HOW GOOD IS THE GOOD FOOD MARKET: AN EXPLORATION OF COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
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Community food security (CFS) is a new, community-based, collaborative approach to achieving food security. CFS seeks to merge social justice and environmental sustainability goals in the pursuit of food-secure communities. The Good Food Market (GFM) is a new CFS initiative wherein a subsidized community food market operates in a food desert. Through a qualitative case study approach, I examine and evaluate the programmatic design of The Stop’s Good Food Market, and explore its contribution to community food security. The research is framed within a larger study of food security. Research findings are based on semi-structured and structured interviews with GFM coordinators and customers, as well as participant observation and literature reviews.
Acknowledgements

Thank you to Jennifer Sumner and her “Pedagogy of Food“ class for without them I likely never would have written a thesis. As a supervisor, Professor Sumner provided knowledge and important insight, but also a kind, gentle and approachable demeanor that I am extremely thankful for. I am also thankful to Professor Koç of Ryerson who provided valuable suggestions as my second reader.

I am deeply thankful to The Stop’s Good Food Market: to Rekha and Hussein, all the student interns I’ve worked with (especially Shawn and Nicole), all the GFM volunteers (especially Rosa, Grace, Anthony, Patrick, and Tony), and of course all the wonderful GFM customers!

Thank you to my friends (especially Dawn and Adam) and my family (especially my mum) for their love and support.

My deepest gratitude is to Bubs. This thesis took a lot out of both of us and I could not have done it without you. Thank you for your invaluable editing, enriching and creative discussions on the GFM and CFS (things you know way too much about); thank you for loving me and for helping me do this.
Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................................................ iii

Table of Contents .......................................................................................................................................... iv

Chapter one: Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1

1.1 Research questions and significance .................................................................................................... 2
1.2 My connection to The Stop’s Good Food Market ........................................................................... 3
1.3 Chapter summary ................................................................................................................................. 3

Chapter two: Theoretical framework ....................................................................................................... 4

Part 1: What is political economy? ............................................................................................................. 4
1.1 Strengths of a political economy approach ....................................................................................... 6
1.2 Weaknesses of a political economy approach .................................................................................. 7

Part 2: Political economy and food studies ............................................................................................... 7
2.1 Interdisciplinary approach ................................................................................................................. 8
2.2 Inherent interest in social change ..................................................................................................... 9
2.3 Materialist perspective ...................................................................................................................... 10

Part 3: New food paradigms ..................................................................................................................... 11
3.1 The Good Food Market and EIP ....................................................................................................... 12

Part 4: Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................... 13

Chapter three: Literature review .............................................................................................................. 14

Part 1: The context of a world food system .............................................................................................. 14
1.1 Markets and pre-industrial food ........................................................................................................ 14
1.2 Long distance food ............................................................................................................................. 15

Part 2: The impacts of a world food system ............................................................................................. 16
2.1 The “stuffed and starved” paradox .................................................................................................... 16
2.2 Food security ..................................................................................................................................... 18
2.3 The complexity of food security ....................................................................................................... 20

Part 3: Community food security ........................................................................................................... 21
3.1 CFS definitions .................................................................................................................................. 21
3.2 History of the concept: A US perspective ...................................................................................... 23
Roots of coalition ...................................................................................................................................... 23
3.3 CFS from a Canadian perspective .................................................................................................... 24
Chapter four: Methodology .................................................................................................................. 39

Part 1: Qualitative research ................................................................................................................. 39

Part 2: Case study ............................................................................................................................... 39
  2.1 Strengths of case study research ................................................................................................. 40
  2.2 Shortfalls of case study research ................................................................................................. 41

Part 3: Study participants .................................................................................................................... 41

Part 4: Methods .................................................................................................................................. 42
  4.1 Semi-structured interviews .......................................................................................................... 42
  4.2 Structured interviews .................................................................................................................. 43
  4.3 Thoughts and observations as a participant observer ................................................................. 43
  4.4 Literature .................................................................................................................................... 43
  4.5 Limitations .................................................................................................................................. 44

Part 5: Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 45

Chapter five: Findings ............................................................................................................................. 46

Part 1: The Stop, FoodShare and the Good Food Market ................................................................. 46
  1.1 The Stop Community Food Centre ............................................................................................. 46
  1.2 The Stop’s Good Food Market ................................................................................................... 47
  1.3 FoodShare: The GFM parent organization ................................................................................. 47
  1.4 The roots of the GFM: FoodShare’s Good Food Box program ................................................ 48

Part 2: Results of semi-structured interviews with market coordinators / program review .......... 49
  2.1 The organizational structure of the GFM at The Stop .............................................................. 49
  Food orders ......................................................................................................................................... 50
Chapter one: Introduction

Beyond nutrition, food serves a variety of roles and functions in society. It is both sustenance and comfort in the form of hot soup and hearty stews. It is a livelihood for food growers and producers, an art form for chefs. Food is culture, an expression of identity, a manifestation of the sacred, and the natural world from which we arise. It can also be a source of war, of self-hatred, of infatuation and power. Everyone is touched by food. Food systems scholar Phillip McMichael (2000) affirms that food “has deep material and symbolic power” (p. 32).

Food is a nexus. It connects many different and often isolated issues, highlighting an interconnectedness that challenges the dominant reductionist paradigm. McMichael (2000) defines “the power of food” as the ability to link “nature, human survival, health, culture and livelihood as a focus of resistance to corporate takeover of life itself” (abstract). Welsh and MacRae (1998, as cited in Sumner, 2008a) also explain the importance of food as a teacher of interconnectedness. They write:

Food is a nexus for industry, rural/urban relations, global trade relations, domestic and social life, biological health, social belonging, celebration of community, paid and unpaid work, expressions of care, abuse of power, hunger strikes, fasts and prayer. Food is part of daily life at least as much as we are consumers and possibly more as we labour for either love or money.

Food and food production are inextricably tied to our ecological systems and survival in the future. (p. 32)

Food brings many different and important issues related to justice, equality and sustainability together under its banner; galvanizing people from diverse backgrounds and opinions, it offers an opportunity to “reclaim the ethos of democracy” (Levkoe, 2006, p. 89).

Food is also an “intimate commodity” (Winson, 1993). Unlike widgets, or couches, food is something we put inside ourselves; we eat it and internalize it. Food is much more complex than a simple commodity to be bought and sold for it becomes part of us. Winson (1993) explains that eating food “gives (it) special significance denied such ‘externally’ consumed commodities as refrigerators … Moreover, unlike many other goods that we produce and consume in capitalist society, food is an essential commodity” (as cited in Levkoe, 2006, p. 91). Food, “the intimate commodity”, is fundamental to our species’ survival, and, as something with which we engage on a daily basis, represents a powerful reminder of our rights and responsibilities as citizens. As Belasco (2005) reminds us, food is also an “edible dynamic – a visceral, lived daily link between the personal and the political” (p. 217).
Food has many dimensions, perhaps none as important as sustenance for it is a basic need. Food security emerged as a concept in the late 70s when part of the developing world was plagued by a series of famines. Thus, the term originally meant food availability, in terms of aggregate food stocks. Over the years, the meaning of food security has broadened. Today it encompasses four dimensions: (1) availability, (2) accessibility, (3) acceptability, and (4) adequacy / sustainability (Koc, MacRae, Mougeot, & Welsh, 1999); to be discussed later. This research explores a community-based, collaborative approach to achieving food security known as community food security (CFS).

1.1 Research questions and significance

My research aims to explore the role of civil society organizations in community food security, using The Stop’s Good Food Market as an example. Three overriding research objectives guide this work:

1. To better understand the general capacity of The Stop’s GFM.
2. To assess the strengths and weaknesses of its service delivery.
3. To determine its contribution to community food security (CFS).

I employ a qualitative, single exploratory case study methodology (Creswell, 2007); an approach suitable for in-depth analyses of activities in their natural setting, where the researcher is “involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 177).

Every Tuesday afternoon for the past year, I have been volunteering at The Stop Community Food Centre’s weekly Good Food Market. Capitalizing on the relationships and insights that I have cultivated through this involvement, I conducted judgmental sampling (Babbie, 1998) and used a structured interview guide to interview 13 market customers. The use of a structured interview guide has facilitated the comparison of answers across participants (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). I also used a semi-structured approach to interview the market coordinator and two student interns who run the market every week. I have triangulated these findings with my own observations as a participant-researcher and insights from the literature.

This research complements a larger study examining FoodShare’s Good Food Market program as an example of a social business. J.J. McMurtry, of York University’s Business and Society Program, is leading a team of researchers seeking to understand the impact of the GFM on the lives of its participants as well as the surrounding community. The research aims to better understand the capacity issues faced by the GFMs, and to help FoodShare create strategies to address those capacity issues. My
In-depth analysis of The Stop’s GFM contributes to this body of knowledge by focusing on the operation of the GFM at The Stop as well as addressing the impact it bears on the lives of its customers in terms of community food security. The GFM is a new approach to CFS and as such, it represents a new area of food security research.

1.2 My connection to The Stop’s Good Food Market

I learned about The Stop during one of my classes while pursuing graduate studies in Adult Education and Community Development at the University of Toronto. The topical focus of the course was “the pedagogy of food” (Professor Sumner, AEC1131 Special Topics). Throughout the course, we discussed organizations such as The Stop and their intersection with food issues. I was drawn to The Stop for its grassroots approach to tackling problems of food insecurity. I agreed with The Stop’s overarching ethos which stipulates that food is a basic human right and I was inspired by their creative community-based programs. When The Stop was looking for a baker for their Good Food Market, I answered the call and the seeds of this research were planted.

1.3 Chapter summary

This research is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the many sides of food, my research questions and their significance. Chapter two explains the theoretical framework guiding the work. Political economy is defined and justified as a valuable lens of analysis through which to explore the GFM’s contributions to CFS. In chapter three, I present the relevant literature on food security and CFS; highlighting the lack of previous research on the GFM program. Chapter four outlines the qualitative case study methodology I employed as well as the specific research methods I used to collect the data. Chapter five highlights the research findings. Here, I detail the GFM’s organizational structure, present a SWOT analysis of the program, and highlight seven major findings in terms of how it is meeting the needs of its customers. In Chapter six, I assess these seven themes for their congruence with prominent CFS theories. I compare my findings to the work of Levkoe (2006), Feenstra (2002) and the CFS Coalition (1998, as cited in Anderson & Cook, 1999). The seventh chapter offers a summary of the research and recommendations for future research.
Chapter two: Theoretical framework

Between crates of asparagus and bunches of spinach, volunteers and customers of The Stop’s Good Food Market (GFM) have discussions about the price, availability and quality of food. Often unbeknownst to us, we touch upon broader socio-political issues that affect the food we buy and sell. “Why are there no strawberries this week? How come the bananas are cheaper at No Frills? Why do I have to pay so much more for organic broccoli?” These questions necessarily involve the economic and political systems that shape our society. Fittingly, this research uses a political-economy framework to explore the success of The Stop’s GFM and its connection to Community Food Security (CFS).

This chapter begins with an introduction to political economy as an approach to research, and discusses its strengths and weaknesses. Next it outlines the relevance of political economy to food studies, highlighting its interdisciplinary approach, inherent interest in social change, and materialist perspective. The chapter closes with a discussion of the new food paradigms, focusing on how the GFM is a working example of the Ecologically Integrated Paradigm.

Part 1: What is political economy?

In his book *Understanding Canada: Building on the New Canadian Political Economy*, Wallace Clement (1997) defines political economy as “a holistic approach to understanding society from a materialistic perspective ... at its best, [it] connects the economic, political, and cultural/ideological moments of social life” (p.3). Political economy is the interface of the political, economic, social and cultural; pulling from multiple disciplines in order to understand the totality, “where the whole is greater than its parts” (Clement, 1997, p. 3).

The materialistic perspective begins with an assumption that relations between people are conditioned by the ways in which society reproduces itself, that is, the manner by which people earn a living affects the relationships between them. For example, the relationship between a factory worker and factory owner is different than the relationship between two members of a cooperative, and these different social relations affect how society functions as a whole. The political economy perspective acknowledges that people’s material existence shapes, and is shaped by, society’s values, beliefs and/or attitudes. The manner by which people organize, coordinate and are controlled, as well as their definition of what is “right, just, and proper” (Clement, 1997, p. 4), are defined by the ways in which society reproduces itself (how a society’s members earn a living and thus, survive). A capitalist society

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1 No Frills is a mainstream Canadian grocery store.
will tend to value hierarchy and subservience whereas equality and solidarity are cooperative values typical of non-capitalist societies. Clement (1997) asserts “the ideological and cultural are embedded in the economic base and are an integral part of the reproduction of society” (p. 4). The ways in which a society meets its basic economic needs is inherently social, cultural and political, and is in a constant state of flux as a dynamic historical process.

The temporal dimension of political economy is important. As production and reproduction transform across time, political economy seeks to capture society’s dynamic trajectory as the tensions and contradictions within it continually evolve. Social change is at the heart of political economy. Within a political economy framework, the role of human agency is emphasized, for the actions of people shape the course of history. Additionally, political economy examines power relations, looking beyond electoral democracy to examine all facets of human agency seeking to assert power, be it “within the workplace, in unions, in social movements, or between the sexes” (Clement, 1997, p. 4).

Famed Canadian political economist Harold Innis stressed the holistic nature of political economy by highlighting not only the interrelation of economics and politics, but also the influence borne by other aspects of human social interactions at both the local and global levels. He recognized the active role played by ideas and ideologies through their interplay with material circumstances in determining the course of public life. According to Innis and to the field of political economy more generally, the dominant ideas and ideologies of a society are not neutral, but tend to serve the interests of power and privilege. Accordingly, Innis conceived the role of engaged intellectuals, academics in particular, as “questioning the pretensions of organized power” (J. Sumner, personal communication, April 20, 2012).

Speaking of the “new political economy”, Clement (1997) writes that exclusive economic adjustments - treating the market as purely an economic space - with no regard to the social and political dimensions, is not possible or sustainable (p. 5). He recognized that the interconnectivity of the economic, political, and social aspects of life are the crux of political economy; “the economic provides the context, but the political, ideological, and cultural write the text of history and specify the particulars for each nation and the possibilities for the future” (p. 5).
1.1 Strengths of a political economy approach

As an analytical framework, political economy offers five key advantages. It is (1) holistic, (2) materialist, (3) critical, (4) socially constructive, and (5) dynamic.

A political economy framework tries to create what Clement (1997) describes as a “totality”. Rather than seeking explanations derived from the narrow lens of a single discipline, political economy examines the interconnections between many, seeking an understanding of a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. By combining the perspectives of many different disciplines, political economy is a comprehensive framework that reflects the complexity of the real world. It looks at life from all facets: the economic, political, social, and ecological to gain a more comprehensive and natural explanation of our reality; what Sumner and Mair (2008) call the “wider world”.

The materialist perspective sees society as rooted in its economic base. The ways that a society meets its economic needs largely determines how it organizes its political, social and ecological systems. While the economy forms the foundation of society, a political economy perspective recognizes that this foundation cannot be considered purely economic. The way society reproduces itself is also social and political, none of these dimensions can be separated from the others; they form a symbiotic whole.

Sumner and Mair (2008), stress that political economy is “an analytical framework that is comprehensive, interdisciplinary and critical” (p. 56). Social change is at the heart of political economy, it can help provide alternatives to the status quo and broaden the politics of the possible. Political economy is concerned with questioning the pretensions of organized power, with people’s attempt to assert social values and their associated power struggles.

Political economy places importance on “the actions of people in shaping the course of history” (Clement, 1997, p 4), it recognizes human agency as the central driver of social change. Political economy examines all levels of people’s power struggles, from the household level to the more complex scales of geopolitics. A political economy framework views the economic, political, and social systems that shape societies as malleable and subject to the forces of human agency. It is people, both as individuals and together as organized collectives, who foment social change.

Lastly, an inherent strength of political economy is its dynamism through time and space. Clement (1997) asserts that “materialism is never static, uniform, or timeless” and “political economy is also always spatial – consciously located in particular territories, which are themselves relationally specified by both domestic and international relations” (p. 4). And thus, political economy is a framework that has
the built-in flexibility required to track an ever-changing social reality, providing a realistic snapshot of life in flux. It is an inherently hopeful way of seeing, because it recognizes the changing and changeable nature of reality; transformation is not only always possible, but is always happening.

1.2 Weaknesses of a political economy approach

Traditional political economy has been accused of being too narrowly focused on the role of the State and the role of the economy, while excluding much of everything else. For example, power relations between genders have remained largely outside the realm of political economy until only recently, nor has the role of civil society or the environment typically been included within this framework. However, the field has been continuously expanding ever since the early “classic” period, to embrace many more disciplines and areas of study. This has now caused traditional political economists to critique the field for lacking “the heat and light of the 1970s and 1980s” (Clement, 1997, p. 6) with its focus on the US’s domination of Canada’s culture and economy. But, writes Clement (1997), Canadian political economy today has become more a “way of seeing” than a “subject” and has developed “a more solid base and greater rigour” (p. 6). For this reason, it can be used as a way of seeing food in general, and the GFM and community food security in particular.

Part 2: Political economy and food studies

Though relatively new to academia, food studies has ancient antecedents. People have been saving seeds, perfecting growing conditions, and exchanging recipes for millennia. Prominent food scholars Koc, Sumner and Winson (2012) define food studies as “a relatively new field of research and scholarship that focuses on the web of relations, processes, structures and institutional arrangements that cover human interaction with nature and other humans involving the production, distribution, preparation, consumption and disposal of food” (as cited in Sumner & Mair, 2012, p. 2).

This complex web involving the determinants and consequences of food production and consumption manifests every week at The Stop’s GFM. The market offers an excellent site for critical inquiry into the “patterns of social inequalities, institutional arrangements, structures and organizations such as the patriarchal family, corporations, governmental bodies, international treaties and the media [which] contribute to the farm crisis, hunger, the obesity epidemic, eating disorders, food insecurity and environmental problems” (Koc et al, 2012, as cited in Sumner & Mair, 2012, pp. 2-3). Thus examining the connections between The Stop’s Good Food Market and Community Food Security is best approached through a political economy lens because of this very interconnectedness; as an interdisciplinary approach political economy offers the most comprehensive lens to conduct this
research. Political economy is also most appropriate to this study because of its interest in progressive social change and its materialist perspective.

2.1 Interdisciplinary approach

As noted by Clement, political economy is a gathering point for diverse projects, issues and concerns; it is necessarily interdisciplinary because it focuses on the totality formed by the interfacing of political, economic, social and cultural spaces. Similarly, food studies focuses on complexity. Rather than examining food from single-minded perspectives like nutrition, agriculture, or social science, as has traditionally occurred, food studies offers a new approach, what Berg, Nestle & Bentley (2003) call a “synthetic approach that would utilize every conceivable method for studying the historical, cultural, behavioral, biological, and socioeconomic determinants and consequences of food production and consumption” (as cited in Sumner & Mair, 2012, p. 2).

Food is a nexus; it connects issues of agriculture, health, trade, culture, gender, sustainability, and more. Food cannot be separated from the earth that produces it, the person and/or machines that tend to it, the ways it is prepared and disposed of, nor the place it occupies in the hearts, minds and stomachs of culture and community. Food is so many things to so many people, and thus requires an academic framework that acknowledges its holistic intersection with other disciplines.

Sumner and Mair (2008) remind us that “a number of interrelated concepts are central to the emerging field of food studies. These concepts include: globalization, sustainability, scale, power and commodification, as well as specific food-related concepts such as food safety, food security and food sovereignty” (p. 63). Food studies, seen through the lens of political economy, seeks to understand how these interrelated concepts form a totality, and perpetuate a worldwide food system characterized by a dichotomy of winners and losers. CFS and the GFM program in particular, are responses to this global food system that pits the environment and the poor living in food deserts, against the agro-industrial food complex.

In many ways, food scholarship and community food security in particular, arose from the understanding that feeding the people of this planet required a whole-systems approach. Since the 1970s, the dominant discourse has begun to acknowledge that food security is premised on questions of integration and interconnectivity. Aggregate food supply does not exist as an independent silo, but is connected to all scales of economic and socio-political activity. The notion of community food security (CFS) was born out of collaboration, diverse stakeholders of the food system rallying to support an approach to food that is holistic and interdisciplinary, and organizing for corresponding legislation.
2.2 Inherent interest in social change

Social change is at the heart of political economy for it “seeks out tensions and contradictions within society that produce struggles and resistance to the prevailing order” (Clement, 1997, p. 3); the most important goal of political economy is to understand how societies are, and can be, transformed. As a theoretical framework designed to examine the tensions and contradictions implicit to social reproduction, political economy is concerned with power relations, as they pertain to both the maintenance of the status quo and its undoing. Applied to food, political economy raises questions about the winners and losers of the agro-industrial model of food production. Sumner and Mair (2008) explain that looking at food studies through the lens of political economy establishes it as “inquiry with attitude” because it raises questions about “taken-for-granted assumptions ... to ask who wins, and who loses, as a result of our food choices” (p. 55).

Political economy can help us see the world through a more critical lens and facilitate a reconsideration of our relationship with food. It encourages us to “develop a robustly critical investigation of the organized power behind food” (Summer, 2008b, p. 57) and to consider dynamic and democratic alternatives. That is not to say that organized power is necessarily always bad, rather, it depends on ideological orientation. Power structures such as governments, social movements, and corporations, to name a few, can support public wellbeing or private enrichment; they can work symbiotically with the environment or denigrate it. The values and goals of organizations very much determine our social wellbeing, and indirectly affect the quantity and quality of food available to the majority.

Political economy also reminds us of the importance of human agency; recognizing that problems are created by human beings and are thus resolvable by human beings (Allen, 2008). Respect for the anthropogenic nature of society strengthens political economy’s propensity for social change by “break[ing] open the illusion that social problems are fixed and immutable ... [and] expand[ing] the limits and boundaries of what is possible in transforming the agrifood system” (Allen, 2008, p. 160). A political economy framework demonstrates the centrality of social constructivism. Allen describes community as “a contingent and ideological construction that provides opportunities for some and constrains those for others ... [with] no practical meaning independent of the real people who construct it and act in it” (Allen, 1999, p. 120). Our communities, our social environment, are a social construct. Factors like income, wealth, property ownership, occupation, gender, ethnicity, age, etc..., influence our social experience in ways determined by us. All societies determine for themselves what they think is important and valuable; their priorities are a social construct, which when viewed from a political-
economy perspective, derive from the economic base. Accordingly, social priorities can only shift when the economic base shifts. In order to create the impetus for new food systems premised on equity, justice, and sustainability we must first reconsider the neoliberal capitalist economic system that has been brought into power.

2.3 Materialist perspective

Contemporary political economists recognize that global capitalism shapes our material world. Our individualistic, consumerist social norms have transformed the ways we interact with all of life and more specifically, our food. There is now more than ever, a greater distance between people and the food they eat, both geographically as food is transported greater physical distances, and affectively as humanity becomes increasingly alienated from the food systems which sustain them. Food has become commodified and disembedded as a final product for our plates. We have come to believe that food comes from a grocery store, not from a farm (Sumner, 2008b). Political economists encourage us to problematize the relationships we have with the world around us and to consider alternatives to the current economic and socio-political systems.

Johnston and Baker (2005) remind us that a community food security initiative such as FoodShare’s Good Food Box (GFB) program engages people “to creatively alter patterns of social reproduction and empowers them to make connections between everyday consumption patterns and broader political-economic, cultural and political-ecological issues” (p. 318). That said, food scholars also appreciate the inherent challenges and limitations of mobilizing at the local scale (households, communities and municipalities) to affect structural change at the national and global scale. The structure of the existing agro-industrial world food system creates huge challenges for alternatives like CFS initiatives. The process of supplying the global North with cheap food produces a number of tangible costs and externalities including environmental degradation, oppressive labour tactics, the growth of inequality worldwide and structural unemployment. Indeed, the political economy lens reminds us of the need to scale both “up” (to include state involvement) and “out” (to other localities) (Johnston & Baker, 2005) with CFS programs like the GFB and GFM due to the broader social and political contexts that they operate within.

Political economy’s materialist perspective situates the production, distribution, and consumption of food as processes that are inherently social and political. Nowhere are these connections more clearly demonstrated than food studies. Sumner and Mair (2008) highlight the five main social and policy contexts that influence food studies in Canada. They are: (1) neoliberalism, (2)
international trade agreements, (3) social movements, (4) environmentalism, and (5) industrial agriculture. Moreover, political economy recognizes the role that government plays in shaping our relationship to food by the policies and programs that it implements. Policies that support the agro-industrial food system have drastically different outcomes (food deserts, environmental devastation and obesity, etc...) than policies that support local, sustainable agriculture (healthy communities and ecosystems). The current economic base, neoliberal capitalism, has lead to the creation of a socio-political system that has transformed food into, first and foremost, a commodity to sell on the global market rather than a basic human right.

Part 3: New food paradigms

CFS and the programs striving to cultivate it, like the GFM, refuse to accept a food system which proliferates such a marked disparity between winners and the losers. Failing to understand the connections between the economic, the political, the social, and the ecological dimensions of our world blinds us to the holistic nature of our food system. The conventional paradigm of our time has been reductionistic, dissecting whole systems to their constituent parts and failing to appreciate the interrelationships and interdependence between them. Today, the ongoing legacy of a neoliberal capitalist economic system is a framework that puts profit over people and the planet, and treats food as a commodity rather than a human right.

In her article “From Land to Table: Rural Planning and Development for Sustainable Food System”, Sumner (2010) draws on the work of Heasman and Lang (2006) who explore the intersection of public policy and food systems. They suggest that three competing paradigms influence food policy. The Productionist Paradigm, which might otherwise be called our dominant Eurocentric worldview, or the conventional paradigm, is what defines the current global food system. Heasman and Lang (2006) describe how since the mid 20th century, the industrially-oriented Productionist Paradigm has ascribed by a core ethos of “production almost at all costs” (as cited in Sumner, 2010, p. 29). The authors suggest that two new paradigms have since been born out of the Productionist Paradigm. The Life Sciences Integrated Paradigm (LSIP) is but an extension of its predecessor. Premised on the same reductionist worldview, the LSIP is a continuation of the “green revolution”, endorsing the integration of life sciences into food policy by using technological “fixes” like genetically modified organisms to solve contemporary food and agriculture problems. Companies like Monsanto exemplify the LSIP; in fact, the company has recently rebranded itself as a life-science organization. The LSIP, like the Productionist Paradigm, is deeply corporatized and heavily reliant on state support and subsidies to maintain its dominance. It
offers a “medicalized” solution to a food system under severe duress and continues to externalize much of the associated costs.

In contrast to the LSIP, the Ecologically Integrated Paradigm (EIP) is a response to the destructive forces of the Productionist Paradigm. Known as the “alternative paradigm”, the EIP connects the food supply to social and ecological forces, and seeks to create sustainable food systems that support communal health rather than individualized gains prioritized in the LSI (and where costs are transferred to the collective through economic externalities). Heasman and Lang (2006) identify the organics movement as the figurehead of the EIP because it has succeeded in uniting a previously fragmented collection of EIP-oriented small players. The EIP “promotes environmental sustainability based on ecological principles, a holistic view toward human health solutions, social justice in food systems, the importance of the ‘public good’ and the minimization of external costs” (Sumner, 2010, p. 30).

In stark contrast to one another, these two new paradigms take radically different approaches to understanding the biological and social systems surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of food. As such, Heasman and Lang (2006) conclude that policy-makers cannot be neutral about them. They urge those with decision-making power to critically assess each paradigm with an eye for the ideological and political agendas underlying them.

3.1 The Good Food Market and EIP

When looking at food studies through a political economy lens, it seems obvious that our current economic base, neoliberal capitalism, is not in line with the best interests of the majority or with the ecological health of the planet. Externalizing much of the social and ecological costs is becoming increasingly problematic, as can be shown by the growing number of dietary-related diseases and environmental constraints such as drought and soil erosion. An economic system that pits production against our social and ecological wellbeing is no longer sustainable; our food system is a stark indicator of this.

When we look at our food system through a political economy lens and situate food studies within a social context, the total costs of the LSIP are accounted for, and the entire system suddenly becomes untenable, if not absurd. Through a political economy lens the economic context of food is embedded within ecological limits, a fact to which the LSIP remains oblivious, but is acknowledged by the EIP.
This research will demonstrate that the Good Food Market’s approaches towards achieving community food security are demonstrative of the EIP ethos: holistic, sustainable, community-oriented, and socially just.

**Part 4: Conclusion**

This work is inspired by a new academic field known as food studies, a critical and interdisciplinary approach to food issues seeking to better understand our current food system and envision an alternative system that is more sustainable and just. CFS initiatives like the GFM are manifestations of this new food system. They are holistic in their approach to food security and as such, are best examined by a political economy framework as this chapter has demonstrated. The next chapter will highlight prominent CFS research from academic and non-academic sources.
Chapter three: Literature review

The Stop’s Good Food Market is an offshoot of the Good Food Box program, which is itself a community food security (CFS) initiative. In this chapter I will review some of the CFS literature and community-based food initiatives more broadly. Before doing so however, I will contextualize their place within a global industrialized food system. The chapter thus begins with a history of our current world food system, then introduces the issue of food security, and ends by exploring the themes, challenges and critiques of CFS.

Part 1: The context of a world food system

1.1 Markets and pre-industrial food

For many people the word market conjures up images of shoppers filling their bags with fresh produce and the sounds of buyers and sellers squabbling over price; the scene of a neighbourhood getting to know itself. At a lecture presented by Carolyn Steel (2011), author of Hungry City: How Food Shapes our Lives (2008), I learned about the central role played by the market in human history. The concept of centrality is important in the context of markets, in both a literal and figurative sense. Literally, our markets have always been in the centre of town; located where the people congregate, they are the place of every person. Figuratively, markets have always been central to our very existence, satisfying two important human needs: social needs and sustenance needs. We require human interactions for our emotional survival, and we require food for our physical survival; the market has been the one-stop shop for furnishing both. Sumner (2008a) also highlights that markets “were embedded within social relations” (p. 40); she quotes Polanyi (2001) who defines a market as “a meeting place for the purpose of barter or buying and selling” (as cited in Sumner, 2008a, p. 40). The origins of local markets as social spaces contrast with the more recent phenomenon of markets being strictly commercial spaces (farmer’s markets a viable exception). One can fulfill all of their consumer needs without ever having to speak to another human being. We no longer discuss meat with the butcher, or bread with the baker, instead we select and pay for our groceries independently and in complete anonymity at supermarkets, and now for some, even more privately online.

Markets have historically represented the civic heart of the city. They provided a place where people and food could come together in the simplest manifestation of the pre-industrial food chain, producers selling directly to consumers. Steele (2011) described how urban authorities often built their own infrastructure immediately adjacent to the market in order to oversee the commercial activity. In those days, city fathers had a lot of control over the food system. In Toronto, ON, the city where this thesis
paper is being written, our bustling St. Lawrence Market once housed our first city hall. The name Toronto is itself a food-based name derived from a Mohawk word, it means the place where the trees stand in water, referring to fish weirs (Steele, 2011). As is indicated by the title of Steel’s (2008) book, food really does shape our lives.

1.2 Long distance food

As early as the late 18th century, rural to urban migration had begun as a result of the industrial revolution. And as cities grew, so did the demand for food. Travel and industrialization drastically altered the relationship between cities and their food. Philip McMichael (2000) describes the industrial rationality that emerged in Britain, and later in the US: “it viewed nature as an unproblematic human laboratory and rendered rural society as a residual domain: supplying labour for urban industrial ventures as agro-industrialization expelled rural populations from their local agricultural communities” (p. 21). He goes on to explain how food became removed “from its direct link to local ecology and culture, and became an input in urban diets and industrial processing plants” (p. 21). Since the advent of industrialization, food has been disconnected from its origins; origins rooted in ecology, culture, spirituality and community. Wayne Roberts (2008), author of The No-Nonsense Guide to World Food, describes the impact of industrialization on food:

[It] created some problems flowing from the fact that food is no better suited to mechanization than are sex, love, art, education, health, religion or anything else that’s close to body or soul. Problems from that bad fit have been magnified and compounded by what economists call a ‘market failure’, and by what political scientists call a ‘governance failure’. (p. 18)

In the 1990s, Tim Lang coined the term “food miles” to describe the distances food must travel to the point of consumption, however the concept of collecting food from faraway places is nothing new. Steel (2011) described how Ancient Rome was nourished by grain and other foodstuffs that travelled by sea from distant lands. She also described connections between food and violence, for maintaining the food supply often required armed forces to embark on food-seeking missions abroad.

In his book, Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World’s Food System, Raj Patel (2007), describes similar appropriation-through-force. Britain’s early 19th century factory workers procured their calories from colonialism. Imported sugar and tea became a central feature of the working-class diet. Just as in Ancient Rome, Britain required military enforcements to secure a steady stream of these valuable imports. Patel writes, “in order for the companies to supply tea and sugar, imperial power was necessary, in India and China principally for tea, and in the Caribbean for sugar” (p. 80).
These histories offer insights into the evolution of the contemporary global food system. First, they demonstrate a historical trend of increasing physical distance between people and their food supply. Prior to tea, Britons drank beer, a beverage that was locally sourced and far more delicious (Patel, 2007). Secondly, they demonstrate a steady trend of diminishing nutritional value of food. With the advent of industrialization, the focus in all industries was to increase efficiency and produce more, faster, which required an abundant workforce fuelled by calories. “Tea with milk and sugar provides ready caffeine and carbohydrates to the drinker – it’s good for stimulating and providing the calories for manual work” (Mintz, 1985, as cited in Patel, 2007, p. 79). Caffeine and calories replaced nutrition as the basis for what constituted good food, and this began a trend in changing social values where work was prioritized over health. Thirdly, the fact that armies accompanied the food missions of the Ancient Romans, and that historically Britain’s food security depended on colonial imperialism to maintain a steady supply of cheap imports, speaks to the dark relationship between force and the maintenance of one’s food supply from afar. As the food system became more and more divorced from place, it became increasingly exploitative. Patel concludes: “the mechanics of setting up a global food system involved the twin processes of colonization and the forced creation of markets” (p. 81).

Part 2: The impacts of a world food system

Our global industrialized food system has been causing negative consequences since it began at the dawn of industrialization. From the problems in cities due to uncontrolled rural to urban migration, to nutrient-deprived diets and negative environmental externalities, the consequences of our food system are all around us.

2.1 The “stuffed and starved” paradox

The title of Raj Patel’s (2007) book Stuffed and Starved, alludes to an ironic paradox of the modern world food system, namely “global hunger and obesity are symptoms of the same problem” (p. 1). Koc, MacRae, Mougeot and Welsh (1999) write, “despite technological advances that have modernized the conditions of production and distribution of food, hunger and malnutrition still threaten the health and well-being of millions of people around the world” (p. 1). Allen (1999) corroborates: “a defining contradiction of the American food and agriculture system has been the persistence of hunger despite the world’s most productive agriculture” (p. 117).

In the North American context, the poor are a living manifestation of the “stuffed and starved” paradox. Low income neighbourhoods, often home to a large concentration of racial and ethnic minorities, face a higher than average risk of diet-related health problems (Pothukuchi & Kaufman,
Obesity and diabetes are two of the more common food-related illnesses affecting the poor (Critser, 2003, as cited in Kaufman, 2004). Obesity is a result of being “stuffed” with the wrong kinds of food, whereas diabetes caused by being “starved” of the right kind. Low-income children in particular, are more prone “to obesity and diet-related diseases from overexposure to sugar sweetened drinks, carbohydrates, and fatty foods” (Kaufman, 2004, p. 339). Connected to low income are two other contributors to this “poor diet”: food deserts and food banks.

Food deserts are defined as “large gaps in the city where it is difficult or impossible to find a grocery store or supermarket within walking distance, and where the predominant means to buy food is through fast-food outlets and higher-priced convenience stores” (Lister, 2007, as cited by Sumner, 2010, p. 21). Kaufman (2004) explains how the growing concentration of market power in the retail food industry is causing fewer supermarkets to serve low-income communities as new “big-box” stores chase the profit opportunities offered by more upscale neighbourhoods, and also force the smaller, independent grocers (who used to service these neighbourhoods) out of business. In a food desert, not only does limited income cause food insecurity, but the constraints of geography and distribution play a factor as well (Sumner, 2010). Car ownership is rarely feasible on a low or fixed income; the poor rely more heavily on public transit, car sharing or rides with neighbours, friends and family to reach the grocery store (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999). Thus, the quality of public transit becomes an important food security issue, especially in a food desert.

A second dimension of this “poor diet” is a reliance on food banks, where food quality and quantity are dependent on the donations received from the general public and from food producers, processors and retailers that dump their unsalable products promoting an image of goodwill (Tarasuk, 2001). This lack of access forces the “starved” to source their food or “edible foodlike substances” (Pollan, 2008, p.1) from food banks or convenience stores, and so often they end up “stuffed” with poor quality food and suffering from obesity and diabetes.

Another dimension of this paradox relates to finance. Not only do the poor stuff and starve their bodies, they “stuff” the wallets of the transnational agri-businesses from which they purchase their processed food and in turn, “starve” their wallets of the limited income they have. Food scholars point to the disproportionate amount of income that the poor spend on food (Guthman et al., 2006; Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999). Allen (1999) also highlights the fact that the poor already pay more for their food.
The “stuffed and starved” paradox also manifests ecologically. Modernist high-input, high-production agriculture is “stuffing” the planet full of harmful pesticides and fertilizers, and “starving” it of water in the name of irrigation. While we harm the planet with the deleterious effects of food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal, we have imposed on our environment all of the associated costs, treating all the pollution and degradation of the environment as economic externalities: the unintended and therefore unaccounted for costs of doing business (Sumner & Mair, 2008). Rees’ (2004, as cited in Sumner & Mair, 2008) concept of the ecological footprint also speaks to our “stuffed and starved” relationship with the environment. In continuing to “stuff” ourselves with the products of contemporary industrial agriculture, which is heavily reliant on fossil fuels and degrades the earth, we must “starve” the earth of her finite resources. Monocultures perhaps best exemplify the negative environmental impacts of our approach to agriculture. Monocultures were created in order to mass-produce agricultural outputs using a variety of harmful inputs such as fertilizers and antibiotics under conditions of high density. They result in what Rees refers to as “self-consuming quasi-parasitic systems that shed biodiversity, dissipate energy and nutrients and convert natural cycles into terminal throughput” (2004, as cited in Sumner & Mair, 2008, p. 62); they essentially “starve” the earth.

2.2 Food security

Global power politics has always been front and centre on the world food stage. The food system has long offered world leaders an important venue for their dramas of dominion. Once colonialism and industrialization were unleashed, the quest to secure sources of cheap food has forever been a focus of many a government’s foreign policy.

Food security scholars point to the world food crisis of the early 1970s as the birthplace of the concept, though concerns about “the ability to meet aggregate food needs in a consistent way” (Anderson & Cook, 1999, p. 142) were prevalent in international development work a decade earlier. The oil shock increased the international trading prices of staple foods (Allen, 1999) causing widespread hunger and famine across many parts of the developing world. Not surprisingly, the initial concept of food security had twin goals of ensuring an adequate supply of food and stabilizing the prices of food and energy. Anderson and Cook (1999) write, “the World Food Conference in 1974 emphasized producing enough food for world needs, making sure that this supply was reliable, and avoiding dramatic price fluctuations” (p.142). As such, the definition of food security at the time was “[the] availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion
of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices” (United Nations, 1975, as cited in FAO, 2003, para.2.2).

In 1983, the first of many definition changes occurred. “Ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food that they need” (FAO, 2003, para.2.2) was added to the original definition. Anderson and Cook (1999) explain how this new definition implied a smaller geographic scale (the individual and household level) and a longer time-frame. They highlight that the 1983 definition speaks to a newfound focus on demand – no longer was it merely about having enough food in an aggregate sense, but ensuring that people had access to it. From then on, the individual and household became food security’s primary units of analysis.

The World Bank released a report in 1986 that once again changed the definition. The report demonstrated the difference between chronic and transitory food insecurity. This was an important juncture because it acknowledged how structural barriers such as poverty and low incomes impact food security, which differs from the food insecurity caused by war, drought or economic collapse (FAO, 2003, para. 2.2). In 1986, the FAO changed the definition once more to include the following: “access of all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life” (para. 2.2).

The 1996 definition acknowledged food security’s complexity: “food security, at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels [is achieved] when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO, 2003, par. 2.2). Rather than a goal as an end point, the concept was seen as “an intermediating set of actions that contribute to an active and healthy life” (FAO, 2003, par. 2.2). Maxwell’s (1996) post-modern interpretation of food security aptly synthesizes FAO’s understanding of the term. He writes “instead of a discussion largely concerned with national food supply and price, we find a discussion concerned with the complexities of livelihood strategies in difficult and uncertain environments, and with understanding how people themselves respond to perceived risks and uncertainties” (as cited in Anderson & Cook, 1999, p. 143). Treating the causes of hunger rather than the symptoms is necessarily a more complex challenge. The current FAO definition is: “food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO, 2012).
2.3 The complexity of food security

Food security is an issue with broad implications across scales, from the individual and the household all the way up to the world of global geopolitics. The concept of scale is important when examining the political economy of food security and highlights the importance of acting locally, while thinking globally. As political economist David Harvey reminds us, the micro scale of body or community cannot be understood outside the “nested relationships that exist across a hierarchy of scales” (as cited in Johnston & Baker, 2004, p. 314); everything is interconnected.

Food security is also a concept that means many things to many people, it has multiple dimensions. Depending on one’s background, it can be about nutritional intake, community development, or can encompass a range of other pertinent priorities. Leading Canadian food security scholars Koc et al. (1999), stress that food security initiatives must reflect the complexity of the goal itself by including considerations of economic feasibility, equity, broad participation and environmental sustainability in their design. Of note here is the consideration for environmental sustainability, which is not explicit in the current FAO definition of food security. In terms of economic feasibility, the authors draw our attention to problems of availability, questioning whether current technical and scientific innovations on the supply side of food security are sustainable. Regarding equity, they question the accessibility of food security initiatives, cautioning that limited success has been achieved overcoming the structural conditions that perpetuate inequalities in access to food. On the topic of participation, the authors highlight the importance of acceptability, acknowledging that “food and food practices reflect the social and cultural diversity of humanity” (Koc et al., 1999, p. 2) and food security initiatives must follow suit. Lastly, they introduce the notion of adequacy to describe a sustainable food system that does not compromise ecological integrity.

Levkoe (2006) also highlights the complexity of food security both as a concept and an intermediating set of actions, demonstrating that food security is both a means and an end. Using a discourse analysis, he presents three perspectives of food security. The first is centered on a rights discourse and is focused on the individual, contending that he/she has “a right to feed him or herself as an essential attribute of the social rights within a democracy” (p. 91). The rights discourse focuses on international agreements yet has little more than moral weight because there are no international enforcement mechanisms. The responsibility lies primarily with governments to protect their citizens from hunger. The second perspective is the anti-poverty discourse. It acknowledges the structural barriers, primarily poverty, to overcoming food insecurity. Those working from an anti-poverty perspective believe that food security must go beyond access and work to restore a strong social safety
net and adequate income to combat food insecurity. Finally, Levkoe offers Community Food Security (CFS) as a third perspective. Building upon both previous discourses, CFS adds environmental sustainability and community development to the goals of food security. CFS strives to ensure equitable food access through democratic decision-making and a decentralized food system. Initiatives are often community-based and beyond the government’s purview, working instead to build neighbourhood self-sufficiency, though Levkoe does stress the need for global coalitions reflecting Harvey’s notion of nested scales.

Part 3: Community food security

Famed Indian economist, Amartya Sen’s work on famines has aptly demonstrated that food security has less to do with aggregate food supply, and more to do with the issue of hunger in the midst of plenty. And nowhere is this more evident than in North America, the land of plenty. Acknowledged by Koc et al. (1999), food security initiatives must look beyond the notion of food availability and consider the challenges of affordability, accessibility and sustainability. This diversity of goals has led to a diversity of interpretations in terms of what a food-secure community should look like and how it is to be achieved.

3.1 CFS definitions

CFS is a complex idea with many different interpretations. It has been viewed as a new approach to food security, a breakthrough concept highlighting the interdependence between food insecurity and systemic barriers, as well as a new social movement bringing social justice and sustainability activists under its banner. I refer to CFS as being exemplary of all three: an approach, a concept, and a social movement. CFS has been formally defined in a number of different ways:

- Gottlieb and Fisher (1996), writing before the signing of the 1996 US Community Food Security Empowerment Act, defined CFS by a list of its programs and advocacy objectives. These are: “direct marketing strategies, urban greening and food production initiatives such as community gardens, edible landscape plantings, urban river restoration, urban forestry programs, economic development initiatives, and food retail industry initiatives” (p. 197).

- Anderson and Cook (1999) use the then newly established Community Food Security Coalition’s definition: “[it] emphasizes building local capacity for food production and marketing, distributional equity, social justice, ecological sustainability, and a community focus on problems rather than ‘blaming the victim’” (p. 145).
• Allen (1999) writes that “community food security embodies a community-based and prevention-oriented framework that focuses on both immediate and long-term food security” and works to “build a community-based food system grounded in regional agriculture and local decision-making” (p. 119).

• Pelletier, Kraak, McCullum, Uusitalo and Rich (1999) define CFS as “the ability of a community to ensure that all its members have adequate access to healthful and acceptable food through environmentally sustainable, economically viable, and socially desirable production, processing, and distribution systems” (p. 401).

• Tarasuk (2001), does not use the term CFS but refers to community development responses to food insecurity which she says “focus on self-help, mutual support, and community empowerment” and include examples such as: “community gardens, food-buying clubs, farmer’s markets, alternative food distribution networks, and community-supported agriculture” (p. 490).

• Hassanein (2003) draws on Gottlieb’s (2001) work on CFS, which she says “puts emphasis on the community rather than individual level, looks for strategies for empowerment and food self-reliance, and stresses prevention with a focus on nutrition and sustainable food production” (p. 79).

• Kaufman (2004), himself a scholar of urban planning, also writes about community food systems which appear very similar to CFS, “[they] seek to establish greater food self-reliance, to foster healthier eating practices, to help small family farmers survive, and to provide all community residents access at all times to a readily available, nutritious, safe, and sustainably produced food supply” (p. 336).

• The Community Food Security Coalition’s most recent definition explains that CFS is “a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice” (2011, n.p). The coalition’s six basic principles of CFS are: (1) low income food needs, (2) broad goals, (3) community focus (4) self-reliance/empowerment, (5) local agriculture, (6) systems-oriented.

As demonstrated by this list of definitions, CFS and its “cousins” (community food systems and community-based food initiatives) constitute different means of securing a consistent end goal: more
food-secure communities. The most salient themes are community, sustainable environment and social justice.

3.2 History of the concept: A US perspective

In the US, Anderson and Cook (1999) explain how CFS emerged as resistance to an overly medical understanding of food security, one based on the absence of “objectively-measurable” symptoms of hunger. Not surprisingly, this reductionist and scientific understanding of the term left many feeling it was incomplete. The authors highlight three streams of professional practice and advocacy groups that resisted the medical model of food security: (1) community nutritionists and educators working towards improving healthy food access, (2) progressive agricultural researchers and activists concerned with food production from a sustainable and socio-political perspective, (3) anti-hunger, anti-poverty community development advocates. The authors claim that this diversity of disciplines makes the transitioning of CFS from a loose concept in to a concrete theory difficult.

Gottlieb and Fisher (1996) trace the origins of US domestic food security to the civil rights movement and its concerns regarding hunger and nutrition. The authors demonstrate that given the inherent connections between hunger and other issues such as access, quality, and availability, as well as questions of how food is grown, processed and distributed, food security began to adopt a broader outlook; one that could address the “wide range of social concerns associated with the food system” (p. 196). It was along these lines that food security came to be associated with a community approach. The authors continue:

as opposed to the concept of hunger, which measures an existing condition of unfulfilled needs and is defined in terms of an individual’s insecurity, food security has come to represent a community-based and prevention-oriented framework. It seeks to evaluate the existence of resources, both community and personal ... to provide an individual with adequate, acceptable food (p.196.)

This evolution in community food security history came to a climax in 1996 with the passage of the Community Food Security Act in the US Farm Bill, and the establishment of a national Community Food Security Coalition (Anderson & Cook, 1999).

Roots of coalition

Coalition-building has always been a part of farm bill articulation in the US. Gottlieb and Fisher (1996) trace the progression of the 1985 farm bill to the adoption of the Community Food Security
Empowerment Act in 1996, illustrating how coalitions remained centrally important to the movement under the CFS banner. The 1985 and 1990 farm bills show clear alliances between the sustainable agriculture movement’s environmental and consumer groups. The organics movement and environmental conservation programs took hold at this time, establishing environmental agendas around issues of food safety (pesticides on produce) and farm-specific (wetlands protection) issues. Since no attention was paid to the overall food system however, the environmental justice and community food security movements fell outside the purview of this legislation. It wasn’t until the 1996 farm bill process that a coalition formed under the banner of CFS to advocate for changes to the food system as a whole. The Community Food Security Empowerment Act, which arose out of the 1996 Farm Bill, provided “a direct and strategic entry point for establishing environmental ... and food security linkage” (p. 199).

3.3 CFS from a Canadian perspective

Turning now to the Canadian perspective, I draw on the work of Valerie Tarasuk (2001), a leading scholar in the field of nutritional sciences. Tarasuk corroborates Gottlieb and Fisher’s (1996) point that advocacy for domestic food security in North America originated in the anti-hunger movement. Hunger, she argues, versus food security, is a significant North American social problem. Whereas issues of food security can involve problems of aggregate food supply at the national and international levels, in North America, the issue is most prevalent at the household and community level in the form of food insecurity. Tarasuk writes, “in Canada, both the awareness of food insecurity as a domestic problem and the development of responses to this problem have originated at the community level” (p. 488). In fact, we still measure food insecurity by food bank usage in Canada.

While the extensive research on food banks is beyond the scope of this project, it is important to recognize that the Canadian CFS movement was spawned by concerns about the adequacy and appropriateness of food banks as a response to food insecurity. Drawing on Tarasuk’s (2001) research, I offer four reasons for this concern. First, food banks were established as temporary, extra-governmental community organizations to provide emergency food to the hungry during the recession of the early 1980s, but have become firmly rooted in the Canadian socio-political landscape as the primary means of food assistance. Second, food bank data demonstrates rising levels of hunger since their inception. Third, the sustained use of food banks has been linked to systemic barriers like poverty and the erosion of social welfare programs. Fourth, food banks address the mere symptom: hunger, not the systemic roots, thus framing the issue merely as a lack of food rather than an issue of social justice. And in doing
so, food banks mask the problem of food insecurity by making it appear that the problem: hunger, is being dealt with.

As in the US, it was suggested that more lasting solutions to the problems of food insecurity come from community development strategies. Canadian initiatives are designed to enhance people’s knowledge and skills in food “use” (i.e. community kitchens) and increase local control of the food system (i.e. community gardens). Inherent to these CFS approaches is a critical stance vis-à-vis the global industrialized food system.

Part 4: Themes of CFS

Upon reviewing literature pertaining to CFS and community-based food initiatives more broadly, I discovered the following dimensions: identity issues, value conflicts and compromises, and the struggle to counteract the agro-industrial food system.

4.1 Identity issues:

Because CFS emerged as an alternative to the powerful and destructive forces of the global industrialized food system, and as such positioned itself as a broad catch-all category, it necessarily suffers from identity crises. I will highlight two such dilemmas of identity: the clash between thinking and doing, and the red-green gap.

The clash between thinking and doing

Some people see CFS as both a concept - a new way to look at food security - and a set of intermediating actions, so at times it suffers from a clash between theory and practice, between thinking and doing. A study by Pelletier et al. (1999), points to this paradox. The researchers examined CFS in terms of a) its local legitimacy and social acceptability, and b) the responsiveness of local agencies and organizations to it (p. 411) in order to understand the link between CFS as a theory (or convergence of interests, values and concerns) and a sustainable practice. Their study, which followed food system community planning initiatives in six New York counties, found that despite many counties displaying similar CFS goals and objectives, differences arose in terms of interpretation. The common goals were to re-localize the food system, to strengthen the economic viability of local agriculture, to improve access to healthy local food, to strengthen anti-hunger efforts, and to increase education about larger food system issues. There was however less agreement when it came to issues of social justice and the environmental and social dimensions of the food system. Additionally, the study found that over the long-term, these community activities and accomplishments were impeded by a variety of socio-political
constraints. In other words, some CFS goals are less political than others and thus are potentially more attainable. As well, CFS actions require greater socio-political support over the long-term in order for the ultimate goals to be reached.

Anderson and Cook (1999) bemoan CFS for its lack of a clear-cut definition. Emerging from such a melting pot of interest groups and its ambiguous status as part social movement, part conceptual breakthrough, and part practical approach, CFS has been difficult to define theoretically and thus it is difficult to determine what constitutes a food-secure community. However, the authors believe that a clear theoretical basis could help CFS gain institutional footing in terms of contributing to the formulation of new social policies. The authors argue that while much work has been done to address each of CFS’s themes (outlined in section 3.1), the concept lacks a clear definition and therefore its progress cannot be measured. Anderson and Cook believe there are three requisite steps to achieving a CFS theory. First, a clear vision of a desirable food system must be articulated. In other words, defining what a food-secure community looks like and how it would function. Does widespread food access in wealthy communities constitute CFS if there is little public involvement in decisions about the food system? Would CFS communities limit food imports? The authors propose that “the first step in developing a theory of CFS is developing collective visions of the components of food-secure communities” (p. 145). Second, the underlying political philosophy of CFS must be formally articulated. This is important in order “to make sure that disagreements over policies and practices are not actually disagreements over unstated political assumptions” (p. 145). Third, the terminology used in CFS discourse requires clarification, the vagueness of the terms “community” and “cultural acceptability” is problematic. The USDA Food Security Measurement Study defines CFS as “the aggregated measure of household-level food security status of all households within a particular geographic area” (Hamilton et al., 1997, as cited in Anderson & Cook, 1999, p. 146). However, to CFS scholars and practitioners, the term signifies much more. Anderson & Cook posit that a lack of clarity over the meaning of “community” has “hindered identification and measurement of community-level factors that influence household-level food security. As a result, there is not yet a clear understanding about how household- or individual-level food security is related to CFS” (p. 146). Additionally, how is the term “cultural acceptability” understood as part of CFS? The authors ask whether satisfying some community members’ taste for gourmet imported foods is part of CFS, or whether “cultural acceptability” refers only to traditional foods and/or food staples. They stress, “for CFS theory and research to be effective as a guide for public policy, programmatic action, and practice, the definitions ... must be in terms that are relevant to these processes” (p. 146). It is believed that a number of positive outcomes could result from the development of a CFS theory such as more effective coalitions among organizations working on
food-system changes, and a more sophisticated system of measuring the indicators of CFS success based on specific characteristics that distinguish food-secure communities from food-insecure communities. Anderson and Cook outlined a range of tasks related to theory-creation and ranked them in terms of priority, fourth among these is “to evaluate the successes and failures of various efforts to improve CFS ... so that it will be possible to begin constructing systematic policy priorities and ‘optimal mixes’ of policies to apply in different circumstances” (p. 149). They recommend starting the evaluation with policies and programs that have high returns relative to costs, or that address multiple concerns simultaneously (e.g., markets that serve neighbourhoods with limited access to fresh produce). My own work responds to this recommendation.

It is evident from these examples that CFS does not offer a clear cut path to making communities more food secure, or even clearly define what constitutes a food-secure community. It’s easy to unite the multiple interests and actors under broad categories such as a “commitment to social justice”, but in terms of implementation such unity is far more difficult to achieve. The practical reality is complex and advancing some objectives and values may come at the expense of compromising other CFS values. Anderson and Cook’s (1999) call for a conceptual model of CFS speaks to the need for theory to guide action and is a testament to the clash between thinking and doing.

**Bridging the red-green gap**

Similar to the issue of problematic definitions (what constitutes a food-secure community?) and the questions regarding the more political goals of CFS, so too is it difficult for on-the-ground CFS programs to maintain a commitment to the twin pillars of CFS: social justice and environmental sustainability.

The inherent tensions of combining what are referred to as red (social justice) and green (political ecology) principles in CFS projects are many. For one, they are not always compatible. Scholars have written about the difficulties of “squaring farm security and food security” (Guthman, Morris and Allen, 2006), raising questions such as: how can the poor afford organic produce? Evidently, cheap food has tremendous costs associated with it. The ecological costs are polluted oceans and aquifers, drought and desertification, climate change, deforestation, etc... The social costs are low pay and rights abuses for migrant agricultural workers, health epidemics like diabetes and obesity, among other things. Despite the challenges, CFS strives to balance red and green principles.

In the aforementioned study, Guthman et al. (2006) sought to determine to what extent Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiatives and farmer’s markets (both unquestionably green) were addressing principles of food security (red). Little empirical research had been conducted to test the
supposition that red-green goals could be accomplished through such market-oriented CFS initiatives. Their study found that low-income people rarely participate in CSA or farmer’s markets. Directly marketing farm produce to the consumer was not a sufficient intervention to meet the food security needs of the poor; and so “bringing the goals of farm security and food security into congruence require(d) additional directed effort” (p.667). This then raised the question of who should subsidize the difference between the cost of local farm produce and the amount people can afford to pay for it. Small-scale local farmers practicing sustainable agriculture do not have the means to provide this subsidy, and of course the poor, whose income and social assistance have been eroded by government policies, cannot be expected to pay more for “good” food either. In their study, many of the CSA and farmer’s market managers pointed to the government and entitlement programs, such as food stamps, as appropriate sources of subsidy. The study did show a correlation between the use of entitlement strategies and participation of low-income customers. Not surprisingly, the research indicated that bigger, more established operations were more willing and able to support red CFS principles, through the implementation of strategies like discounts and food recovery. They also found that non-profit or government-run operations implemented more red CFS policies. However, in terms of sustainably bridging the red-green gap, the authors point to guaranteed government entitlement programs that can be, and are encouraged to be (through marketing and education), redeemed at green CFS initiatives like CSAs and farmer’s markets, as the most viable solution. The authors raise questions about whether purely market-based approaches can meet the twin red and green goals of CFS. They make the point that non-profit ventures, though doing good work, are ephemeral “for they are subject to the vagaries of philanthropic priority changes, the volatility of the stock market that determines foundation resources, and the presence or absence of effective leaders” (p. 683). They also posit that food recovery strategies cannot solve food security problems, due to the fact that the solution: donated food is dependent “on the whims and largesse of donors and volunteers” (p. 681) and mirrors the problem: “food insecurity is primarily a function of insufficient and irregular income” (p. 681). Guthman et al.’s study demonstrates that market-based CFS initiatives require the support of guaranteed government entitlement programs like food stamps that can be redeemed at green CFS ventures. Only in this case, can the twin goals of farm security be consistently squared with food security.

Along similar but slightly different lines, the work of Connelly, Markey and Roseland (2011) examines two local food initiatives that are striving to synthesize social and environmental concerns to bring about structural change to the food system. Both Vancouver’s New City Market Local Food Hub and Edmonton’s Good Food Box program are social enterprises (red) with a focus on sustainability (green). The struggles faced by these ventures echo the previous study’s findings. The authors conclude
that while issues of food security and sustainability are necessary parts of a local food system transformation, they are also “extremely complex social and political issues that are dependent upon underlying community values” (Feagan, 2008, as cited in Connelly et al., 2011, p. 318). In other words, without a firm ideological commitment on behalf of public officials who can support these initiatives through such initiatives as tax breaks or entitlement programs, the challenge of staying true to the red-green principles of CFS can be impossible. Visionary ideals will undergo the true test of their feasibility in implementation and will need to be adaptive; the farmer’s market manager may not be in a position to offer a discount and the Good Food Box program may cease to be a social enterprise due to funding cuts. As one Edmonton farmer put it, “values are important, but they are not something that will take over the business” (p. 317). Shifting priorities may be the only option for survival of red-green projects, especially, as in this case, when they desire to scale-up and affect real, structural change.

4.2 Value conflicts and compromises

Perhaps the best example of compromising values can be found in the organics movement. If you shop at Walmart, you may have seen the new organics section. To many in the organics movement this is ghastly; to others, a sign of real change. As the previous section highlighted, compromise is inevitable. Values are bound to be questioned as efforts to change the food system progress. Should a community garden treat its plants with fertilizer because it will increase the yield and support more people? Can a farmer’s market charge an entrance fee to better support its growers? If a Good Food Box program sources some of its produce from a transnational agri-business (i.e. Chiquita Banana) in order to reach a broader customer base, is it still being true to its CFS values? The tensions inherent in these questions echo Anderson and Cook’s (1999) call for the creation of a CFS theory to better define what constitutes a food-secure community. Whether a set of binding principles would help or hinder these initiatives is a case for further study. Regardless, I posit that the issue of values conflicts runs deeply through most social change oriented projects and is worth exploring in the context of CFS.

Many CFS programs and projects have been criticized for being too small-scaled to affect any real change. Johnston and Baker (2005) argue that CFS initiatives, like the Good Food Box in Toronto, must “scale up” to address structural concerns and “scale out” to other localities. With regards to scaling up, they recommend “identifying state-sponsored solutions to the entrenched structural problems of global capitalism and not assume that a patchwork of community-based activism and green entrepreneurialism can solve (the) problems” (p. 319). In terms of scaling out, the authors suggest that small-scale, locally controlled programs like the Good Food Box, be expanded to other localities. While the authors mostly highlight positive advantages to growth, they acknowledge the compromise of
values that comes along with it. They stress that scaling up is more risky than scaling out; “scaling up in this manner is not only daunting, but carries the risk that locally rooted programs will transmogrify into large-scale, faceless bureaucracies, disconnected from the local, community-based roots that made them successful in the first place” (p. 321). In terms of scaling out, Johnston and Baker believe that programs like the Good Food Box are “inspirational prototypes” and must necessarily be expanded in order to affect widespread change because single-handedly they cannot meet the needs of food insecure populations. The authors argue that the risks can be minimized so that the original CFS principles are not largely compromised. They also advocate for long-term food pedagogy in order to awaken people’s critical consciousness to further challenge the global food system; a point corroborated by Guthman et al. (2006), and Connelly et al. (2011). The notion that “if people only knew” is common in food discourse, and these authors all believe that CFS projects must be undertaken in parallel to discussions about the impacts of cheap food and the benefits of “local food systems that are socially just and environmentally sustainable” (Connelly et al., 2011, p. 320).

Neva Hassanein (2003) asks that we reconsider the very notion of compromise all together. She argues the word is wrongly associated with a pejorative sense of weakness, and that compromising to move a project forward is actually a sign of integrity. In movements like CFS, which involve so many actors and interests, it is inevitable that value conflicts will occur, especially when we extend these concepts beyond the realm of thinking into the realm of doing. Hassanein points to “food democracy” as an approach to reconciling these values conflicts. She writes:

At the core of food democracy is the idea that people can and should be actively participating in shaping the food system, rather than remaining passive spectators on the sidelines. In other words, food democracy is about citizens having the power to determine agro-food policies and practices locally, regionally, nationally, and globally (p.79.)

Food democracy is an important concept, one that offers resolution to values conflicts in a manner respectful of CFS’s aim “to assure equitable food access created through democratic decision-making” (Fisher, 1997, as cited in Levkoe 2006, p. 91). Hassanein (2003) reminds us that “there is no independent authority that society can meaningfully appeal to for a definitive resolution of disputes” (p. 78) and that “politics is the arena in which we deal with disagreements over values” (p. 79). Here she is not referring to politics in an electoral sense, but in a broader sense to denote “active participation of the citizenry ... and political engagement to work out our differences” (p. 79). Resolved through a framework of food democracy, values conflicts can help propel CFS towards its goals.
4.3 David vs. Goliath

CFS has taken on a giant. The mainstream food system, including what Beus and Dunlap (1990) call the “conventional paradigm of large scale, highly industrialized agriculture” (as cited in Sumner, 2010, p. 13), is big, bad and ugly. It is “heavily subsidized and [does] not account for negative social, economic and environmental externalities” (Connelly et al., 2011, p. 321). In order to counteract the industry in any kind of meaningful way, CFS scholars suggest pairing the bottom-up approach of CFS with top-down institutional support, and coalition-building.

Bottom-up and top-down

While CFS strives to build a community’s own capacity for food production and thus often works at arm’s length from the government, food scholars warn against “deflecting attention away from government responsibilities” (Allen, 1999, p. 121). Tarasuk (2001) problematizes the “self-help orientation” of many CFS initiatives which fuel public perception that household food insecurity is a problem of individual choice rather than a problem of their access to resources. “In this sense, such initiatives may serve to depoliticize the problem of food insecurity and defuse arguments for more fundamental social changes, thus facilitating further reductions in publicly funded services and supports to vulnerable groups” (p. 494). Johnston and Baker (2005) make the point that while it sometimes appears that local market-based approaches can adequately address food insecurity, this is an “assumption which diverts attention away from the welfare state’s historic and continuing responsibility to regulate industry and redistribute wealth” (p. 319). Highlighting the complexity of the issue, Allen (1999) notes that “while problems of food insecurity are manifest at the local level, they are not necessarily caused at the local level but are rooted in larger, often global, political economic structures” (p. 121). Allen, in her work with Guthman and Morris (2006), makes another point about the problem of working outside the government by referring to the fact that CSAs and farmer’s markets, while providing fresh produce and conviviality, cannot meet the goal of food security unless they have access to external funding. A sentiment echoed by Johnston and Baker (2005) when they advocate, together with FoodShare (the organization responsible for Toronto’s Good Food Box program), for a “third sector”: “modes of food provisioning that have an entrepreneurial dimension, but that are supported by state funds” (p. 319). Another inherent challenge to pairing CFS’s bottom-up approach with top-down state support has to do with scale. Johnston and Baker (2005) argue for a homeopathic approach to CFS:

Because agriculture exists on multiple scales (local, national, global), resistance must be similarly multi-scaled. Good food boxes are needed in various localities, alongside states with regulatory
Allen (1999) agrees, calling for the “reweaving of the food security net”. She suggests that CFS should combine efforts with traditional anti-hunger work which provide regular food access for the most vulnerable populations to pressure for “a nonretractable government safety net that protects against food insecurity” (p. 118). Bottom-up and top-down approaches each have their strengths, the community is in the best position to help confront the daily struggles of a particular reality, whereas the government is tapped into the broader forces that necessarily affect this reality. Combined, these perspectives can be rather effective in enacting meaningful social policy in a holistic way.

Coalition-building

Another means that CFS scholars recommend for broaching the tilted power dynamics of the David vs. Goliath struggle is to form coalitions. As in the above example, some recommend working together with government as a way of strengthening CFS initiatives, while others advise building partnerships among members of the CFS movement and beyond, to other sectors, in order to tackle systemic barriers collectively.

As I hope to have demonstrated throughout this chapter, the roots of food insecurity largely stem from people’s inability to purchase food. Poverty and unemployment, to name but two systemic barriers, restrict many people’s capacity to produce and eat food in the way that they and the CFS movement more broadly, would prefer. The fact remains that it is the poor who suffer from the most crippling kind of food insecurity. While many income-secure individuals and families are still eating ‘inside the box’ of the industrial food system” (Johnston and Baker, 2005, p. 313), a practice the CFS movement strives to change, the more pressing issue from a human rights perspective, is the large percentage of poor people who cannot feed themselves at all. “The hungry are the poor, mostly women, children, ethnic minorities, and the elderly” (Nestle and Guttmacher, 1992, as cited in Allen 1999, p. 121) and poverty is a complicated problem to address, let alone solve.

As demonstrated by Levkoe’s (2006) discourse analysis of food security, CFS is made up, in part, by the anti-poverty approach. Many who frame hunger as an issue of poverty work and advocate for the food bank movement, point to the need for “a strong social safety net and adequate income [to] enable marginalized people to make choices around the foods they purchase” (Levkoe, 2006, p. 91). Allen

muscle at multiple scales. States will need to redistribute wealth to empower marginalized populations, resist the centralizing pull of monopolized agri-business, and reclaim food growing and eating as local endeavours ground in national food standards and global human rights (p. 321.)
(1999) advocates for the CFS and anti-hunger movements to work together, to reweave the safety net by tackling both on-the-ground food demand and structural change collectively.

Tarasuk (2001) raises doubts about whether CFS initiatives, what she calls “food-based community development strategies”, are designed to address the underlying issues of poverty, and questions their ability to combat food insecurity. She feels that many CFS projects focus on self-help, mutual support, and community empowerment through food and “appear unlikely to affect poverty-related problems of household food insecurity” (p. 495). However, she does acknowledge that locally sustainable alternatives offered by way of farmer’s markets, CSA, food-buying clubs, community gardens and kitchens “challenge social and economic structures that are relevant to local problems of poverty and unemployment” (p. 495) and break down social isolation. Tarasuk’s argument is that they do little to affect the financial barriers of food access. She asserts that “strong networks and partnerships need to be forged between food security initiatives across communities to facilitate collective actions around broad policy issues related to poverty and inequality” (p. 496). Other scholars like Levkoe (2006) stress that these coalitions must also look beyond community to regional, national and international levels where the mechanisms that promote and perpetuate poverty and food insecurity operate.

A second dimension of CFS coalition-building is to look beyond current members of the movement to other fields of study. A prominent professional field interested in community transformation and relevant to food security is that of urban planning.

Kaufman (2004), a planning educator and researcher, has written a lot about the interconnections between CFS and planning. He points to the fact that the food system, though relegated to the lower end of city policy agendas, “has substantial effects on the local economy, the local workforce, environmental conditions, public health, and the quality of neighbourhood life” (p. 336). He also shows growing support for strengthening community food systems amongst planning educators who are interested in embracing “food as a path to a better quality of community life” (p. 339). Similar to the role played by urban planning in environmental and public policy dispute resolution, Kaufman sees the possibility for bridging the tensions between the global industrialized food system and the alternative community food system as planning’s most significant potential contribution to CFS. Kaufman provides the following list of ways planners could align their work with the aims of CFS:

Getting major institutions like local government, hospitals and schools to purchase more sustainable produce from farmers in the region ... address[ing] the need to develop more locally based food-related industries ranging from the production side to the processing, marketing, and retail sides.
Changing restrictive local governmental policies that discourage or inhibit the operation of community-based food enterprises would be another policy avenue to pursue ... improving transportation access for low-income people to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food places as well as raising public awareness of the critical connection between poor diets, illnesses, and rising health costs (p. 340.)

Pairing CFS initiatives with long-lasting government support, and building coalitions amongst members of the food security movement and beyond, are the requisite preconditions to empower the alternative localized food system that is David to confront the excesses of Goliath, the global industrialized food system.

Part 5: Critiques of CFS

Part of CFS’s strength is its respect for complexity, thus its proponents must be comfortable knowing that nothing is wholly good; that every action (i.e. including conventionally grown imported bananas in a Good Food Box) entails a compromise (supporting the global industrialized food system). But as the old adage goes, perfect is the enemy of the good, and CFS should not strive for some new world utopia, but rather, as Hassanein (2003) proposes “a pragmatic politics of transformation”. The pragmatic, incremental steps that CFS can take towards fundamentally changing our food system will not be perfect, as the following critiques will demonstrate.

The literature revealed three primary critiques of CFS: its exclusivity, its place within a limited politics of the possible, and its whiteness.

5.1 Exclusivity

This critique is two dimensional: CFS has been labelled exclusive because of the high cost of sustainable food systems, and because it is seen to cater to low income people exclusively.

CFS initiatives with a predominantly “green-focus” (CSAs and farmer’s markets are the most obvious examples) have been accused of creating what Allen (1999) calls “a two-tiered food system differentiated by class” (p. 126). Despite the many problems associated with the industrialized food system, it is cheap and thus affordable to a greater percentage of the population. The local, and often organic produce supported by CFS is expensive and unaffordable to those living in fixed and lower income brackets.Positing this problem as a criticism of CFS is unfair however, as it is in fact a direct result of the global food system which subsidizes non-organic, non-local production and thus artificially inflates the relative price of the green alternatives. Paying the true costs of food, which involves
accounting for negative environmental externalities like pollution and the loss of biodiversity, and negative social externalities like family breakdown due to patterns of migrant work and the rise in child obesity rates, will do much to correct this price distortion and accordingly, is a big focus of the CFS movement. As it stands now however, the move to local food supply must be tempered with attention to the underlying values of social justice, the other pillar of CFS, if not “the localization of consumption and production risks being limited to the fetishization of local food for the most well resourced consumers” (Connelly et al., 2011, p. 314).

The second aspect of exclusivity in the CFS movement relates to its target audience. Similar to the exclusivity created by the price of green CFS projects, red CFS strategies such as good food boxes, can struggle to attract a broad range of customers because of the stigmatized association with income support. While programs like the Good Food Box are designed to provide nutritious food to “particularly marginalized low-income and ethnocultural communities” (Johnston & Baker, 2004, p. 313), they also strive to target “the majority of urban consumers who still eat ‘inside the box’ of the industrial food system” (p. 313) because one of CFS’ objectives is “universal access to culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate, sustainable food through local non-emergency channels” (p. 313). Income levels are not necessarily a corollary of food choice; consumers choose to consume the products of the global industrialized food system for a variety of reasons. Therefore, CFS projects “cannot be based exclusively on a sense of ecological responsibility or social justice, but can and must emphasize the pleasures of eating and being involved with one’s food choices from field to table” (p. 322). The fact remains that social change will require a critical mass; CFS requires the support of a large percentage of the population and must therefore be especially mindful to issues of exclusivity.

5.2 The politics of the possible

The “politics of the possible”, a phrase oft-cited by famed food scholar Julie Guthman, speaks to neoliberalism’s firm ontological grip on society; evident by the fact that even “alternative” practices such as CFS still espouse basic neoliberal values such as entrepreneurialism and self-improvement in their resistance strategies. The fact that neoliberal subjects ascribe to neoliberal values in a consumer society goes without saying; however Guthman (2008b) argues that while “agro-food activism” purports to be opposed to these values, in practice they promote neoliberalism in their strategies of consumer choice, localism, entrepreneurialism and self-improvement. Effectively, neoliberal subjectivities, indirectly contributed to by CFS, allow the State to escape from its responsibilities to regulate, care for, and protect the planet and its citizens. The first way in which CFS, as part of Guthman’s category of agro-food activism, intersects with neoliberal rationalities is by treating people primarily as consumers,
implying that we can shop our way out of food insecurity by strengthening consumer choice for sustainable and more affordable local foods. This focus on “voting with your dollars” (p. 1176) reinforces the notion that the State is no longer required to be a judicious and effective regulator because individual consumers can effectively regulate the market. The second issue is the focus on local (good, small-scale and caring) versus global (bad, wasteful and placeless). The effects of focusing on a local scale of attention and action, has resulted in “a turn away from the state, articulating with devolutionary tendencies” (p. 1177). Neoliberalism greatly contributes to the creation and sustainability of the global industrialized food system, as it is premised on “the drying up of public funds, the breakdown of state capacity, the illegitimacy accorded to efforts that constrain profit making, and the devolution of regulation to scales not commensurable with the problems being addressed” (p. 1180). It thus follows that any resistance to the effects of neoliberalization should advocate for greater state involvement.

Third, food activism like CFS uses market-based mechanisms to solve the problems of food insecurity. Though Guthman clearly acknowledges the well-intentioned origins of these kinds of CFS approaches, “in part concession to the decreasing political support for entitlement programs, in part a way to make the food insecure independent of the charity of others” (p. 1177), she argues the effect is a depoliticization of hunger. Fourth, is the focus on self-improvement. Guthman stresses that the focus on empowerment, self-sufficiency and broad notions of citizenship in food activism programs like farm-to-school programs or garden-oriented projects aimed at at-risk populations, detracts from what should be the actual focus: food production. She also problematizes the extent to which local organic food has been “intensely proselytized”, which she writes, “suggests something deeper going on about contemporary subject-making” (p. 1177). This is important because as Guthman reminds us, the links to participation in various community partnerships, campaigns and professional activities and neoliberal subject formation are well established.

Other food scholars also critique CFS from a politics of the possible standpoint. Tarasuk (2001) argues they’re not so different from food banks, an ad hoc charity model of food security. Connelly et al., (2011) point to the fact that social justice and “business” do not fit well together. They state:

If we agree that we need to transform the local food system to make it both more sustainable and more just, we cannot be limited to and bound by economic constraints of the existing food system, which views food purely as a commodity (p. 318.)

This speaks to another of Guthman’s (2008b) points about the politics of the possible: “it is difficult to know what something outside of neoliberalism might look like when all is seen as neoliberalism” (p. 1181). Allen (2008) also highlights that, often for reasons of practical exigency, local
food systems depend on many of the features of neoliberalization like flexible labour arrangements, private funding and discourses of choice and consumerism. She asks that scholars “break open the illusion that social problems are fixed and immutable [to] expand the limits and boundaries of what is possible in transforming the agrifood system” (p. 160); in essence remembering that another political economic process is possible.

5.3 Whiteness

When the dominant social group in an increasingly diverse society are white, it may be hard to avoid the implementation of political projects that “reflect white desires and missionary practices” (Guthman, 2008a, p. 433), yet this becomes especially problematic when a goal of such projects is social justice.

Guthman (2008a), who teaches a class called “Agriculture, Food and Social Justice” in the Community Studies program at the University of California at Santa Cruz, was intrigued by the relationship between the alternative food movement and the production and reproduction of whiteness by her students who complete a field study with food justice organizations as part of their coursework. She found that while many of them embark with great hopes and expectations of bringing good food and good food practices to “others”, convinced as they are that food security is a problem of access or lack of exposure, they return with a more nuanced understanding of the problem. From their field work many of Guthman’s students “conclude that the alternatives reflect the desires of the creators of these projects more than those of the communities they putatively serve” (p. 441). These alternatives are said to be “coded white” not only due to the presence of white bodies, but also because the “associations of the food, the modes of educating people to its qualities, and the ways of delivering themselves lacks appeal to the people they are designed to entice” (p. 442). And while this white coding affects the resonance of these alternative projects with the communities in which they are located, Guthman is also concerned with how “whiteness perhaps crowds out the imaginings of other sorts of political projects that could indeed be more explicitly anti-racist” (p. 443). This research echoes a previous theme of the literature, that the focus of food activism must be upon “the injustices that underlie disparities in food access” such as racism and poverty; the systemic barriers to food security. In order to do this, Guthman points to transcommunality as an alternative to the politics of conversion, something associated with CFS initiatives which often seek to bring the good food to others so that they adopt it themselves. Transcommunality refers to the constructive and developmental interaction among diverse communities, which through shared political action, develops “increased communication, mutual respect, and understanding” (Brown Childs, 2003, as cited in Guthman 2008a, p. 433). Effectively
broaching the issue of whiteness appears to be inspired by Freirian ideals; the oppressors, in true solidarity with the oppressed, should “listen, watch, and sometimes even stay away” (Guthman, 2008a, p. 444) so the oppressed can become masters of their own thinking.

Part 6: Conclusion

As I have presented here in this chapter, the GFM, as a community-based food initiative, is a response to the global agro-industrial food system that has created food security challenges in communities around the world. Food insecurity stems from a world food system that prioritizes industrialization and technological advances over social and environmental health and wellbeing. As a response to food insecurity, CFS, in terms of concept, approach, and social movement, values food both as a basic human right and as a product of the natural world. CFS initiatives focus on red (social justice) and green (ecological sustainability) priorities, and while there is already a substantial body of CFS literature, very little have been written about FoodShare’s Good Food Market initiative. This research will shed new light on the GFM and its connections to CFS.

The Good Food Market (GFM) program, an offshoot of FoodShare’s Good Food Box program, aims to extend the Good Food Box’s social justice reach by setting up markets in low-income neighbourhoods and selling fresh, local produce to individuals and households that cannot afford an entire box of food, or do not require such large amounts. As a relatively recent approach to CFS, the GFM has not yet been explored and thus represents a new area of food security scholarship. The GFM hosted by the Stop Community Food Centre has been in operation for several years and provides a unique opportunity for exploring both its reasons for success and its connections to CFS. In the following chapter, I present the qualitative case study methodology and the data collection tools I used to do so.
Chapter four: Methodology

This research is guided by three overriding objectives: (1) to better understand the general capacity of The Stop’s GFM, (2) to assess the strengths and weaknesses of its service delivery, and (3) to determine its contribution to community food security (CFS).

In order to meet these research objectives, I employed a qualitative, single intrinsic/instrumental case study methodology, which I will outline here. I will also present the methods of data collection used in the work.

Part 1: Qualitative research

Qualitative research is premised on the value of subjective experience as research data, the study of individuals’ unique experience within a particular context (Creswell, 2007). The qualitative researcher seeks to discover meaning where it did not previously exist (Perry, 2008). Qualitative research is also descriptive and inductive; it focuses on uncovering meaning from the perspective of research participants (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The GFM is a relatively new approach to CFS and little is known about it. The insights and experiences of the GFM’s staff, student interns, and volunteers as well as its customers will reveal valuable information about a new and understudied phenomenon. While not designed for generalization or drawing hard and fast conclusions, qualitative research of The Stop’s GFM can provide insight into the particulars of a new approach to CFS by drawing on the different perspectives of a variety of research participants. In other words, the subjective experiences of the people who participate in the GFM in a variety of different capacities will tell its story.

Part 2: Case study

Having been operational year-round for four years, The Stop’s GFM provides an excellent case for an in-depth exploration of FoodShare’s Good Food Market program more broadly. What can be learned from the specifics of a single case is an important rationale for choosing this particular research methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), and in this case, there is significant potential for learning due to my long-term involvement with The Stop’s GFM. The case’s detailed description is made possible by over a year of volunteering at the GFM and thus becoming a researcher-as-insider. This study is motivated by my personal experience with the case, by my supervisor’s research agenda (she is involved in a larger study described below), and by the existing gap in the scholarly literature - there has been no research exploring the connections between Good Food Markets and community food security.
The Stop’s GFM provides a single or bounded case to examine two sets of research questions. The first looks at how the GFM is organized and the strengths and weaknesses of this model. This type of research is typical of an intrinsic case study wherein the case itself is worthy of research (Stake, 1995, as cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008). The Stop’s GFM is unique to all other Good Food Markets in the city of Toronto, it is bigger (more customers, larger weekly produce orders and is operational year-round) and it is more established (it has been in existence longer, and its sustainability is ensured by its host institution – The Stop Community Food Centre). As such, The Stop’s GFM is ripe ground for studying best practices of the Good Food Market program more broadly. Information gleaned from this intrinsic case study will complement a broader study aiming “to understand the impact of social businesses in addressing the needs, both social and economic, of marginalized persons in the GTA” (Quarter, Guy, Malinsky, & Jamieson, 2009) by providing in-depth information of one such social business model. This intrinsic case study will also offer both The Stop and FoodShare - the organizations responsible for running and coordinating the program - valuable operational insight. The second research question, which aims to understand the relationship between the GFM and community food security, a connection never studied before, is exemplary of Stake’s (1995, as cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008) instrumental case studies. Instrumental case studies provide insight into an issue or help refine a theory. Since “generalization and proof linger in the mind of the (case study) researcher” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 448), it is my contention that the particularities of The Stop’s GFM will contribute to our understanding of the broader field of CFS.

2.1 Strengths of case study research

Case study methodology is ideal for such in-depth, holistic investigations (Tellis, 1997). They are the preferred strategy “when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (Yin, 2003, p. 1). Most importantly for the purposes of this research, the case study methodology allows researchers to retain the “meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 2003, p. 2) by concentrating on the experiential knowledge of the case, detailing ordinary activities and paying close attention to its social, political, and other contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Therefore, the complex social particularities of The Stop’s GFM can best be captured by such a method. Case studies are used extensively in the social sciences, they are traditional in the fields of sociology and political science, and are increasingly used in practice-oriented disciplines like education and urban planning. Yin (2003) also notes that the case study is also a popular method of thesis research.
2.2 Shortfalls of case study research

Yin (2003) outlines the “traditional prejudices against the case study strategy” (p. 10). He points out that case studies have primarily been criticized for their lack of rigour. Investigators have been called “sloppy” for not following systematic research procedures, or allowing biased views to influence their findings. The other shortfalls listed by Yin (2003) are: confusion between case study teaching and case study research, limited ability to generalize findings, and lengthy studies that produce unreadable documents. Today however, the case study methodology has been legitimized through extensive study; contemporary case study researchers can now draw on many methodological texts, such as those used to guide this study.

Despite the weaknesses associated with the case study method, it is still a preferred strategy for in-depth, holistic and context-sensitive comparative studies (Patton, 2002). The Stop’s GFM represents a specific, unique and bounded case worth studying; FoodShare, the GFM’s parent organization, is interested in comparing it to other GFMs. In addition, exploring the connection between the market and community food security fills a gap in the existing literature.

Part 3: Study participants

“Qualitative research is characterized by researchers spending extensive time on site, personally in contact with activities and operations of the case, reflecting, and revising descriptions and meanings of what is going on” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 450). I have become a central part of the GFM at The Stop. Over the past year, I have volunteered every Tuesday afternoon at the market, first as a baker and then as a market coordinator. During this time, I have assisted in the weekly operations of the market and in doing so have developed relationships with The Stop staff, student interns, other volunteers and market customers. After a few months of volunteering, I decided to conduct research on the market and began reflecting more deeply on the weekly market activities and the GFM’s impact on the local community’s food security.

I employed purposive or judgemental sampling (Babbie, 1998; Neuman, 2004) in order to select specific participants that I felt would be especially informative. I used “subjective information” and my “judgement [as] an expert” (Neuman, 2004, p. 139) gained as a market volunteer, to identify a “sample” of customers to interview. After nearly a year of volunteering with the GFM, I felt that I had significant and sufficient “knowledge of the population, its elements, and the nature of [my] research aims” (Babbie, 1998, p. 195) to select my sample. I invited 13 customers to participate in my study based on five criteria:
1. A fifty-fifty split between customers redeeming their volunteer voucher and those paying cash.

2. Customers who regularly attend the market as an attempt to “select informants who are somewhat typical of the group [being studied]” (Babbie, 1998, p. 195)

3. Customers who knew me and were comfortable speaking with me - this is in line with Bourdieu’s (1999) emphasis on non-violent communication in research interviewing; he writes, “social proximity and familiarity provide two of the conditions of ‘nonviolent’ communication ... investigators [are] free to choose their respondents from among or around people they knew” (as cited in Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 103).

4. A sampling of customers who represented maximum variation (Creswell, 2007) in so far as I could visibly discern (gender, age, physical ability, race).

5. Customers who had time to speak to me and wished to do so. In the end, my findings do “not represent any meaningful population” (Babbie, 1998, p.195), yet they are suitable for exploratory studies such as this.

Part 4: Methods

Case study research explores a case through detailed and extensive data collection involving multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007). Otherwise known as triangulated research, the case study method ensures that alternative explanations are considered in order to confirm the validity of the findings (Tellis, 1997). As such, I conducted both semi-structured and structured interviews with three types of GFM participants: customers, student intern coordinators, and The Stop staff coordinator. I also garnered insight from my own thoughts and observations as a participant-researcher, and the many informal conversations I have had with other Stop participants, staff members, and volunteers. As Lofland and Lofland (1995) note, “you achieve the richest possible data through direct, face-to-face contact with, and prolonged immersion in, some social location or circumstance” (p. 197, as cited in Babbie, 1998). To complete the triangulation, I also read literature from the fields of food security and CFS, as well as writings about The Stop Community Food Centre and FoodShare.

4.1 Semi-structured interviews

I conducted three semi-structured interviews with current GFM coordinators. Two interviewees were student interns and the third was The Stop staff member responsible for the market. I used a semi-structured approach so the conversations could be broad in scope and personally meaningful to the
interviewees. As these interviews were conducted during the workday, and were cleared by management, they posed minimal disruption to the participants. The length of the interview varied from 25-70 minutes.

4.2 Structured interviews

I interviewed the 13 market customers using a structured interview guide. My questions were carefully worded and arranged so that each participant answered the same question in the same sequence. This was done in order to minimize variation so that I could more easily compare the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Using a structured interview was also important in order to standardize the amount of time spent with each customer. I was asking a favour from my participants, to stop and talk to me during their regular weekly trip to the Good Food Market, so I was conscious of their time and wanted to be sure to use it efficiently. These interviews lasted approximately ten minutes each. The interviewees already knew me and thus could speak freely, sharing their experiences with me more readily than if I were a stranger; this reduced the length of the interview, as the initial briefing stage was minimal.

4.3 Thoughts and observations as a participant observer

During both the semi-structured and structured interviews, I asked additional questions to clarify the meaning of responses. Here again, my time spent volunteering at the GFM greatly facilitated my ability to obtain relevant and reliable responses from which to draw interpretations. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) highlight that “interviewers who know what they are asking about, and why they are asking, will attempt to clarify the meanings relevant to the project during the interview” (p. 134). In many ways, I was my best research tool. My in-depth knowledge of the GFM provided me with a heightened awareness of meaning; I was cognizant of the themes and issues that would arise in the interviews before they began, and was able to uncover deeper meanings from the interviews because of my familiarity with the interview topics and participants.

4.4 Literature

After having spent time volunteering with The Stop’s GFM, I realized it would be an excellent site for research, so I began reviewing food studies literature: academic and gray literature, as well as media and internet sources. I quickly focused on the area of CFS and identified a gap in the prior research: the GFM was a new approach to CFS and thus little was known about it. Other CFS initiatives such as farmer’s markets and Good Food Box programs have been studied in-depth, but The Stop’s GFM
represents a unique opportunity to explore CFS. The literature helped me define my research questions. It also served as a sounding board to test ideas; to confirm or challenge my findings and render them more theoretically robust.

4.5 Limitations

A common limitation of the structured interview is a lack of flexibility. However, in this particular case and as highlighted above, my unique position of researcher-as-market-insider allowed me to probe for more information when necessary. My interview guides, both structured and semi-structured, were thus open to a wide amount of interviewer subjectivity; I probed and asked for meaning clarification wherever and whenever I saw fit. This method may raise concerns surrounding variation, as it cannot be assured that each interviewee was probed in the exact same way; often the stimuli and/or probing questions were different. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) understand that an interview is an interpersonal situation requiring a great deal of intuition and social intelligence. They acknowledge that methodological rules must not dictate an interview, but serve as a guide. This “client-centered questioning” relies heavily on the skills and knowledge of the interviewer to balance the advantages and disadvantages of an interview guide while also maintaining the organic nature of an interview.

Participant observation is inherently subjective; it is “conducted by a biased human who serves as the instrument for data collection” (Kawulich, 2005, para. 16). Researchers must understand that their observations are necessarily filtered through their own interpretive frames, so questions of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and worldview are going to colour the observation, analysis, and interpretation (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002 as cited in Kawulich, 2005). Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999) also acknowledge that most researchers are not “full participants in community life” (as cited in Kawulich, 2005 para. 17) and therefore questions of trust and a community’s discomfort with outsiders and/or their research may arise. The University of Toronto’s Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board (n.d.) make reference to six complex and predictable ethical issues that arise with participant observation. They are: (1) the long term nature of the interface between researcher and participants, (2) status, power, and educational differences between researcher and participants, (3) the variety of research settings, (4) unfamiliarity of research setting to the researcher, (5) different ethical codes between participants and researcher, (6) the changing nature of the researcher’s roles and relationships over time. Despite my inherent biases, there were unique factors particular to the context of my research that mitigated the limitations of this particular research method. For one, the GFM is run by volunteers who do not reside in the community, so the research participants are accustomed to
seeing and interacting with “outsiders”. Secondly, I participated in the GFM as a volunteer coordinator for many months before I formally began my research and so I already knew the ins and outs of the GFM. Lastly, the data I was collecting was not considered sensitive information and thus issues of status, power, educational, and ethical differences between me and the participants were less of a concern.

Literature reviews are limited to collecting information about what happened in the past, they cannot provide data about current actual behaviour (Marrelli, 2005), even gray literature, which is usually more recent as it has yet to be published, generally reports on what happened in the past. Thus literature reviews lack currency. They also require a high level of skill to identify and analyze relevant resources, and to write a meaningful summary. Inappropriateness and decontextualization are other potential risks associated with literature reviews. Ensuring that prior research is both relevant to one’s current study and that it is not interpreted outside of its original context, also present a challenge to researchers. Lastly, previous research may not exist on a topic and the literature review can therefore only be vaguely connected to the current study. While this scenario presents an opportunity for researchers, it may also reduce the reliability and validity of the study because the findings cannot be confirmed or challenged by prior research on the topic.

Part 5: Conclusion

The Stop’s GFM provides an excellent model of the Good Food Market program and is worthy of in-depth study in order to improve and expand the program. Furthermore, the market offers a unique opportunity to explore the connections between it and community food security, an issue of increasing importance in Canadian cities where the number of food bank users continues to rise. This qualitative, single intrinsic/exploratory case study offers insight for those wishing to (a) further understand the strengths and weaknesses of the GFM program and (b) explore a new dimension of community food security. In the next chapter, I present the findings of this research.
Chapter five: Findings

In the following chapter, I offer detailed information about The Stop Community Food Centre, the GFM and its parent organization, FoodShare, to better understand the GFM’s general capacity. Next, I summarize the findings of three semi-structured interviews I conducted with GFM coordinators, describe how the GFM is organized at The Stop and present a SWOT analysis of the program, to assess its strengths and weaknesses. I conclude the chapter with the major findings gleaned from thirteen structured interviews I conducted with GFM customers in order to explore the market’s contribution to community food security.

Part 1: The Stop, FoodShare and the Good Food Market

1.1 The Stop Community Food Centre

The Stop Community Food Centre has existed for over 30 years and while its mission is adaptable and forever in a state of flux, it has always revolved around a core belief that healthy food is a basic human right. While the Stop has always operated a food bank, it also became engaged with advocacy work in the mid-80s (Levkoe, 2006). By 2000, The Stop’s purview had come to embrace the full breadth of community food security. Thus, they began tackling the roots of hunger and not just the symptoms. Today, The Stop runs 21 different programs including urban agriculture initiatives, community cooking, and family support programs. The Good Food Market (GFM), where I volunteer, is one of these programs. Every Tuesday afternoon since 2008, The Good Food Market has sold affordable fresh fruit and vegetables at their Davenport location. The Stop operates two food centres: (1) The main office on Davenport focuses on providing frontline services to the community, (2) the Green Barn, located in the Wychwood Barns on Christie St., is a sustainable food production and education centre (The Stop, n.d., “About Us”).

According to the website:

[The Stop] serve[s] low-income, homeless or marginally housed and socially isolated community members who live between Bloor Street (south), St. Clair Avenue (north), Dovercourt Road (east) and Runnymede Road (west). ... Participants come from 32 countries and speak 16 languages. These different groups are brought together by a lack of adequate income with which to purchase nutritious food that ensures good health. For example, the median after-rent income per person per day for our community members is $5.80 and 66% of our participants report that they have no money left for food or any other expense after they have paid rent. The
Stop is a critical resource for many of the most vulnerable people in our community. (The Stop, n.d., “About Us: Frequently Asked Questions”)

The Stop also operates a food bank and is a member agency of the Daily Bread Food Bank, the central institution in Toronto’s food bank community. The 2011 “Who’s Hungry” report shows that 44% of food bank clients at The Stop go hungry at least once per week (Daily Bread, 2011). In addition to providing temporary food relief, The Stop strives to increase access to fresh, healthy food. Each year, their urban agriculture initiatives produce over 4000 pounds of organic produce which is then distributed to community members via the food bank and other programs (The Stop, n.d., “Programs”).

1.2 The Stop’s Good Food Market

The Good Food Market is another means by which The Stop brings fresh and affordable fruits and vegetables into its community; an area of Toronto categorized as a food desert. The GFM sells high quality and affordable fruits and vegetables to community members, who otherwise, would have to rely on emergency food programs like The Stop’s food bank and Drop-In\(^2\), or travel to grocery stores and supermarkets to obtain such food.

1.3 FoodShare: The GFM parent organization

Although the GFM is held at The Stop, it is actually a FoodShare initiative. FoodShare is a non-profit community organization premised on the vision of “Good Healthy Food For All”. Like The Stop, it also began as an emergency food distribution centre and has grown since its inception in 1985 to become Canada’s largest community food security organization. Foodshare takes a holistic approach to the issues of poverty and hunger. It looks at the entire food system: from the farmer’s field to the table, thereby working with issues of food production (community gardening and composting programs), food distribution (Good Food Boxes and Good Food Markets), and food consumption (cooking training and student nutrition programs). FoodShare also believes that hunger is but one symptom of a food system that treats food as a commodity, itself a notion completely at odds with the philosophy shared by both FoodShare and The Stop who understand food to be a basic human right. (FoodShare, n.d., “Who We Are”).

Food, according to FoodShare, cannot be a market commodity, but must be instead governed by principles of social justice. The Good Food Markets are a manifestation of this belief. They function as

\(^2\) The Stop’s Drop-In offers free meals (breakfast and lunch) to anyone regardless of where they live.
not-for-profit community food markets that sell high quality and affordable fruits and vegetables to communities in Toronto without regular access to such food. The Good Food Market program is coordinated by FoodShare and run by different community organizations, such as The Stop, throughout the city. FoodShare acts as a buying club, purchasing the food in bulk from local growers and the Ontario Food Terminal\(^3\) and then reselling the food at inexpensive prices. The large quantities of produce it purchases are sold at the Good Food Markets by volunteers and community organizations at rates that are in essence, subsidized by the centralized buying and coordination club that is FoodShare. Thus, low income neighbourhoods that would otherwise not attract farmer’s markets because of their limited buying power, have access to fresh, local, and culturally appropriate produce at affordable prices. The fruits and vegetables on offer at a Good Food Market are a combination of local and seasonal produce as well as imported favourites. Each market reflects its host community and strives to be a “vibrant and important meeting place” (FoodShare, n.d. “Good Food Box: Good Food Market”).

1.4 The roots of the GFM: FoodShare’s Good Food Box program

The Good Food Market program was an expansion upon FoodShare’s Good Food Box program, which began in 1994. The Good Food Box is a reusable plastic box filled with fresh and mostly local produce. It is pre-ordered and delivered to a centralized pick-up area every week. So long as there are at least 8-10 people who want to buy a Good Food Box, as well as a volunteer to act as the neighbourhood coordinator, anywhere in the city can become a delivery / pick-up point. Depending on the contents of the box, the price ranges between $13 and $34 per week. FoodShare acts as the centralized buyer and chooses Ontario-grown produce as much as possible so that it may monitor how the food is produced, so to support local farmers, and to reduce the consumption of fossil fuels due to the transport of food. Good Food Box customers pay the cost of the food itself while the distribution costs are largely subsidized by FoodShare (FoodShare, n.d., “Good Food Box”).

While the aim of the Good Food Box is to improve food access for low-income people (Scharf, 1999), after several years of operation, the program was found to be both inaccessible and unappealing to some people. Having to pay a minimum of $13 upfront for a food box was financially prohibitive for some individuals and families on a fixed income. Also, the quantity of food contained in a Good Food Box was often too much for people living on their own, as is the case for many seniors. The Good Food

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\(^3\) “The Ontario Food Terminal Board owns and operates the largest wholesale fruit and produce distribution centre in Canada and ranks in the top five by volume wholesale fruit and produce distribution centres in North America.” The Ontario Food Terminal is located at 165 The Queensway, Toronto (Ontario Food Terminal Board, 2011, n.p.).
Market arose as a remedy to these two barriers of the Good Food Box program (Sumner, McMurtry & Classens, 2011).

The Good Food Markets are small, sometimes as small as a single stand, and they sell fruits and vegetables by item rather than in bulk or by weight. The market is accessible and affordable, it is a place where low income individuals and families can come and purchase “seasonal, local produce plus imported favourites” (FoodShare, n.d., “Good Food Box: Good Food Market”). This balance of healthy and favourite foods is an attempt to combine both food quality and cultural appropriateness in the services provided to the GFM communities. The GFM at The Stop is weekly, requires no pre-ordering or pre-payment, and sells staple foods such as apples and potatoes for ten cents each, bananas for 20 cents, and weekly specialties such mangoes, baby bok choy or eggplant whenever it is reasonable to do so. Customers can spend as little as a dollar or two and walk away with some fresh produce that is healthy and culturally appropriate.

Part 2: Results of semi-structured interviews with market coordinators / program review

2.1 The organizational structure of the GFM at The Stop

Initially, The Stop was a Good Food Box distribution centre, but demand for the food boxes was low in the surrounding neighbourhood and eventually the program ended. In the meantime, The Stop and FoodShare were collaborating on a “Food Animators Project” and it was suggested by Debbie Field, executive director of FoodShare, that The Stop should begin hosting a GFM (K. Scharf, personal communication, March 30, 2012). A Stop employee who was participating in the FoodShare Animator project had previous experience starting market projects in other communities, and so a GFM was launched at The Stop in the summer of 2008 (A. Montgomery, personal communication, March 30, 2012). The GFM offers The Stop a sustainable point of access for its community members to healthy and affordable food that was not overly organic or local, which could be potentially less appealing to the community (K. Scharf, personal communication, March 30, 2012). The GFM sells produce item-by-item, so customers can decide what they want to eat in terms of quantity and selection, and how much money they want to spend rather than buying a whole Good Food Box that comes with a set amount and selection of produce, and a fixed price.

The GFM operates every Tuesday afternoon from 3 - 5:30pm (or 3:30 - 6pm in the summer), all year long. Rekha Cherian is the primary Stop staff member responsible for the market. Hussein Silva, another Stop staff member, provides a supportive role. Rekha runs the GFM as part of her role as Food Bank coordinator, a position she filled in the fall of 2010. One of the first changes that Rekha instituted was
hiring two student interns\(^4\) to organize and operate the market. As food bank coordinator, Rekha realized that she didn’t have enough time and energy to provide the GFM with the full support it required, so she hired student interns to run it. Rekha explains: “running the food bank is a lot of work, and I didn’t want the GFM to just be a side project; the students pay more attention to it and I’m there to offer guidance and help make the bigger decisions”. One of the student interns explains that “conscripting” students ensures the GFM is consistently staffed by the same individuals, which when compared to a purely volunteer labour force, has some clear advantages.

**Food orders**

The student interns, together with Rekha, order the GFM produce from FoodShare on Thursdays, the week before the market. A lot of time and energy goes into placing the orders. The GFM really strives to balance both the “red” and “green” principles of CFS (Johnston & Baker, 2004); it is conscious of servicing its customers’ needs in terms of food selection, while at the same time promoting local and seasonal eating. The GFM’s primary policy in terms of choosing the food that it orders and sells is to prioritize local and seasonal produce and minimize imported produce. Popular fruit and vegetables that are not grown in Ontario, like lemons, oranges, bananas and avocados are always available, while produce that does grow in Ontario (strawberries, plums, eggplants and peppers) is offered only during its growing season. During the winter months, it was found that prioritizing local and seasonal produce was affecting the GFM’s bottom-line; the number of weekly customers was dropping and so were sales, so Rekha and the students started ordering some of the more popular requests such as broccoli, spinach, cauliflower and celery. Rekha explains:

> We do now have some things that were grown in California, which is usually a big no-no ... we want to go with our local and seasonal kind of ideology, but the problem is that we can’t do that just despite what people actually want, because we’re also trying to be a market, I mean we’re a non-profit market but we need customers ... so there has to be this balance of being able to provide things that people like and are culturally appropriate ... and the principles and policies that we want to implement.

The GFM also sells organic produce. Approximately 10-15% of produce sold at the market is organic. And while Rekha recognizes that organic produce is often more expensive and thus outside the

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\(^4\) The students are both studying social work at different universities in Toronto. As part of their program requirements, they must fulfill a certain number of hours in a field placement.
budgetary range of most GFM customers, she believes it’s a big part of The Stop’s overall approach to building community food security through environmentally sustainable means.

**Market-day operations**

On market day, the student interns receive the produce delivery from FoodShare in the morning and sort it into baskets. They are then responsible for calculating the weekly price list. The pricing and accounting practices of the GFM are a rather complicated process that requires a lot of time, as Rekha says “whenever money is involved, it’s not as easy as you think”. Foods must be priced such that the GFM can cover its costs; market sales have to pay the invoice from FoodShare. To calculate most of the prices, the interns divide the number of items by their total cost ($65.33/250 bananas = $0.26/banana); however they do tweak some prices to make them more appealing to customers. For instance, the GFM sells bananas for $0.20, in part because customers are enticed by the price of five bananas for $1. Since the bananas are being offered below cost, the interns may raise the price of another item to compensate, avocados for example. Their unit cost is $0.70 but the GFM can sell them for $0.80, so it earns back some of the money it loses on the bananas. As much as possible, the price list remains consistent from week to week. The key is selling as much of the produce as possible, and reducing the amount of leftovers at the end of the market. The Stop’s GFM is very fortunate because any leftover produce is purchased by The Stop, to be used in its other programs. However, these programs operate on a budget and cannot afford to buy too much of the GFM’s leftovers. The success of the GFM depends on choosing the right selection of produce and setting the right price so it will appeal to customers and sell.

In the winter of 2011, the GFM started selling baked goods: cookies, squares, cakes and loaves prepared by a small group of volunteers. In preparing the baked treats, volunteers try to incorporate healthy ingredients like whole wheat flour and alternatives to processed sugar like apple sauce and honey. The baked goods are sold for $0.50 each, and the profit is used to subsidize the cost of the produce sold at the GFM, though Rekha is wary of subsidizing the GFM beyond $15-20 per week because anything more could affect the market’s sustainability.

The GFM volunteers arrive shortly before 3pm on the day of the market, and help carry the baskets of produce out to the market location (inside The Stop’s Drop-In area during the winter months and outdoors, behind the neighbouring health centre\(^5\) in the summertime). The baskets of produce are displayed for easy viewing and reach by customers, and 3-4 volunteers position themselves behind the

\(^5\) Davenport Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre (DPNCHC).
produce to assist customers and answer any questions. Customers are provided with baskets to shop with and are offered brown paper bags for mushrooms. No other bags are made available at the GFM.

After a few months of running the market, Rekha decided that it was wasteful to be spending GFM money on plastic bags; customers were paying more for their produce in order to take it home in plastic bags. Knowing there was a growing culture of people bringing their own bags to grocery stores in Toronto, Rekha decided the GFM should encourage people to do the same. Last spring, the GFM stopped distributing plastic bags and the transition was smooth, customers quickly adapted and started bringing their own reusable shopping bags. One customer I interviewed did request that the GFM have plastic bags for customers to purchase, like grocery stores and supermarkets do.

The cash is operated by student interns, and occasionally a volunteer who is not a community member. An itemized receipt is prepared for each customer’s purchases. All sales must be paid for in cash or with the volunteer voucher card (explained in the following section). Baking sales are kept separate from produce sales. At the conclusion of the market, all of the remaining produce is counted and sold to The Stop at cost. The produce is stored in the fridge and The Stop’s kitchen programs and food bank access it as needed. This is one of this particular GFM’s biggest advantages over other Good Food Markets in the city. The Stop acts as a cushion for the GFM buying its leftover produce, offering refrigerated storage space and providing an accessible location to house the market.

2.2 SWOT analysis of The Stop’s GFM

Based on the three semi-structured interviews that I conducted with the GFM coordinators - one staff member and two student interns - I have prepared the following analysis.

Strengths:

The Stop’s GFM has many strengths. The fact of being housed and operated by The Stop Community Food Centre - a long standing community centre with a well established track record for using food as a

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6 In the early days of the GFM, community members volunteering with the market worked the cash. However, it proved to be a difficult position for community members to fill because they had to collect payment from peers and neighbours who didn’t always have the money to pay. The market ran up an extensive list of IOUs and was losing revenue, so one of the changes Rekha instituted was removing community members from the cashier role. This was challenging for Rekha because she had to ensure that these volunteers didn’t feel like they were being removed from the position due to a lack of competency or trust, but rather stress the inherent difficulty of being in a position of collecting money from friends.
tool for community development - is the GFM’s greatest strength. Other strengths include access, approachability and extracurricular activities.

Access

The GFM is both geographically and financially accessible to its customers; the weekly market is nearby and inexpensive.

Central to the GFM is its volunteer voucher system. Every volunteer at The Stop is entitled to a voucher card which tracks their shifts worked. Volunteers work one shift per week, regardless of the program (Food Bank, Drop In, Green Barn, etc…) and acquire a stamp in their voucher card at the completion of each shift. For every four shifts worked, volunteers earn $10 worth of GFM money, which they can redeem at the market on Tuesdays. Once they have earned four stamps, they are eligible to purchase $10 worth of GFM produce for free. The voucher system was slow to take off, but in the last year, The Stop has really tried to advertise it and encourage volunteers to take advantage of it. Rekha explains the impact of the volunteer voucher on the GFM: “every program, every volunteer, has access to [the voucher]. So that program has grown tremendously and also helped our numbers to go up ... we were seeing half the numbers in the winter last year, so that’s really impressive”.

The volunteer voucher system combined with the affordable prices offered by the GFM really stand to transform the way many people access their food in The Stop’s catchment area. The GFM’s prices are low because both The Stop and FoodShare operate as non-profits, and FoodShare acts as a wholesale buying club by purchasing all the food for the GFMs and the GFBs directly from the Ontario Food Terminal. This means that at the GFM, customers can spend very little money and obtain quite a lot of produce. The $10 volunteer voucher card goes a long way at the GFM where potatoes and apples cost $0.10 each, a bag of carrots is $0.75, a bunch of spinach costs $1.15 and an onion is $0.20 (March 2012 prices). Making fresh affordable produce available in a food desert (or for free in the case of volunteer voucher redemption) contributes to community food security in terms of access but it also has a positive psychological impact on market customers. Rekha noted that food bank usage is high amongst The Stop’s local community, and the monthly food assistance provided by the food bank usually lasts just two to three days. She believes having the market every Tuesday has helped a lot of her food bank members increase their access to healthy food, many of whom are on a fixed income. Customers have commented how convenient it is to come to a market within walking distance of their home (not having to spend money on transit) and only have to spend a few dollars to acquire quality produce. This is significant for people who normally can’t afford food because their monthly fixed income is consumed
by other necessities such as rent, utilities, medication, phone bills, etc... Rekha and The Stop have noted that food is an expendable purchase when compared to rent or medication; it is often the first thing people give up when funds are low. Rekha, through her work in the food bank, tries to encourage people to get into the habit of saving money for food and promotes the GFM as a place where $5 goes a long way, especially if it can be combined with the $10/month worth of free food offered by the volunteer voucher. Being encouraged to budget for healthy food and having access to a local community market to purchase it really contributes to food security. Rekha explains:

The GFM is a really good beginning into getting people to feel proud of being able to buy their own food, people leave and you can see it on their faces, they’re so happy because they got to buy fresh produce, and people try to barter and are picky about their food, and we want to hear that ... we are always listening to people’s comments and I think that’s also something that people aren’t getting other places ... [the GFM] is allowing people to kind of self-determine a part of their life.

Rekha’s aforementioned quote is especially important in that it acknowledges the increased dignity and empowerment people experience when they can afford to buy their own food. The GFM offers people who are often excluded from participating in the market economy due to their low income, a chance to be real consumers. They can express their concerns about the state of the cabbages or the price of avocados, and as Rekha said, are encouraged to do so.

The geographical proximity of the GFM, as well as its reduced prices, offer community members an opportunity to engage as dignified consumers in the market economy and procure affordable fruits and vegetables.

**Approachability**

GFM organizers (Stop staff, student interns, and community volunteers) make themselves available to customers and prioritize their feedback; communication between market “staff” and customers is an essential reason for the GFM’s success.

The GFM coordinators, both staff members and student interns, pride themselves on being approachable. This approachability is in line with The Stop’s overarching participatory ethos. The website reads: “a key tenet of The Stop’s approach is that community members must be involved in making decisions about how our organization operates” (n.d., “About Us”). One of the student interns, remarks that the GFM is always open for suggestions: “we’re always up for change and open to ideas
that the volunteers and community members have. We’re really approachable which I think is good”. Rekha also believes in the importance of having the decision-makers present at the GFM so customers can direct their questions and complaints to people with the capacity to receive them. She explains:

There’s always someone there to give them the correct information, like “where do you order from?” and “why is this like this?”, and I think it’s really important that people have access to the people that are deciding things; like deciding the prices or deciding how the market runs, because then customers can comment on it. I think it’s really important to hear what people have to say, even though you may not be able to accommodate them, listening to them and telling them why is important because they’ve heard “no, no, no” all the time.

All GFM customers necessarily interact with the student interns when they pay for their produce and Rekha and Hussein are always ready to assist customers and/or volunteers in any way. A definite benefit of a small, community market is the access customers have to the organizers, and since the GFM’s success depends on the support and participation of its community, the organizers are wise to be approachable and to encourage customer feedback. As such, staff, students and community volunteers are encouraged to be especially approachable and communicate with customers in order to improve the weekly GFM service.

**Extracurricular activities**

The GFM at The Stop is more than just a market, it is a social space. Every week, a number of other social activities occur alongside the buying and selling of fruits and vegetables. Customers are invited to purchase a cup of tea ($0.25) and a baked good ($0.50), and relax in the café-atmosphere that has been created in the Drop-In centre which houses the market. Because community-building is so vital to The Stop, and because the summertime GFM has been so successful at fostering socialization, the wintertime GFM incorporated a café in order to encourage the same kind of social interaction. Customers are invited to get to know one another and meet old and new friends, gathering around tables covered in brightly covered table cloths and topped with flowers. The GFM also operates a free ESL class and a storytelling circle. Both are offered by volunteers; people are attracted to the GFM mostly due to The Stop’s reputation. As celebrity chef Jamie Oliver said: “I’ve travelled all around the

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7 From May-September, the GFM is held outdoors behind the Davenport Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre (DPNCHC) and features a pizza-bake oven. Community members can socialize and enjoy a free pizza after or before they do their GFM shopping.
world, and I’ve never seen anything like The Stop. Every city should have one” (The Stop, n.d., “The Power of Food”).

Two ways that the GFM is trying to encourage healthy, seasonal eating is through food tastings and demonstrations. The Stop’s Community Chefs will often prepare a simple dish for GFM customers to sample while they shop. Also, a nutritionist from the DPNCHC is on hand to offer food demonstrations to customers. Both of these activities use local, seasonal ingredients (they often feature The Stop’s “food of the month”), simple recipes and don’t involve a great deal of cooking (raw food dishes are preferred). The motivation for these initiatives is to encourage people to replicate the dishes at home and start eating healthier, local and seasonal food. Rekha and The Stop understand that sustainable eating requires changing people’s habits and perceptions. She describes conversations she’s had with immigrants who, when they first arrive in Toronto, don’t believe anything grows here, but are introduced to local, seasonal foods and their growing practices through Stop programs like the GFM and their urban agriculture initiatives. Rekha says: “[seasonal eating] is something that has to be communicated and once it is, people understand it better”. In addition to education, the motivation for the food tastings and demonstrations is to get people eating the food. The Stop clearly understands that one of the ways to make change is by appealing to people’s taste buds, an argument articulated in CFS literature (e.g., Johnston & Baker, 2005).

**Weaknesses:**

GFM weaknesses include a lack of outreach and institutional support, the accusation of being a mere band-aid solution, and the challenge of operating a social business.

**Lack of outreach and institutional support**

The GFM is a relatively new CFS initiative; it is still in its growing-phase and as such has not fully developed its outreach techniques to increase its customer base. Also, the GFM is an addendum to The Stop’s core programs, and thus not entitled to full-fledged institutional support from its host organization.

Running the GFM requires a lot of work and most of the students’ time is consumed doing the accounting and organizational work, which comes at the expense of more efficient, creative and consistent community outreach. The GFM has implemented a variety of outreach tactics, such as distributing flyers in the food bank, at the DPNCHC and in the social housing building above The Stop. It is also advertised on both The Stop and FoodShare’s website, and in a variety of their print material. Yet,
the average number of GFM customers remains relatively low, a fact arising from its limited community outreach. One of the largest groups of potential customers the GFM is hoping to attract is food bank users. The food bank prepares 1000 food hampers a month (which feeds ~1800 people). Rekha wonders whether the stigma associated with food banks prevents a number of people from making additional visits to The Stop and/or the GFM:

It’s hard for people to come into the food bank, people feel humiliated, they’re embarrassed and I wonder if a lot of people are getting their stuff and running out of here, and not looking around to see what else is here because they may want to be anonymous.

And while The Stop takes a multi-faceted approach to increasing its community’s food security, it may still be viewed primarily as an emergency food provider servicing low income people. The Stop may therefore suffer from its own stigma, preventing people who don’t see themselves in need of charity from becoming involved in its programs. In the winter especially, the majority of the GFM’s customers are regulars, many of whom are Stop volunteers8, and while regular customers are great for business, they usually cannot carry the whole business. Rekha is looking to expand the GFM’s customer base:

We do have a bunch of regulars who are coming, which is great because you definitely want to have regulars at your market, but now we need other people, and with this community, there’s a huge disparity between income levels and socio-economic status, and the market doesn’t want to discriminate against that, we want people to come from any sort of income level because we feel this would help the market, so I think we need to do a better job of advertising the market to the whole community.

The GFM is very fortunate to be part of The Stop and it is successful in large part because of this connection, but the market constitutes such a small part of The Stop’s operations that it doesn’t receive the same amount of attention as its other programs in terms of staffing or budget. The GFM is neither Rekha nor Hussein’s primary job, they both fulfill other roles at The Stop and the GFM is more of a side project for them. It is primarily the role of the student interns to ensure the weekly operations of the GFM run smoothly, and they are unpaid workers who must also balance their full-time academic responsibilities. One of the interns explains the GFM’s relationship to The Stop:

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8 Data from a six-week period in the winter recorded an average of 48 customers, 14 of whom redeemed volunteer vouchers. Data from a similar period in the summer counted an average of 81 customers, 16 volunteers.
I don’t feel like the market is valued in the same way other programs are. Other programs have actual staff and they have a budget, whereas we always have to make sure we break even and make sure we count everything, and that kind of thing. So it's more stringent and less valued to a certain extent. I think running the GFM is hard; it's a lot of work to do for a person. But then to pay someone, like to pay my time, or anyone's, would be worth almost $100 on a Tuesday because you work like 9 hours. And it would be hard for The Stop to pay someone to do that kind of work. I can't see how things could be different, except maybe by bringing in more students, or different students; having a rotation set up to get some schedules going.

Rekha also acknowledged that the GFM is “a big project disguised as a little one” and is lacking in resources. For the GFM to really flourish into a true community market, it requires a paid staff with the time and energy to devote to it.

The GFM is becoming increasingly popular in the community as evinced by steadily increasing use (see section on access) and accordingly, is coming to occupy a more important place within The Stop’s purview. There may in fact be a connection between outreach and institutional support: the more outreach, the more customers, which in turn will likely increase The Stop’s institutional support because higher attendance will indicate the value of this service to the community.

**Band-aid solution**

The GFM is merely treating the symptoms of a larger problem. The weekly market is addressing the symptoms of a low-income food desert (hunger and malnutrition); it is not addressing the root causes.

The GFM operates once a week, for a few hours. It is located in a food desert, and in one of the city’s most diverse and lowest-income neighbourhoods. And though it has brought low cost, local and healthy food to this community, it is offering a mere band-aid solution. Much in the same way that a food bank treats hunger by giving away free food, the GFM treats the issue of food deserts by bringing produce into the area and selling it once a week. Both the student interns raised concerns over the GFM’s ability to effectively address the neighbourhood’s lack of access to quality and affordable foods. In the words of one intern:

I think the GFM is a band-aid type solution. We need grocery stores, because The Stop doesn’t operate every day, but we also don’t want the food supply chain to be controlled by a handful of Westons and Monsantos. The GFM isn't tackling that corporate control, it does in part by buying more local foods and buying off a non-profit but it's a niche market, it doesn't present a
legitimate challenge, the system is still flowing. Ideally we'd need a coop, because we don't want to be building more super grocery stores, but we do need a place where the community can purchase food and right now there's just nowhere that's affordable to do that.

This idea that the solution to the problem of food deserts really is grocery stores has been problematized by food security scholars like Guthman (2008a), but the potential of food coops is perhaps worthy of more thorough investigation.

Food insecurity is the manifestation of complex structural problems, a fact acknowledged by The Stop. The community food centre works within a holistic framework that approaches hunger, poverty and environmental sustainability together. The GFM’s goal of enhancing community food security should not be seen as separate from The Stop’s, as alone the GFM is ill-equipped to treat the root causes of a food desert.

**Social business challenges**

Social businesses are part of a broader economic activity known as the social economy. A social business “functions in the market, but is created to fulfill a social need” (Sumner, McMurtry & Classens, 2011, p. 1). Delving into the discourse surrounding social businesses is beyond the scope of this paper; instead, I will explore the unique challenges faced by the GFM because of its status as a social business.

While the GFM is a non-profit business, it is self-sufficient; relying on its own sales to cover its costs. Therefore, the GFM is a social business in so far as it is a non-profit produce market with a social objective, and this double bottom-line presents a challenge to the GFM. In essence, the market - the business side of the equation – requires sales, while the community’s food security – the social side of the equation – requires local, seasonal food to be prioritized over imported products from the mainstream global industrialized food system. And so satisfying the customer base is often at odds with the social objective; customers don’t purchase the local, seasonal food that the GFM prefers to sell.

Reconciling these two goals has been a challenge for the GFM, as has been discussed previously. Additionally, changing people’s eating habits doesn’t happen overnight, social change takes time and it also requires resources. The GFM’s food tastings and demonstrations are conducted on an ad hoc basis, when staff members can take time away from their other responsibilities. Rekha explains the GFM’s dual responsibility, “not only is it our responsibility to get better, more affordable food into this area, but also to teach people how to cook and enjoy food that’s in season, or local, like kale and chard and beets”. Tackling such issues requires both time and resources, two things that are often in short supply where grassroots community development projects are concerned.
The challenges of running a successful social business are many, “attempting to combine an approach that earns revenues from the market while fulfilling a social mission, primarily addressing the needs of marginalized persons” (Sumner, McMurtry & Classens, 2011, p.1) is no small task.

Opportunities:

The principal opportunity of the GFM is to increase its existing customer base.

Expand customer base

To expand the GFM’s customer base, the number of people shopping at the market each week must increase. The quality and affordable price of GFM produce is undisputed (as will be demonstrated in the following section), and there is little to no competition in the area because it is a food desert. Therefore, there is good reason to assume that the GFM could potentially appeal to more people. Increasing patronage at the GFM might be accomplished through better community outreach tactics and rebranding The Stop’s image as a community food centre that serves the whole neighbourhood regardless of socio-economic status. In order to service the working population, the market might consider extending its hours so people can shop on their way home from work.

One of the student interns remarked that GFM volunteers are being underutilized during their weekly market shifts: “they just basically show up at the market, do their thing and there's not a lot of outreach, we don’t have a concrete plan for consistent outreach, we don’t have as vibrant a space that we could have”. Such a coordinated, creative and consistent plan for outreach requires dedicated personnel; hiring a GFM coordinator is a worthwhile consideration. Or, as was suggested by a student, perhaps The Stop could hire more students, or solicit more involvement from other staff members in order to help build the GFM into the vibrant community space it could be.

Other strategies for increasing the number of GFM customers would be to organize a customer transportation service for people living in the outer limits of the catchment area, and coordinate a bike delivery service so people could buy more groceries and not have to worry about carrying them home. There’s talk of organizing a buyer’s club in coordination with the GFM, which is an initiative of The Stop’s Bread and Bricks Social Justice club and an example of the multi-faceted approach to increasing CFS for which The Stop is known. Coalitions between the GFM and other Stop programs provide opportunities to expand the market by encouraging more customers to shop there.
Threats:

The primary threat to the successful operation of the GFM is the uncertainty of its funding, relying as it does on a liberal charity model susceptible to the fluctuating economic conditions of its donors.

Liberal charity model and lack of financial support

Charities are an attempt to level the playing field between the “haves” and “have-nots” in a liberal economic system. The GFM is operated by two such charities – FoodShare and The Stop. Accordingly, its future success depends on the ability and willingness of donors to keep it afloat.

The GFM depends on FoodShare and The Stop; it cannot exist without the former and it would not be as successful without the latter. FoodShare and The Stop are both charities rebranded as non-profit community organizations, and their survival depends on charitable donations. Both organizations raise a considerable amount of funds via their commercial activities (program sales, special events and in The Stop’s case, from its catering business which is categorized as a social enterprise), but they necessarily depend upon the generosity of foundations, corporations, organizations, and individuals. As Guthman et al. (2006) have noted the vagaries of philanthropy and the volatility of the stock market, which determines foundation resources, puts the whole charity sector in a vulnerable position.

Part 3: Major findings of structured interviews of GFM customers

3.1 Data analysis

The data I gathered has been analyzed using Creswell’s (2009) six-step process for data analysis and interpretation. First, I organized and prepared all the data for analysis. I typed the interview guide and customer responses, and transcribed the semi-structured interviews. Second, I read through all the data “to obtain a general sense of its meaning and to reflect on its overall meaning” (p. 185). Third, I colour coded the data into a series of categories that I created based on the literature, unusual or surprising data, and to a certain extent, the larger theoretical perspective of political economy. This coding process revealed 15 categories, from which I generated seven themes in Creswell’s fourth stage of data analysis. What follows is the fifth step of Creswell’s methodology; a detailed discussion of the themes. All the quotations are pulled from interviews I conducted with 13 GFM customers. Creswell’s sixth and final step will be presented in the following chapter.

I have categorized the seven themes so that they coincide with the three dimensions of CFS as determined by the literature review.
CFS dimension: Identity issues

GFM theme 1: Complement or supplement

The GFM suffers from an identity crisis: is it complementary to the service offered by regular grocery stores and supermarkets, or is it a supplementary service? Currently, the market sells only fresh fruit and vegetables, therefore a purchase at the GFM complements purchases made at mainstream grocery stores; it cannot supplement them. However, data revealed that many customers are requesting a wider variety of produce than what is currently offered at the GFM, and suggest that the market sell other foodstuff such as bread, rice, pasta and tea. Customers remarked: “what’s offered in supermarkets should be offered here” and “make the market more like a supermarket”. When asked what he didn’t like about the market, a male customer replied: “sometimes I don’t find what I want, like lettuce for example, so I have to buy it outside, at other places”.

In response to a question about what would make the market better, 11/13 customers said a greater variety of produce. Grapes (sold in smaller bunches because of the expense), cilantro and parsley, lettuce, berries, melons, dates, nuts, yellow tomatoes (they’re lower in acidity), green onions, broccoli and cauliflower were food items customers would like to see on offer at the GFM. Two customers requested that the market should start selling bread again, as it has in the past. Two customers wanted to see the market expand beyond selling just produce, recommending that the market begin to sell staples like rice, sugar, milk, oil, flour, pasta, butter, yogurt, tea; “make it more like a real market”. Others suggested activities that would make the market more fun and encourage people to come: music, jewelry and artisan sales, and free coffee. A senior customer spoke of her desire to purchase healthy snacks such as dips (i.e. hummus, garden dips, etc...) at the GFM:

stuff you could eat with raw veggies as a snack at night. It’s better than eating chips and stuff, which is a concern for people with health and weight issues. Dips are expensive at the store. It would be great if you could order your dips the week before at the GFM and then pick them up the following week. Sell only small packages, for single people. I don’t have a blender; I have no way of making my own dips.

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9 Two years ago, the GFM sold bread. Volunteers and staff members baked the bread for each market, but the time it took to do so and the cost involved did not equate to the price they could charge for the bread. After approximately a year, they replaced the sale of bread with baked goods, which was less time consuming to prepare and had a higher cost-benefit ratio.
The items most often requested by customers I interviewed were berries and lettuce - requests that I have often heard as a market volunteer. Some customers cited health concerns as added justification for why a particular fruit or vegetable was being requested: “I would like to see strawberries sold all year long. Other berries too, like blackberries and blueberries; they have antioxidants which are important to me”. Plums and dates were other fruits mentioned for their health benefits. One customer remarked: “the doctor and nurses that used to come here, told us to eat dates in the winter. You can stew them and drink their syrup, which has a calming effect”. A customer also requested that dates be sold during the holy month of Ramadan because of their cultural significance to the Muslim community.

Another reason that customers suggested the GFM increase its selection of foods was to ensure there was sufficient produce for late arrivals. The market is busiest between 3 and 3:30 pm; there is always a line-up of faithful GFM customers, many of whom have finished their morning volunteer shift with the Drop-In or Food Bank, and are waiting for the GFM to open before they leave for the day. After the opening rush, the customer demographic shifts - people who work or have children that need picking-up from school cannot frequent the market until closer to 4 or 5 o’clock. These customers often do not have access to the same selection of food because the popular produce sells out quickly. Several GFM customers suggested the market either buy greater quantities of the produce in high demand: tomatoes, broccoli, spinach, mushrooms, and bananas, or alternatively, hold some of it back for the late-comers.

This data highlights one of the greatest challenges of running the GFM, confronting the dilemma identified in the previous section: figuring out what is the appropriate or optimal balance between access and sustainability. A shift towards increasing the variety of foods on offer at the market so it can compete with the mainstream grocery stores and supermarkets would very often compromise the commitment to promoting local, seasonal eating. The ever-present challenge of creating and implementing initiatives that successfully meet both these objectives is prominent in CFS literature (Guthman et al., 2006; Connelly et. al, 2011; Johnston & Baker, 2005). The balance is inherently difficult to strike because it requires the reconciling of two mutually exclusive philosophies. It also speaks to Guthman’s (2008b) point regarding the embedded nature of neoliberal subjectivities in today’s culture and the fact that CFS initiatives such as the GFM end up compromising their core values and employing neoliberal tactics despite their staunch resistance to the global industrial food system. The GFM customers are so embedded in a consumer culture that in order not to go broke the market has had to bend towards the neoliberal model that it opposes.
The GFM’s identity crisis reflects Guttmann’s (2008a) findings that many people living in a food desert prefer having access to a supermarket for “anonymity, convenience, and normality” (p. 443) rather than CFS projects such as the GFM that “bring good food to others” (p. 431). She asks whether “the focus of activism should shift away from the particular qualities of food and towards the injustices that underlie disparities in food access” (p. 443). I maintain that it is important to do both: focus on food quality as well as the structural barriers that lead to hunger and poverty. The Stop offers a wide variety of education, advocacy and front-line service programs. The Stop runs a series of programs that aim to provide its members with the skills and knowledge necessary to begin resisting the lure of the global industrialized food system, by learning how to grow some of their own food in gardening workshops and cook meals from scratch using whole food ingredients. The Stop organizes social justice clubs and workshops, and its membership is active in rallies and protests challenging the systemic barriers to food security. It also provides much needed emergency food relief by serving free, nutritious meals in the Drop-In centre as well as operating a food bank. The Stop is embracing and surmounting the challenges posed by shifting paradigms to create a more food secure future.

GFM theme 2: Environmental sustainability

Customers were resoundingly in favour of the GFM purchasing foods from local farmers. 100% of participants support the idea in theory; however customer comments highlight the inherent practical complexities of implementing practices that remain true to this green CFS principle. One customer identified one of the great ironies of the global industrial food system, that local foods can often be more expensive: “it’s great if it’s possible [to buy food from local farmers], but it’s important to make things inexpensive for people”. Another mentioned the value of importing foods when they’re not in season here, while also acknowledging the importance of protecting local farm land. He said:

I think it’s alright to import stuff out of season if the prices compare to what we’d pay for it here, but it’s also important to support our farms. We’re losing farms to development and then where will we get fresh vegetables? They don’t want to make affordable housing in the city; they just want more expensive housing on the farm land.

This is an important quote for two reasons: (1) it highlights the dilemma posed by idiosyncratic food preferences and habits in so far as they compete with the desire to protect local farm land as a means of securing a local food supply, and (2) it raises questions about the larger political-economic influence of tangential issues such as poverty and housing. I deduce both from these findings and from my own observations and interactions with GFM customers that they tend to be well informed and savvy
consumers. Thus, the GFM is a suitable environment to raise questions about the inherent complexity of CFS, and to create opportunities for people to learn about the importance of making personal lifestyle changes in support of CFS principles.

While supporting local farmers appears to be universally endorsed by GFM customers, many also want to have access to things like berries and lettuce all year, and so perhaps the optimal goal is striking a balance between supporting local farms while at the same time, accommodating people’s existing food palettes. Or, perhaps this data highlights an opportunity for market coordinators to use localism as a means for promoting the value and logic of seasonal eating.

While everyone supported local farms, not everyone supported seasonal and organic foods, reinforcing once again the complexity of running a GFM. Organic produce was disfavoured for reasons of cost and a lack of belief in the merits of organics over the cheaper industrial alternatives. One customer remarked: “I don’t believe in [organics]. How can you grow food without [pesticides/fertilizer]?” Another customer said: “organic produce is expensive, it doesn’t sell as well as the regular stuff that people are familiar with”. 2/13 customers mentioned that although they themselves did not purchase the organic produce on offer at the GFM, they thought it was important that the choice was available to others. A customer said: “I can’t afford it, but people should have access to it”. I posit that in order for the GFM to support organic agriculture, it needs to educate consumers about the value of organic foods and provide price subsidies to counter the artificially low price of industrially grown produce which does not account for negative externalities.

CFS dimension: Values conflicts and compromises

GFM theme 3: Food and culture

The GFM strives to promote as much local produce as possible while at the same time offering customers the food they want. Data revealed that customers of Central and Western European descent felt comfortable buying and eating many of Ontario’s winter vegetables like parsnip, turnip and beets. Though I did not explicitly ask participants to reveal their ethnic background, many did in response to the question: “is there anything at the market that you haven’t bought because you don’t know how to prepare / cook it?” Two customers revealed their Scottish and Irish roots respectively: “no, I’m Irish; I know how to cook all the root vegetables”; “I have no problem with root vegetables because I have Scottish roots”. None of the other five customers who are also members of the visible majority identified any limitations on the foods they would buy based on their knowledge of how to prepare and cook the food. The other GFM customers I interviewed, members of the visible minority, in this case
from Latin American, South Asian and Caribbean origins, all mentioned their lack of familiarity with Ontario’s root vegetables as the rationale for the absence of these foods in their diet, turnips in particular. A young Central American customer remarked: “people from outside of Canada, who grew up elsewhere, often don’t know how to cook/prepare these root vegetables”. A Colombian woman, who conducted the interview in Spanish, said she did not buy turnip, parsnip, bok choy and kale because she does not know how to prepare or cook them. She continued: “demos on how to cook this stuff would be good, and offered in Spanish as well as English. I’d like to know if these are sweet or salty vegetables”. The data confirms consistent purchasing trends that correlate to customer’s familiarity with the foods; cultures that routinely cook these foods are buying them and those that don’t are not. There was one exception to this pattern. A customer of Asian descent said there was nothing she would not buy at the market due to a lack of knowledge. This customer was the only participant who does not live in The Stop’s catchment; she frequents the Stop because of its proximity to the neighbouring community health centre where she volunteers. She also questioned whether she was “the right kind of person” I should be speaking to, as she self-identified as an atypical customer.

Many customers who were born outside of Canada suggested the GFM sell produce from their home countries such as pineapple, custard apple, guava, yucca, plantains and rapini; while other customers questioned how much accommodation is realistic or feasible given the current size of the market and diversity of tastes. In response to a question about the importance of selling culturally appropriate foods at the GFM, 4/13 customers, half of whom were visible minorities, expressed concerns over the inherent limitations of a small enterprise like the GFM. One said: “where does it end where culturally appropriate foods are concerned? How far do you try to accommodate? The market would have to be huge to accommodate everyone”. The other nine customers said the GFM should make an effort to offer culturally appropriate foods. Of these nine, one customer said the GFM was already doing so and two noted the knowledge exchange that cultural food could facilitate. An older member of the visible majority commented: “yes, it’s important to have culturally appropriate food so people know how to cook what they’re buying. They don’t always know our food. It’s good for us too because we get to try new things”.

Interestingly, a food item that was consistently problematic for customers, regardless of ethnic and/or cultural background, was kale. 7/13 customers were wary of buying kale, either because of taste or a lack of familiarity. This suggests that cooking demonstrations showing the different methods for preparing kale might encourage more customers to try it again, or for the first time. It may also suggest that kale is not worth selling at the GFM.
One of FoodShare’s guiding principles is that good food markets should offer local, seasonal produce as well as imported favourites to reflect their host community, a principle validated by this data. Customers want to buy the food they are accustomed to eating irrespective of where this food comes from, and GFMs must strive to accommodate this consistent buying pattern in order to survive. At the same time, the market must maintain its commitment to its core values, and encourage a shift towards choosing local alternatives to imported and industrially produced foods. The markets should thus consider teaching people about local, seasonal food items by way of regular and participatory food demonstrations and tastings, distributing recipes in multiple languages, and always striving to extol the benefits and importance of eating locally.

GFM theme 4: Socialization

For many GFM customers, the market is a social event; they see their friends and get to know people in their neighbourhood. Many GFM customers are seniors, living on their own, and the market provides them an opportunity to get out of the house and socialize. An elderly customer said: “I’m lonely; I come here to see people”. The Stop recognizes that many of its clients face social isolation and so their programs aim to use food as a point of connection drawing people together. Not surprisingly, the GFM has a strong community-feel to it, which customers recognize and appreciate. One customer commented that the GFM is “more social than shopping in a grocery store”. A primary reason for the GFM’s social atmosphere is that it is housed within and operated by The Stop, which has been located in the community for many years and has become an important social and political hub of the neighbourhood. Its visibility is also the predominant reason people know about the GFM. 11/13 customers discovered the market through The Stop, the other two learning of its existence via the DPNCHC.

For many of its volunteers, The Stop is like a “second home” and a “family”. Some of the volunteers I interviewed described longstanding relationships with The Stop; relationships lasting eight, twenty and even thirty years. When GFM participants were asked whether they had met people or made friends at the market, every single person responded positively. The GFM, due largely to its small scale and special perks like the volunteer voucher system, is a quintessential social gathering, especially during the opening rush. Customers expect to see one another from week to week and faces become familiar. One customer tells a heartwarming story of building community through the GFM:

You see people who live in your neighbourhood, you come to know their faces and then you say hello to them when you pass them on the street. In the summertime, people come out and hang
out in their backyards to socialize, so it’s nice if you’ve got to know them a little from the market.

As a market volunteer coordinator, I can attest to the market’s social dimension. It is truly a community market and I have come to know many of the customers and other volunteers very well. For customers, it would be almost impossible to come to the market and not speak to someone, especially because the prices are not displayed on the individual baskets of produce, like they are in a regular grocery store. GFM customers must consult the central price list, displayed on a large chalk board, or ask one of the market volunteers, or other customers, the price of the goods. This practice, though annoying for some, gets people talking; a good first step in reducing social isolation and building community.

CFS dimension: David vs. Goliath  (CFS’s struggle to counteract the agro-industrial food system)

GFM theme 5: Access

The GFM is located in a food desert; as such, many customers mentioned the benefit of having a weekly produce market in the neighbourhood. The GFM location is easily accessible for people living in The Stop’s catchment area; they can walk and thus save on transportation costs. 9/13 customers mentioned the GFM’s geographical accessibility when asked why they come to the market, what they like about the market, and what the market does for their community. One customer elaborated further:

I like that it’s centrally located. We do need something like this here because there’s no major grocery store in the area. Metro is at Keele and St. Clair, and the Galleria Mall’s [Price Chopper] at Dufferin and Dupont. For a lot of seniors, this is a good thing because a lot don’t have access to transportation to get out and shop.

Customers also appreciate the GFM’s affordability; price was a major reason why people preferred the GFM. All the customers were satisfied with the prices at the GFM, and many cited lower prices in response to questions about the advantages of the market. 9/13 customers specifically mentioned that GFM prices were “cheaper” than elsewhere, this despite the fact that I asked about price but never raised the issue of cheap food. Customers said things like: “I go to different stores and the price is better here”; “the produce is a little bit cheaper here, nothing is sold by the pound here, it’s sold by the unit instead and that makes it cheaper”; and “I find things cheaper and fresher than elsewhere”. In general, GFM customers were very price savvy; they compare prices between stores and are avid coupon users. One customer self-identified as a “super shopper” stating, “I compare the flyers
from all the different supermarkets and I know that the GFM prices are good”. Another customer always requests an itemized bill from the cashier so she can compare her GFM visits and track her expenses, as well as compare GFM prices to the Price Chopper. Clearly price is a major influence on GFM shoppers’ purchasing habits.

The Stop’s volunteer voucher system increases GFM access to a significant degree. It is very popular and a great way to honour people’s commitment of time and effort as volunteers. 8/13 customers interviewed were volunteers and redeemed their voucher card whenever they had the opportunity. Of those eight, three volunteer customers come to the market only when they have $10 to redeem, and two of them said they would pay cash for purchases that exceeded the $10 limit. The other five volunteer customers are all market-regulars; they come to the GFM every week and purchase produce regardless of whether they have a voucher to redeem or not. One customer noted, “the volunteer policy and the card system is excellent, it encourages better eating habits amongst its volunteers. The majority of market customers are volunteers”. Another commented on how far $10 will go at the GFM, “to spend $10, you gotta go some, with $10, I get enough to last me two weeks”.

The GFM’s volunteer voucher is a clear example of the kind of entitlement strategies recommended in the CFS literature (Guthman et al., 2006). The data shows that volunteers are using the voucher card, and The Stop’s website explains that “many of our volunteers have experience with issues facing the community: unemployment, poverty and homelessness”, thus it could be said that the voucher system together with the GFM are increasing many low-income people’s food security. The rewards system is also increasing sales because many volunteers shop without their card and/or spend more than the allotted $10 voucher.

GFM theme 6: Quality of produce

Customers overwhelmingly prefer the quality of GFM produce over that of mainstream grocery stores. Every single interviewee without exception mentioned feeling satisfied with the quality of the fruit and vegetables on offer at the GFM, and many stated that it’s better than what they have access to elsewhere. The following comments were made: “everything’s fresher than at the supermarket, it’s not going to spoil” and “here the produce is fresher, better quality – it is delivered fresh on the day of the market”. 9/13 customers mentioned the freshness and/or quality of the fruit and vegetables as reasons

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10 The Davenport Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre (DPNCHC), located next door to The Stop, runs a senior’s program called “Walk Fit 55+”, which is a seasonal mall-walking program offered in coordination with the Galleria Shopping Mall where the Price Chopper grocery store is located.
why they shopped at the market and/or what they liked about the market. In fact, the word “freshness” was a common adjective used to describe what people liked about the GFM.

The GFM is becoming well known for its high quality produce. Two customers relayed stories of their family members commenting on the quality of the market’s produce. One said: “my son-in-law couldn’t believe how good our bananas are”, and the other reported that her nephew really likes the quality of the food she buys at the GFM. Customers are impressed with the quality of produce on offer at the GFM and it is clearly a major reason for the market’s success. In her analysis of FoodShare’s Good Food Box program, Kathryn Scharf (1999) argues that alternative food systems like the GFB “must be relevant to individuals, feasible, and sustainable” (p. 127). Judging by the freshness and quality of the produce at the GFM alone, I would posit that the GFM is very relevant to the demands of its customers and likely to a broader community of potential customers as well. Scharf also identifies a connection between low-income and low-quality food, which is received either from food banks or freely chosen for its low cost. She states that the good food box program, with its high-quality products and good service, is an attempt to send the message that “you’re worth it” (p. 124). The GFM, as an extension of the GFB, is seeking to affirm the same message and it is validating to hear so many GFM customers comment on the superior quality of produce they receive from the market.

GFM theme 7: Impact

The GFM is impacting its customer’s lives. All 13 customers interviewed mentioned that they’re saving money by shopping at the GFM. One Hungarian-Canadian customer described her savings in cabbages alone: “here a cabbage is $1; somewhere else you’d pay $1.50, that’s good savings. Savoy cabbage is $1.50, somewhere else it’d be $2”. Two customers mentioned saving money as a result of the volunteer voucher card.

Other lifestyle impacts resulting from the GFM are time savings and dietary changes. 12/13 customers reported saving time. One participant noted how much quicker it was to shop at a small market “where everything’s in front of me and I don’t have to walk up and down the aisles” of a big grocery store. Another commented, “the nearest grocery store to me is a half-hour walk, to get here, it only takes me two minutes because I live two blocks away”. In fact, 5/13 customers I interviewed live inside the same building or in the building immediately adjacent to that which houses The Stop. All of the others, with one exception, live in the catchment area and can walk to The Stop in 15-20 minutes, which most of them do so long as the weather accommodates.
In terms of dietary changes, seven customers remarked that shopping at the GFM had changed their diet / eating habits. Of these, four specifically mentioned they’re eating more fruits and vegetables because of the market. One customer commented: “my doctor said I had to eat more fruits and vegetables, and I’m doing that now, thanks to the GFM. I’m even eating raw vegetables and tried a grapefruit for the first time here”. The other six customers said their eating habits have not changed as a result of shopping at the GFM: “no, I always eat this way”; “no, I only buy onions, potatoes and avocados here. I have to go elsewhere to get everything I need, so if the GFM wasn’t here, I’d buy that stuff from the store”; “it’s about the same. What I buy here, I’d buy somewhere else if it weren’t available here because I have access to the grocery store”. I posit that many of the GFM customers are already well aware of the positive health benefits of eating fresh produce and thus shopping at the market has not changed their dietary habits, but rather, it has increased their access and provided a communitarian space to purchase the food they were already in the habit of choosing. These findings parallel Tarasuk’s (2001) qualitative study of community kitchens in southwestern Ontario, which found the program did not hugely impact participants’ food purchasing or preparation skills, because many of the low-income participants already possessed exceptional food skills and resourcefulness. What the community kitchens did offer was “their participatory format and potential to foster mutual support among participants” (p. 493). The impacts of CFS projects such as the GFM have both tangible impacts like cost savings and intangible impacts like reduced social isolation. Inevitably, both are positive effects and proof of the inherent value of such initiatives.

Part 4: Conclusion

CFS scholars Anderson and Cook (1999) and urban planning educator Jerome Kaufman (2004) highlight a need to assess the successes and failures of CFS efforts. To help meet this need, I have explored the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats concerning The Stop’s GFM, and its impact on the lives of its customers. The findings also reveal some of the core challenges and dilemmas faced by CFS initiatives such as the GFM.

The Good Food Market is an exemplary model for fostering greater community food security. I will substantiate this further in the following chapter by following the sixth step of Creswell’s process for organizing and analyzing qualitative data.
Chapter six: Analysis and interpretation

The Stop’s GFM is an important site for the cultivation and improvement of CFS. To expand on the themes presented in the previous chapter, and in completion of Creswell’s six-step process, here I assess them in relation to the ideas and concepts of CFS literature. In particular, analysis and interpretation through the lenses of Levkoe’s (2006) CFS discourse, Feenstra’s (2002) four kinds of spaces required for successful sustainable food systems, and the CFS Coalition’s ten distinguishing elements of CFS projects (1998, as cited in Anderson & Cook, 1999) will demonstrate the congruence between the GFM and CFS. Additionally, I will examine how The Stop’s GFM is a working example of Heasman and Lang’s Ecologically Integrated Paradigm (2006, as cited in Sumner, 2010), an axiology that accounts for the complexity of CFS. This analysis will firmly situate the GFM as a new and successful approach in the pursuit of CFS.

Part 1: GFM and CFS discourse

Levkoe’s (2006) CFS discourse encompasses four perspectives: (1) human rights, (2) structural change, (3) ecological sustainability, and (4) community development. The GFM’s fifth theme: access, aligns first and foremost with Levkoe’s rights perspective, “every citizen should have a right to feed him or herself as an essential attribute of the social rights within a democracy” (p. 91). The GFM helps secure peoples’ right to food by providing access to good quality, and affordable fruit and vegetables in a food desert. The GFM’s volunteer voucher system is another method by which the market acts to increase people’s ability to access healthy food. In terms of Levkoe’s second perspective: structural change, one could look at the GFM’s seventh theme: impact, for examples of change occurring at an individual or household level (smaller scales are viewed in the context of CFS as having the potential to initiate social change). GFM customers report saving both money and time by shopping at the market and some credit the GFM for cultivating better eating habits. More broadly, The Stop’s Community Action Program works hard to challenge chronic income and food insecurity. Additionally, the GFM’s parent organization: FoodShare advocates for social assistance reform and for policies that would ensure adequate employment and income for all. Levkoe’s CFS discourse and the GFM’s second theme both prioritize environmental sustainability. The Stop’s GFM favours the sale of local, seasonal food, and challenges its customers to change their eating habits by choosing local foods. Cooking demonstrations and food tastings also help increase customers’ familiarity with seasonal eating. In terms of community development, The Stop’s GFM strives to be a community gathering point; this is highlighted by its fourth theme: socialization. In the winter, customers interact at the GFM café, and in the summer, the pizza oven becomes a community gathering place. In terms of organizational structure, the GFM offers
community members an opportunity to volunteer together and work on something that is bigger than them. As well, by purposely not displaying the prices, customers must engage with one another and with the volunteers, this encourages communication between people. In this way, the Stop’s GFM touches on all four perspectives of Levkoe’s CFS discourse.

Part 2: GFM and the red – green gap

In addition to access, the GFM is an appropriate space to foment personal change. At the weekly market, customers are invited to begin the long and complicated journey of changing their eating habits. Over the long-term, customers can alter the way they purchase, prepare, and ultimately consume food. The “green” values of CFS (environmental sustainability) can begin to merge with the more immediate “red” values of CFS (social justice through increased access to “good” food). Customers at the GFM tend to be savvy consumer-citizens who understand both the importance of eating fresh produce and supporting local farms (GFM’s seventh and second themes respectively). This knowledge constitutes an important base upon which to build broader awareness about the importance of eating sustainably and supporting CFS’s “green” values. In order to encourage and facilitate the transformation of dietary/lifestyle choices, GFMs must remain committed to the importance of eating locally and sustainably by continually extolling the benefits of doing so. GFMs should also facilitate the shift in consumer habits with value-added educational initiatives such as regular cooking demonstrations and container garden workshops offered in a variety of languages. The opportunity to learn from the experience of making a simple and delicious meal using Ontario root vegetables, or growing your own container garden, are first steps towards unlearning the eating habits instilled in us by the global agro-industrial food system. In addition to building new skills, these activities help familiarize people with sustainably grown, local food, extending the discussion outside of academic silos - an important step in fomenting change.

In order to genuinely contribute to CFS, it is imperative that the GFM not compromise its “green” values for environmental sustainability is an essential dimension of CFS. The challenge therefore, is finding the optimal balance between access (red values) and sustainability (green values). While offering a wider selection of produce, regardless of seasonality, might render the market more competitive with mainstream grocers, it would compromise the GFM’s commitment to CFS by undermining its green values. On the other hand, an uncompromising commitment to the “green” mandate, and hence, limiting the selection of produce on offer at the GFM would likely force the market out of business, thus undermining its red values. The GFM must always strike this balance in order to remain viable, while seeking creative ways to both open up access opportunities and shift consumer
demands towards green alternatives; sourcing a wider variety of produce from innovative local growers (i.e., greenhouses heated by compost that can grow produce year-long) is but one idea. While at present, there is a clear tension between green and red values at the GFM, CFS practitioners are developing strategies to reduce the conflict and align them; opening up access while shifting consumer demands such that the food people want is the food that is good for them, their communities, and the planet.

Part 3: GFM and CFS spaces

Food scholar, Gail Feenstra (2002) maintains that CFS initiatives “create space for the germination of these admittedly risky projects in their communities, and protect space for their continuation” (p. 101). She highlights four kinds of space that are integral to the success of sustainable food systems. The first space is social space, which is a definite strength of the GFM.

The Stop’s GFM has succeeded in creating a new community space where rich social interaction can take place (the GFM’s fourth theme: socialization). Feenstra highlights that for such a space to actually contribute to building CFS, it must be conducive to doing more than simply socializing. The space should foster what Putnam (1993, as cited in Feenstra, 2002) calls “social capital”. It should bring different people together to talk about issues and ideas surrounding a community food system in a way that leads to communal planning, problem solving, and compromising; a space for community members to “learn to speak a common language” (Feenstra, 2002, p. 102). The CFS social space is thus a place to cultivate Hassanein’s “food democracy” (2003), where people are actively engaged in shaping their community food system. The Stop’s GFM provides a space for its community volunteers to participate in ad hoc meetings where they share their views and concerns regarding the GFM. Rekha, the GFM coordinator, is committed to running a participatory market where the voice of community volunteers is heard; however, there remain opportunities for a more consistent and institutionalized system of participation in the market’s organization. As was highlighted by a student intern, the market is not making the most of its community volunteers, some of whom have been volunteering at the GFM since it began four years ago. The market could be a place to build their social capital, to transform into active, engaged community members equipped with the skills required to foster a food democracy. Perhaps joining forces with The Stop’s Community Action Program, which “support[s] community members to speak out about and work together on issues of poverty, housing and inadequate income in the community” (The Stop, n.d., “Programs”) would be a good strategy for fostering increased social capital amongst GFM volunteers. The GFM is halfway to becoming the type of “social space” identified by Feenstra (2002); it is an excellent site for social interaction, a place of celebration (the pizza oven in the
summer has a particularly celebratory atmosphere), and a space to grow the roots of trust, common purpose, and vision.

Feenstra (2002) also highlights the need for political, intellectual, and economic spaces in sustainable food systems; however, these spaces are not as significant as the GFM’s social space. In terms of a political space, Feenstra implies that project leaders must work hard towards institutionalizing sustainable food system policy. She contends that this often involves community organizing, and she urges leaders to use a combination of stories and “solid data” to convince policymakers of the positive impacts of CFS initiatives. On a larger CFS scale, much of this work is done by The Stop and FoodShare; however, the GFM could improve its measurement and documentation of market successes in order to build its clout within these organizations.

In referring to intellectual spaces, Feenstra (2002) is alluding to the importance of bringing multiple perspectives together to elaborate the rationale and the vision for a sustainable community food system. In so doing, participants have the opportunity to reflect upon, and evaluate current practices. The Stop’s GFM is quite successful in bringing together a broad amalgamation of people: different members of the community, as well as people living outside the community. Perhaps the GFM could host an annual general meeting, or forum of some sort, wherein stakeholders could discuss their ideas for improved market success. Additionally, the student interns who coordinate the market for four to six months at a time could be asked to submit summary reports as part of their internship. This would formalize an avenue for capturing some of this insight currently being lost and encourage more reflection and evaluation of the GFM. My own work is also a contribution to the kind of intellectual space recommended by Feenstra.

Lastly, CFS initiatives should also work towards creating economic spaces. Feenstra (2002) suggests that successful CFS projects should eventually recirculate local financial capital. In the beginning however, she acknowledges that they require access to outside funding, and managers who are fiscally responsible and creative. In this regard, the GFM benefits tremendously from its affiliation to The Stop. The Stop buys all of the leftover produce thus protecting the GFM from food waste or financial losses, and supplies the market with the majority of its customers, primarily through the volunteer voucher system. However, Rekha has worked hard to ensure the GFM is financially stable. Incorporating the sale of freshly-made bake goods (year-round) and barbequed corn (summer only) has increased the market’s weekly revenue, creating a pool of reserve funds with which to subsidize prices if the cost of produce increases sharply from week to week. Rekha demonstrates the kind of fiscal responsibility and creativity that Feenstra recommends project managers should have.
The GFM has created, at least in part, all four of Feenstra’s recommended spaces. Largely successful as a social space, in terms of fostering community interaction, the GFM does present some exciting opportunities to further the expansion of all four spaces. Fostering social capital amongst its community volunteers, and even perhaps amongst regular customers, could be an effective means of improving CFS. As well, and like so many community projects, the GFM must strive to collect better data and reflect more deeply on its operation, especially since the creation of this intellectual space could help the GFM occupy a more significant position within The Stop and FoodShare, which could in turn, lead to greater political space for CFS policies and practices.

Part 4: GFM and CFS’s complexity

CFS scholars Anderson and Cook (1999) refer to “optimal mixes” of policies (p. 149) when they write of efforts to improve CFS. Here they are referring to the holistic nature of CFS and the necessity of combining different initiatives to successfully achieve it in varying circumstances. The Stop’s GFM is a program which seeks to address multiple CFS concerns simultaneously; as such it is a good place to contemplate an optimal mix of CFS initiatives. The Stop’s GFM is a place where fresh fruits and vegetables are being sold alongside among other activities: a drop-in ESL class, a community café serving hot beverages and freshly made baked goods, a free community pizza bake in the summer, cooking demonstrations and food tastings, children’s activities, free bike repairs, gardening activities, plant giveaways and an almost constant exchange of advice on purchasing, preparing, and consuming food. In the past, the GFM has also hosted live music, arts and craft tables, bread sales, and information booths. Another important CFS initiative is the volunteer voucher system, which has helped many GFM customers increase their access to fresh, healthy, and locally-grown food.

This type of multiple service provision is a definite strength of the GFM, and helps improve CFS by contributing along a multitude of dimensions. In terms of “optimal mix”, the seven themes revealed by my research indicate that extracurricular or value-added activities that focus on teaching the benefits and values of eating locally and sustainably, as well as the skills associated with it, are effective market-based activities for the improvement of CFS. Additionally, enhancing opportunities for increased community socialization (theme four) and broader community access to the quality produce (theme five) further enhance CFS. By determining which elements of CFS the GFM best contributes to, the program can focus its resources and further its contribution to the creation of a food-secure community.
Part 5: GFM and the 10 distinguishing elements of CFS

The CFS Coalition (1998, as cited in Anderson & Cook, 1999) outlines ten distinguishing elements of CFS projects. What follows is an assessment of the Stop’s GFM for its success in achieving each one of these elements.

1. A multi-disciplinary systems approach in planning and program implementation.

Because the GFM is housed within The Stop Community Food Centre, coordinated by FoodShare, and operated out of the Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre (DPNCHC) in the summer, opportunities for a multi-disciplinary systems approach in planning and program implementation abound.

2. Promotion of action in geographic communities, rather than isolated sites.

The average GFM customer is a participant in The Stop’s and/or the DPNCHC’s programs; however, the GFM would like to service more community-members who are not program participants. There are a number of ways the GFM could increase its customer base, such as: lengthen its hours of operation so people could shop after work, increase its outreach activities (i.e., flyer distribution, community newspaper ads, door knocking), and improve its visibility (i.e., operate out of the front of the building so customers can see the market from the street).

3. Broad community participation in planning and needs assessment.

As previously highlighted by Feenstra’s (2002) “social space”, community participation in the GFM’s planning and needs assessment exists; however, it could be improved.


The GFM could benefit from regular meetings with the other GFMs being organized across the city. FoodShare, the program’s host, could organize more regular meetings amongst GFM organizers and possibly even incentivize participation (i.e., attend the meeting, and get a $25 discount on your next GFM order). The GFM, as a CFS program, could benefit from the formation of a GFM council, whose members would come from a variety of the city’s GFMs. The GFM council could attend municipal CFS events, such as conferences, Food Policy Council meetings, etc... to promote, advocate for, and develop strategies for the GFM program.
5. Multi-sector linkages (i.e., inclusion of non-profit organizations, businesses, and individuals from many different parts of the food system).

The Stop’s GFM is constantly striving to develop multi-sector linkages from different parts of the food system. Organizers from The Stop’s urban agriculture program have started attending the GFM in order to distribute free plants and offer gardening advice. Also, the Community Cooking program is often onsite delivering food samples that feature the market’s food of the month, cooked together with other simple ingredients. A nutritionist from the DPNCHC regularly organizes cooking demonstrations at the GFM to encourage customers to expand their cooking repertoires and to sample new ingredients. All of these initiatives are valuable and should be formally integrated as a more consistent element of the GFM. Another possibility is including the participation of local urban agriculturalists who could sell their produce at the GFM, as well as the participation any other sustainable food businesses interested in selling their products at the market (i.e., a bread maker, or a local health food store that could sell rice, grains, and pasta in bulk). This would help the GFM expand beyond supplying mere complements to food purchases made at mainstream grocery stores (the GFM’s first theme: complement or supplement).

6. Use of locally-grown food, whenever possible.

The GFM does an excellent job at sourcing as much locally-grown food as possible given its diverse customers’ tastes. FoodShare encourages its GFM organizers to order 80% local produce every week and Rekha has made it her personal mission to increase the sale of local, seasonal produce at The Stop’s GFM. She has espoused the benefits of this alternative food system to us market volunteers and trained us how to share this information with customers. Additionally, the cooking demonstrations and food tastings encourage customers to purchase locally-grown food.

7. Multiple project objectives, such as producing, distributing, and expanding access to high-quality food, creating jobs, developing a community’s economy, and training residents in skills useful for employment.

The Stop’s GFM excels in increasing access to high-quality food. As noted by the GFM’s sixth theme: quality of produce, GFM customers are extremely impressed with the quality of fruits and vegetables on offer at the market. Because the GFM functions within a food desert, and offers an entitlement program in the form of volunteer vouchers (theme five: access), it facilitates access to high-quality food for vulnerable community members who do not have the physical/emotional or material means to travel outside their community to obtain healthy, fresh food. Regarding job creation, the GFM would benefit
from employing a primary market organizer. As was noted by a GFM student intern, there is a lot of work that goes into the organization of the GFM every week, and creating a paid position to fulfill this role would not only create employment, but could improve the overall operation. In terms of developing a community’s economy and training residents with useful employment skills, the GFM offers its community volunteers multiple skill-building opportunities; however, at the present time, this learning is not recognized as such nor is it formalized in any way. The GFM could serve as a hands-on educational opportunity for community members to learn skills associated with: food handling, customer service, sales, and even small-scale marketing. Additionally, these community volunteers would become strong advocates for CFS principles.

8. Inclusion of locally-owned small-scale business ventures.

The inclusion of locally-owned small-scale business ventures in the GFM is an interesting suggestion. As was mentioned, The Stop’s GFM used to sell loaves of bread in the past; however the initiative proved too labour intensive for the small returns earned on each loaf of bread. Outsourcing the sale of bread to the community could be an option for the GFM, and just one example of the ways the GFM could both expand its offerings and more fully integrate itself within the community economy. As was noted by a GFM customer, the sale of prepared food (such as hummus and garden dips) could also help elderly customers who live on their own eat better. Ideally, the GFM could be a full-scale community market, a one-stop shop for community members to do their local shopping. Or, it could expand into something more permanent such as a neighbourhood food coop: open during regular business hours and offering a full range of grocery items; resolving the GFM’s first theme: complement or supplement, yet potentially compromising its core value of ecological sustainability. The overarching goal of striking an optimal balance between access and sustainability has previously been discussed.

9. Formation of food policy councils to address local policy issues.

The city of Toronto already has a municipal Food Policy Council; therefore, exploring both existing and potential links between it and the GFM program could be an area of interest for FoodShare.

10. Long-range planning.

Unfortunately, much of the time contributed by both GFM volunteers and student interns is consumed by the logistics of organizing the weekly market, with little time devoted to long-term planning. Institutionalizing the GFM, either within The Stop Community Food Centre, through the formation of a
GFM council, or with the creation of a paid, permanent organizer position, could facilitate better long-range planning.

In many ways the GFM is already a significant contributor to local CFS. Working to expand its reach beyond the market walls, in terms of building collaborations to improve program implementation and strategic planning could further increase the GFM’s contribution to CFS. There are opportunities for job creation and community economic development through the creation of a more extensive market, offering a greater range of local products. Most importantly, the GFM serves as an important community hub for the distribution of sustainable locally grown food; this is its greatest contribution to the improvement of CFS, and should remain its primary area of focus.

**Part 6: GFM as EIP**

The Stop’s GFM is an exciting new CFS initiative that combines a high quality, affordable fruit and vegetable market operating in a food desert with other CFS contributors such as: the volunteer voucher system that rewards volunteers with free food, food tastings, cooking demonstrations, and over-the-counter discussions that provide customers with opportunities to learn about the benefits of local and seasonal eating, as well as a vibrant community space in which to develop community-members’ social capital. The GFM, with its holistic approach to building a more food-secure community is a working example of the Ecologically Integrated Paradigm (EIP), as presented by Heasman and Lang (2006, as cited in Sumner, 2010). The tendencies captured by the concept of EIP are “environmental sustainability based on ecological principles, a holistic view toward human health solutions, social justice in food systems, the importance of the ‘public good’ and the minimization of external costs” (p. 30). In many ways, and as this research has demonstrated, these EIP tendencies overlap with the outcomes of the GFM in terms of how it improves CFS. This new paradigm advocates for what the GFM practices. Both promote the cultivation of communities that are holistically-healthy: communities whose ecological, social, economic and political health are in sync and rooted in community-based approaches.

**Part 7: Conclusion**

This chapter has highlighted the many ways that The Stop’s GFM is contributing to CFS. The GFM supports all four of Levkoe’s (2006) CFS discourses; it is also a site where the red-green gap that plagues many CFS initiatives can be bridged. The four spaces that Feenstra (2002) recommends CFS projects endorse have been, at least partially, created by the GFM. The complexity that is inherent to CFS, both in its theoretical and practical nature, is very much reflected in the GFM’s multi-pronged approach to developing a more food-secure community. And the CFS Coalition’s list of ten distinguishing elements of
CFS, serves as both a checklist with which to measure how the GFM is currently contributing to CFS, and an indication of where to focus future endeavours. When compared to the literature, as well as the theoretical framework, as highlighted by the EIP, The Stop’s GFM is clearly contributing to its community’s food security.
Chapter seven: Conclusion and recommendations for future research

A storyteller often visits The Stop’s GFM. In the summer, he gathers a group of eager listeners under a tree and delights them with tales from all over the world. In the winter, he and GFM shoppers, gather around a table sharing a cup of hot tea, a freshly baked treat and a story or two. This storyteller once told me about the “custodians of why”. He described how the commons have always been spaces where communal knowledge is shared. The commons are the custodians of why, they are the protectors of communal knowledge. Community markets, like the GFM, are part of the commons, and as a custodian of why, the GFM is a place where knowledge is brought and exchanged.

One day in the spring, I saw the GFM as a custodian of why. Allen, a GFM customer, who had never seen an avocado, picked one up and asked me what it was. As I began to reply, the other custodians of why and fellow GFM customers, were quick to offer their knowledge. They gathered around Allen and the avocado, and began sharing their information about the selection, preparation, and consumption of avocados. I was reminded of how food brings people together, how the commons develops communal knowledge, and, as shown by the GFM, how it can also be the basis of community food security.

Part 1: Conclusion

This research is guided by three overriding objectives: (1) to better understand the general capacity of The Stop’s GFM, (2) to assess the strengths and weaknesses of its service delivery, and (3) to determine its contribution to community food security (CFS). These three objectives are not weighted evenly however. As alluded to by the title of this research, my primary focus is exploring the connections between the GFM and CFS; just how good is the Good Food Market when it comes to community food security?

As a volunteer-researcher at The Stop’s GFM over the past year and a half, I have been immersed in the weekly operations of the market. In this capacity, I conducted a single, exploratory case study to fulfill my research objectives. Through the use of judgemental sampling, I interviewed the GFM coordinators and thirteen customers to understand how their market experience might improve the practice of the GFM program more broadly, and to assess the contribution of the GFM to CFS. This research will serve a dual purpose: to inform a larger study being conducted by J.J. McMurtry, of York University’s Business and Society Program, which is examining FoodShare’s Good Food Market program more broadly, and offer new research on the connections between the GFM and CFS.
1.1 Summary of chapters

Chapter one offered a brief introduction to food studies, highlighting the many roles food plays in society and the ever-pressing need to create sustainable global food security. It presented my research objectives as well as outlined my personal connection to the study.

Chapter two framed my research within political economy, a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to understanding society from a materialistic perspective. Political economy enables me to examine the GFM’s operational model and explore its connections to CFS in a way that respects the interconnections between the economic, political and social dimensions of society. The GFM does not function in a silo, divorced from the neoliberal capitalist economic base which shapes every aspect of our lives. As such, it should be explored through a lens of analysis which interfaces the economic, political and social to understand the GFM within these dimensions. The GFM is a new contribution to CFS, and part of a broader academic discipline known as food studies. Food studies is itself premised on holistic and interdisciplinary-thinking. Rather than approach food from a variety of independent and disconnected disciplines, such as agriculture, health and nutrition, environmental science, and sociology, food studies combines all of these in a web of relations, processes, structures, and institutional arrangements that affect the food we produce, prepare, and consume. Political economy is best suited to this work because it is a framework that is interdisciplinary, focused on social change, and rooted in a materialistic perspective.

Chapter three contextualized the GFM and CFS within the world food system, beginning in the pre-industrial era when food travelled little and was primarily obtained in village markets where producers sold directly to consumers. The combination of colonialism and the industrial revolution changed the face of food however. High calorie, cheap food from the colonies fueled the manufacturing sectors in Western Europe, which became increasingly distant from its food supply. With increasing modernization, the food system was modelled on a factory system that favoured economies of scale and comparative advantage. The chapter then presented an in-depth discussion of food security, beginning with an examination of the changes made to the FAO’s definition of food security. These changes allude to the inherent complexity of the concept. Emerging in the later part of the 1990s, the concept, practice and social movement known as Community Food Security focused on local capacities to meet both immediate and long-term food security in a self-reliant, socially just, and sustainable manner. Much has been written on CFS, and chapter three presented some of the major themes from the literature. The clashes between theory and practice, and the two pillars of CFS - social justice and environmental sustainability – were highlighted in the literature review. As well, the struggles over conflicting values
and the necessary compromises being made by CFS initiatives are a big focus of the literature. The challenges faced by CFS as it pits itself against the global agro-industrial food system (a theme I have coined “David vs. Goliath”), was also presented in the literature review. The chapter examined some of the critiques being made against CFS. It explored the exclusivity and whiteness of CFS initiatives, as well as how many of these projects and programs endorsed a limited notion of the politics of the possible with their focus on market-based initiatives. Despite these challenges and critiques however, CFS, as a theory, practice, and social movement, continues to present a viable alternative to the food insecurity challenges common to many communities in North America.

Chapter four outlined the methodological approach applied to the research. I selected a qualitative single, intrinsic/instrumental case study methodology to fulfill my research objectives. Qualitative research is inductive; it discovers new meaning from individuals’ experience within a particular context. Intrinsic case studies focus on the case itself, whereas instrumental case studies focus on new and understudied phenomenon. The Stop’s Good Food Market is one of the oldest and most successful GFMs in the city, as such its general capacity, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of its service delivery are worthy of in-depth analysis. Exploring the connections between the GFM and CFS, a new and understudied phenomenon, makes for an excellent instrumental case study. My own prolonged involvement with the market as a volunteer organizer facilitated the case study research and justified the use of judgemental sampling. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the market coordinator and two student interns responsible for the weekly operation of the GFM, and invited 13 market customers to participate in structured interviews with me. These findings were then triangulated with my own thoughts and observations as a participant observer and findings from the literature.

Chapter five presented the research findings. The organizational structure of The Stop’s GFM is presented in thorough detail. The semi-structured interviews conducted with both The Stop’s staff GFM coordinator and the two student interns responsible for the weekly GFM operation revealed a great deal of insight into how the GFM is organized. Highlights include the role of the student intern, the care that goes into placing the weekly food orders, with much consideration being made to balance the red and green goals of CFS, as well as the pricing subsidies made possible from the weekly sale of baked goods. The chapter went on to present a SWOT analysis of The Stop’s GFM. Listed under strengths are: access, approachability, and extracurricular activities. The GFM’s weaknesses are a lack of outreach and institutional support, its identity as a band-aid solution to the problem of food security, and the challenges of operating as a social business. In terms of opportunities, the GFM could consider expanding its customer base. The fact that the GFM is coordinated by FoodShare and operated by The
Stop - organizations rooted in a liberal charity model - means that the GFM’s future is unpredictable and financial support is minimal at best, which represents a potential threat. The seven major findings revealed from the 13 structured interviews conducted with GFM customers were: (1) complement or supplement, (2) environmental sustainability, (3) food and culture, (4) socialization, (5) access, (6) quality of produce, and (7) impact. These findings demonstrated how The Stop’s GFM is contributing to its community’s food security and were discussed in detail and supported by excerpts from the interviews.

Chapter six expanded on the major findings from the previous chapter by evaluating their congruence with prominent CFS theories. The findings were compared to Levkoe’s (2006) CFS discourse, the four kinds of spaces that Feenstra (2002) dubbed integral to the success of sustainable community food systems, and the ten distinguishing elements of CFS as determined by the CFS Coalition in 1998 (as cited in Anderson and Cook, 1999). This analysis and interpretation of the seven major findings as compared to prominent CFS theories situated The Stop’s GFM firmly within its purview.

Part 2: Summary of findings

For many years, civil society organizations have contributed to food security. Classic examples include food banks and soup kitchens. Recently, however, a new generation of civil society organizations have taken a more holistic approach by trying to address the causes of hunger, as well as the fact of hunger, using the concept of community food security. One of these organizations is The Stop and its Good Food Market.

2.1 CFS strengths and weaknesses

Community food security is premised on increasing local capacity for food security while balancing the principles of social justice with those of environmental sustainability. It also highlights the interdependence between food insecurity and the systemic barriers which cause hunger. As Levkoe’s (2006) work reveals, CFS is a uniquely holistic approach to food security which integrates human rights, systemic barriers, and local, sustainable solutions to food production. CFS is both a concept and an approach to food security, as well as a social movement that connects social justice and environmental activists. As such, CFS suffers from an ambiguous status and often functions as a catch-all category of opposition to the global industrial food system. The underlying political philosophies of CFS are varied. CFS is difficult to define theoretically and lacks clear-cut definitions; what constitutes a food-secure community? This ambiguity renders it difficult to measure CFS progress; as the advancement of some
CFS goals and values may come at the expense of others. As such, maintaining a commitment to the twin pillars of CFS: social justice and environmental sustainability requires directed effort.

2.2 GFM as CFS initiative

The Stop’s GFM, as an example of a civil society initiative, is contributing to CFS. First and foremost, the GFM brings high quality and affordable fruits and vegetables into a food desert; making good food accessible, both in terms of geography and affordability. FoodShare’s model of centralized buying and coordinated distribution is hugely successful at providing the GFM with fresh, affordable produce.

The GFM largely supports local food production and is mandated to offer as much local produce as possible; supporting CFS’s commitment to environmental sustainability by promoting the values of seasonal eating. The GFM food tastings and cooking demonstrations provide an educational dimension to encourage healthy eating and further support CFS’s “green” goal. They also appeal to customers’ taste buds, a key consideration when seeking to inspire eating habits that support sustainably grown, local food.

In terms of financial accessibility, beyond the low cost of food at the GFM (made possible by FoodShare’s wholesale buying model and subsidized distribution costs), The Stop’s volunteer voucher program is hugely successful at getting free food into the hands of people who need it, in a dignified manner. The GFM has seen a steady increase in the use of the volunteer voucher card since its inception. Volunteers are also shopping at the GFM even when they don’t have a voucher to redeem. Rekha, The Stop’s GFM coordinator also runs the centre’s food bank, and has remarked that the market helps food bank users increase their access to healthy food. The GFM, with its convenient location and affordable prices, is helping food bank users budget for food, which in turn provides them a sense of self-determination over this important part of their life. The GFM’s contribution to the social justice goals of CFS is clear, establishing greater equity of access to healthy foods.

Additionally, community members contribute substantially to the operation of the GFM. They help run the market and participate in the decision-making process. Customers are encouraged to provide feedback to the GFM coordinators, who are always on hand during market hours. The GFM is also an important social space for the community. During the weekly market, neighbours interact as they shop and are encouraged to sit and visit with one another at the café or pizza bake.

The Stop’s GFM, as a sustainable point of access to “good food” (fresh, affordable, and predominantly local) integrates central tenets of CFS such as community participation and socialization.
It also tackles some of root causes of food insecurity by fomenting a change in diet. GFM customers record better eating habits (more fresh produce) as well as changed eating habits (more seasonal food), all the while saving time and money by shopping at the GFM. The fact of being housed within The Stop Community Food Centre, an organization determined to make access to healthy food a human right, both in terms of frontline services to the community (food bank, soup kitchen, GFM) and structural change (advocacy work, urban agriculture), is invaluable to the success of the GFM as a CFS initiative.

2.3 The GFM as an alternative to the conventional food system

The GFM does not supplement purchases made at mainstream grocery stores, it complements them. The GFM only sells high quality fruits and vegetables, so customers must still visit a regular grocery store to purchase their other foodstuffs. Additionally, the GFM only operates once a week for a few hours, making it inaccessible to a large number of community members. For these reasons, the GFM is not a complete solution to the problem of food deserts; it mostly addresses the symptoms of a larger problem of food insecurity. As one of the GFM student interns expressed, the GFM is not a viable challenge to the conventional food system in the same way that a food coop could be, for example.

Broader access to the GFM is also hindered by the stigma attached to The Stop Community Food Centre, an organization that is still viewed by many as an emergency food provider servicing low income people only. The community in which the GFM operates is diverse, in terms of income level and culture, and the GFM would like to serve as many of these people as possible because eating outside the mainstream agro-industrial food system is important to CFS, regardless of socioeconomic status.

This work has aimed to explore the role of civil society organizations in building CFS, using The Stop’s GFM as an example, and was guided by the following three objectives: (1) to better understand the general capacity of The Stop’s GFM; (2) to assess the strengths and weaknesses of its service delivery; (3) to determine its contribution to community food security (CFS). I have found that central to the GFM’s success as a contributor to CFS, and as a potential alternative to the conventional food system, is its connection to The Stop Community Food Centre. The GFM should not be seen as separate from The Stop, for as an independent initiative, it is surely ill equipped to address the root causes of food deserts and food insecurity more broadly. However, as a component of The Stop’s holistic, multi-initiative approach to building a more food-secure community, the GFM can make a meaningful contribution to CFS.
Part 3: Recommendations for future research

The Stop’s GFM contributes to community food security because it is a site of access to healthy and affordable fresh food in a food desert. It is also a site for transformation. The GFM is a community space (a.k.a. “the commons”), where eating habits can be challenged, where the learned behaviours of the agro-industrial food system can be unlearned. As was demonstrated by the story of Allen and the avocado, the GFM, as a custodian of why, can offer community members a space to learn a new way of eating and thus existing. First and foremost, the GFM is a site where the twin pillars of CFS – the green of environmental sustainability and the red of social justice – can manifest in a mutually beneficial manner. Future GFM studies would be wise to focus on the nature of this co-existence; how can environmental sustainability (local, seasonal eating) be best paired with increased access to healthy, fresh food for a community’s most marginalized citizens. This is a question that will become increasingly relevant as the gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow, and the world’s natural resources continue to be squandered under our current neoliberal capitalist economy. The work provided by The Stop Community Food Centre and FoodShare in terms of challenging both the roots and symptoms of hunger is invaluable.
References


The Stop Community Food Centre. (n.d.). The Power of Food. [Brochure].


APPENDIX A – Interview Guide

Structured interview questions for GFM customers

1. Are you a paying customer or a market volunteer?
2. How many years have you been attending the GFM?
3. Where do you live / how long does it take you to get to the GFM?
4. What is your first language?
5. Why do you come to the market?
6. What do you like about the market?
7. What don’t you like about the market?
8. What would make the market better?
9. How did you find out about the market?
10. Is the time, Tuesdays 3-5:30 (or until quantities last), of the market appropriate with your daily schedule? Why or why not?
11. Do you come to the market every week? If not, why? How often do you come?
12. How is the service at the market? What can we improve?
13. Are you satisfied with the quality and quantity of the produce? What produce would you like to see at the market?
14. Are you satisfied with the prices?
15. Is there anything at the market that you haven’t bought because you don’t know how to prepare / cook it?
16. Is it important to you that the market makes an effort to buy seasonal foods?
17. Culturally appropriate foods?
18. Organic food?
19. Food from local farmers?
20. What does the market do for your community?
21. Has shopping at the GFM changed your diet/eating habits? If so, how?
22. Do you save time by shopping at the GFM?
23. Are you saving money?
24. Have you met or made friends?
25. What activities would you like to see at the market?

Semi-structured interview questions for GFM student intern coordinators and The Stop staff coordinator

1. What do you like about the GFM in terms of service-provision and operation?
2. What could be improved in terms of service-provision and operation?
3. Do you think the GFM is helping to address the social/economic needs of marginalized people?
APPENDIX B - Information Letter to Request Participation (printed on UofT letterhead)

Dear,

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information about the project. This information will help you decide if you want to participate in this study, or not. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. Your participation or withdrawal from this study will not affect your relationship with The Stop or the Good Food Market.

The reason for this project is to collect information about the Good Food Market. I am collecting this information to help improve the way we run the market, and to potentially help other Good Food Markets across the city improve their service. This project is part of my studies at the University of Toronto. I am writing my Masters thesis on the Good Food Market. I will also write a report about my project for the University, The Stop and FoodShare. You can request a copy of this report if you so wish.

You are being asked to participate in the project because you are a frequent GFM customer and I think your opinion about the market is important for us to hear. I am asking 12 market customers, the current and past student intern coordinators, and The Stop staff coordinator to share their thoughts and opinions about the Good Food Market. The interview will not take longer than 30 minutes. I would like to audio record the interviews I conduct with market coordinators.

All the information I collect will be confidential, I will not ask for your name or contact information and no one will be able to connect you with the data I collect. I will lock up all the data I collect, and store it for five years. I will immediately destroy any data I collect if you choose to withdraw from the project. Only my professor (thesis supervisor) and I will have access to the data I collect.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this project, you may contact the Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273. I can be reached at ashley.booth@utoronto.ca. My supervisor can be reached at jennifer.sumner@utoronto.ca.

Thank you,
APPENDIX C – Consent Form

I have read the letter to request participation in the project and I understand what is required for participation.

I agree to participate in the project.

I understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time and there will be no implications as a result of my non-participation.

Name:

Date: