIGAN

Characterized by its industrial, Rust Belt demeanor and unique culture, Wayne County and Detroit have a notably different demographic makeup than other counties. A strong Black or African-American demographic (40 percent of residents) and culture are central to the County's identity. Along with that, the community and communal emphasis of African-American culture is a heavily influential accompanying factor. The paradigmatic case of white suburban flight in the 1960s and 70s, Detroit has had the ongoing opportunity to rebrand itself and its culture. Now, in Detroit and Wayne County, there is substantive emphasis on cultural revitalization with a strong prioritization of community and African-American culture in the area.

Of the 1,775,273 people living in Wayne County, a still largely under-populated city, 26.3 percent live below the poverty line; almost double the national average of 14.5 percent. 274,017 residents of the county, or about 15 percent of the population have low access to full service grocery stores (USDA). Ostensibly, access to nutritious food is less of an issue in Wayne County, given these statistics. This however is not the case. A city once publicized for not having a single major non-discount supermarket chain, Detroit currently has 115 grocers registered as full-service and major national chains currently setting up shop in the area. However, the existence of stores does not guarantee a wide selection of fresh produce and healthy foods, nor does it guarantee that the stores are accessible to residents in a city with a significant lack of public transportation (HP).

Detroit's public transportation is notoriously under-resourced – there are mere 36 routes, with often-inaccessible stops for 106,000 daily users of the Detroit Department of Transportation's services (Felton, 3). This often forces Wayne County residents to buy food from corner stores or discount chains, resulting in frequently less healthy, less varied, or more expensive food (CNN).

In Wayne County, 377,630 inhabitants, or 20.9 percent of residents are considered food insecure, or falling into the USDA categories of either low food security or very low food security (Weinfeld). This distinction between populations with low-access to full service grocery stores and populations that are food insecure is, again, an important one. Though the two often overlap, in Wayne County, access to food is certainly less of a problem than being able to afford it. This means that even though a large percentage of the population in Wayne County has reasonable access to full-service grocery stores, a substantive amount of them are unable to afford food at these stores, leaving them food insecure.

In Wayne County, of the 20.9 percent that are food insecure, 18 percent are above Michigan's income threshold for governmental nutritional assistance programs (200 percent poverty) and the remaining 83 percent of those that are food insecure do fall under the state's 200 percent poverty threshold to obtain SNAP benefits. A smaller percentage also is eligible for WIC benefits.

Looking to the other side of the metaphorical gap, we now turn toward the progressive food movement in Wayne County. As of 2013, there are 31 farmers markets in Wayne County and 62 farms in the county with direct sales, primarily to restaurants in the County. Detroit prides itself on its sense of community and, since the 2008 recession,

solidarity in community struggles and successes. In Detroit, there is a remarkable emphasis on place and community. President of the revitalization organization Project for Public Spaces Fred Kent says about Detroit: “Revitalizing cities around place is all about the community organizing, and [Detroit’s] passion for that, and understanding of it, is truly revolutionary” (PPS). The farmer’s markets in the area are a testament to this sort of community, and the power of community movement. From 2009 to 2013, there was a 244 percent increase in farmer’s markets in Wayne County, going from 9 to 31 in just 4 years. There is clear demand for community-based, local food in Detroit and Wayne County, but with high poverty rates accompanied by high food insecurity, it is initially challenging to see from where this demand is coming.

After filing for bankruptcy as a city on July 18, 2013, Detroit had hit rock bottom (Orr). But, looking on the bright side as often forced to do when in such an overwhelmingly negative experience, the city and its remaining inhabitants could only go up, so to speak, from this filing. And up they went (and continue to go). Bolstering an already-strong sense of community, grassroots based initiatives focus on restructuring existing policy to create positive change in Detroit and Wayne county (Kirkpatrick, 2). This focus on policy is evident at the highest levels of local government – in early 2013, as a means of bracing for the impending bankruptcy, the city of Detroit created the Detroit Future City Strategic Framework, a series of various initiatives to revitalize the once-failing, but much loved city (DFC). The creation of this policy/government-based initiative inspired those organizing at the grassroots level to adopt a similar policy-oriented focus. From this, we see dozens of community-based, policy-oriented initiatives to revitalize Detroit and surrounding Wayne County from the ground up. Many of these

initiatives are ones focused on food security and access to nutritional foods, simply because food access is a substantial issue in this area, as previously evidenced.

Exemplarily, the Michigan Urban Farming Initiative is a nonprofit organization in Wayne County that seeks to engage members of the Michigan community in sustainable agriculture. This organization wishes to specifically address challenges unique to the Michigan community (e.g., vacant land, poor diet, nutritional illiteracy, and food insecurity) and believes that these challenges present a unique opportunity for community-supported agriculture. Using agriculture as a platform to promote education, sustainability, and community—while simultaneously reducing socioeconomic disparity—MUFI hope to empower the Wayne County urban community.

According to Shelby Wilson, MUFI Volunteer Coordinator, the Michigan Urban Farming Initiative takes a broad three-pronged approach to bridging the gap between progressive food initiatives and food insecurity, basing their methods on education, sustainability, and community (Wilson). By viewing urban farming and gardening as an educational opportunity, MUFI aims to provide a long-term solution to the problem of food insecurity in urban areas. When people develop new skills they become actively engaged in the learning process and through a combination of workshops and fieldwork, this organization hope to educate the citizen farmers and provide hands-on experience necessary for successful food production. As for sustainability, MUFI holds that “growing food locally minimizes environmental impacts on a local and global scale. When waste is recycled and crops are rotated, minimal fertilizer is needed to maintain high yields. Through using abandoned and vacant land, we also lessen the need to develop more farmland in rural areas” (Wilson). Lastly, by building relationships with the

community and starting at a grassroots level, MUFI is better prepared to achieve their initial aims, closing the gap between progressive food and food insecurity in Detroit and Wayne County.

MUFI is specifically working to target issues of vacant land, unemployment, access to nutritious food, and awareness of food miles and nutrition information. The abandoned buildings and houses, unkempt land, and other poorly used spaces of a post-2008 Detroit are being redeveloped into food producing plots. A productive time filler for many unemployed people in Wayne County, community farming can support a healthy lifestyle, especially in times of limited income. Also, urban areas have particular difficulty providing consistent access to nutritious food and fresh produce. Such circumstances are particularly acute in low-income neighborhoods, where people may not have access to transportation. The local urban gardens and farms supported by MUFI provide a source of fresh, affordable produce available to the whole community. As for larger popular education, many people are disconnected from their food and where it comes from and MUFI provides ongoing educational opportunities for the community concerning the growing and harvesting of produce, in addition to its nutritional value, so community members develop a certain consciousness about where their food comes from and their role in the process.

A broader, umbrella organization, the Detroit Food Justice Task Force is “a consortium of People of Color led organizations and allies that share a commitment to creating a food security plan for Detroit that is: sustainable; that provides healthy, affordable foods for all of the city’s people; that is based on best-practices and programs that work; and that is just and equitable in the distribution of food and jobs” (FJTF).

The Food Justice Task Force, a recent endeavor in Detroit and Wayne County, will be working within the community to establish a set of Food Justice Principles that work specifically for the particulars of Detroit. While abandoned by major supermarket chains, Detroit, like many inner city communities, has rich social and environmental capital that has been largely untapped or under-utilized in addressing food security for the people in its diverse communities. The Task Force, according to their mission statement, “brings together a broad coalition of local growers, social, environmental and media justice organizations, schools, churches, food educators, restaurants, caterers and restaurant suppliers, the City of Detroit, representatives from the Michigan Environmental Council, community activists, residents and stakeholders” (FJTF). The members of the task force represent a broad spectrum of experience and resources in food production, distribution, land use, restaurant and other end users/retail options who will work together to develop and implement strategies to expand urban agriculture production, improve food access and security, create jobs, and contribute to community sustainability.

While so new that results cannot be analyzed, the Food Justice Task Force combines the community aspect of a grassroots initiative with a larger social policy focused goal, an interesting and worthwhile combination of models. This model is heavily present in other organizations in the area, inspired in part by a strong sense of community in Detroit and the initiatives of the DFC. We find similar organizations across the city, often with very similar names and goals. Another organization, the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN), was formed to specifically address “food insecurity in Detroit’s Black community, and to organize members of that

community to play a more active leadership role in the local food security movement” (DBCFSN). Emphasizing new partnerships with and endorsements of statewide initiatives to address food insecurity, like the Double-Up Food Bucks Initiative in Michigan – the DBCFSN, the FJTF, and MUFI have high degrees of awareness of their roles in the Wayne County community. This new 2015 initiative provides an excellent example of these organizations roles in local implementation of revitalization efforts. Double-Up Food Bucks Initiative in Michigan is “the first statewide incentive program to be rolled out with a uniform design, central administration, and local implementation” (FFN). The program doubles the value of federal nutrition assistance (mostly SNAP benefits) spent at participating farmers’ markets and grocery stores. Its success lies in community education and endorsement by community leaders, like those involved in the aforementioned organizations.

Well intentioned and with an inspiring for-the-people, by-the-people attitude, these organizations are three among many similar ones in the larger Detroit community. The larger, policy oriented goals of these organizations in support of ongoing revitalization efforts in Detroit and Wayne County are commendable – from looking at these and other similar organizations, there is a fairly cohesive vision of what active residents want their city to be. United in similar goals, these various organizations hold the most effective movements develop organically from the groups of people they are designed to serve. I am compelled to agree with this point and applaud the organizations for their efforts.

In this though, there are some seemingly large flaws in the way these organizations are run and work together. The general model of bridging the gap between

sustainable, nutritious food and food insecurity in the organizations of Detroit and Wayne County is one I will call the grassroots-for-policy model. These organizations begin with passionate people in the community and call for food justice in nutrition and accessibility largely by providing support for revitalization policy and community education. The largest issues we see in this model, though, are high degrees of fragmentation and high potential for co-organizational stalemate. The three organizations spotlighted in this paper (and the many other similar food-justice oriented ones in Wayne County and Detroit) have very similar focal points, with sweeping goals for social change based around progressive food and seemingly limited on-the-ground initiative implementation (save for MUFI and its community gardens). That is to say, there is a lot of grassroots organization and support for issues surrounding food security problems in Detroit and Wayne County – these organizations serve as educational middlemen between community members and larger revitalization efforts.

There is not enough actual action, though, being taken at the community level. For every organization that plants gardens or teaches free nutritional cooking classes, there are more that are ambiguous task forces, cooperatives, and networks. And while community support for ongoing revitalization policy efforts surrounding progressive food is undoubtedly helpful, there is such an abundance of this sort of organization that the support becomes redundant and unnecessarily fragmented and real, community action is limited.

CHESTERFIELD COUNTY, VIRGINIA

In this section, I turn to an interesting geographical case within the food landscape of the United States. The state constitution of Virginia allows for independent cities in addition to the standard unit of counties, in which these cities have the same authority as counties. For this section, I will be examining Richmond City and Chesterfield County in a paradigmatic example of city/suburb divide in food landscape and progressive food dynamics. Richmond, the capital of the Commonwealth of Virginia, is also an independent city, treated by the state and federal government as its own county unit, of sorts. Chesterfield County is the county surrounding Richmond to the south and has a largely different demographic and food landscape make-up worth exploring in this paper.

Of the 327,745 residents of Chesterfield County, 7 percent live below the poverty line, almost 7% below the national average. 116,514 residents of the county, or 37 percent of the population have low access to full service grocery stores, as a result of their relatively rural-suburban surroundings. In the City of Richmond, though, there is a dramatically different demographic landscape. Of the city's 217,853 inhabitants, 25.3 percent live under the poverty line, almost double the national average. In direct comparison, to reiterate, surrounding Chesterfield County halves the national average of those living in poverty, while the City of Richmond almost doubles it (USDA). Due to its more urban environment, though, people living in the City of Richmond have higher access to full service grocery stores, but still 20.36 percent suffer from low access.

In the greater Richmond region, there is a noteworthy divide between the demographics of the City of Richmond and the rest of the County, as we have already partially seen. Delving further into the specifics of the food landscape of the region, in

the City of Richmond, 42,680 residents of the city, or 20.5% of residents are considered food insecure, or falling into the USDA categories of either low food security or very low food security. In the greater Chesterfield County area, though, these numbers are dramatically different – 30,670 residents or about 9.6% of the population is considered food insecure.

Another important distinction to reiterate is the one between poverty and food insecurity. In Chesterfield County, excluding the city of Richmond, of the 9.6 percent that are food insecure, 47 percent are above the income threshold for governmental nutritional assistance programs (185 percent poverty), 17 percent are in a gray area of 130 – 185 percent poverty, and the remaining 36% make up the smaller majority of those that are food insecure do fall under the 130 percent poverty threshold to obtain SNAP benefits. A smaller percentage also is eligible for WIC benefits. In the City of Richmond, though, of the 20.5 percent that are food insecure, 21 percent are above the income threshold for governmental nutritional assistance programs (185 percent poverty), 19 percent are in a gray area of 130 – 185 percent poverty, and the remaining 60 percent make up the majority of those that are food insecure do fall under the 130 percent poverty threshold to obtain SNAP benefits.

Changing gears, we will now turn toward the progressive food movement in the greater Richmond Region, focusing on the divide between Chesterfield County and the City of Richmond. As of 2013, there are 10 farmers markets in Chesterfield County (up from 0 in 2009) and 22 farms in the county with direct sales, frequently to restaurants and consumers in the County. While the farms remain in the County, for fairly obvious spatial reasons, farmers' markets have also, surprisingly, come equally into the City of

Richmond – up to 12 in 2013 from 2 in 2009. Against intuition, based upon the previously stated demographics, the progressive food movement in this region is present both in the poorer, urban center of Richmond and in the surrounding suburbs of Chesterfield County; with seemingly equal amounts of popular exposure to and interest in progressive food.

Since the exposure to, interest in, and progressive food supply (in the form of an adequate amount of farmers' markets) are already equally present in Richmond as they are in Chesterfield County, the primary barrier to the progressive food movement for food-insecure individuals in Richmond is, unsurprisingly, a socioeconomic one. The juxtaposed gap between popular desire for progressive food and food insecurity is an unfortunate and substantial byproduct of the socioeconomic inequality and high rates of poverty in the City of Richmond.

FeedMore is Central Virginia's hunger-relief leader made up of the Central Virginia Food Bank, Meals on Wheels Serving Central Virginia and the Community Kitchen. This organization is one of the more run-of-the-mill federal food bank organizations that work to alleviate food insecurity, but does not do much in the way of progressive food.

Because of the relative drought of progressive food related organizations in this area, I thought it would be beneficial to look at a more traditionally organized effort.

FeedMore's programs provide hunger relief to Central Virginia's most vulnerable populations, particularly children, families and seniors – it is important to note that this organization is responsible for feeding food insecure residents of 36 counties in Virginia. In 2013, FeedMore provided 17,052,474 meal equivalents through the Food Distribution center, 1,076,072 meals and snacks to children through the Kids cafe, Summer Food

Service and Backpack programs, 323,097 meals to the homebound and elderly through Meals on Wheels deliveries, and helped with 6,402 food referrals, including phone, walk-in and SNAP applications completed (FeedMore).

Tricycle Gardens is another organization in Chesterfield County and Richmond that serves more directly to bridge the gap between progressive food and food insecurity (and the divide between county and city) in this region. They have “done ground breaking work engaging individuals, community centers, non-profits, businesses and the city government to bring a collective effort to restore our urban ecologies and create beautiful public spaces throughout Richmond, Virginia” (Grant). By bringing urban agriculture, food skills education and healthy food access to greater Richmond, Tricycle Gardens is improving the environmental landscape and strengthen the ecosystems of the local neighborhoods. Through partnerships with the community, schools, neighborhood youth and their families they are using a grassroots movement for food security that will transform the health and well-being of the greater Richmond regional community (Grant).

So, while FeedMore addresses food insecurity in a more traditional manner and Triangle Gardens is working to bridge the gap between progressive food and low-income, food-insecure populations in the City of Richmond, the huge disparity in the food landscape between Chesterfield County and Richmond remains. Unlike what we have seen in other regions, there is seemingly sense of general apathy towards this issue in the greater Richmond region, with very few organizations working to bridge the gap between progressive food and food insecurity in the region and also the gap within the region itself.

ALAMEDA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

In the heart of the Bay Area and under the powerful socio-cultural influence of Berkeley, where progressive food is simply food, Oakland, in Alameda County, California, provides an excellent case study of the normalization of progressive food. In this region, there is a strong emphasis on food justice as a motivating factor for the movement. The longevity of the progressive food movement in the area combined with the historical activist leanings of Berkeley and the Bay Area in general has allowed the food justice movement to thrive in Oakland and surrounding Alameda County, allowing progressive food to truly become progressive.

That said, poverty and food insecurity are still major issues in Alameda County. Of the 1,578,891 residents of Alameda County, 13.1 percent live below the poverty line, hovering right below the national average. 160,425 residents of the county, or about 11 percent of the population have low access to full service grocery stores (Weinfeld). In scholar Nathan McClintock's essay "From Industrial Garden to Food Desert," he investigates the food deserts of Oakland and their historical place. Food accessibility in Oakland follows almost directly along the "contours of [the area's] physical geography of flatlands and hills. Census data reveal that the vast majority of Oakland's people of color live in the flatlands...[and] between a quarter and a third of people in the flatlands live below the poverty line; median income is 25 percent lower than the city wide average" (McClintock, 90). These flatland neighborhoods host the city's food deserts and are the focal point of food justice movements in the region.

But, as we know, low-access and food insecurity are not necessarily directly causal in their relationship. In Oakland and greater Alameda County, 235,570 residents of

the county, or 15.3% of residents are considered food insecure, or falling into the USDA categories of either low food security or very low food security. Of the 15.3 percent that are food insecure, 37 percent are above the income threshold for governmental nutritional assistance programs (200 percent poverty) and the remaining 63 percent of those that are food insecure do fall under the 200 percent poverty threshold to obtain SNAP benefits in Alameda County (Weinfeld). A smaller percentage also is eligible for WIC benefits.

Turning toward the progressive food movement in Alameda County, as of 2013, there are 37 farmers markets in Alameda County and 29 farms in the county with direct sales. This is an astounding per capita ratio of farmers' markets, but one that is not particularly surprising considering the activist, locavore culture of the Bay Area. Sprawling outward from progressive food hub of Berkley, the Bay Area in particular, prides itself on a strong focus on justice, accessibility, and sustainability within the larger progressive food movement. The large number of farmers markets within county lines are a testament to this. Farmers markets have been a mainstay in the larger Bay Area and within Alameda County – from 2009 to 2013 there was a 37 percent increase (from 27 to 37) in the number of farmers markets in the County, substantive, but not as dramatic as in other areas since the market was previously saturated (USDA).

Without the need to grow the infrastructure of the progressive food movement in Oakland and Alameda County, local organizations are able to specialize and invest in particular branches of the progressive food movement they view as worthwhile for their communities within Alameda County. The longevity and evolution of these food justice organizations in Oakland and Alameda County is unique to the County. Over the last decade, these sorts of organizations “have taken over vacant lots and underutilized park

land in West and North Oakland to provide flatlands residents with fresh produce either via community supported agriculture (CSA), sliding-scale farm stands, or farmers' markets" (McClintock, 112). From this, we can see the Oakland/Alameda County niche emphasis on food justice within the larger progressive food movement.

Exemplarily, People's Grocery is a twelve-year-old non-profit organization in West Oakland that works to "improve the health and local economy" of the region by investing in the local food economy (PG). People's Grocery has three main points of address within their organization, according to the organization's administrative coordinator Christine Hernandez. "Community self-determination" is the goal-orientation imperative to the mission and vision of the organization, supporting and developing positive communal change through accessible, nutritious, and sustainable food (Hernandez). This orientation is applied to the three components of the cultural landscape People's Grocery aims to improve: economic opportunity, nutrition and awareness, and social capital.

By piloting four different economic enterprises – the Mobile Market (a renovated trucks that carry fresh and healthy foods into neighborhoods in Oakland), the Grub Box (a partnership between People's Grocery and a new farm Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project), Wholesale Hookup (sale of cheap, non-perishable goods), and People's Community Market (a spin-off, for-profit grocery store in the center of West Oakland) – People's Grocery has directed almost \$393,000 toward the healthy food economy in West Oakland (PG). Under their directive of building a healthier environment, People's Grocery has directly worked with approximately 9000 members of the Oakland and Alameda County community. Through nutrition education programs,

community gardens operating under partnerships with other like-minded organizations, cooking classes, nutrition demonstrators project, and community celebrations and workshops that have collaborated with public hospitals and health clinics to reach “vulnerable communities with specific cultural needs,” this organization works consistently and sustainably to support and educate the historically under-resourced area in which they are situated (PG). Finally, in a replicative move similar to that of the previously discussed SFC in Austin, TX, People’s Grocery hopes that by using the community of West Oakland “as a model of leadership development, micro-enterprise creation and health project development,” they aim to support and develop a thriving network of like-minded change-agents in cities nationwide (PG).

People’s Grocery is aware of their place and impact in the now-niched food justice movement, as are other similar organizations in the greater Oakland area. Phat Beets Produce is another food justice oriented organization that supports small farmers, particularly farmers of color, by connecting them to urban communities in North Oakland through farmers’ markets, farm stands, and community-market gardens. North Oakland is another area of aforementioned flatlands where food deserts once dominated the area. This organization has taken an interesting and remarkably self-aware social stance on the gentrification that often accompanies progressive food, saying:

“Phat Beets sees gentrification as a structural process with many players and stakeholders, not an issue of individuals or families just trying to buy their first home near good schools, parks and restaurants. Therefore, we do not blame individuals for their roles in gentrification. Many of the members, allies and supporters of Phat Beets are not historic residents of Oakland, and while we are aware and critical of our own role in gentrification through urban greening, we also understand the powerful possibilities that our programming can create when we unite in support of current residents and re-investment in the neighborhood” (PBP).

The organization works to do just that – with a cohesive and well-structured support program for a historically under-resourced demographic and area.

Perhaps most unique to the Oakland and Alameda County region – and worth briefly mentioning – is the over one-hundred gardens in elementary, middle, and high schools that are used to “teach science, health, and nutrition” (McClintock, 112).

Instituted in public and private schools beginning in the early 2000s, these school gardens support nutritional awareness and create and sustain the food justice culture.

The culture surrounding food in Alameda County is a unique and highly sophisticated one that has already recognized and is actively working to bridge the gap between progressive food and food insecurity in the region. The strong emphasis on food justice in this region is highly commendable and the self awareness of each of the organizations within the movement is what allows them to thrive. Like the SFC in Travis County, many of these organizations are promoting replication of their community supported, food justice models. However, I again voice hesitation – the right sort of socio-cultural climate should be in place for this type of organization to find success. Without the pre-existing enthusiasm for local, sustainable, and nutritious food, organizations like People’s Grocers and Phat Beets would not be as successful in their missions. These organizations assume a passionate audience and target demographic (because they can), but replication in a decidedly less nutritionally aware locale with disdain towards activist culture would certainly be met with more substantial opposition.

That said, these organizations, and others like them (City Slicker Farms, Village Bottom Farms, Planting Justice) in Oakland and Alameda County work extremely well within their socio-cultural environment. The organizations have proven themselves as

sustainable and admirable models of food justice and will continue to work and grow in this capacity.

ETHICAL EVALUATION OF MODELS AND CONCLUSION

From these four case studies, then, we can see three basic models of organizations that work to bridge the gap between the progressive food movement ideals and food insecurity. The traditional food bank model, as exemplified in this research by FeedMore of the greater Richmond region, meets some success in alleviating acute food insecurity, but is ultimately unable to fully address issues of chronic regional food insecurity. This sort of model does not work in the realm of progressive food at all, relying on local and federal donations of canned and non-perishable goods. It is a sort of “band-aid” solution to the problem of food insecurity – by giving out typically processed, non-perishable foods, food banks provide temporary and often nutritionally unsatisfactory relief.

The second model, grassroots-for-policy-change, comes closer to bridging the gap between progressive food and food insecurity. This model of organization recognizes the importance of sustainable and nutritious food alongside of problems associated with food insecurity and uses community organization to call for policy changes to reconcile the existing gap. We see this model represented in this research by Detroit’s Food Justice Task Force and the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, somewhat ambiguous coalitions calling for change but not necessarily taking concrete action. Organizations falling under this sort of model, as discussed in the Wayne County section, serve as educational middlemen between community members and larger policy-based efforts for socio-cultural change, in this case, revolving around food. While

community support for ongoing policy efforts surrounding progressive food in domestic regions is certainly useful to a certain extent, there ultimately is a more productive means of bridging the problematic gap between food insecurity and progressive food.

This solution, then, comes in the form of the food justice model. Organizations like the Sustainable Food Center in Travis County and People's Grocery and Phat Beets Produce in Alameda County have an action-centered focus on social justice within a nutritional, sustainable food system. In her book, Alison Hope Alkon presciently states: "The cultivation of a food system that is both environmentally sustainable and socially just will require the creation of alliances between the food movement and the communities most harmed by current conditions. The food justice movement is laying the foundation for such coalition building" (Alkon, 331). Organizations that fall under this model do just that. Building up to an organizational structure that combines community-supported action with nutritional, sustainable food certainly requires certain pre-existing cultural framework that values progressive food (as the subcultures of Austin and Oakland generally do). To begin building these coalitions, then, that cultural framework must slowly be established, evolving to become the action-oriented food justice movements of today and tomorrow.

APPENDIX A: RESOURCE GUIDE

USDA Food Atlas

Economic Research Service (ERS), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Food Atlas.
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-atlas.aspx>.

USDA Food Environment Atlas

Economic Research Service (ERS), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Food Environment Atlas. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-environment-atlas.aspx>.

Accommodation and Food Services Census Data

Food Insecurity and Progressive Food Census Data. Accommodation and Food Services." United States Census Bureau, 2013. Web. 11 Mar. 2015.
<https://www.census.gov/econ/accommodation.html>.

Feeding America – Hunger in America 2014 Report and Interactive Mapping Tool
Weinfeld, Nancy, Gregory Mills, and Christine Borger. "Hunger in America 2014."
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APPENDIX B: INTERESTING LITERATURE ON FOOD

Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability

Written and edited by Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman

Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism

By Julie Guthman

Growing Power (YouTube documentary)

Directed by Will Allen

The Town That Food Saved: How One Community Found Vitality in Local Food.

By Ben Hewitt

The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals

By Michael Pollan

Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty

By Mark Winne

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